



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature
Conservation

STATE & CONSERVATION
13-2020

Online, 5-9 October 2020

Document title	HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food Webs - Draft ToRs and plan
Code	4J-11
Category	DEC
Agenda Item	4J – Progress of relevant HELCOM expert groups and projects
Submission date	14.9.2020
Submitted by	Secretariat

Background

State and Conservation 12-2020 discussed the potential need for additional structures to support work in newly identified themes that have no direct Expert Group coverage within the existing HELCOM structures (STATE & CONSERVATION 12-2020, [Outcomes paragraph 4J.61-2](#)). The outcomes of State and Conservation 12-2020 were presented to the HOD 58-2020 ([Document 5-14](#)) and the proposals made were endorsed (HOD 58-2020, [Outcomes paragraph 5.17-21](#)).

The following document provides a draft proposal for how to achieve good input to HOLAS III via these new Correspondence Groups or Workshops, including provisional timelines and Terms of Reference (ToRs).

Nominations for the groups/workshops should be submitted to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) **by Friday 30 October** to initiate planning and preparatory work.

This document specifically addresses the draft plan and ToRs for a time limited HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food Webs.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- review the content of the draft ToR and the provisional time plan and improve the focus and details as needed,
- endorse the draft ToRs and the provisional time plan and their submission to GEAR 23-2020 for information and HOD for intersessional approval,
- initiate national processes to provide nomination of experts to populate the group and the planned workshop (including the preparatory work required in advance of them).

HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food webs

Draft Terms of Reference for HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food webs (CG FOODWEB)

Background

The HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food Webs (CG Food Webs) will operate dominantly via online communication. Intersessional work will be a key component of achieving the aims of the group and making progress on the topic within HELCOM. The group is time limited.

Validity of ToR

Autumn 2020 – autumn 2023.

The initial time frame of the group is time limited to cover the period prior and during HOLAS III, with an option to extending the mandate of the group and/or make the group a permanent part of the HELCOM structure, based on need and evaluation of performance.

Main aims and focus of the group:

- 1) Identify, collate and summarize existing Food Web information from the Baltic Sea region,
- 2) Identify how existing information can be utilized in the HOLAS III report,
- 3) Produce an assessment of Food Webs in the Baltic Sea for the HOLAS III report (descriptive report that is data driven, where possible, and reflects any limitations via a confidence in the assessment),
- 4) Propose viable and best options for longer term development towards an optimal assessment of Food Webs in the Baltic Sea (taking into account available knowledge, data and other relevant factors).

The latter task (task 4) is only to be addressed once the first three items have been established and are concretely in place.

The work in HELCOM on indicators and assessments needs to be driven by the best available scientific knowledge, but should also consider aspects that may influence the design or application of assessment, including: the need for comparable and harmonized regional assessments, potential sub-regional variation, data availability and ecologically relevant assessments of status. These factors are key in the development of a solid assessment, and confidence evaluation, that offers the broadest and most inclusive regional coverage possible.

Organization of work

CG Food Webs will be guided by the State and Conservation Working Group. Information flow to State and Conservation is a key factor and timely exchanges will increase acceptance of the work of the CG for HOLAS III. State and Conservation may request that specific topics or issues are addressed. Chair(s) will be elected by the members of CG FOODWEB. The products will be handled at HELCOM Meeting Portal workspaces dedicated to this purpose.

The mode of work for the expert network will include correspondence and online meetings facilitated by the HELCOM Secretariat, with a physical meetings and workshops taking place as needed in the build up to the Third Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS III), as approved by State and Conservation.

The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the correspondence group. The indicator coordinator (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) and the Professional Secretary responsible for State and Conservation (Jannica.Haldin@helcom.fi) will act as contact points to support the work of the CG.

Reporting

The Chair(s) will report back to the State and Conservation WG on the activities of the correspondence group. For State and Conservation WG this will take the form of an agenda item at WG meetings.

Membership

It is anticipated that this Correspondence Group will be dominantly formed of experts already nominated to existing HELCOM Expert Groups that currently address specific independent components of the Baltic Sea food web. Additional nominations are anticipated where Experts have knowledge related to the assessment of food webs as an entity (e.g. simulations, models, or field/experimental studies).

Nominations should be submitted to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) **by Friday 30 October 2020**.

Provisional time plan and proposed work flow

Step 1: Nominations to populate the CG – 30 October 2020

Nominations of national Experts will be made by State and Conservation Contacts to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) by **Friday 30 October, 2020**.

Step 2: Inaugural online kick off meeting of the CG – late November 2020

The nominated members of the CG will meet online and discuss the following issues: 1) review the ToRs and time plan of the CG (further detail them for submission to State and Conservation), 2) review the expertise covered by the group and flag any significant gaps to State and Conservation, 4) review the topic specific work plan developed at the second HELCOM indicator workshop ([Food Webs work plan](#)), 4) establish the date for the next online meeting of the CG, 5) establish the preparatory work required for the next meeting and responsible persons to do it – including presentations for the next meeting and collation of relevant documents/information.

A brief introduction to HOLAS III planning and relevant deadlines (e.g. indicator development deadlines) will be provided by the Secretariat.

Step 3: Establish a workspace for the CG – December 2020

The Secretariat will establish a workspace for the CG to use in the collation and exchange of information and all development work.

Step 4: Second online meeting of the CG – February 2021 TBC

Setting the scene will be carried out via selected presentations from members of the CG and invited guests. The presentations will be required to address a series of common factors, such as: scientific basis of approach, feasibility of approach (e.g. impact on monitoring requirements or current data availability), describe the approach/method, determine the potential application across the region, define the ecological and policy relevance of the approach, and evaluate if achievable by HOLAS III or longer term prospect.

Potential invited guest currently identified: OSPAR Ecological Network Analyses expert Ulrike Schülkel (present OSPAR test cases), representatives from ICES Food Web groups, BONUS food web projects.

The following discussion aspects will follow: 1) what is the optimal approach to assess Baltic Sea Food Web status (ecological and policy basis), 2) what can be achieved with the available knowledge and data by HOLAS III and what form will it take (e.g. indicator assessment, threshold value proposals, summary report and overview, testing of provisional approaches and test cases), 3) will and how will the existing HELCOM indicators be utilised in a Food Web assessment (umbrella approach or other), 4) what are the required intersessional preparations needed to advance the work and who will carry it out, 5) are there options, and is there value, for equivalent test cases in the Baltic Sea (e.g. to those carried out in OSPAR).

Step 5: Third online meeting of the CG – June 2021 TBC

The third meeting of the group will address the specific details of the assessment being developed for HOLAS III. As a deliverable of this meeting an outline of the approach planned will be submitted to State and Conservation for their review, commenting and endorsement.

The issue of the comparability of the food web assessment proposed with existing indicators (and their threshold values) will be addressed.

Step 6: Thematic Workshop on the topic of Food Webs – autumn 2021 TBC

A thematic regional Workshop will be organised to preview the initial results and approach to be applied in HOLAS III.