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Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature  
Conservation

STATE & CONSERVATION  
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### Background

STATE & CONSERVATION 8-2018 took note of the activities of Expert Groups, Intersessional Networks and Projects under the guidance of State and Conservation as collated and presented by the Secretariat, and invited the Secretariat to regularly update the document and present it at the State and Conservation meetings.

This document contains an outline of the main activities and outcomes of expert and correspondence groups since the latest State and Conservation meeting, as well as the status of projects under the guidance of the group, both those finalized in 2018-2019 and those which are ongoing or agreed on to start in 2019, under State and Conservation. Information on the progress of the groups will also be presented at the meetings of HELCOM Heads of Delegation and the annual meeting of the Helsinki Commission.

### Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information.

## Activities of Expert- and Intersessional Networks and Projects under the Guidance of State and Conservation Expert Group

### Expert Network on hazardous substances (EN-HZ)

**Co-Chairs: Ms. Sara Danielsson and Ms. Elisabeth Nyberg, Sweden**

The next meeting of EN-HZ takes place 4 – 5 April 2019, at ICES.

The group has initiated reporting of activities to the HELCOM PRESSURE Working Group to increase the connection between status and load, particularly through work on HELCOM indicators. The HELCOM-ICES project (in association with OSPAR and the MIME script developer) to develop an automated system to calculate the hazardous substances indicators has also been a topic of discussion and will be one of the main focusses of the next EN-HZ meeting.

### Expert Network on benthic habitats (EN-BENTHIC)

**Chair: Ms. Antonia Nyström Sandman**

The next meeting of EN BENTHIC will take place 14-15 November 2019 in Helsinki, Finland.

The detailed [ToRs and workplan](#) have been endorsed by HELCOM HOD 55-2018 ([Outcomes, paragraph 4.58](#)). The work of the group is underway and a number of interactions with projects (e.g. BONUS SEAM and the EU co-funded ACTION project) are being developed. The upcoming meeting of EN BENTHIC will take place back to back with a HELCOM Workshop on Habitat Mapping, hosted by Finland.

### Intersessional Network on Eutrophication (IN-Eutrophication)

**Chair: Ms. Vivi Fleming-Lehtinen (Finland)**

In Eutrophication serves as a discussion platform and operational group producing eutrophication assessments. The main aim of the work of the group is to further develop eutrophication indicators and assessment methodology and carry out eutrophication assessment. The group is currently working on developing indicator scaling in eutrophication assessment methodology. The group held an extra online meeting in November ([IN-Eutrophication 11E-2018](#)), focusing on indicator scaling issues. The next online meeting of the group ([IN-Eutrophication 12-2019](#)) takes place 1 April, where the group will also consider issues related to the updating and revision of the Baltic Sea Environment Factsheets.

### HELCOM-OSPAR-ICES Joint Working Group on seabirds (JWG BIRD)

**HELCOM Co- Chair: Mr. Volker Dierschke, Germany**

The group meets annually and also works intersessionally through correspondence. The topics the group works on during the annual meetings are agreed jointly by HELCOM, OSPAR and ICES. The work programme provides a thematic overview of the work carried out by JWGBIRD, covering databases and data products, monitoring, assessment, ad hoc consultation and the ICES advisory process. Tasks under each theme will be specified on an annual basis. JWGBIRD collaborated, as needed, with national leads and co-leads of HELCOM indicators related to seabirds and with national leads of HELCOM recommendations, including but not limited to: Recommendation 34E-1 'Safeguarding important bird habitats and migration routes in the Baltic Sea from negative effects of wind and wave energy production at sea', and Recommendation 37-2 'Conservation of Baltic Sea species categorized as threatened according to the 2013 HELCOM red list'. The group can also work on other HELCOM projects that support the commitments mentioned above.

The work of the group after STATE & CONSERVATION 9-2018 has included providing responses to the questionnaire on the review of the HELCOM indicators. The group arranged a workshop, jointly with State and Conservation WG, on mapping migration routes of seabirds (20-22 November, HELCOM Secretariat, Helsinki, Finland) in support of implementing HELCOM Recommendation 34E-1. Representatives of the group also took part in the EU workshop on threshold setting and indicator development for species.

**[Monitoring of Radioactive Substances in the Baltic Sea \(MORS EG\)](#)****Chair: Ms. Tamara Zalewska, Poland**

The next meeting of MORS EG will take place in 21-23 May, in Risö, Denmark.

The group works with monitoring of radioactive substances in accordance with HELCOM Recommendation 26/3 and developing and updating core indicator on concentrations of radioactive substances in marine environment as well as making thematic assessments of the impacts of radioactivity on the marine environment and humans in regular intervals. In 2018, the group's latest achievement was finalized when the Thematic assessment on radioactivity 2011-2015 in the Baltic Sea was published as Baltic Sea Environment Proceeding #151.

**[Expert Group on Marine Mammals \(EG MAMA\)](#)****Chair: Anders Galatius, Denmark****Vice-Chair: Morten Tange Olsen, Denmark**

The next meeting is planned to be held in Helsinki, Finland, on the 24-26 September 2019.

The main focus of work of the expert group during 2018 was on drafting new guidelines for monitoring of abundance and distribution, plan the further work on the indicators for nutritional and reproductive status and health. Regular reporting was also considered and updated. The group also suggested a new, more structured mode of working, with dedicated time set aside also for harbour porpoise work, and in relation to this suggested to update their name to HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA).

**[HELCOM - Baltic Earth Expert Network on Climate Change \(EN CLIME\)](#)****HELCOM Co- Chair: Ms. Clarisse Kehler Siebert, Sweden**

The overall scope of the group is to facilitate the regional cooperation in relation to climate change and its impacts, including transferring quality assured science to end users, and to provide clear guidance on the level of confidence in information which is presented. The work can also vicariously support the identification of knowledge gaps and identification of possible future research priorities. The main goal is to condense the large body of scientific research into a form that is directly utilizable in developing HELCOM core indicators, updating and implementing BSAP, and in preparation of future HELCOM Assessments on climate change.

The work of the group was initiated, and the group has had two online meetings, first held on 29 January ([EN CLIME 1-2019](#)) and the second on 15 February ([EN CLIME 2-2019](#)). The focal points of these meetings included agreeing on the content and scope of the Climate Change Fact Sheet, agreeing on working mode and parameters to be included, mapping current expertise and planning future work. The group will have a physical meeting in association with 12th Baltic Sea Science Congress in Stockholm 19-23 August.

**[Expert Network on Marine Litter \(EN-Marine Litter\)](#) (joint with PRESSURE)****Chair: None**

The network reports back to Pressure Working Group on their activities related to the RAP ML, and to State and Conservation Working Group on monitoring issues. During 2018 the network has focused on the finalisation of the beach litter monitoring guidelines which were adopted by HELCOM countries, the update of the section on marine litter in the State of the Baltic Sea report, to mainly include information on: (i) the ten most frequent litter items at Baltic Sea level at different types of beaches, categorized into urban, peri-urban and rural beaches; and (ii) the proportion of marine litter material categories in bottom trawl hauls for sub-basins covered by the Baltic International Trawl Survey coordinated by ICES. Additionally, national experts contributed to the implementation of the RAP ML: (i) information on national activities on ALDFG have been compiled; (ii) "Principles for design reducing/ preventing marine litter" evolved from the HELCOM-Interreg workshop on marine litter and eco-design held on 15 June 2018 in Berlin, Germany; (iii) raising awareness is a topic of high relevance for the region which is supported by the "Clean Beach Campaigns" activities held around the region.

**Expert Network on Underwater Noise (EN NOISE)** (joint with PRESSURE)**Chair: Mr. Peter Sigray, Sweden**

The network reports back to Pressure Working Group on their activities. During 2018 the network focused on the finalisation of the regional monitoring sub-programme as well as monitoring guidelines of continuous noise and HELCOM input to the process of establishing environmental targets for underwater noise, which are all now adopted by HELCOM countries. Furthermore, the HELCOM input was presented at the EU TG-NOISE Thematic workshop: “Towards thresholds for underwater noise - Common approaches for interpretation of data obtained in (Joint) Monitoring Programmes – Part 2” (7-8 November 2018, Brussels, Belgium). To ease the process the reporting format to the OSPAR-HELCOM registry of underwater noise events was updated in 2018. A lot of effort was dedicated to the update of the [section on underwater sound](#) in the State of the Baltic Sea report to mainly: (i) improve the maps showing the sound pressure level of underwater continuous sound at different frequency bands in the Baltic Sea; (ii) include a table compiling impulsive event days in the Baltic Sea as reported by countries to the regional registry (by April 2018); (iii) improve the figure showing the auditory range of some marine species present in the Baltic Sea and sound frequencies generated by human activities; and (iv) improve the map containing an example of how information on the distribution of sound can be compared with important areas for species that are sensitive to sound. In addition to the specific section on underwater sound, the ‘Input of continuous anthropogenic sound’ layer (used in the Baltic Sea Pressure Index-BSPI) was improved based on data from the BIAS project.

**Task Group on Marine Protected Areas (MPA TG)****Chair: Ms. Penina Blankett, Finland**

The task group has had two online meetings after STATE & CONSERVATION 9-2018. The focal points of the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the task group (MPA TG 8-2019) were the possibility of linking species to habitats and to consider the inclusion of this information in the MPA database, developing the Guidelines for MPA pressure evaluation, the review process of the HELCOM MPA management and designation guidelines and drafting a survey on the national frequency of review and/or update of MPA management plans. The other online meeting was an extra meeting dedicated to deal with the update of guidelines for MPA pressure evaluation. The group is in addition working on updating the MPA management and designation guidelines. The next meeting of the group is held online 12 March and will focus on scoping the updating needs for the HELCOM MPA management and designation guidelines.

Projects currently ongoing or agreed under State and Conservation:

- Project on [Quality assurance of phytoplankton monitoring in the Baltic Sea](#) (HELCOM PEG), 2017-2019
- Upgraded [HELCOM Checklist of Baltic Sea Species \(BaltiCheck\)](#), 2018-2019
- Continuation of the [Project for Baltic-wide assessment of coastal fish communities in support of an ecosystem-based management \(FISH PRO III\)](#), 2018-2023
- HELCOM core indicators (HELCOM CORE INDICATORS), 2018-2020
- Project for the development of a workspace for the evaluation of HELCOM hazardous substances indicators and integrated assessment, 2018-2019