



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 5-2016](#) (Tallinn, Estonia, 7-11 November 2016)
- [FISH 5-2016](#) (Copenhagen, Denmark, 16-17 November 2016)
- [HOD 51-2016](#) (Helsinki, Finland, 14-15 December 2016)
- [STATE & CONSERVATION 6-2017](#) (Uppsala, Sweden, 15-19 May 2017)
- [FISH 6-2017](#) (Helsinki, Finland, 22-24 May 2017)
- [HOD 52-2017](#) (Brussels, Belgium, 20-21 June 2017)

Action required

The Meeting is invited to take note and make use of the information.

Extracts from recent HELCOM Meetings of relevance for Seal

SEAL 11-2017 ToR

STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016 considered the draft Terms of Reference for SEAL 11-2017 (document 3J-2), amended them according to proposals by the Meeting, and endorsed the ToRs as contained in [document 3J-2-Rev.1](#).

HELCOM core indicators on marine mammals

STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016:

- endorsed the proposal to rename the core indicators on population demography to ‘Nutritional status of seals’ and ‘Reproductive status of seals’ in order to better reflect the content of the indicators.
- noted the proposal by the SEAL EG to develop new health indicators for marine mammals to be used at a later stage, and the proposal by Germany and Sweden that this development should be reflected in HOLAS II, e.g. with a specific text box. Germany accept that these core indicators can be used in HOLAS II and informed the Meeting about its view that for the assessment of seals the criteria of the Habitats Directive must be applied.
- took note that Germany lifted their study reservations on the core indicators ‘Distribution of seals’, ‘Population trends and abundance of seals’, ‘Nutritional status of seals’ and ‘Reproductive status of seals’.
- took note that from a scientific point of view Denmark can lift the study reservations for the core indicators ‘Distribution of seals’, ‘Nutritional status of seals’ and ‘Reproductive status of seals’. The Meeting noted that Denmark will provide editorial comments to the ‘Reproductive status of seals’ indicator.
- noted that Denmark retains the study reservation on ‘Population trends and abundance of seals’ in relation the assessment of harbor seals as it is now proposed to assess the Southwestern Baltic Sea and the Kattegat populations together, as the Danish expert consideration is that there is insufficient data to suggest that the seals form a meta-population.

STATE & CONSERVATION 6-2017:

- considered the core indicator ‘Population trends and abundance of seals’ (document 4J-47) which was submitted as a late document. The Meeting endorsed its publication in principle, taking note that endorsement will be concluded through a written procedure. The Meeting invited Contracting Parties to provide their possible comments to the Secretariat and noted that should there be any substantial proposals for amendments, these will be consolidated with the Lead authors and circulated to State & Conservation contacts for endorsement with the aim to have them approved before the June meeting of HOD 52-2017.
- endorsed in principle the publication of the core indicator on ‘Distribution of seals’ (document 4J-37) taking note that some countries (Denmark, Germany and Poland) will consider the document by 30 May 2017.
- endorsed the publication of the core indicator on 'Reproductive status of seals' (document 4J-18) and 'Nutritional status of seals' (document 4J-29), with final edits base on comments provided by the Meeting, e.g.: the Meeting noted that the indicator on reproductive status of seals does not achieve

the threshold values for the Baltic Sea region, but the result section does not correctly present the combined data from Sweden and Finland, which determines the status. The results for the Baltic Sea region need to be emphasized, Swedish data should be added to the graphs presented in the results section before publication and Finnish supplementary figures can be presented in the report as extra information.

- Denmark requested to be given access to a final version of a number of indicators before they are published.
- took note of the current Status of development of pre-core and candidate indicators (document 4J-7) and identified e.g. the indicator on harbour porpoise to be of high priority for the upcoming year. Sweden offered to co-lead the work together with Lead country Germany.
- requested the Secretariat to send an invitation to the ASCOBANS Jastarnia group for support to develop the indicator on harbour porpoise abundance.

HOD 52-2017 took note of the information on the status of updating the core indicator report (document 3-10) and that the reports endorsed by the State and Conservation Working Group will be published shortly after HOD 52-2017 and that the remaining core indicator reports will be also published as soon as they have been endorsed by the State and Conservation Working Group.

Follow-up of Recommendation Conservation of seals in the Baltic Sea Area (27-28/2)

STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016:

- considered the draft evaluation of HELCOM Recommendation 27-28/2 (document 2N-1) and endorsed the criteria and assessment. The Meeting welcomed the work carried out by the Seal Expert Group and noted that the effectiveness of the Recommendation, although not fully implemented yet, is overall satisfying.
- accepted, in general, the editorial changes to the Recommendation as contained in Annex 1 of document 2N-1, however noting the concerns of Denmark and Germany concerning the suggestion to amend “Southwestern Baltic” to “Southwestern Baltic and Kattegat” in the Recommendation, since the harbor seal populations in these areas are genetically separate, and the Kattegat is covered by the OSPAR area. An analysis of the implication of these changes in terms of OSPAR regulations in the Kattegat is needed. The Meeting invited Germany and Denmark to investigate this issue and agreed to come back to this issue at State and Conservation 6-2017.
- considered the proposal on the Limit Reference Level (LRL) for harbour seals (document 6N-3) and noted that Denmark and Sweden need additional time to clarify their position. The Meeting invited Denmark and Sweden to resolve their study reservations bilaterally, preferably before the document is submitted to HOD 51-2016 on 22 November 2016.
- welcomed the Guidelines for Reporting on the implementation of HELCOM Recommendation 17-2 for countries being also ASCOBANS parties (document 2N-4), noting the suggestion by SEAL 10-2016 to report on the Recommendation every four years. The Meeting noted the proposal from Germany to also consider harmonizing the reporting to the EU Habitats Directive and MSFD. The Meeting agreed to postpone the decision until State and Conservation 6-2107 to allow for Contracting Parties to consider the document nationally in the meantime.

HOD 51-2016 considered the proposal on the Limit Reference Level (LRL) for harbour seals (document 6-21), noted that Denmark and Sweden can lift their study reservations, and agreed to define the limit reference level at 10 000 harbour seals for the combined management unit “Kattegatt (including the Danish Straits)” and “Southwestern Baltic”.

Next HELCOM Red List assessment

STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016:

- discussed the timing for the next Red List assessment (2025). Finland and Sweden were of the opinion that the year 2025, as proposed by some Contracting Parties at STATE and CONSERVATION 4-2016, is a long time gap, risking losing the momentum of the process and increased risk that experts who know the current work will not be available for the next Red List assessment. Poland, Denmark and Germany were of the opinion that 2025 should be kept for the finalization of updated HELCOM Red Lists.
- acknowledged the significant amounts of new information available nationally in some countries and noted the proposal from Finland and Sweden to update of the Red Lists in the year 2020 or 2021, providing an opportunity to fill in previous data gaps and to serve as a regular monitoring of Red Listed species. The Meeting noted that for many Contracting Parties there are still concerns of availability of resources for updating the Red Lists, but acknowledged also that the next update would not be as laborious as the previous round since checklists already exist. The Meeting discussed the possibility to update the assessment for only some biotopes or species groups in 2021 and proposed that such an option could be explored on the basis of the planned workshop (cf. paragraph 2).
- discussed the arranging of a Red List workshop to take stock of data and information on Baltic Sea species, biotopes and developed draft terms of reference for the workshop as contained in **Annex 4**. The Meeting suggested that such a workshop should be at least 1 day long and welcomed the offer of Sweden to host the workshop, back-to-back with the meeting of State and Conservation 6-2017.

STATE & CONSERVATION 6-2017:

- took note of the outcome of the Workshop for planning the updating of a HELCOM Red List (document 2N-1).
- considered the proposed conclusions and suggestions of the workshop, i.a. the fact that many countries will update national species Red Lists by 2020, and the proposal to use this as an opportunity to update the HELCOM species Red List by 2020. No potential was however found for an update of the biotopes Red List by 2020.
- noted the views of Denmark, Germany, Latvia and Poland that there is a need for national consultation to discuss the proposals before taking a decision on how to proceed with the updating of the HELCOM species Red List.
- noted the comment of EU that there would be a need to consider and review the potential for synergies between different national and international activities.
- noted the view of Finland that postponing the next assessment until 2025, as proposed by some countries, is undesirable since their data from the ongoing national Red List work will at that time be nine years old.
- noted that the HELCOM Red List has only rarely been used in HOLAS II work and discussed how to make further use of the Red List assessment results. The Meeting considered that the information could be used for e.g. marine spatial planning if the results are spatially linked to habitats and information on pressures. The Meeting invited Contracting Parties to consider nationally the allocation of resources for making further use of the HELCOM Red List assessment results.
- noted the views of Finland and Sweden that it is important to ensure the continuity of the work and that regular assessment would better support the process of implementing the conservation measures.
- considered the proposal by Poland and Germany that Finland and Sweden could start working bilaterally to update the check lists and make a first threat evaluation to be presented to State &

Conservation WG. An evaluation covering Finnish and Swedish waters will likely cover a majority of Baltic Sea species and other Contracting Parties could check if the results are relevant for their waters.

- discussed that a bilateral cooperation cannot deliver a Baltic-wide assessment.
- agreed on the need to elaborate a list of “next steps” to set the framework for carrying out an updated Red List assessment and welcomed the offer of Finland and Sweden to develop and submit a proposal to the meeting of State & Conservation 7-2017.

Guidelines for monitoring reproductive status of seals

STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2017 noted that German lifted their study reservation on the monitoring guidelines of reproductive status of seals. The [guidelines](#) were published on the HELCOM website the end of July 2017.

Conservation of ringed seals

STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016 recalled the HELCOM Ministerial Declaration 2013 as regards the request for regional cooperation to improve the status of ringed seals especially the southern sub-populations (Gulf of Finland, Archipelago Sea and Gulf of Riga). The Meeting welcomed that Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Russia are willing to consider working on this issue jointly within the framework of the HELCOM SEAL group and invited Lithuania to also take part of the work.

STATE & CONSERVATION 6-2017 took note of information about the preparation of a Finnish Life+ project focused on the conservation of southern ringed seal populations in the Baltic Sea.

Fisheries-marine mammals interactions

FISH 5-2016

- took note of the presentation by the Chair on behalf of Lotte Kindt-Larsen, DTU Aqua, on the work carried out in Denmark by DTU Aqua on the testing of fishing gear prototypes to protect the catch from seal predation (Presentation 5).
- took also note of the comment by BS AC (Danish fishermen) that, while the traps show promising results, they might not be economically feasible for traditional small scale fisheries use yet. It was noted that the use of these gears involves also a change in fishing behaviour to make them a viable alternative.
- invited the incidental catch subgroup under the HELCOM Seal expert group to present work undertaken intersessionally on seals-fisheries interactions at the next meeting.
- invited DTU aqua to present recent work on minimising porpoise incidental bycatches at the next meeting.

FISH 6-2017

Testing alternative fishing gears/fishing techniques

- recalled that information on trials of alternative fishing gears or fishing techniques is being gathered by HELCOM, with the aim of compiling a list of gear trials and developments in fishing equipment.
- noted the updated results of the questionnaire on alternative fishing gears and fishing techniques contained in document 6-1 and thanked Poland for the valuable work carried out so far.
- noted the comment by EU that it should be clarified in the accompanying documentation to what purpose trialled gears are included, i.e. to focus on mitigating environmental impacts.
- discussed how the information in the document can be used, and emphasized that the purpose of the document is to serve as information for Contracting Parties, and that it does not serve as a recommendation for legislation.

- took note of updated information from Denmark about testing of seal safe fishing gear, together with Germany and Sweden. Poland has initiated cooperation with Sweden on this issue.
- noted the comment by BSAC and CCB that there are several on-going small national projects for developing seal safe gear and the recommendation that Contracting Parties join forces in these projects to make more large-scale developments.
- agreed to consider seal-fisheries interactions at FISH 7-2017 and proposed to invite external guests to present relevant information.
- took note of the analysis of National EU-MAP Work Plans (2016) in the Baltic Sea with respect to incidental bycatch of marine mammals and waterbirds submitted by BirdLife International/ Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union Germany (NABU) (document 6-3). The Meeting noted that document 6-3 includes only some national activities and is meant to be a brief overview indicating types of data collection activities in the coastal countries and is not intended to be a comprehensive assessment.

Incidental bycatches and utilization of EU data collection framework (DCF)

- considered the document “Draft HELCOM proposal as end user, for data to be collected under DC-MAP in order to effectively assess the impact of Baltic fisheries on the marine ecosystem in the Baltic Sea”, as elaborated by Poland, with input from Germany (document 6-2, Presentation 1).
- recalled that the meeting of STATE & CONSERVATION 6-2017 took note of the document 6-2 and noted (S&C 6-2017, Outcome, § 4J.59) the information by European Union that EC recognizes HELCOM as an end user of the DCF and welcomes the initiative to match the data needs across marine and fisheries policies. STATE & CONSERVATION 6-2017 took also note that this issue will be on the agenda of the Marine Directors meeting in June 2017 at which the European Fisheries and Aquaculture Research Organisations (EFARO) will give a presentation on exploring possible synergies between MSFD and fisheries (CFP) monitoring programmes.
- agreed that the content of document 6.2 should be restructured and revised in such a way that the core document would focus on highlighting the HELCOM data needs for assessing impacts of fisheries on the marine environment - which can then possibly be met by data from various sources (including, but not limited to, EU-MAP).
- highlighted that information on the following points should be covered:
 - parameters needed (including prioritization of species covered, taking into account national considerations of the costs involved)
 - the scientific justification for needing the data and the desired data quality
 - existing data and data sources
 - missing data
- took note that even though other pressures affect the listed species, the document is geared toward specifying data needs for operationalizing two indicators focusing on the impact of fisheries.
- drafted a document based on document 6-2 to reflect HELCOM data interests (Working Paper 1) in order to specify HELCOM data needs, and revised it as contained in Working Paper 2 (Annex 2 of the outcome).
- took note of the Danish and Finnish reservations on the Working Papers and Annex 2.
- requested the Secretariat and Poland to incorporate outstanding comments and submit the draft for national consideration with a deadline for comments by FISH Contacts by 1 September 2017.
- requested that the State and Conservation working group review the document from the perspective of the data needs (i.e. tables on biotopes and species).

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- agreed that a revised draft, incorporating comments from the commenting with deadline 1 September 2017 (cf. paragraph 7) should be submitted for the meeting of the HELCOM State and Conservation WG in October 2017 and suggested that a joint (FISH and State & Conservation) online meeting should be arranged with the interested State and Conservation WG contacts in the end of September (date and time to be agreed by correspondence).

Targets for underwater noise

HOD 52-2017:

- considered the revised HELCOM guidelines for establishing environmental targets for underwater noise (document 3-6).
- recalled the request by Russia expressed at HELCOM 38-2017 to, e.g., provide examples for how the decision support trees can be applied and to compare the natural and anthropogenic noise level. The Meeting agreed that such considerations will be prepared by relevant HELCOM groups in the future development of the subject on underwater noise.
- agreed that the approach will be further developed in the future once more experience is gained through testing of the decision support trees and more data becomes available and that the HELCOM Fish Group and SEAL EG will be engaged, and cooperation with ASCOBANS on this topic will be established.

Harbour porpoise

STATE & CONSERVATION 6-2017:

- considered the proposed Guidelines for reporting on the implementation of the HELCOM recommendation 17/2 for countries being also ASCOBANS parties (document 3N-1) and agreed on the final version of the Guidelines.
- noted the comment of Germany that the ASCOBANS reporting format currently seems to be lacking a date entry field and welcomed that Poland will communicate this possible oversight to the ASCOBANS Secretariat.
- proposed including the guidance as an attachment to Recommendation 17/2, and that the reporting requirement of the Recommendation should be revised to take place every fourth year. The Meeting agreed to proceed with this updating after the ASCOBANS reporting format has been published on the ASCOBANS website, and decided to come back to this issue at State & Conservation 7-2017.
- took note of information by Denmark, Poland and Sweden on initiated or planned projects for monitoring by-catch and testing of fishing gear for minimizing by-catch.
- welcomed the information by CCB on a project to protect the Baltic harbour porpoise (documents 4N-5 and 4N-5-Rev.1).
- congratulated Sweden on establishing large Natura2000 sites for protecting harbour porpoise in offshore areas, noting that the work is based on the results of the SAMBAH project that identified areas of particular need of protection. The Meeting invited Sweden to inform the State & Conservation WG on the development of a management plan for the site.
- acknowledged that the designated new Natura2000 sites for protecting harbour porpoise may be relevant for transnational cooperation and encouraged Contracting Parties to cooperate with Sweden in the upcoming international process to create fisheries regulations for the designated N2000 area around the Baltic Proper offshore banks as soon as it is initiated.

Future meetings

HOD 52-2017 endorsed convening the meeting of State and Conservation 7-2017 in Sopot, Poland on 23-27 November 2017 and the meeting of FISH 7-2017 on 14-15 November 2017 in Copenhagen, Denmark.

HOD 53-2017 will be held on 13-14 December 2017 in Helsinki, Finland.