



# Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Ad hoc Seal Expert Group  
Berlin, Germany, 2-4 December 2015

SEAL 9-2015

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Agenda Item 1	Adoption of the Agenda .....	2
Agenda Item 2	Information by the Chair, HELCOM Secretariat and Contracting Parties.....	2
Agenda Item 3	Progress with National Management Plans .....	3
Agenda Item 4	Limit reference level for harbour seals .....	3
Agenda Item 5	Monitoring and data collection .....	4
Agenda Item 6	Core indicators and other activities under the Seal Expert Group teams.....	5
Agenda Item 7	Work on Baltic Sea harbour porpoise .....	7
Agenda Item 8	Human induced pressures and management of marine mammals .....	9
Agenda Item 9	Evaluation of Recommendation 27/28/2 .....	9
Agenda Item 10	Any other business .....	10
Agenda Item 11	Outcome of the Meeting .....	11
Annex 1. List of Participants .....		12
Annex 2. Draft Terms of Reference for SEAL 10-2016 (Poland, 5-7 October 2016).....		14
Annex 3. Composition of the intersessional teams under the Seal Expert group .....		15
Annex 4. Composition of the incidental catch subgroup under the Seal Expert group.....		16

## Outcome of the Ninth meeting of HELCOM ad hoc Seal Expert Group (SEAL 9-2015)

### Introduction

0.1 In accordance with the Outcome of HELCOM SEAL 8-2014 (paragraph 8.2), the Ninth Meeting of ad hoc Seal Expert Group (HELCOM SEAL 9-2015) was held in Berlin, Germany, at the premises of Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety.

0.2 The Meeting was attended by delegations from all Contracting Parties except Estonia, EU and Lithuania, and observers from Nordic Hunters' Alliance and WWF Finland and Invited Guests from Pro Mare MTÜ. The List of Participants is attached as **Annex 1**.

0.3 The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Anders Galatius, Denmark, Chair of the Seal Group and Ms. Ulla Li Zweifel, Professional Secretary, and Ms. Petra Kääriä, Assisting Professional Secretary, acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

0.4 The Chair highlighted the focal items of the Meeting including the further development of the marine mammal core indicators, development of a database for seals, planning for the assessment of the effectiveness of Recommendation 27/28-2 and the review of national management plans for seals.

0.5 Mr. Alexander Liebschner welcomed the participants to Berlin.

### Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

Documents: 1-1

1.1 The Meeting noted that the Meeting will select a Chair and vice-Chair for the expert group for 2016-2018 (c.f. paragraph 10.7).

1.2 The Meeting adopted the Agenda as contained in document 1-1.

### Agenda Item 2 Information by the Chair, HELCOM Secretariat and Contracting Parties

Documents: 2-1, 2-2, 2-3

2.1 The Meeting took note of extracts from recent HELCOM meetings of relevance for Seal (document 2-1) as well as proposals on actions on selective extraction and incidental catch (document 2-2), as presented by the Secretariat.

2.2 The Meeting further took note of the survey of HELCOM knowledge and research needs for achieving good environmental status, as presented by the Secretariat (document 2-3), and agreed that the expert teams under the Expert Group will look into the research needs intersessionally and will provide input to the survey by using the excel template included in [document 2-3-Att.1](#) to the Secretariat ([petra.kaaria@helcom.fi](mailto:petra.kaaria@helcom.fi)) by **1 March 2016**.

2.3 The Meeting took note of the following reports by the Contracting Parties on project results and other issues of relevance to the activities of the group:

- Denmark presented information on grey seal population structure in Danish, Estonian and Swedish waters. Currently the grey seal hauling out at Rødsand in Denmark appears to be admixed between the Baltic and North Sea populations. Grey seals at Kattegat appear to be of North Sea origin and seals at Bornholm are of Baltic origin.
- Denmark further presented a recent study on damage by seals to different Danish fisheries, in particular gillnet, hook and line fisheries (**Presentation 1**). The study, being based on interviews with fishermen, photo documentation, and video system on gillnet vessels indicated that the 'catch damaged by seals shows large variations by fishery, area, season and vessel from around 1 % up to 30 %. The report of the study including an English summary is

available at [http://www.aqua.dtu.dk/Publikationer/Forskningsrapporter/Forskningsrapporter\\_siden\\_2008/](http://www.aqua.dtu.dk/Publikationer/Forskningsrapporter/Forskningsrapporter_siden_2008/)

- Finland has started to hunt ringed seals in the Bothnian Bay and the quota is 100 ringed seal individuals. Since 2016 grey seal counts will only be carried out in the Finnish waters of the Quark and Bothnian Bay every second year.
- Sweden: due to decreased ice conditions in 2014-2015 higher counts of ringed seals have been obtained and in 2015 permits have been issued for protective hunting for 150 ringed seals in the Swedish areas of Bothnian Bay.

2.4 The Meeting regretted the information that Finland will only carry out complete grey seal counts every second year from now on, since this will effect negatively the confidence of the assessment of grey seals based on the core indicator ‘**Populations trends and abundance of seals**’ and agreed to examine the consequences for the assessments.

2.5 The Meeting welcomed the report on the cooperation between Estonia, Finland and Russia on the Gulf of Finland ringed seal, presented by Mr. Mart Jussi, Pro Mare MTÜ (**Presentation 2**) as urged by the HELCOM 2013 Ministerial Declaration and noted that the action is included in the Finnish MSFD Programmes of Measures.

### **Agenda Item 3 Progress with National Management Plans**

Document: 3-1, 3-1-Rev.1

3.1 The Meeting took note of the status of national seal management plans (document 3-1), agreed to rename the document as ‘national management plans for marine mammals’ to be able to incorporate management plans for harbour porpoise, updated the information as included in document 3-1-Rev.1 and agreed to provide further amendments to the Secretariat ([petra.kaaria@helcom.fi](mailto:petra.kaaria@helcom.fi)) **by 15 December 2015**.

3.2 The Meeting recalled that SEAL 7-2013 started the work on harmonizing national seal management plans as required by the Recommendation 27-28/2 and that SEAL 8-2014 agreed on guidelines for national management plans (Annex 2 of the outcome of SEAL 8-2014).

3.3 The Meeting recommended for the Contracting Parties to harmonize national seal management plans according to the guidelines when existing plans are revised or when new plans are developed and suggested that the plans would be produced in English in addition to national language. The Meeting agreed to review new and revised management plans as they are adopted to assess the use of the guidelines. The Meeting invited the Contracting Parties to inform the Secretariat when new plans are adopted and to make them available in advance of HELCOM Seal meetings.

3.4 The Meeting encouraged the Contracting Parties to review current national management plans and their implementation in light of the Recommendation 27-28/2 as well as the management plan guidelines developed by SEAL 8-2014 (Annex 2 of the [outcome](#)).

### **Agenda Item 4 Limit reference level for harbour seals**

Documents: 4-1

4.1 The Meeting recalled that SEAL 8-2015 was of the opinion that the agreed 10.000 limit reference level for Baltic seals does not apply to harbour seals because of their more complicated population structure compared to other seal populations as well as influx migration from other areas and that work should be started to define a LRL for harbour seals.

4.2 The Meeting took note of the comment by Sweden that the 10.000 LRL for Baltic seals was based on not taking into account effects from tentative catastrophic events and represents a minimum long-term level for populations that are genetically isolated.

4.3 The Meeting took note of the presentation by Denmark on the scientific publication by Olsen *et al.* (2014): Integrating genetic data and populations viability analyses for the identification of harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*) populations and management units, as background information for limit reference levels for harbour seals (document 4-1). The Meeting noted that although there are distinct sub-populations of harbor seals in the HELCOM area, genetic flow has been detected between them. The Kalmarsund population was not included in this study but previous studies suggest that it is genetically isolated.

4.4 The Meeting noted that new data on gene flow will likely be available in March 2016 and can be used as a basis to define LRL for harbor seals. The Meeting further noted that LRL may be set separately for different management units.

4.5 The Meeting agreed that due to the apparent gene flow between sub-populations, the LRL will be equal to or smaller than 10.000 individuals for harbor seals. The Meeting agreed to consider this matter again at SEAL 10-2016.

## **Agenda Item 5            Monitoring and data collection**

Documents: 5-1

5.1 The Meeting considered the development of a HELCOM database for seals under Work Package 1.2 of the HELCOM coordinated EU co-financed project BalticBOOST (September 2015-December 2016) (document 5-1, **Presentation 3**), as presented by the Secretariat. The Meeting noted that the database will be structured to provide data for the HELCOM core indicators on abundance and distribution of seals, but if desired also for other indicators.

5.2 The Meeting noted that the database developed by the BALSAM project will be updated and that reporting to the updated database will require point wise location of counts which will enable aggregating results to any assessment unit level. The Meeting further noted that the database will be an Oracle solution and that it will be possible to report data using forms or by using excel import, and the data can be exported in csv-format.

5.3 The Meeting suggested to develop the database in communication with OSPAR to seek harmonization as far as possible in the reporting format for mammals between the two marine regions.

5.4 The Meeting noted that data and maps on seal distribution and abundance from the recent BALSAM project are available on [this HELCOM website](#) and noted that the database on GPS tracks of tagged animals created by BALSAM should be updated.

5.5 The Meeting took note of the template for HELCOM monitoring guidelines, presented by the Secretariat and noted that STATE & CONSERVATION 3-2015 agreed on using it for harmonization of HELCOM monitoring guidelines. The Meeting agreed that the new and existing monitoring guidelines for seals will be prepared/edited to be in line with the template.

5.6 The Meeting noted that STATE & CONSERVATION 3-2015 invited the Seal group to consider monitoring guidelines for harbour porpoise and was of the opinion that monitoring guidelines for harbour porpoise will be developed after national monitoring is initiated in all relevant countries and that this work will be coordinated by the Seal Expert Group, when timely.

5.7 The Meeting welcomed that the Chair will lead the work to transfer the existing monitoring guidelines for abundance of seals to the new template format and that the Chair and Mr. Tero Härkönen, Sweden, will share the responsibility of preparing guidelines for distribution of seals and that guidelines for offshore distribution of seals will be drafted by Mr. Mart and Ivar Jussi. The Meeting noted that Sweden is leading the development of the monitoring guidelines for the indicators '**Nutritional status of marine mammals**' and '**Reproductive status of marine mammals**' under the State and Conservation Working Group and that the development will be carried out in consultation with the health team, taking note of the German study reservation on these indicators.

5.8 The Meeting noted that new and updated monitoring guidelines should be ready by mid-2016 and encouraged the Contracting Parties to aim at providing drafts of the monitoring guidelines to the Secretariat ([petra.kaarja@helcom.fi](mailto:petra.kaarja@helcom.fi)) **by 14 March 2016**.

## Agenda Item 6 Core indicators and other activities under the Seal Expert Group teams

Documents: 6-1, 6-2

### *Marine mammal core indicators*

6.1 The Meeting took note of the presentation on the second HELCOM Holistic Assessment (HOLAS II) as well as timeline and organization for the further development of HELCOM core indicators (document 6-1, **Presentation 4**), as presented by the Secretariat. The Meeting noted the agreement by HOD 48-2015 that the core indicators will be further developed through a Lead Country approach and Lead and co-Lead Country representatives have been nominated as indicated in document 6-1.

6.2 The Meeting welcomed that HELCOM expert groups, i.a. Seal EG, will be used as a platform for discussing and reviewing the indicators under development and noted that HOD 48-2015 furthermore requested HELCOM groups, projects and networks to prioritize this role as well as the delivery of input to HELCOM assessments and make arrangements for the work as necessary.

6.3 The Meeting took note of the information that core indicators will form the basis for the thematic assessment to be carried out by the HOLAS II project and that in order for indicators to be used in the biodiversity assessment, they need to be reviewed with associated GES definition at the latest by STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016, 7-11 November, and adopted at HOD in December 2016.

6.4 The Meeting noted that the Seal EG is anticipated to supply updated indicator reports and indicator evaluations by early 2017 and early 2018 to contribute to the 2nd holistic assessment. The Meeting noted that for abundance and distribution data the planned timetable is realistic, while for data for indicators on population condition the German study reservation needs to be resolved.

6.5 The Meeting took note of the request to support the development of relevant distribution maps for marine mammals for use in HOLAS II, and invited the Secretariat to approach the contacts of Seal EG to compile the required data. The Contracting Parties were invited to propose relevant existing data sets for spatial distribution of marine mammals or e.g. functional habitats, and inform the Secretariat ([petra.kaarja@helcom.fi](mailto:petra.kaarja@helcom.fi)).

6.6 The Meeting took note of the presentation on the indicators '**Population trends and abundance of seals**' by Lead Country Sweden (**Presentation 5**) and noted that the indicator is operational for all seal species, although for harbor seals, the LRL is based on the preliminary LRL of 10.000 animals.

6.7 The Meeting took note that the evaluation of abundance and trends, being based on Bayesian analysis, requires 80% support for growth rates above the agreed thresholds (e.g. 7% for grey seal) and that the reduction of monitoring by Finland may affect the status assessment of grey seals.

6.8 The Meeting took note of the report on the core indicator '**Distribution of Baltic seals**', as presented by Mr. Tero Herkönen, Sweden (**Presentation 5**), discussed the GES definition for the indicator and noted that it is currently formulated as when "All historically identified and available haul-out sites are used and there are no migration barriers".

6.9 The Meeting agreed that breeding distribution should be reflected in the short version of the GES definition.

6.10 The Meeting recalled the German study reservation on the indicator and noted that based on this definition GES is not reached in the Southern Baltic waters while the status of grey seal distribution in the Baltic Sea is assessed as GES in the current indicator report. The Meeting recognized that if "all" historical sites should be used to reach GES, the evaluation would be sub-GES for distribution of grey seals in the management unit i.e. in the whole Baltic Sea area. The Meeting proposed that the indicator on distribution should not use the management unit for purpose of assessing grey seals but instead assess the distribution of grey seals in smaller assessment areas. The

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Meeting agreed that the evaluations of grey seal distribution should be re-made based on smaller assessment areas, and that the indicator report will be adjusted according to the outcome of the new evaluation.

6.11 The Meeting took note of the Finnish study reservation on using ice coverage as a basis for the GES boundary for ringed seals since the ice cover is predicted to diminish in the Baltic Sea. The view of Finland is that ringed seal GES should instead be linked to human activities that can be managed e.g. ice breaking, fisheries, shipping, hunting, etc.

6.12 The Meeting suggested to revise the text on the GES boundary as follows: *'Historically identified and available haul-out and breeding distribution used and no migration barrier'* and the following on page 13 of the indicator report:

*'Ringed seals breed in lairs constructed in snow covered broken and consolidated ice. The sizes of the breeding areas display substantial inter-annual variation. GES is achieved when the long-term breeding area is stable or not diminishing due to direct human activities.'*

6.13 The Meeting agreed that when the core indicator report on **'Distribution of Baltic seals'** has been revised according to proposals by the meeting (paragraph 6.9-6.12), Lead Country Sweden will circulate the revised version to Seal EG contacts and the Contracting Parties will have a possibility to provide nationally consulted comments before submission to State and Conservation 4-2016. The Meeting noted that data from haul-out sites in Polish and German water areas are missing in the core indicator report and invited those countries to provide the missing data to Lead Country Sweden.

6.14 The Meeting took note of the presentation on the population condition indicators **'Nutritional status of marine mammals'** and **'Reproductive status of marine mammals'**, by Lead Country Sweden (**Presentation 6**). The Meeting noted that blubber thickness, used as a proxy of nutritional status, affects reproduction and responds to short-term variation in the environment and represents a general indicator of the condition of the animal. The Meeting noted that GES for the two indicators has been defined for grey seals from Finnish and Swedish waters but not for other marine mammal species.

6.15 The Meeting recalled the German study reservation on the two indicators and furthermore noted that Germany regretted that the Seal EG health team had not been involved the choice of health indicators and was together with Poland of the view that blubber thickness and reproductive status are not considered as suitable indicators for health of marine mammals, and furthermore that new parameters should be considered for measuring the health of marine mammals.

6.16 The Meeting considered the proposal to use weaning weight and condition of grey seal pups on ice as a non-lethal complement to the indicator on **'Nutritional status of marine mammals'** indicator, presented by Sweden (document 6-2). The Meeting noted that several existing studies can provide baseline data for a possible indicator on weaning weight of pups. The Meeting proposed that the indicator details and the feasibility of monitoring should be further discussed by the health team.

6.17 The Meeting clarified that hunted seal individuals in Finland and Sweden can be used to measure blubber thickness and reproductive status but are not shot for the purpose of providing samples for assessments.

6.18 The Meeting proposed that the Lead Country representatives and the health team will continue the discussion on the indicators on population condition intersessionally and report the conclusions to SEAL 10-2016.

6.19 The Meeting took note of the report on the indicator **'Harbour porpoise distribution and abundance'** as presented by co-Lead Country representatives from Denmark and Finland for the indicator and noted that there are plans to develop the indicator under the MAMBO project (tentatively between 2016-2021) which is still in the evaluation phase. The Meeting proposed to distinguish more clearly between the two populations of harbour porpoise in the draft report for the candidate indicator. The Meeting agreed that the indicator report on harbour porpoise distribution and abundance (version presented to State and Conservation 2-2015) will be reviewed.

6.20 The Meeting welcomed that Germany will investigate the possibility to take the lead for the further development of the harbour porpoise indicator.

The Meeting welcomed the presentation by Mr. Sven Koschinski, Lead Country representative for the core indicator '**Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gear**' (**Presentation 7**). The Meeting noted that the indicator is still on a conceptual level since there is currently not sufficient monitoring of incidental catch on mammals and seabirds to assess the status and that targets level only exists for harbour porpoise while approaches such as CLA (Catch limit algorithm) is explored for other species. The Meeting pointed out that the boundaries for harbour porpoise management units presented in the indicator need to be revised. *Activities under the intersessional teams*

6.21 The Meeting took note of the report on the activities of the health group, presented by the team leader Ms. Ursula Siebert as well as a presentation by Mr. Morten Olsen on 2014 avian influenza H10N7 outbreak among harbor seals (document 6-3).

6.22 The Meeting took note of the report on the activities of the distribution group, presented by the team leader Mr. Olle Karlsson. The Meeting noted that a majority of work has been carried out within the framework of the BALSAM project. The Meeting supported the proposal to make an annual call for telemetry data to continue building information to the database on GPS tracks from tagged seals, developed by BALSAM.

6.23 The Meeting took note of the report on the activities of the population group, presented by the team leader Mr. Markus Ahola, and that the team had been involved in the development of indicators as well as in activities within the BALSAM project.

6.24 The Meeting agreed that the development of indicators by the Lead and co-Lead Countries of the indicators will be taken forward in consultation with the intersessional expert teams according to the following:

- the distribution indicator on seals and harbour porpoise under the distribution team,
- the population condition indicators under the health team,
- the abundance indicator on seals under the population team.

6.25 The Meeting reviewed the composition of the intersessional expert teams and agreed on them as included in **Annex 3**.

6.26 The Meeting agreed that the consultation on indicators will be initiated by the Lead Countries by submitting a plan for the continued development of indicators in 2016 to the Secretariat ([petra.kaaria@helcom.fi](mailto:petra.kaaria@helcom.fi)) as well as to the participants of the respective team. The Meeting agreed that Lead Countries will distribute core indicator reports for review to the respective team when suitable, keeping in mind the document deadline for State and Conservation meetings and leaving good time for review by members of the intersessional teams. The Meeting recognized that for the development of indicators, data from Contracting Parties is needed and acknowledged that such requests may be made to members of the Seal EG teams by the Lead countries.

6.27 The Meeting was of the view that some intersessional work of the teams could likely be taken forward through written communication while meetings may be proposed as needed. The Meeting noted that the Secretariat can facilitate online meetings for the teams upon request.

6.28 The Meeting considered work on incidental catch under the Seal Expert Group and noted that incidental catch is addressed in the Work Plan of the HELCOM Fish group. The Meeting agreed that the incidental catch sub-group under Seal will facilitate exchange of information with the Fish group and proposed the sub-group to provide support to the Lead Country Germany on the indicator '**Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gear**'. The Meeting reviewed and agreed on the composition of the ad hoc incidental catch subgroup under Seal as included **Annex 4**.

6.29 The Meeting thanked Mr. Markus Ahola, Finland, for his dedicated work in the group and welcomed Mr. Ivar Jussi as the new lead for the population team.

Documents: 7-1, 7-2

7.1 The Meeting recalled that HELCOM SEAL 4-2010 agreed to review the status of the HELCOM-ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database in each future meeting of HELCOM SEAL and agreed to include static acoustic monitoring data and other observations of harbour porpoises. SEAL 4-2010 also agreed that any updates to the harbour porpoise database should be reported to the Secretariat. The Meeting further recalled the suggestion by SEAL 7-2013 not to include incidental sighting from the high density areas for harbour porpoise when reporting to the database.

7.2 The Meeting took note of the reporting gaps in the [HELCOM-ASCOBANS harbour porpoise database](#) (document 7-1) and noted that last updates have been received by the Secretariat in November 2015 from Germany and the data will be shortly uploaded to the database. The Meeting encouraged the Contracting Parties to update information to the database by filling in the [reporting form](#) and sending it to the Secretariat ([petra.kaaria@helcom.fi](mailto:petra.kaaria@helcom.fi)) and furthermore agreed that each Contracting Party will designate a contact person for updating data to the database and inform the Secretariat ([petra.kaaria@helcom.fi](mailto:petra.kaaria@helcom.fi)).

7.3 The Meeting reconfirmed not to include information on incidental sightings and strandings from high density areas, welcomed that Germany will prepare a suggestion on an east-west border for the high and low density areas of harbour porpoises and invited Germany to present the proposal at SEAL 10-2016.

7.4 The Meeting supported the maintenance of the database for incidental sightings, standings and incidental catch as it provides data of interest for use by different stakeholders (e.g. projects, authorities and general public), but agreed not to request the reporting on static acoustic monitoring data since the reporting is demanding and currently the data does not support any core indicator. The Meeting proposed instead to establish a HELCOM meta-database on acoustic monitoring and welcomed that Germany will prepare a meta-data format for the database in advance of SEAL 10-2016.

7.5 The Meeting noted that STATE & CONSERVATION 3-2015 invited SEAL 9-2015 to discuss how to organize reporting of the Recommendation 17-2 'Protection of Harbour Porpoise in the Baltic Sea Area' for those countries that are not parties to ASCOBANS, welcomed the offer by Poland to develop a draft reporting form and submit it to SEAL 9-2015 for consideration.

7.6 The Meeting considered the proposal for a reporting form for HELCOM Recommendation 17/2 for countries that are not parties to ASCOBANS (Estonia, Latvia and Russia) (document 7-2), submitted by Poland, Lead Country for the Recommendation, and suggested the following amendments/edits to the form:

- to include information on the bycaught individuals, including total length and sex (for e.g. demographic purposes)
- to only include harbour porpoise in the field 'species',
- include 'number of bycaught animals' instead of 'estimated number of bycaught animals' (as estimates for incidental catch are hard to obtain),
- to clarify what kind of effort data is needed
- change 'party' to 'Contracting Party'

7.7 The Meeting invited Poland to consider the proposed changes and submit the updated reporting form to STATE & CONSERVATION 4-2016.

7.8 The Meeting took note of the report on activities related to Baltic Sea harbour porpoises under ASCOBANS and the Jastarnia Plan, as presented by Ms. Penina Blankett, Finland. The Meeting noted that ASCOBANS organized a workshop on the requirements of legislation to address monitoring and mitigation of small cetacean bycatch in January 2015 and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Advisory Committee meeting, held in autumn 2015, provided recommendations on the matter, including suggestions for improvement of the Regulation (EC) 812/2004 (incidental catches of cetaceans in fisheries). The



recommendations have recently been forwarded to the European Commission and the effectiveness of the regulation will be evaluated by the end of 2015. The Meeting further noted that the ASCOBANS 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Parties will be held in Helsinki, Finland, 30 August-1 September 2016.

#### **Agenda Item 8      Human induced pressures and management of marine mammals**

Documents: 8-1, 8-1-Rev.1, 8-1-Rev.2, 8-2, 8-3, 8-3-Rev.1

8.1            The Meeting updated the 2014 numbers for registered mortality of seals, as contained in document 8-1-Rev.2, and agreed that the Contracting Parties will submit additional numbers to the Secretariat ([petra.kaaria@helcom.fi](mailto:petra.kaaria@helcom.fi)) **by 15 December 2015**.

8.2            The Meeting took note of the information by Finland that according to new national fishery legislation enforced on 1 January 2016, fishermen are obliged to report incidental catches.

8.3            The Meeting welcomed the draft overview of incidental catch knowledge and activities in the Contracting Parties and relevant working groups as presented by Mr. Karl Lundström (document 8-3) and amended it as contained in document 8-3-Rev.1.

8.4            The Meeting noted that the incidental catch subgroup has initiated contact with the HELCOM Fish group and that the work on the incidental catch review by Seal has been acknowledged by the Fish group.

8.5            The Meeting took note of the interview survey of grey seal by-catch in the Baltic fisheries (document 8-2), as presented by Finland, indicating a significantly higher by-catch than officially reported. The Meeting encouraged similar studies to estimate the incidental catch on ringed seals and harbour porpoises.

#### **Agenda Item 9      Evaluation of Recommendation 27/28/2**

Documents: none

9.1            The Meeting noted that the next assessment of the effectiveness of the HELCOM Recommendation 27/28-2 is due in 2016 and recalled that STATE & CONSERVATION 2-2015 recommended that the assessment should be discussed at SEAL 9-2015, the Seal Expert Group should provide input for the assessment and evaluate if it currently follows-up the Recommendation as a whole or if complementary reporting is required.

9.2            The Meeting welcomed that Sweden as Lead Country of the Recommendation is prepared to lead the assessment intersessionally.

9.3            The Meeting provided the following preliminary comments regarding the implementation of the Recommendation:

- paragraph 1, point 3 (page 2 of the Recommendation): it is not possible to define a Precautionary Approach Level until populations are close to carrying capacity.
- paragraph 3 (page 3):
  - point 1. work in progress by the Seal EG,
  - point 2; not possible to set LRL and PAL for all species/management units at this time (cf. para 4.4).
  - point 3; reference levels for seal distribution and health are to be considered as GES level for related indicators.
  - point 4: attempt to harmonize national management plans ongoing through the guidelines developed by Seal EG, review will take place as guidelines are revised and published.
  - point 5: unclear, but likely covered,

- point 6: SEAL 9-2015 prepared ToR to be adopted by HELCOM State and Conservation (Annex 4).
- point 7: reporting to State and Conservation (previously HABITAT) is carried out.
- paragraph 4 (page 3): Ongoing as linked to core indicators.
- paragraph 5 (page 3): Analysis of protection of seals through MPAs have been carried out nationally and regionally through a German study presented previously to the Seal EG. However, it has not been analyzed whether additional protection of seals through MPAs is needed.
- paragraph 6 (page 3): projects and initiatives have been taken e.g. Denmark, Finland and Sweden.

9.4 The Meeting concluded that the Seal Expert group will follow-up all paragraphs of Recommendation 27/28-2.

9.5 The Meeting invited the Distribution team to provide input to the assessment of paragraph 5 **by 30 April 2016** and agreed that Sweden will circulate a draft of the evaluation 30 days in advance of SEAL 10-2016.

#### **Agenda Item 10**      **Any other business**

Documents: 10-1, 10-2

10.1 The Meeting took note of a pilot study on comparing assessment of the status of seal populations based in MSFD and HD criteria under the BalticBOOST project, as presented by Sweden. Favorable Conservation Status as defined in the Habitats Directive is based on a number of qualitative judgements based on predefined criteria while GES under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive is based on a quantitative approach by applying indicators with GES-boundaries. WP 2-1 of the BalticBOOST project will provide a comparison, based on data for seal abundance and distribution, of assessment results using criteria under the HD and MSFD and will provide a recommendation on how to harmonize the assessment under the two directives.

10.2 The Meeting considered the proposal on joint management of grey seal in the Baltic Sea, presented by Denmark (document 10-1), which has also been presented to STATE & CONSERVATION 2-2015, HOD 48-2015 and FISH 3-2015. The Meeting noted that the grey seal population in Danish waters has been increasing during the recent years, e.g. around the island of Bornholm, with negative effects on fisheries and the view by Denmark that the mobility of grey seals would justify harmonized Baltic wide management of the species.

10.3 The Meeting 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. The Meeting noted that this view is also shared by Poland and Sweden as informed to the meeting.

10.4 The Meeting however underlined the role of the Seal EG to exchange experience on management of seals and to work towards harmonization of management plans and furthermore noted the view of Finland and Sweden that cooperation between the Contracting Parties can go beyond the current level of cooperation.

10.5 The Meeting agreed on the draft Terms of Reference for SEAL 10-2016 (c.f. sixth bullet point under point 3 [in the Recommendation 27/28-2](#)) and agreed on the draft ToR as included in **Annex 2** and to submit them for approval by State and Conservation 4-2016.

10.6 The Meeting noted that the next meeting of HELCOM Fish will discuss seals-fisheries interactions and noted that the outcomes of FISH 4-2016 on this matter will be taken into account when planning for SEAL 10-2015.

10.7 The Meeting re-elected Mr. Anders Galatius as Chair of HELCOM Seal for 2016-2018 and Mr. Olle Karlsson as vice-Chair of HELCOM Seal for 2016-2018.

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10.8 The Meeting took note of the recent meeting hosts of HELCOM Seal (document 10-2), and agreed to organize the next meeting of HELCOM ad hoc Seal Expert Group, SEAL 10-2016, on 5-7 October, 2016 and thanked Poland for her willingness to host the Meeting in Hel Marine Station, Poland.

10.9 The Meeting thanked Germany for the excellent hosting of the Meeting.

**Agenda Item 11 Outcome of the Meeting**

Documents: draft Outcome

11.1 The Meeting adopted the draft outcome of the Meeting. The Outcome of the Meeting, together with the documents and presentations considered by the Meeting are available on the HELCOM Meeting Portal.

## Annex 1. List of Participants

<b>Chair</b>			
Chair	Anders Galatius	Aarhus University	agj@bios.au.dk
<b>Contracting Parties</b>			
Denmark	Michael Grell	Miljø- og Fødevarerministeriet, Naturstyrelsen	Migre@nst.dk
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## Annex 2. Draft Terms of Reference for SEAL 10-2016 (Poland, 5-7 October 2016)

The Seal EG will during its tenth meeting, and in the intersessional period leading up to the meeting;

1. Review Recommendation 27-28/2:
  - a. Lead Country Sweden to prepare a draft assessment of the effectiveness of the Recommendation 27-28/2 by [30 days in advance of SEAL 10-2016].
  - b. Distribution team to provide background information to support the assessment of paragraph 5 of Recommendation 27-28/2 **by 29 April 2016**.
2. Indicators:
  - a. Seal EG expert teams to review the indicator report intersessionally and support Lead Countries in the development of HELCOM core and candidate indicators on seals and harbour porpoise, through written consultations or meetings as needed,
  - b. The Contracting Parties to provide 2015 data, including for abundance, in advance of SEAL 10-2016, and carry out updates of the relevant core indicator evaluations at the meeting with the view to provide updates by early 2017 at the latest, or as otherwise agreed in the HOLAS II project,
  - c. Health team to propose indicators to assess the health status of mammals.
3. Harbour seal LRL related to population structure:
  - a. Tero Härkönen, Sweden, and Morten Olsen, Denmark, to report to the SEAL 10-2016 meeting.
4. Management plans:
  - a. Review new and updated national management plans, to be circulated for discussion at SEAL 10-2016.
5. Databases:
  - a. Intersessional development through the BalticBOOST project to be presented at SEAL 10-2016.
6. Monitoring:
  - a. Transfer the existing monitoring guidelines for abundance of seals to the new template (Anders Galatius), prepare guidelines for distribution of seals (Anders Galatius, Tero Härkönen) and guidelines for offshore distribution of seals (Mart and Ivar Jussi) as agreed by SEAL 9-2015.
  - b. Health team: support Lead Country Sweden in the development of monitoring guidelines on nutritional and reproductive status of marine mammals as proposed by State and Conservation 3-2015.
7. Mitigation measures for seal fisheries interaction:
  - a. Pending out of the Fish Group meeting in May 2016, Finn Larsen, Denmark, to consider making a review of studies on seal-safe fishing gears.

## Annex 3. Composition of the intersessional teams under the Seal Expert group

### **POPULATION TEAM**

Team Leader: Ivar Jussi, Estonia

Team Members:

Mervi Kunnasranta, Finland

Mikhail Verevkin, Russia

Mikko Toivola, Finland

Tero Härkönen, Sweden

Alexander Liebscher, Germany

Morten Olsen, Denmark

Penina Blankett, Finland

Finn Larsen, Denmark

Susanne Viker, Sweden

### **DISTRIBUTION TEAM**

Team Leader: Olle Karlsson, Sweden

Team Members:

Mervi Kunnasranta, Finland

Mikhail Verevkin, Russia

Iwona Pawliczka, Poland

Penina Blankett, Finland

Alexander Liebscher, Germany

Mart Jüssi, Estonia

Morten Olsen, Denmark

Antti Halkka, WWF

Finn Larsen, Denmark

Susanne Viker, Sweden

### **HEALTH TEAM**

Team Leader: Ursula Siebert, Germany

Team Members:

Mikhail Verevkin, Russia

Kaarina Kauhala, Finland

Marja Isomursu, Finland

Britt-Marie Bäcklin, Sweden

Charlotta Moraeus, Sweden

Karin Hårding, Sweden

Iwona Pawliczka, Poland,

Mette Sif Hansen, Denmark,

Morten Tange Olsen, Denmark,

Rune Dietz, Denmark,

Ivar Jussi, Estonia,

Mart Jussi, Estonia,

Valdis Pilats, Latvia,

Kristina Lehnert, Germany

Vivica von Vietinghoff, Germany

## Annex 4. Composition of the incidental catch subgroup under the Seal Expert group

Karl Lundström, Sweden  
Finn Larsen, Denmark  
Susanne Viker, Sweden  
Ursula Siebert, Germany  
Penina Blankett, Finland  
Krzysztof Skora, Poland