



Document title	Proposals for new actions related to oiled wildlife response for the updated HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan
Code	3-10
Category	DEC
Agenda Item	3 - Update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan
Submission date	12.10.2020
Submitted by	EWG OWR
Reference	

Background

The 16th Meeting of the HELCOM Expert Working Group on Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG OWR 16-2020) agreed to propose two additional actions for the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) and welcomed the offer by Sea Alarm, WWF Finland and Finland to draft the proposals.

Enclosed to this document are proposals for the following two actions as agreed on by EWG OWR via correspondence:

- 1) Monitoring and pollution risk assessment regarding species and habitats in the Baltic Region;
- 2) Strengthening mutual assistance for oiled wildlife response in the Baltic Region.

In order for the new proposed actions to be included in the updated BSAP, they should be agreed by the Meeting, followed by a review and evaluation for endorsement and submission to HOD 59-2020 in December 2020.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to consider the proposals for new actions and agree on a process for assessing the proposed measures in a similar manner to those submitted through the synopses with view to have them endorsed for submission to HOD 59-2020 in December 2020.

1. Monitoring and pollution risk assessment regarding species and habitats in the Baltic Region

<p>Title</p> <p>Monitoring and pollution risk assessment regarding species and habitats in the Baltic Region</p>
<p>Submitted by:</p> <p>HELCOM EWG OWR</p>
<p>Description of measure</p> <p>Marine pollution incidents such as oil spills are rare and catastrophic events that can have severe impacts on sensitive habitats and species. In order to prevent and minimise damage, including suffering of oiled animals, reliable data on environmental sensitivity should be available in the command centre that can be used to plan, direct and optimise response operations.</p> <p>This requires the following actions to be undertaken:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Availability of recent and up to date monitoring data from field research in the whole Baltic Sea Proper 2. An analysis of these data to determine vulnerable species, vulnerable areas, vulnerable times of the year 3. A representation of the results that fulfils the needs of an operational manager, e.g. seasonal maps with risk indications, scale indications, etc. 4. A risk analysis as to how combat activities could also impact certain species and habitats in areas, seasons, or certain circumstances. <p>Oil spills often have a large impact on seabirds, as these are not able to avoid oil contamination on the sea surface and on the shore. In the Baltic Sea, seabirds can be found from time to time in large, high-density aggregations (sometimes thousands) for breeding, migration and moulting. In certain nearshore areas in the Baltic Sea high density aggregations can be found year round. This leads to a scenario where even a relatively small spill could lead to thousands of oiled birds, which in turn could have a significant impact on waterbird populations that are already declining and under pressure from other human activities. Many seabird populations have declined in the Baltic Sea region since the 1990's, and the HELCOM Red List of species (2011) has classified 16 species, subspecies, or populations of wintering birds, and 23 species, subspecies or populations of breeding birds as red-listed. Seabirds are protected by the EU Birds Directive.</p> <p>The measure would consist of ensuring that continued systematic scientific gathering of monitoring data for seabird species is carried out in all areas of the Baltic (Action 1, combined with HELCOM State and Conservation). For oil spill preparedness, vulnerability overviews are prepared as baseline information (Action 2). As a next step these data should be transferred into operational maps and guidelines (Action 3). In addition an analysis should be made on the use of response equipment and the possible impact of response activities on wildlife under different seasons, reflecting differing specific behaviours, etc.) (Action 4).</p> <p>The results of actions 1-4 will benefit the HELCOM Contracting Parties as they can be used for response planning purposes for example when drafting or updating national oiled wildlife response plans or national/municipal environmental risk analyses.</p>
<p>Activity:</p> <p>Transport – shipping (incl. anchoring, mooring)</p>
<p>Pressure:</p> <p>Hazardous substances</p>
<p>State:</p> <p>Birds</p>

<p>Red listed species and habitats Hazardous substances</p>
<p>Extent of impact: The measure will contribute to the awareness of the Baltic Sea as a natural area, and to the level of protection that can be given to vulnerable species and habitats. Gathering the data and integrating the whereabouts of vulnerable species and habitats will make marine emergency responders more aware of risks to nature and lead to better alerting and mobilisation protocols, and more effectiveness in the actual prevention and minimisation of suffering and mortalities.</p>
<p>Effectiveness of measure The measure will contribute to oil spill response planning and make it possible for oil spill authorities to take seabird populations into account already in the planning phase. This may significantly reduce the effects of an oil spill, if vulnerable areas and bird populations can be protected from contamination, and will help oiled wildlife response planners correctly scale their response.</p>
<p>Cost, cost-effectiveness of measure: The measure would require the solidification of budgets for regular and comprehensive seabird monitoring in the Baltic. Efforts should be made to tie in with existing seabird surveys where possible, in order to minimise costs. Data will have multiple purposes, including detecting trends, identifying vulnerable areas and prevention of oiling impacts, the latter indicating that costs for a wildlife response can be reduced. The translation of the data into operational tools is relatively straightforward, and low cost if done regionally, to the same standards and output.</p>
<p>Feasibility: Technical implementation is feasible within 5 years involving the existing expertise and survey data of national experts of the Helcom Contracting Parties.</p>
<p>Follow-up of measure: Data needs to be regularly updated (ideally every 6 years) in order for it to be accurate and helpful for planning and preparedness purposes. Climate change may impact the distribution of species in the future.</p>
<p>Background material:</p>
<p>References Waterbird Populations and Pressures in the Baltic Sea, TemaNord 2011:550, Nordic Council of Ministers 2011 The HELCOM Red List of Baltic Sea species in danger of becoming extinct (2013) HELCOM Second Holistic Assessment of the Ecosystem Health of the Baltic Sea (2017)</p>

2. Strengthening mutual assistance for oiled wildlife response in the Baltic Region

<p>Title</p> <p>Strengthening mutual assistance for oiled wildlife response in the Baltic Region</p>
<p>Submitted by:</p> <p>HELCOM Expert Working Group on Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG-OWR)</p>
<p>Description of measure</p> <p>Annex VII of the Helsinki Convention is underpinned by the philosophy of mutual assistance, where countries aim to support each other with resources in the event of serious pollution emergencies. Rather than having to invest nationally into a preparedness level that can deal with less frequent large and complex spill scenarios, countries work together so that they can blend their national resources to create an ad hoc multi-national system that can deal with exceptional extreme challenges.</p> <p>The mutual assistance mechanisms that were developed under the Convention so far have been strongly biased towards at-sea response. For other forms of response, such as shoreline response and wildlife response the mechanisms are still in their infancy. The field of wildlife response, in particular, is an aspect of oil spill response that would also strongly benefit from agreed mutual assistance mechanisms. The EUROWA collaboration, which has been supported by EU funding (2016-2017; 2021-2022) provides a framework of standards, training and accreditation on the basis of which mutual assistance can be facilitated.</p> <p>This measure aims to strengthen the development of regional oiled wildlife preparedness that is based on HELCOM's mutual assistance mechanism, building on the EUROWA framework. The proposed activities aim to further integrate quality standards into national preparedness systems and facilitating regional exchange, cooperation and exercises.</p> <p>Overview of proposed actions under this measure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adoption and integration of the EUROWA framework at regional and national levels, assisted by the EUROWA-2 project (2021-2022), and facilitating relationships between authorities and NGOs on the basis of EUROWA standards and qualification. 2. Regional implementation of mutual assistance mechanisms, standards and procedures, as described in Chapter 7 of the HELCOM Manual, via HELCOM RESPONSE and coordinated by the EWG-OWR. 4. Baltic States strengthening oiled wildlife response planning at the national level, in line with EUROWA standards and HELCOM Recommendation 31/E/6. Oiled wildlife response needs to be fully integrated into the general pollution emergency response systems of HELCOM Response and CPs. Progress in establishing oiled wildlife preparedness (defined response strategies, trained experts and volunteers, equipment and facilities, capacity building programmes) will be monitored through the continuing activities of the EWG-OWR. 5. Baltic states enabling national expert NGOs to participate in EUROWA network activities and in national preparedness activities, including training and exercise programmes for oiled wildlife response. 6. A multi-year exercise agenda for different exercise categories (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, Delta), and rotation between Contracting Parties (CPs) to organise, where possible integrated with oil spill exercises. <p>Progress on the actions above will facilitate that oiled wildlife response preparedness can become embedded in an international policy on ecosystem management, including species and habitat protection and pollution prevention. This will require cooperation between different HELCOM Working Groups (e.g. RESPONSE and STATE&CONSERVATION).</p>
<p>Activity:</p> <p>Transport – shipping (incl. anchoring, mooring)</p>
<p>Pressure:</p> <p><i>Input of other substances (e.g. synthetic substances, non-synthetic substances, radionuclides) – diffuse sources, point sources, atmospheric deposition, acute events</i></p>

<p>State: Hazardous substances</p>
<p>Extent of impact: Developing capacity on the basis of mutual assistance mechanisms and principles is cost saving whilst also providing a high quality of response that is consistent throughout the region. Baltic wildlife species impacted (and protocols used) are the same across the region, so the type of expertise required is also the same. Proper development of trained oiled wildlife resources in each Baltic country and adoption of EUROWA standards will provide a Baltic-wide expert capacity to provide mutual assistance for wildlife emergencies.</p>
<p>Effectiveness of measure The EUROWA philosophy is based on mutual respect and trust amongst its NGO members, who cooperate on joint international response activities and a collective process of creating tools, guidelines and training materials which improve the ability of the group to respond and to pass knowledge onto local responders. This cooperation, underpinned by the EUROWA Charter, provides a work force of trained and aligned responders who can mobilise internationally for an emergency, working alongside local in-country responders who have been educated to the same standards. However, effective operation of this mutual assistance system cannot be guaranteed only by the NGO members of the EUROWA initiative, support is needed from authorities at national and regional levels to ensure proper integration of EUROWA members in a national response system, and providing the necessary support when mobilised internationally. This measure will give a more solid basis for EUROWA activities, by ensuring that Baltic states actively start to develop shared resources for oiled wildlife response according to the best available European standards. In an incident where thousands of seabirds may be affected by an oil spill, the effectiveness of an international oiled wildlife response operation may be crucial in conserving local/regional populations of densely aggregating seabird species like the endangered long-tailed duck. Oil spills may cause significant long-term effects on bird populations (e.g. impacts on breeding success).</p>
<p>Cost, cost-effectiveness of measure: Development of a Baltic-wide mutual assistance structure and capacity for wildlife emergencies is more cost-effective than each Baltic state developing their own capability individually.</p>
<p>Feasibility: The measure builds on structural elements that are already in place, e.g.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendation 31E/6. • Updated Chapter 7 on Cooperation in Oiled Wildlife Response in the HELCOM Manual. • An active Expert Working Group for Oiled Wildlife Response (EWG-OWR) • An established EUROWA Network with standards, training modules, accreditation system and dedicated expertise groups. • EUROWA standards increasingly adopted in national preparedness systems, e.g. the Netherlands. • The EUROWA-2 project (2021-2022) that has been selected by the EU for funding.
<p>Follow-up of measure: HELCOM Response has adopted a Self-Assessment Tool for Baltic States to evaluate their level of national preparedness for oiled wildlife incidents. The Tool is routinely used by countries to report on their progress according to a set of defined criteria in categories such as oiled wildlife response planning, training & exercises, partnering & funding. As the language in the Tool is based on the aims of the EUROWA philosophy, the Tool provides a mechanism to monitor progress on achieving this measure.</p>
<p>Background material:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New HELCOM Manual Chapter 7 on Cooperation in Oiled Wildlife Response. • Recommendation 31E/6
<p>References EUROWA Charter, 2019.</p>