



Document title	Extracts from recent HELCOM meetings of relevance for Seal
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Agenda Item	2 – Information by the Chair, HELCOM Secretariat and Contracting Parties
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Background

This document contains extracts from recent HELCOM meetings of relevance for Seal Expert Group, including:

- STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016 (Schwerin, Germany, 11-15 April 2016)
- FISH 4-2016 (Gothenburg, Sweden, 11-12 May 2016)
- HELCOM HOD 50-2016 (Laulasmaa, Estonia, 15-16 June 2016)

The topics of relevance for the Seal Expert Group include the following issues:

1. [SEAL 10-2016 ToR](#)
2. [HELCOM core indicators on marine mammals](#)
3. [Recommendation 17/2 'Protection of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea Area'](#)
4. [Next HELCOM Red List assessment](#)
5. [Guidelines for monitoring reproductive status of seals](#)
6. [Fisheries-marine mammals interactions](#)
7. [Survey of knowledge and research needs](#)
8. [Next meeting of State and Conservation](#)
9. [Next meeting of Fish](#)

Action required

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information.

Extracts from recent HELCOM Meetings of relevance for Seal

1. SEAL 10-2016 ToR

STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016 took note of the report on the work of the ad hoc HELCOM Seal Expert Group (document 4J-2), presented by the Secretariat and endorsed the Terms of Reference of SEAL 10-2016.

2. HELCOM core indicators on marine mammals

HOD 50-2016

- took note of the remaining study reservations on GES boundaries for core indicators (document 4-18).
- noted that Denmark and Germany are still not in a position to lift their remaining study reservations on the GES boundaries, however, are making efforts to clarify their position by STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016.
- took note that a set of indicators with associated GES boundaries under development in HELCOM is anticipated to be presented for technical review by STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016 and for adoption at HOD 51-2016.
- noted the view by Denmark that the indicator ‘Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gear’ is less relevant compared to, e.g. the indicators on population condition of mammals.
- recognized the need to reach clarity regarding the use of indicators in HOLAS II and urged the Contracting Parties with study reservations to clarify their position as soon as possible.

Populations trends and abundance of seals

STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016

- considered the revised HELCOM core indicator on ‘**Populations trends and abundance of seals**’ (document 4J-11), presented by Sweden, noting that the changes of the core indicator report are of editorial character.
- took note that Germany could in principle agree to content of the document but that due to ongoing national consultations the German study reservation on the indicator cannot be lifted at this time.
- furthermore noted the information from Germany that for seal indicators the national position is to use the HD assessment as far as possible also for the MSFD reporting purposes and that a way on how to combine the two approaches is also considered.
- noted the view by Sweden that applying HD indicators in a regional status assessment of marine mammals is considered to be difficult as there is no alignment of targets and methods for the HD indicators between countries in the Baltic Sea region. Furthermore, Sweden recalled that HD-MSFD harmonization for assessment of abundance and distribution of seals is ongoing in the BalticBOOST project.
- recalled that Denmark has requested the indicator to be adjusted to Danish waters and that a Danish expert has commented the draft report. Denmark is not in a position to lift the study reservation at this time. Denmark will clarify the study reservation when the revisions to the indicator are final.
- took note of the request from Finland to reflect in the report that the method of counting of ringed seals is different depending on ice conditions and noted that 2015 data on ringed seal abundance is available and that the evaluation will be updated at the next meeting of the Seal expert group (SEAL 10-2016).
- underlined the importance to clarify remaining substantial national issues well in advance of SEAL 10-2016 and STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016, e.g. by convening online meetings as needed.

Distribution of Baltic seals

STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016

- considered the revised GES proposal for HELCOM core indicator ‘**Distribution of Baltic seals**’ (document 4J-10), presented by Sweden.
- noted the proposal from the Seal EG to base the GES definition for distribution of ringed seal on current ice conditions, i.e. only available haul out sites should be taken into account in the assessment. The

Meeting noted that with the proposed amendments Finland has lifted the study reservation on GES for distribution of ringed seals.

- noted that Germany for the same reasons as argued for the abundance indicator is not in a position to lift the study reservation. Comments and proposed changes to the document have been compiled by German experts and submitted to the Lead Country during the Meeting.
- noted that Denmark is not in a position to lift the study reservation on the indicator, however Denmark will clarify the study reservation when the revisions to the indicator are final. A Danish expert has commented the draft report.

Nutritional status of marine mammals and Reproductive status of marine mammals

STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016

- considered the revised proposal on HELCOM core indicators '**Nutritional status of marine mammals**' and '**Reproductive status of marine mammals**' (document 4J-9), presented by Sweden.
- noted the clarification by Sweden and the proposal to first seek to agree on using the indicators as core indicators in the whole Baltic Sea area, while the proposal presented in the document, i.e. to only use the indicators in northern, central and eastern Baltic Sea, should only be considered if such agreement cannot be reached.
- noted the view by Finland that the indicators are good indicators for the population status of seals in the whole Baltic area and the wish to seek for a compromise solution for the indicators so that they can be used in HOLAS II.
- took note that Germany is not in a position to lift the study reservation on the core indicator. German experts have reviewed the documents and welcome that they have improved, however, the general concerns on the indicators remain i.e. whether they can be considered as good indicators of the health status of Baltic seals.
- recalled the request to adjust the indicator to Danish waters and that Denmark is not in a position to lift the study reservation. Denmark also considers it challenging to get enough data from healthy seal populations for the indicator since only data from by-caught and stranded animals will be used in Denmark.
- encouraged Lead country Sweden and the Seal Expert Group health team to find a solution and noted that Germany, as Lead country for the Seal expert group health team, is prepared to continue the discussion with a view to arrive at an agreement.

3. Recommendation 17/2 'Protection of harbour porpoise in the Baltic Sea Area'

STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016:

- took note of a proposal for a reporting form for HELCOM Recommendation 17-2 (document 3J-2), presented by Poland, agreed on the form and that both non-Parties and Parties to ASCOBANS will use the same form for reporting on the Recommendation to HELCOM. The Meeting agreed that guidance for Parties to ASCOBANS will be prepared on how to extract information in the easiest way from the ASCOBANS report to the HELCOM reporting form by the co-Chair and Poland in advance of STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016.

4. Next HELCOM Red List assessment

STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016:

- took note of the draft project description for the development of updated HELCOM Red Lists by 2019 (document 5N-3), presented by the Secretariat. The Meeting recalled that the steering group of the previous Red List project proposed to make a new assessment by 2019 as a one-time event to update and improve the 2013 assessments while in the long-term a longer assessment cycle was proposed.
- discussed the timing of the next Red List assessments, noting the view by Denmark, Germany and Poland that the level of new knowledge does not justify a new assessment already after 6 years from the previous assessments. The Meeting further noted the proposal by Denmark, Finland, Germany and

Poland to have a 12-year assessment cycle, which would mean finalizing the next Red List assessment by the year 2025.

- noted the view of Sweden, supported by Finland, that is important to keep the momentum going and take advantage of the experience gained through the previous Red List project and Sweden being in favour of carrying out an updated assessment by 2019. The Meeting also recalled that 2019 is one year before the CBD targets should be met.
- noted the suggestion by Germany to indicate the individual salinity tolerance values in the macro-species check lists and to depict salinity tolerance maps in the next Red List species assessment.
- agreed to convene a workshop back-to-back with the Nature conservation session at the spring meeting of State and Conservation in 2017 where experts should come together to take stock of data and available updated information on threatened Baltic Sea species and habitats/biotopes and to consider improvements needed for the purpose of an updated assessment. The Meeting agreed to discuss the planning of the workshop at STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016.
- furthermore proposed that the Contracting Parties should regularly report to upcoming State and Conservation meetings on the improvement of national data and work on Red Listed species and biotopes, to keep the needed development of background information going.
- invited the Contracting Parties to inform the Secretariat on planned updates of the national Red Lists (petra.kaaria@helcom.fi) with the view to compile a timetable of national and international reporting obligations.
- agreed to come back to discuss the scope and timing of the next red list assessment after the planned workshop, however concluded that it will not be prepared by the year 2019. The Meeting agreed to come back to the presented project proposal at a later stage.

HOD 50-2016

- took note of the ongoing discussions to postpone the next HELCOM Red List assessment since some countries were of the view that the level of new knowledge does not justify a new assessment already by 2019 as originally planned. The Meeting further noted the plans for a workshop to take stock of new data and updated information on threatened Baltic Sea species and habitats/biotopes in spring 2017.

5. Guidelines for monitoring reproductive status of seals

STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016

- endorsed the guidelines for monitoring reproductive status of seals in principle, taking note of study reservations by Germany and Poland that will be clarified **by HOD 50-2016** to the Secretariat (ullali.zweifel@helcom.fi).

HOD 50 took note that the finalization of the review and revision of HELCOM monitoring guidelines has been shifted to the end of 2016.

6. Fisheries-marine mammals interactions

FISH 4-2016

- emphasized the importance to continue communicating the work on seals-fisheries interactions between HELCOM Seal and Fish and invited Seal to present work undertaken by the incidental catch subgroup to the next meeting of Fish.
- invited Denmark to present information on an initiative to protect the harbour porpoise in Danish waters from fisheries in FISH 5-2016 and noted that in Sweden similar work is ongoing (designating protected areas for porpoises) and could possibly also be presented at FISH 5-2016.
- noted the discussion held at SEAL 9-2015 on joint management of grey seal in the Baltic Sea based on the recent increase of the grey seal population in southern Baltic waters with negative effects on fisheries and that the view of most Contracting Parties is that HELCOM Recommendation 27/28-2 'Conservation of seals in the Baltic Sea' provides sufficient guidance for actions needed at national level and that a joint management plan is not required in the Baltic Sea. The Meeting further noted that the Seal expert group

will continue exchanging experiences on management of seals and working towards harmonization of seal management plans.

- considered the seals-fisheries conflict in Sweden (document 4-5, **Presentation 5**), presented by Ms. Sara Königsson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), and noted that several seal safe fishing gear are being tested on the coastal areas in Sweden.
- suggested to include the different seal safe gear to the questionnaire on alternative fishing gears or fishing techniques (meeting document 4-2).
- noted the proposal by Latvia for preparing an analysis/literature review estimating the use of pingers or other possible scaring devices on fishing gear and the comment by Ms. Sara Königsson, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), that no further resources will be employed for this purpose in their research plans.
- noted that Denmark is currently developing seal safe fishing gears in cooperation with fishermen and took note of the Danish view that in addition to developing seal safe gear it would be important to concentrate on the effects of seals on the population level, and of the wish for HELCOM to revisit the Danish proposal on Baltic-wide grey seal management.
- recalled that Finland, Germany and Lithuania expressed at HOD 48-2015 that HELCOM Recommendation 27/28-2 provides sufficient guidance for actions needed at the national level and that a joint management plan is not required in the Baltic Sea and that this view was also shared by Poland and Sweden as informed to SEAL 9-2015.
- noted the view by Finland supported by Sweden that revisiting the HELCOM Recommendation 27/28-2 on seal conservation would not be a cost-effective process as management actions on grey seal populations can be taken on national level.
- took note of the presentation by Poland (**Presentation 6**) regarding the losses to small scale fisheries due to seals, evaluated on a basis of voluntary data reporting that started in 2014.
- noted that the HELCOM Recommendation 27/28-2 on conservation of seals allows for national management of seal populations and to control the level of the populations under the specific circumstances as stipulated in the Recommendation.

7. Survey of knowledge and research needs

STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016 took note of the compilation of input to the survey of knowledge and research needs (document 3J-5) and invited the Contracting Parties and HELCOM expert groups and projects to provide further comments to the survey to the Secretariat (petra.kaarja@helcom.fi) by 15 June 2016 and agreed to make the results available on the HELCOM website thereafter.

The results are available on the [HELCOM Website](#).

8. Next meeting of State and Conservation

STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016 welcomed that Estonia will host STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016 on 7-11 November 2016 and will provide information on the location at a later stage.

HOD 50-2016 endorsed convening the next meeting of State and Conservation on 7-11 November 2016 in Estonia.

9. Next meeting of Fish

HOD 50-2016 endorsed organizing FISH 5-2016 on 14-17 November 2016 in Denmark.