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Background

The attached document contains the [Outcome](#) of the Eighth Meeting of the HELCOM Submerged Expert Group (HELCOM SUBMERGED 8-2020) which was held on 7-8 January 2020 in Kiel, Germany.

The draft interim Submerged Assessment as well as a proposal for a new action for the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan discussed by the Meeting, will be submitted as separate documents for consideration and action by RESPONSE 27-2020 as appropriate.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the Outcome of SUBMERGED 6-2018.



Outcome of the Eighth Meeting of the
Expert Group on environmental risks of hazardous submerged objects
(SUBMERGED 8-2020)

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**Outcome of the Eighth Meeting of the HELCOM Expert Group on
environmental risks of hazardous submerged objects (SUBMERGED 8-2020)**

Introduction

0.1 In accordance with the outcome of SUBMERGED 7-2018 and intersessional consultations with the Co-Chairs, the Eighth Meeting of the HELCOM SUBMERGED Expert Group (SUBMERGED 8-2020) was held on 7-8 January 2020 in Kiel, Germany, at the premises of the Ministry of Energy, Agriculture, the Environment, Nature and Digitalization of Schleswig-Holstein.

0.2 The Meeting was attended by representatives from Estonia, Finland (online), Germany, Poland and Sweden (online). An invited guest from the University of Leipzig also attended the Meeting. Consent for publication of the list of participants and the information contained therein (**Annex 1**) was received by all participants.

0.3 The Meeting was welcomed by Mr. Claus Böttcher on behalf of the host, the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety.

0.4 The Meeting was Chaired by Mr. Jacek Beldowski (Poland). Mr. Markus Helavuori, HELCOM Professional Secretary, acted as Secretary of the Meeting.

Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

Documents: 1-1, 1-2

1.1 The Meeting adopted the Agenda as contained in document 1-1.

Agenda Item 2 Matters arising from other HELCOM meetings and ongoing HELCOM work

Documents: 2-1, 2-2, 2-3

2.1 The Meeting took note of the Outcomes of HELCOM RESPONSE 25-2018 and RESPONSE 26-2019 (document 2-1).

2.2 The Meeting noted that RESPONSE 26-2019 stressed the importance of making progress on the Submerged Assessment and invited the Submerged Expert Group to submit a draft Submerged Assessment to RESPONSE 27-2020 for consideration, with a view to finalizing the work by RESPONSE 28-2020.

2.3 The Meeting recalled the Outcome of SUBMERGED 7-2018 (document 2-2).

2.4 Noting the continued lack of participation from some Contracting Parties, the Meeting reiterated the importance of all countries participating in and contributing to the work of the Group. The Meeting agreed that participants and contacts to the Group may reach out to key people in other Contracting Parties, involved in matters related to submerged hazardous objects, in order to encourage their participation in the work.

2.5 The Meeting took note of the Outcomes of the HELCOM HOD 55-2018, 56-2019 and 57-2019 meetings as presented by the Secretariat (document 2-3). In this context, the Meeting noted that that HOD had 55-2018 decided to extend the mandate of the Submerged Expert Group until the end of 2020 and had encouraged all Contracting Parties to participate and to nominate national contact points to the Expert Group.

2.6 The Meeting further noted that the update of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) is to be completed in 2021 and that the process is currently shifting from consideration of actions in the current BSAP towards proposals of new actions. The Meeting recalled that Contracting Parties, observers, projects etc. had been invited to submit proposals with synopsis for new actions by the end of 2019, but that it is still possible for HELCOM Working Groups to make such proposals.

2.7 The Meeting noted that [HOD 57-2019](#), when considering the update of the BSAP, had also discussed the relevance of submerged hazardous objects, including warfare materials like chemical weapons, munition and wrecks, which may affect the environment and other activities in the Baltic Sea. In this context, HOD 57-2019 had noted the view by Poland that the updated BSAP should include actions addressing this problem and the position of Russia that the above-stated matters on chemical weapons and munitions are under the umbrella of other international conventions.

2.8 The Meeting agreed on the importance of addressing submerged hazardous objects in the updated BSAP. The Meeting noted that some of the recommendations on best practices in the draft Submerged Assessment could provide the basis for new BSAP actions. The Meeting consequently agreed to revisit the matter under Agenda Item 4.

Agenda Item 3 HELCOM SUBMERGED Assessment

Documents: 3-1, 3-2

3.1 The Meeting recalled that SUBMERGED 6-2018 had agreed that the HELCOM Thematic Assessment on Hazardous Submerged Objects in the Baltic Sea should be developed as an Interim Assessment to be updated as soon as new information is available.

3.2 The Meeting further recalled that SUBMERGED 7-2018 had agreed that the most efficient way forward would be for two drafting groups to work by correspondence in order to continue the work on the chapters on warfare materials and wrecks, respectively. SUBMERGED 7-2018 had further agreed that the drafting group on wrecks would be chaired by Mr. Jorma Rytönen (Finland) and that the drafting group on warfare materials would be co-chaired by Mr. Jens Sternheim (Germany) and Mr. Jacek Bełdowski (Poland).

3.3 The Meeting took note of the current overall status and structure of the Submerged Assessment as presented by Germany for warfare materials (**Presentation 1**). The Meeting noted that significant progress has been made since SUBMERGED 7-2018 but also noted that some Contracting Parties have not contributed to the work.

3.4 The Meeting noted that contact has been made and will continue to be made by individual participants with those Contracting Parties that have not contributed, including also DG MARE and the European Parliament. In order to involve Russia, the Meeting agreed that including a session on submerged hazardous objects on the agenda of the 2020 Baltic Sea Day in St. Petersburg could provide a good opportunity in this regard.

3.5 The Meeting welcomed the offer by the Polish Naval Academy to also contribute with material to the Submerged Assessment.

3.6 The Meeting further considered the current content of the draft chapter on warfare materials in the Baltic Sea as set out in documents 3-1 and 3-2 submitted by Germany. In this context, the Meeting agreed on the use of the Excel commenting form set out as an attachment to document 3-1 throughout the further development of the Submerged Assessment. The Meeting further agreed that the form should be attached also to the draft Submerged Assessment to be submitted to RESPONSE 27-2020 and that contacts and observers of the Response Working Group should be invited to provide any comments by the end of March 2020.

3.7 The Meeting noted that Sweden had already submitted comments using the form attached to document 3-1.

3.8 The Meeting agreed that case studies on munitions clearing operations and other practical issues should also be included in the Submerged Assessment. One such example case study is set out in document 5-1.

3.9 The Meeting considered the current content of the draft chapter on wrecks in the Baltic Sea as presented by Finland (**Presentation 2**).

Agenda Item 4 **Future work**

Documents: 4-1

4.1 The Meeting discussed the way forward in finalizing the Submerged Assessment for consideration in autumn 2020 by RESPONSE 28-2020. The Meeting agreed that an unofficial meeting taking place immediately after the conclusion of SUBMERGED 8-2020 should continue drafting the chapter on warfare materials, including consideration of the recommendations and conclusions of the chapter.

4.2 With regard to the chapter on wrecks, the Meeting agreed that Finland should share the draft with the drafting team on warfare materials by 17 January 2020 in order to providing comments of a general nature and ensuring compatibility of the structure of the different chapters. The Meeting agreed that in finalizing the Submerged Assessment for approval by RESPONSE 28-2020, it should be in form of two separate volumes (Volume 1: warfare materials and Volume 2: wrecks). The Meeting further agreed that wrecks containing warfare materials should be addressed as appropriate in the Submerged Assessment.

4.3 The Meeting noted that the deadline for submission to RESPONSE 27-2020 is 4 February 2020 and agreed that the drafting teams should liaise directly with the Secretariat in order to ensure timely submission of the draft Submerged Assessment to that meeting.

4.4 The Meeting agreed that the work should continue taking into account any comments received from the Response Working Group, with a view to submitting a final draft Submerged Assessment to RESPONSE 28-2020. The Meeting agreed that unofficial drafting meetings may need to be organized, as well as an official meeting (SUBMERGED 9-2020) prior to RESPONSE 28-2020.

4.5 In revisiting the discussions on the update of the BSAP (c.f. Agenda Item 2), the Meeting considered a draft proposal for a new BSAP action developed by Poland. The Meeting revised the draft proposal but was not able to finalize it due to time limitations. The Meeting agreed that interested parties should liaise with the Chair in order to finalize the draft by correspondence, before it is circulated to contacts and observers of Submerged by 17 January 2020 for a tacit agreement with a deadline on 24 January 2020. Following such agreement, the Secretariat is invited to submit it to RESPONSE 27-2020 for consideration.

4.6 The Meeting reviewed and updated the list of official contacts of the Submerged group as nominated by competent Ministries of the coastal countries (document 4-1). Taking into account the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, (EU) 2016/679), the Meeting agreed that the contact address list will be made available on the HELCOM Meeting Portal upon receipt of consent for publication by all contact persons.

Agenda Item 5 **Any other business**

5.1 The Meeting took note of the information provided by Germany on recent decisions of relevance to the Expert Group by the German Ministries of Environment on both the State and the federal level, to update the national report "Munitions in German Marine Waters", investigate contamination of seafood, survey the current state of preservation of discarded munitions and make decisions on measures to counter hazards to the marine environment.

5.2 The Meeting took note of a case study on UXO clearance operations during a project of laying submarine cables in the German EEZ (document 5-1).

5.3 The Meeting took note of information related to a project Boost applied munition detection through smart data integration and AI workflows (BASTA) (**Presentation 3**).

5.4 The Meeting took note of information related to an incident that took place during munitions clearing by NATO in the Fehmern Belt in 2019, where a number of harbour porpoises are suspected to have been killed (**Presentation 4**). The Meeting discussed the need for awareness raising on the matter and voluntary commitments by NATO and national navies to involve regional and national environmental conservation bodies before undertaking such operations.

- 5.5 The Meeting took note of information presented by Sweden on their work related to remediation of risks from wrecks and dumped chemical warfare materials in the Baltic Sea in 2019.
- 5.6 The Meeting took note of the information on results of the DAIMON Project and activities of the DAIMON 2 Project (**Presentation 5**).
- 5.7 The Meeting invited Finland to consider hosting SUBMERGED 9-2020 in late summer or early autumn 2020, with details to be confirmed at a later stage.

Agenda Item 6 Outcome of the Meeting

- 6.1 The Meeting adopted the draft Outcome of the Meeting. The final Outcome of the Meeting has been finalized by the Secretariat and made available on the HELCOM Meeting Portal together with the documents and presentations given during the Meeting.

Annex 1 List of Participants

Name	Country	Organisation	Email address
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