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Background

The 2018 HELCOM Ministerial Declaration includes a number of paragraphs related to activities under the mandate of the State and Conservation Working Group (Annex 1). These paragraphs give the direction for HELCOM work in the upcoming years but some need further specification in order to be turned into concrete tasks for the Working Group and associated Experts Groups, projects, or networks. This could include e.g. to define type of development work and products (e.g. targets for indicators, guideline, assessment) required to reach the goals of the Declaration and target years for achieving them. The aim is that the concretized actions that are not carried out by end of 2020 will be included in the updated BSAP to be agreed in 2021.

The implementation of existing HELCOM actions, including from the current BSAP and Ministerial Declarations in 2010 and 2013, have been followed-up through a coherent scheme since 2016. Some actions were however evaluated as too generically formulated to be followed-up, e.g. those lacking concrete aims and target years and those that were formulated as aspirations rather than commitments (we encourage, we strive for) (Annex 2). As agreed through the Strategic Plan for the BSAP update, these actions should be reviewed to check if some of them should be considered for uptake in the updated BSAP and in that case to concretize them in a similar way as outlined for paragraphs of the 2018 Ministerial Declaration. The relevant actions related to the State & Conservation Working Group are included in sheet 5 of document 8J-1 Att 1 to State & Conservation 9-2018.

The Meeting is invited to make initial proposals for how to concretize the actions listed in Annex 1 and Annex 2. In the case that the task is not completed the Meeting is invited to consider how to arrange further work, e.g. by Contracting Parties taking the lead to develop the actions further, or by convening an online meetings. The initial proposal will be presented to HOD 56-2019 and the task is to be finalized by 2019 autumn meetings of Working Groups (cf Work Plan activity 2.4).

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- to discuss and agree on existing HELCOM actions to be considered for further development and uptake in the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan,
- to make initial proposal for concretized actions,
- to agree as needed on how to finalize the task by next meeting of the Working Group at the latest.

Annex 1. Paragraphs from MD 2018 related to State and Conservation WG

The tables include an extract of paragraphs from the HELCOM 2018 Ministerial Declaration related to the State and Conservation Working Group ([HELCOM 2018 Ministerial Declaration](#)). An initial evaluation has been made if the paragraphs warrant more concrete formulation and targets for implementation. If not implemented by 2020 the concretized actions will be considered for uptake in the updated BSAP.

Paragraphs using wording such as recall, encourage, strive for, acknowledge etc are in general not proposed to be concretized due to their general character.

Suggestions for text that could warrant more precise wording and concretization, including target years, is presented in yellow. Several of the paragraphs relevant for State and Conservation also contain commitments relevant for Pressure. For such paragraphs the sections relevant for State and Conservation have been highlighted in bold.

Theme: General

Paragraph from Ministerial Declaration	Initial evaluation
21. WE AGREE to complete and fully operationalise a set of indicators used for regularly assessing the status of the marine environment including in the next holistic assessment; to advance mapping and assessment of the extent and intensity of human activities in the Baltic Sea region and improve the understanding of their impacts, including the cumulative effects on the ecosystem; and to use this information for strengthening the implementation of ecosystem-based management;	General, could be specified based on consolidation and development processes leading up to HOLAS III.

Theme: Marine Litter

Paragraph from Ministerial Declaration	Initial evaluation
31. <i>Part of paragraph indicated with bold related to S&C</i> (other part to be considered by Pressure) WE RE-COMMIT to preventing and reducing marine litter from land and sea-based sources and to achieving a significant quantitative reduction by 2025. To that end WE COMMIT to regional work on developing baselines and threshold values for maximum levels of marine litter in the Baltic Sea, in close coordination with work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora. If additional efforts are needed to achieve those levels, WE COMMIT to developing ambitious, regionally coordinated, quantitative targets to reduce input of litter;	Target year to be included.
32. <i>Part of paragraph indicated with bold related to S&C</i> (other part to be considered by Pressure) WE ALSO COMMIT to strengthening regional research and developing harmonised monitoring methods on the sources, distribution, amounts and impacts of marine litter including micro-plastics, in coherence with similar work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora, and to improving assessment of the effectiveness of measures;	Monitoring guidelines and target year.

Theme: Underwater noise

Paragraph from Ministerial Declaration	Initial evaluation
37. WE WELCOME the progress made in the implementation of the Regional Baltic Underwater Noise Roadmap 2015-2017, including the establishment of a joint HELCOM/OSPAR registry of licenced impulsive sound events and on-going work for a regional monitoring programme and for monitoring guidelines for continuous noise, as well as new evidence regarding potential impact of underwater noise on species in the Baltic Sea;	General

38. WE EMPHASIZE the need to further improve our understanding of the adverse impacts of underwater noise on those identified noise sensitive marine species and in particular the cumulative impacts of impulsive noise from multiple activities;	General
40. WE COMMIT to continuing fruitful cooperation between European Regional Seas Conventions, and in particular OSPAR, in order to exchange good practices and to fill knowledge gaps, and to continuing regional work in developing scientifically sound threshold values for underwater noise that are consistent with GES for species identified as sensitive to noise in the Baltic Sea, in close coordination with work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora including UNEP Regional Seas Programme.	Concrete cooperation suggestions can be added, target year for threshold values.

Theme: Loss and disturbance to the seabed

Paragraph from Ministerial Declaration	Initial evaluation
41. <i>First part of paragraph indicated with bold related to S&C (second part to be considered by Pressure):</i> WE AGREE to do regional work on developing threshold values for the adverse effects of anthropogenic physical disturbance and, based on the best available scientific information in close coordination with other relevant fora, if needed to achieve GES, to develop the necessary regionally coordinated quantitative targets for the reduction of physical disturbance caused by human activities and habitat loss;	Target year for threshold values, alternatively concrete examples of needed knowledge or data provisions in order to be able to develop threshold values and commitment to implement those.

Theme: Biodiversity

Paragraph from Ministerial Declaration	Initial evaluation
43. WE COMMIT to increasing the protection and restoration of biodiversity, to intensifying regional, sub-regional and cross-sectoral cooperation, and to preserving and promoting the ecological balance of the Baltic Sea area with strengthened resilience, also as streamlined response to adaptation needs stemming from human-induced climate change;	Concrete example actions needed, especially in relation to understanding, improving and maintaining ecosystem function and increasing resilience.
44. WE AGREE to take actions to prevent the loss of biodiversity in the Baltic Sea and to improve the status of species, biotopes and habitats that are threatened according to the 2013 HELCOM Red Lists, inter alia, by establishing conservation plans or other relevant programmes or environmental measures for species, biotopes and habitats at risk of extinction;	Needs to be specified, e.g. improve status by direct actions (MPAs and restoration) but try to also elaborate the link between improved status and limiting pressures stemming from human activities brought forward by other HELCOM groups.
45. WE WELCOME the significant progress made towards increasing the geographical coverage of the HELCOM marine protected areas (HELCOM MPAs) network. WE RECALL the HELCOM commitment to step up efforts to establish an ecologically coherent and effectively managed network of HELCOM MPAs in accordance with HELCOM Recommendation 35/1. WE ALSO COMMIT to improving the understanding of the role of MPAs for ecosystem services, in order to enhance cost-effectiveness of MPAs management and yield the greatest environmental benefits. WE ALSO AGREE to strive for full achievement of Aichi Target 11 regarding the management, ecological representativeness and connectivity of the HELCOM MPAs network;	Linking MPAs to ecosystem function and services e.g. Brian S. Cheng, Andrew H. Altieri, Mark E. Torchin, Gregory M. Ruiz. Can marine reserves restore lost ecosystem functioning? A global synthesis. <i>Ecology</i> , 2019; 100 (4): e02617 DOI: 10.1002/ecy.2617 . Aichi target reference could need updating. Add a section on adjusting existing MPAs to improve representativeness and connectivity?
46. WE RECALL the HELCOM commitment made at the UN Ocean Conference, to describe Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Areas (EBSA) in the Baltic Sea in collaboration with the Convention of Biological Diversity.	Not current.

Theme: Climate change

Paragraph from Ministerial Declaration	Initial evaluation
47. WE STRESS the need for research and adaptive management to strengthen the resilience of the Baltic Sea in the face of climate change impacts. WE AGREE to increase HELCOM's preparedness to respond to climate change impacts, by taking foreseen climate change impacts into account when updating the BSAP and by exploring the needs and possibilities to further adapt HELCOM's policies and recommendations 1) in line with	Suggest a process for including continuous climate change policy review in the work of HELCOM, using the output from EN CLIME. Starting e.g. with indicators and open recommendations.

existing objectives of protection of the marine environment and sustainable use of marine resources, also under the changing climate, and 2) to maximise the capacity of the Baltic Sea ecosystem to contribute to mitigation of climate change through blue carbon storage;	
48. WE EMPHASIZE the need to further strengthen the scientific understanding of the impacts of climate change together with multiple other stressors on the Baltic Sea marine environment, and AGREE that HELCOM should take action to bridge this knowledge to policy and practice.	Work of HELCOM /Baltic Earth EN CLIME. Concrete suggestions? Raising awareness of expected effects and impacts. Reoccurring climate change-policy seminars linked to WG and HOD meetings?

Theme: Ocean Governance

Paragraph from Ministerial Declaration	Initial evaluation
55. p7 WE ENDEAVOUR to explore further synergies of HELCOM Monitoring System with other relevant monitoring activities ;	Explore the possibility to incorporate novel monitoring methods (EO, passive monitoring, etc). Consider including concrete examples coming out of BONUS projects, e.g. SEAM and FUMARI.
56. <i>First part of para in bold related to S&C: WE STRIVE for joint approaches and synergies among HELCOM and relevant multilateral environmental agreements including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Migratory Species and the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas. WE STRESS</i> the importance of transboundary cooperation, transparency, and information-sharing among Contracting Parties in order to assess, prevent, mitigate, and compensate the impacts arising from human activities such as nuclear energy projects, offshore projects of oil drilling and construction of gas pipelines, in line with international legislation;	This principle for HELCOM work could be developed into more concrete wording on using a regional approach to support reporting on and harmonized regional implementation of e.g. CBD by the countries.
59. <i>Part of para in bold related to S&C: WE AGREE</i> to strengthen the fruitful cooperation with OSPAR on transboundary issues and common challenges to gain efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of SDGs such as ballast water management and introduction of invasive alien species, the issue of underwater noise, micro-plastic, migratory birds, MPA network and management, and threatened and endangered species ;	Concrete suggestions for cooperation welcome.

Annex 2. Existing commitments that are currently not included in the follow-up system

The commitments listed below were previously assigned as “too general”, however, in the process of the update of the BSAP it should be considered if some of the actions could possibly be concretized and included in the updated BSAP.

Commitments in *italics* are already being addressed (partially accomplished) and could either be included in amended existing actions or benefit from concretization to for actions on their own, commitments presented in **bold** have been considered high priority by State and Conservation previously, due to their link to several work strands (MSP, MPAs, climate change, BSPI/BSII), and could therefore benefit from special attention.

Theme: General

- *Expand the HELCOM Geographic Information System with an interface on the HELCOM website showing the progress towards a healthy Baltic Sea*

Theme: Underwater noise

- *Consider regular monitoring on ambient and impulsive underwater noise as well as possible options for mitigation measures related to noise taking into account the ongoing work in IMO on non-mandatory draft guidelines for reducing underwater noise from commercial ships and in CBD context.*
- Encourage research on the cause and effects of underwater noise on biota
- Further investigate the potential harmful impacts to wildlife from noise

Theme: Biodiversity and Ecosystems

Habitats

- **Further development of detailed landscape maps.**
- **Speed up sea bed habitat/biotope mapping for nature protection and maritime spatial planning purposes, and with HELCOM as the regional node for data and information sharing.**
- Identification and mapping of potential and actual habitats of habitat forming species (bladder wrack, eelgrass, blue mussel, stoneworts) and development of a common approach for the mitigation of negative impacts.

Species

- Develop research on reintroduction of valuable phytoplankton species in regions of their historical occurrence.
- Protect seabirds in the Baltic Sea, taking into consideration need for co-operation with other regions through Conventions and institutions such as the Agreement on Conservation of African Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA) under the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), and particularly in the North Sea (OSPAR) and Arctic (Arctic Council) areas;
- *Protect sturgeon through supporting the HELCOM project on Baltic sturgeon remediation as well as raise public awareness concerning re-introduction of sturgeon among fishermen, other relevant stakeholders and the public.*

Biodiversity

- Promotion of research on developing methods for assessing and reporting on impacts of fisheries on biodiversity
- Increase positive incentives to enhance reduction of pressures on biodiversity and to work towards elimination by 2020 of incentives and subsidies which could be harmful to biodiversity in order to improve the buffering capacity of the marine and coastal ecosystems for a better resilience.

- *Implement on a regional level the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity for the 2011-2020 period of the UN Convention of Biological Diversity, including the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, taking into account the special characteristics of the Baltic Sea, bearing in mind that the implementation of the Plan in the EU and its Member States is carried out through the EU Biodiversity Strategy*

Ecosystems

- Further develop information provision from ecosystem models and to co-operate closely in doing so, bearing in mind the requirements of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan in developing targets for good ecological status, indicators for assessing the ecological status of the marine environment and in estimating future allowable nutrient inputs to the Baltic Sea and its sub-regions without jeopardising achievement of the good ecological and environmental status
- *Establish a cooperation network to agree on guidelines to promote the ecosystem-based management of coastal fisheries.*

Theme: Marine Litter

- Further investigate the potential harmful impacts to wildlife from microscopic plastic particles, an ingestion of which could lead to the transfer of toxic chemicals to the food chain

Theme: Climate change

- *Further assess in cooperation with the BALTEX community, the current and predicted effects of climate change on the pressures affecting the marine ecosystem.*