Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Ninth Meeting of the Working Group on Reduction of Pressures from the Baltic Sea Catchment Area

PRESSURE 9-2018

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Background

Operational since PRESSURE 2-2015 (Outcome of PRESSURE 2-2015, para. 4.27), the call for establishing the HELCOM Expert Network on Underwater Noise (HELCOM EN-Noise) has been raised through the need to develop a roadmap for the HELCOM work on underwater noise with the understanding that it is to build a knowledge base towards a regional action plan on underwater noise. HELCOM 37-2016 adopted the Regional Baltic Underwater Noise Roadmap 2015-2017 (Outcome of HELCOM 37-2016, para. 4.10). Recently, the 2018 Ministerial Declaration welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the Regional Baltic Underwater Noise Roadmap 2015-2017 and detailed further commitments on underwater noise in HELCOM (para. 38-40). The HELCOM EN-Noise aims to facilitate the implementation of the 2018 Ministerial Declaration commitments on underwater noise as described in its Terms of Reference (ToR).

The network was of the view that considering the latest HELCOM activities and decisions on underwater noise the network would benefit from having ToR to guide its upcoming work and agreed to draft a proposal for the ToR for the network and submit it to PRESSURE 9-2018 for consideration. The proposal was prepared by the Chair together with Denmark and Lithuania and in consultation with the Secretariat and subsequently circulated to the network for consideration (Memo of the online meeting 16 August 2018). Comments, as provided by Germany, were considered in the finalisation of the document.

This document contains a proposal for the Terms of Reference for the HELCOM EN-Noise for the period 2018-2021.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to consider and endorse the proposed Terms of Reference for the HELCOM EN-Noise for the period 2018-2021.

HELCOM Expert Network on Underwater Noise - Terms of Reference (ToR) for 2018-2021

Rationale

Progress has been made in the implementation of the Regional Baltic Underwater Noise Roadmap 2015-2017, including the establishment of a joint HELCOM/OSPAR registry of licenced impulsive sound events and on-going work for a regional monitoring programme and for monitoring guidelines for continuous noise, as well as new evidence regarding potential impact of underwater noise on species in the Baltic Sea. However, there is still a need to further develop the pre-core indicators and to implement the 2018 Ministerial Declaration commitments on underwater noise (para. 38-40).

Overall aims and tasks

The overall aim of the HELCOM EN-Noise is to contribute to the development of an action plan, preferably by 2021, and regionally coordinated actions on underwater noise, aiming, in the long-term, at addressing adverse effects of underwater noise on marine species identified as sensitive to noise, whilst safeguarding the potential of the Baltic Sea for sustainable human activities. The network shall contribute to the fruitful cooperation between European Regional Seas Conventions, and in particular OSPAR, in order to exchange good practices and to fill knowledge gaps, and to continuing regional work in developing scientifically sound threshold values for underwater noise that are consistent with GES for species identified as sensitive to noise in the Baltic Sea, in close coordination with work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora including UNEP Regional Seas Programme. Finally, the network is to support to improve our understanding of the adverse impacts of underwater noise on those identified noise sensitive marine species and in particular the cumulative impacts of noise from multiple activities.

The network will in the period of 2018-2021:

- Support future HELCOM work on development of an action plan on underwater noise preferably by 2021.

- Provide expert input to HELCOM work related to underwater noise, in particular support the Pressure, State & Conservation and Maritime WG, as well as other groups as may be requested.

- Further work on the HELCOM Input to the process of establishing environmental targets for underwater noise based on testing with involvement of relevant HELCOM groups and in coordination with OSPAR and other work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora including UNEP Regional Seas Programme.

- Act as a platform for discussion and review of HELCOM indicators on underwater noise being developed by Lead Countries and appointed experts. In particular, support the Lead Countries in the further elaboration of the underwater noise indicators.

- Update the indicator reports at regular intervals as decided in HELCOM.

- Review the state of the art knowledge on impacts of anthropogenic noise on marine species identified as sensitive to noise in the Baltic Sea and in particular the cumulative impacts of noise from multiple activities.
- Update information on available and suitable noise mitigation measures in the Baltic Sea.

Participants

The expert network will consist of experts nominated by the Contracting Parties and will be open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures. Additional experts and representatives of organizations can be invited to the meetings. The network will cater for cross-sectorial expertise to carry out the tasks as needed.

Working procedures

The expert network functions as a joint network of Pressure WG and State and Conservation WG receiving guidance from both HELCOM working groups according to their mandates (Pressure WG as lead of the work on underwater noise, including evaluating inputs of noise to the marine environment with the view to developing regional action on underwater noise as far as necessary; State and Conservation indicators, monitoring and assessment) as well as from Maritime WG (on IMO related issues) and providing support to other groups, in particular HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG, as may be requested.

The mode of work for the expert network will be mainly via correspondence and tele-meetings, with physical meetings being organized as needed. A Chair for the network has been elected. The products will be handled at HELCOM Meeting Portal workspaces dedicated to this use. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the network.