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| Document title | Extracts of the outcomes of 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, including:

1. HELCOM FISH-ENV Forum 10-2014, Riga, Latvia, 28 April 2014
2. HELCOM HABITAT 16-2014, Gothenburg, Sweden, 13-16 May 2014
3. HELCOM HOD 46-2014, Helsinki, Finland, 16-17 September 2014
4. HELCOM CORESET II 2-2014, Gothenburg, Sweden, 29-30 September 2014

Action required

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information.

Extracts of the outcomes of recent HELCOM meetings of relevance for SEAL

1. [HELCOM FISH-ENV Forum 10-2014, Riga, Latvia, 28 April 2014](#)

With regards to HELCOM's work on seals FISH-ENV Forum 10 noted concerns of fisheries sector in Latvia on seals-fisheries interaction and invited Latvia to attend the next meeting of HELCOM ad hoc SEAL Expert Group in October 2014.

By-catch and impacts of recreational fisheries

FISH-ENV 10

- took note of the information about the work of ICES Working Group on Bycatch of Protected Species. ICES WGBYC has tried to combine all available data especially on harbour porpoise and a major problem that has arisen is getting reliable data. The group decided that a call will go out to get all figures of fish species collected through DCF. The Meeting noted comments by Observer Organizations that the problem could be resolved by full documentation of catch and by-catch or by using measures like CCTV and reduce the costs of the methods.
- took note of collection of data on recreational catches presented by Estonia (Presentation 2) and considered that to improve data collection from recreational fisheries impact on marine environment an integrated and harmonized approach needs to be developed.

2. [HABITAT 16-2014, Gothenburg, Sweden, 13-16 May 2014](#)

Seals and harbour porpoise

HABITAT 16

- took note of the Outcome of HELCOM SEAL 7-2013 as presented by the Secretariat (document 6-1) including the development in setting Limit Reference Levels for Baltic seals.
- welcomed the summary report on seal management plans as presented by Mr. Morten Olsen, Denmark, representative of the HELCOM ad hoc Seal Expert Group (document 6-3) and thanked the HELCOM ad hoc Seal Expert Group for providing the report. Mr. Olsen concluded that the English summaries need to be more comprehensive or the future evaluation should be based on the full management plans to allow for a thorough review. The future review/evaluation should also await the publication of management plans from Estonia and Poland that are currently being developed.
- noted the comment by Finland that next year there will likely be an updated more comprehensive management plan that will acknowledge also aspects of the MSFD.
- was of the opinion that it would be good to consider producing all the required national seal management plans in English to facilitate their thorough review and harmonisation in the future.
- invited the HELCOM ad hoc SEAL Expert Group to further work on the implementation of the Recommendation 27-28/2 Conservation of seals in the Baltic Sea. 6
- took note of the outcome of the 10th Jastarnia Group Meeting as presented by Ms. Penina Blankett, Finland.
- welcomed the presentation on harbour porpoise acoustic monitoring by SAMBAH project as presented by Ms. Julia Carlström, AquaBiota Water research. The project aims to measure the abundance of the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise, provide distribution maps, increase the awareness of the species and demonstrate best practises. All data analyses will be finalised by the end of the year 2014. The final conference of the project will be held on 8-9 December 2014 in Kolmården, Sweden.
- noted that SAMBAH project is using the data included in the HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database and encouraged the Contracting Parties to submit their observations to the HELCOM/ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database by filling in the reporting format and sending it to the Secretariat (petra.kaaria@helcom.fi) at least once per year.

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- took note of the information by Germany on a project that is recording underwater noise that has deployed loggers to record noise from inter alia ships. The project is currently surveying an area including both noise loggers and C-pods aiming to record sounds from ships and offshore constructions as well as harbour porpoises.

Threat assessment of marine mammals

HABITAT 16

- noted that the Secretariat once in a while receives proposed changes to the Checklists of Baltic Sea macrospecies (BSEP 130) by expert groups and national experts regarding e.g. errors, new names of species or observations of changed distribution and agreed that the Secretariat will collect proposed changes, present them to HABITAT annually and make proposed changes after the acceptance at HABITAT. The Meeting also agreed to include the additional columns “Previous entry” and “Proposed by” to the Checklist Update Logs.
- agreed that comprehensive reviews of the Checklists of macrospecies should be made as part of an initial phase of HELCOM Red List assessments and noted that according to the Roadmap of HELCOM activities the next planned assessment was scheduled to be carried out in 2018-2019 and thereafter based on a 12-year assessment cycle as proposed by the Red List Steering group (RED LIST 5/2013).
- verified the plan to produce the next Red List assessment by end of 2019 and agreed that the comprehensive review and update of the checklists should be made as part of an initial phase of the next assessment, meaning that the next Red List assessment should aim to start in 2017. HABITAT 16 was also of the opinion that the Red List Assessment should be produced at least every 12 years.
- further emphasised that in the future it is relevant to align the Red List assessment to the MSFD and other international legislation and reporting demands. The Meeting agreed to return to the issue of timing of the updating cycle in the next meeting of the group. The Meeting further agreed to discuss a project description and funding for the next Red List assessment at the next meeting of the group.

Biodiversity data portal

HABITAT 16

- took note of the pilot biodiversity database planned to be developed within the EU-RSC-Data project as presented by Ms. Lena Avellan, HELCOM Project Manager of CORESET II (document 4-1, Presentation 3). Project Manager clarified that the pilot will only develop a database with an interface for the data collected in the HELCOM Red List project in order to make it publically available, with the intent of setting an example for a possible future larger biodiversity portal.
- supported the establishment of a pilot biodiversity database. The Meeting further agreed that, in the future, additional biodiversity data gathered in the HELCOM community can be made available through a biodiversity datportal consisting of a cluster of different biodiversity databases with a common interface e.g. through the HELCOM Map and Data service. Concerning including coastal fish monitoring data in to the HELCOM datportal, as suggested by the HELCOM FISH-PRO II Project, the Meeting was of the opinion that it needs to be checked nationally.
- took note of the comment by Sweden that the work of other relevant ongoing projects should be considered when developing the HELCOM biodiversity portal, e.g. as the project LifeWatch operating both on EU and national level for instance in Sweden.
- took note of the comment by Sweden pointing out the relevance to have a linkage between the biodiversity database and the MPA database to allow for the comparison of red-listed species and habitats and MPA data.
- noted the comment by Germany that the biodiversity portal in HELCOM should be constructed with an interface enabling automatic transfer of data stored in national databases to avoid double work of feeding in the data.

Modernization of the HELCOM marine protected areas database and assessment of status of HELCOM MPAs network

HABITAT 16

- took note of the Modernization of HELCOM MPA database (Presentation 1, document 4-2), as presented by Ms. Janica Borg, HELCOM Project Researcher, and discussed the two options for database development included in the document.
- agreed on the importance of being able to modify the structure of the database according to HELCOM needs, including linking to HELCOM GIS, and therefore supported in general the option of developing the database at the HELCOM Secretariat. The Meeting also underlined that if this option was finally decided on, the development should consider facilitating the reporting of Contracting Parties that are also partners of the OSPAR convention.
- further took note of the document on Assessment of ecological coherence of the network of HELCOM MPAs (document 4-5), as presented by Ms. Janica Borg.
- agreed that criteria for the assessment of ecological coherence should be discussed together with other aspects of MPAs e.g. database, status of protection of species and habitats, implementation of the recommendation and reporting of the recommendation.
- noted the comment by Project Researcher pointing out that only four new MPAs have been nominated compared to the situation during the last assessment made in 2010.
- agreed that the next assessment of ecological coherence should be postponed until the database and criteria for the assessment have been developed.

Management plans for Marine Protected Areas

HABITAT 16

- took note of the Review of management plans of HELCOM MPAs presented by Ms. Janica Borg (Presentation 2, document 4-7) and considered the proposal to review the existing management plans for marine protected areas.
- stressed that the content for the review of management plans should be clarified at an early stage so that the database can be structured to contain all relevant information.
- took note of the proposal by Germany to assess management effectiveness as discussed in OSPAR (document 4-6). This approach does not include reviewing the actual management plans, but is based on monitoring data, or when data is not available on expert judgement to assess the achievement of conservation objectives. The Meeting noted the point raised by Germany that a potential assessment of management effectiveness would also benefit from being taken into account when defining the content of the new HELCOM MPA database.
- supported in general a future review of MPA management plans, however took note of the opinion of Denmark, provided in writing (document 3-3), that Denmark is not prepared to support such assessment at this time point. The Meeting also supported in general the assessment of management effectiveness of MPAs but pointed out, based on the outcome of the mentioned workshop, the need to develop the method further.
- agreed to establish an intersessional Task Group, coordinated through the Secretariat by Ms. Janica Borg, to take forward issues related to HELCOM MPAs including the modernization of the database, assessment criteria for ecological coherence and possible future assessment of management plans and management effectiveness, and agreed on a timetable and plan for the work of the Task Group as included in Annex 2. The Task Group is to report to HELCOM STATE (tentative name).
- agreed to ask relevant expertise from the OSPAR Secretariat when discussing development of the database.

HELCOM Recommendation on conservation plans for species, habitats and biotopes which are at risk of extinction by 2015

HABITAT 16

- welcomed the draft HELCOM Recommendations on protection of species, biotopes, habitats and biotope complexes, as presented by Ms. Maike Kramer, Germany (documents 4-3, 4-3-Rev.1, 4-4, 4-4-Rev.1) and thanked Germany for the extensive work done.
- took note of the information from Germany the draft recommendations were prepared by a consultant, initiated to be able to reach the goal set at the HELCOM 2013 Ministerial Meeting to have the new recommendation ready by 2015, and that they do not represent an official German position at this stage.
- agreed to organise a drafting group to provide further comments on the two draft Recommendations, pointing out that specific comments will have to be gathered nationally and provided at a later stage. The drafting group was chaired by Germany and consisted of Estonia, Finland, Germany and Sweden. The drafting group provided comments and a tentative time-table for continued work as included in Annex 3.

3. [HELCOM HOD 46-2014, Helsinki, Finland, 16-17 September 2014](#)

Second holistic assessment (HOLAS II)

HOD 46

- agreed in principle on the project HOLAS II as contained in document 4-11 recognizing that some components need further development. The Meeting invited the upcoming Core Team of the project to further elaborate on the project details and description, and develop a roadmap for carrying out the project as soon as possible to be reported to GEAR and HODs.

Nature Conservation and Biodiversity Group (HABITAT)

- took note of the outcome of HABITAT 16-2014 held on 13-16 May 2014 in Gothenburg, Sweden (document 4-5) in general, and specifically:
 - endorsed the establishment of an intersessional Task Group on HELCOM MPAs that will define the data and information needs in the new HELCOM MPA database considering that it should support the analysis of ecological coherence, MPA management plans and the effectiveness of the management plans;
 - noted that the Secretariat has applied for funding to the Nordic Council of Ministers to carry out ecological coherence analysis of MPAs;
 - took note of the ongoing work and time plan for developing new HELCOM Recommendations on Conservation of Baltic Sea species, as well as underwater biotopes, habitats and biotope complexes that are threatened according to the HELCOM Red Lists published last year.
- welcomed the offer by Sweden to financially support the development of the MPA database, noting the request that the HELCOM database should in principle use the same basic format as OSPAR database, but also taking into consideration shortcomings identified in tests of the OSPAR MPA database. Sweden furthermore informed on a national study on connectivity that will be completed by the end of September 2014 and that can be shared with the Working Group STATE.

4. [CORESET II 2-2014, Gothenburg, Sweden, 29-30 September 2014](#)

CORESET II 2-2014

- took note of the presentation (Presentation 13) by Mr Volker Dierschke on core indicator 'Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gears' noting that such indicator would be based on individuals being by-caught in relation to population estimate for each population range, management

unit or acceptable loss of individuals. At present monitoring is not appropriate to support the indicator e.g. observers or on-board CCTV is needed. The indicator is applicable for both birds and mammals in all coastal and offshore areas.

- took note of the presentation (Presentation 14) by Mr Tero Härkönen on core indicator ‘Population growth rate, abundance and distribution of marine mammals’ noting that the difference compared to the OSPAR EcoQO on seal abundance is due to higher monitoring frequency in the Baltic Sea allowing for an indicator that is more specific and based on more information. The indicator is expected to be fully operational for seals by end of the CORESET II; GES- boundaries have been proposed, and technical guidelines for monitoring has been developed. Assessment units differ between species. Ringed seal in Gulf of Finland and Riga is difficult to monitor since the ice situation has changed and other methods to e.g. count ringed seal on land need to be consider.
- furthermore noted that for harbor porpoise the indicator is less developed due to lack of data and it is not likely to be operational for harbor porpoise within the CORESET II project and considered developing a separate indicator for harbor porpoise.
- agreed to separate the growth rate, abundance and distribution for seals into three separate indicators, and this will be further discussed the upcoming SEAL meeting (21-23 October).
- discussed the comment from LV and LT (document 4.3) proposing to remove the indicator from the list of core indicator since the there is no population to monitor in the waters for these countries. The Meeting noted the clarification from the TML that the existing HELCOM coordinated monitoring of seals is considered as sufficient to assess the state of the seal populations in the Baltic Sea. Monitoring for the indicator is based on surveys of haul out sites, and since seals do not haul out in the waters of Latvia and Lithuania, monitoring in these waters is not needed at this time. The seals move into these CPs waters to feed.
- Ms Charlotta Moreaus on core indicators ‘Reproductive status of marine mammals’ and ‘Nutritional status of seals’ (Presentation 15) noting that
 - the indicator on nutritional status is based on using body condition of seals as an indicator for their status. At this time FI and SE is holding most of the data that is primarily based on necroscopy of hunted seals and by-catches, and are currently discussing further development of the method. GES for blubber thickness for grey seal has been proposed while additional work is needed to develop the indicator for ringed seal and harbour seals. The indicator is expected to be operational for juvenile grey, ringed and harbor seals by end of CORESET II. Data on harbor porpoise is insufficient at this time.
 - that female reproductive status is sensitive for hazardous substances. GES has been proposed for grey seals while for the other seal species data analyses are still ongoing. At present sufficient data is available from the Gulf of Bothnia and the Swedish west coast while there is a lack of data from Baltic Proper and Gulf of Riga. Data on harbor porpoise is insufficient at this time.
- discussed the comment from LV and LT (document 4.3) proposing to remove the two health related indicators from the list of core indicator since the there is no population to monitor in the waters of these countries. The sufficiency of Finnish and Swedish monitoring data to support a Baltic wide assessment will be analyzed.
- discussed the possibility to convene a final joint meeting of CORESET II in the beginning of 2015, underlining that such meeting should also provide options for discussion in smaller groups. It was noted that such a meeting could be useful to hold back-to-back to the upcoming meeting of EUTRO-OPER in week 7, 2015. The option of convening a final meeting was not decided at the Meeting.
- expressed the wish that the work among experts and established network of CORESET II should be kept in some operational also after the project has ended.