



Document title	Status and hosting of SEAL databases developed within the BALSAM project
Code	4-2
Category	DEC
Agenda Item	4 – Monitoring of seals
Submission date	16.10.2014
Submitted by	Secretariat

Background

The HELCOM SEAL Expert group has been working to gather data on seal abundance and distribution in the Baltic. The BALSAM project (October 2013 – March 2015) Work package (WP) 3 is preparing a common database for seal monitoring data for the HELCOM area containing abundance data from year 2000 to the present. The format will be excel/access database, where rows and columns will be temporal units and geographic units. Entries will be estimates and coefficients of variation for ringed seal and counted individuals for grey and harbor seals. The database will include an annex that explains the conditions and survey methods etc. The database was aimed to be ready in June 2014.

Integrated distribution data from available telemetry studies of harbor seals, grey seals and ringed seals is also being gathered in BALSAM. The Estonian Fund for Nature has been tasked to suggest a GIS compatible database to store and display seal offshore distribution based on telemetry data of marked seals. It was agreed, that all data holders will provide an input in a format developed in the project. The offshore distribution monitoring is based on seal telemetry data of marked animals. Among researchers there is agreement to provide filtered and generalized data, which will answer the main question: which sea areas are in use by (marked) seals and what is the use intensity. This data could be used for indicators, which sets requirements for the timely delivery of data as well as making the data used in indicators available.

BALSAM will also prepare an updated framework and methodology for coordinated monitoring of seals throughout the Baltic Sea, living up to current challenges; e.g. climate change and expanded ranges.

The BALSAM WP3 seal experts will have a meeting back-to-back with the HELCOM SEAL meeting on 21.10.2014. The BALSAM experts will be invited to present the upcoming project deliverables to the Meeting.

Action required

The Meeting is invited to:

- discuss and take note of the upcoming deliverables from the BALSAM project
- discuss and agree on update interval, hosting and data collection arrangements for the seal abundance and offshore distribution databases
- discuss possibilities to have data compliant with European data formats (ODV Biology/Darwin)
- discuss and agree on how/if the data can be made publicly available and to what aggregation level

Status and hosting of HELCOM SEAL Abundance and Distribution Databases

1. Update interval

Update interval is suggested to be annual in conjunction with the STATE/SEAL group meetings. The collected data should be checked and verified by the SEAL group. A reporting deadline before the meeting should be agreed to enable timely delivery of the data.

2. Data hosting arrangements

Abundance database: The database could be hosted by national institutes or by the HELCOM secretariat, as deemed necessary. Hosting responsibility should include receiving and updating the database with new data entries, as well as quality control of the correctness of the information.

Telemetry database: The database could be hosted by the experts who developed the database or by the HELCOM secretariat, as deemed necessary. Hosting responsibility should include receiving and updating the database with new data entries, as well as quality control of the correctness of the information.

3. Access to data

According to the HELCOM data and information strategy, all data collected within HELCOM framework to assess the status of the Baltic Sea should be public, unless the data is flagged as restricted. Reason for restrictions could be e.g. preventing the release of precise locations of certain endangered species. The Meeting is requested to agree on which scale the data from these databases can be made publicly available in the HELCOM website and in the HELCOM map and data service. Possible scale levels could be following:

- Gridded data (e.g. 10x10 km grid used in HELCOM RED LIST assessments or other resolution grid)
- HELCOM Assessment unit level 3: Sub-basins

If there are observations/data in the database that should be restricted, that data should be flagged accordingly and will not be made publicly available.