

Expert Group overview

May 2020-May 2021



Expert Network on hazardous substances (EN-HZ)

- **Co-Chairs: Ms. Berit Brockmeyer, Germany and Mr. Jaakko Mannio, Finland**
- The Group held two online meetings during 2020 and the first online meeting of 2021 was held in late-February. All three of these meetings devoted an additional period of time to discussion and planning related to the assessment of biological effects: [EN-HZ 12-2020](#), [EN-HZ 13-2020](#) and [EN-HZ 14-2021](#). The work to date has focused on key areas identified in the Terms of Reference of the Group and also issues lifted in the indicator review process (e.g. assessment needs by HOLAS III). The following major issues were worked on during the previous three meetings:
 - Development towards a Copper indicator (relevance to offshore inputs);
 - Review of issues related to threshold values;
 - Improved application of supporting parameters in the assessment;
 - Sediment cores and their application in providing an overview of hazardous substances;
 - Development of missing monitoring and assessment guidelines;
 - A process to review and identify priority substances;
 - The development of a proposal for wide-scope screening of hazardous substances in the Baltic Sea marine environment (recently funded via NEFCO);
 - Development towards a viable biological effects assessment;
 - Improvements in assessment tools (including links with the Baltic Data Flows project).



Monitoring of Radioactive Substances in the Baltic Sea (MORS EG)

- **Chair: Ms. Tamara Zalewska, Poland**
- The 10th Meeting of the HELCOM Expert Group on Monitoring of Radioactive Substances in the Baltic Sea (MORS EG 10-2020) was held on as an online meeting.
- In 2020, the Group worked e.g. on providing annual updates and quality assuring the environmental and discharge databases. The Group also started the process to updated radioactivity core indicator threshold values according to the updated BSAP objectives (dose-based threshold values). For that purpose, a specific online meeting (MORS EG10A-2020) was held during autumn and MORS 10B-2021 was held in March 2021.



Intersessional Network on Eutrophication (IN-Eutrophication)

- **Chair: Ms. Vivi Fleming, Finland**
- 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 held three online meetings in 2020 and has held [one](#) online meeting in March 2021.
- The Group has worked on further development of HELCOM eutrophication test assessment using eutrophication quality ratios with indicator scaling. The Group has also worked on improving the confidence assessment by taking both temporal and spatial confidence aspects into account.
- Work is also ongoing towards further developing indicators for eutrophication assessment, including a common shallow water oxygen indicator with an aim to include the indicator in the HOLAS III assessment.
- The Group organized a dedicated workshop for oxygen indicator development 22 April 2021.
- Other topics that the Group has worked on include developing remaining targets for total nutrients, and aggregation rules of the HEAT tool used in the integrated assessment.
- The next meeting of IN EUTRO is planned to take place on the 26 May 2021.



Phytoplankton Expert Group (PEG), see also doc 4J-5

- **Chair: Iveta Jurgensone**
- The main activities within the project are carried out at the annual workshops. The venue of the workshops will be rotate between the Contracting Parties and their marine laboratories. In 2020 the annual physical PEG meeting was postponed due to restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic and as a consequence the 2020 project budget was not utilized and will be moved so that the current project is extended by one year to the year 2023. Suggested host countries are: Poland in 2021, Sweden (Umeå University) in 2022 and in 2023 Denmark. Intersessional activities will be organized if needed. PEG held an online meeting on the 24 September which focused on issues considered to be of greatest urgency, e.g. issues regarding data reporting to ICES, indicator related work.
- Proposal for additional prolongation of the project: Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and that it has not been possible to arrange a physical meeting during 2020 or 2021, HELCOM PEG want to ask HELCOM for a possible prolongation of the current project, from 2020-2022, to 2020-2024. This includes a request to be able to postpone the money for the training courses for 2020 and 2021 to 2022-2024 instead. Additional HELCOM PEG would like to ask for an addition of financing for participation in the next intercalibration arranged by SYKE (Finland) that is planned for autumn 2023. HELCOM PEG will send in an updated project description to HELCOM before 7 September 2021, as well as the request for additional funding for the intercalibration 2023, before the call for the autumn State & Conservation meeting 2021.
- The SYKE ProfTest 14/2020 took place in December 2020/January 2021. 6 members were kindly financed by HELCOM, with project money dedicated for intercalibrations, and the PEG group thank HELCOM for that. The test results will be presented and discussed at the PEG autumn meeting in 2021.
- Due to the corona virus outbreak, a physical HELCOM PEG meeting was not possible in spring 2021. Instead a two-day online meeting, using the platform Zoom, was arranged 20-21 April 2021. The focus on day 1 (20 April) was the PEG biovolume file update for 2021, and on day 2 (April 21) database, indicator, and project related presentations, as well as other issues concerning the PEG group. Totally 20 members participated the first day and 26 the second day and additionally four invited guests attended the meeting.



Zooplankton Expert Network (ZEN)

- To be discussed in this meeting.



Expert Network on benthic habitats (EN-Benthic)

- **Chair: Ms. Antonia Nyström Sandman, Sweden**

There was significant activity during 2020 from this group, in particular to follow up on work related to indicators (e.g. following up on the work plan devised during the future work on HELCOM indicators process):

- The Group was strongly represented at the [HELCOM ACTION 2.2 workshop](#) that focussed on work developed under the HELCOM ACTION WP2, including: an overview of pressures and assessment approaches for benthic habitats, displacement of fisheries activity and potential benefits on benthic habitats, and coastal restoration measures.
- [EN BENTHIC 3a-2020](#) focussed on issues not possible to cover at the previous meeting, primarily reviewing the work plan of the Group.
- To follow up on work related to indicators (and discussion at State and Conservation on this issue) a workshop, the First Indicator Workshop of the HELCOM Expert Network on Benthic Habitats ([EN BENTHIC WS1-2020](#)), was planned to initiate the work towards an improved assessment of benthic habitats by HOLAS III. This workshop was moved online at the last minute due to travel restrictions but served to provide a short overview of the current status and established a pathway for the next steps.
- The Second Indicator workshop of HELCOM Expert Network on Benthic Habitats ([EN BENTHIC WS2-2020](#)), focussed heavily on the Cumulative impact on benthic biotopes HELCOM indicator (CumI) and identified issues where changes or clarifications may be required. The workshop identified a series of clear steps for intersessional work in preparation for the next meeting.
- The 4th meeting of the HELCOM Expert Network on Benthic habitats ([EN BENTHIC 4-2020](#)) followed up on the developments carried out on the CumI indicator and identified further development work, as well as other issues or relevance to the Group (e.g. developments in other relevant groups/work strands and possible developments related to the overall assessment of condition of benthic habitats).
- The intersessional work on these issues was followed up on at [EN-BENTHIC 5-2021](#), with a focus on agreed indicator deadlines and development work towards HOLAS III.
- The Second benthic mapping workshop planned for 2020 was postponed due to travel restrictions as it was considered that the process required an in person meeting, or significant re-planning, to achieve its goals.



Baltic-wide assessment of coastal fish communities in support of an ecosystem-based management (FISH PRO III)

- **Chair: Mr. Jens Olsson, Sweden**
- Second meeting of the project, 11-13 February 2020, Vilnius, Lithuania: Annual (data) updating of coastal fish core indicators for HELCOM coastal fish monitoring areas in the COOL database (<http://bio.helcom.fi/apex/f?p=108:5>), continuation of the work on developing additional indicators for coastal fish (i.e. size-related indicators), considering the need for developing indicators for the status and extent of suitable habitats for coastal fish, and potential use of alternative data sources for coastal fish assessments besides fisheries-independent coastal fish monitoring, updating national information on the coastal recreational fisheries, intermediate status assessment of coastal fish (to be presented at the FISH PRO III meeting 2021), contribution to the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, preparation for the HOLAS III assessment, including updating the methodology for status assessment of coastal fish and developing size related indicators, contribution to fish and fisheries-related parameters for the draft Climate Change Fact Sheet by EN CLIME, dissemination of the work within HELCOM ACTION to the HELCOM FISH PRO III project, input to the process of updating HELCOM monitoring program
- During 2021 the work within the HELCOM FISH PRO III project has or will focus on the following activities:
 - Third meeting of the project, online, 23-25 March 2021;
 - Annual (data) updating of coastal fish core indicators for HELCOM coastal fish monitoring areas in the COOL database (<http://bio.helcom.fi/apex/f?p=108:5>);
 - Contribution to the preparation for HOLAS III (agreeing on which indicators with associated thresholds to use and which areas to focus on);
 - Inclusion of new possible monitoring areas currently not included in the work of the project;
 - Considering the need for using alternative data sources for coastal fish assessments besides fisheries independent coastal fish monitoring;
 - Consideration of results of intermediate status assessment;
 - Continuing the work on developing current and additional indicators for coastal fish (i.e. size-related indicators).
 - Discussion on increasing predation pressure by seals on coastal fish;
 - Updating information and presentation of national projects on coastal recreational fisheries;
 - Contribution to HELCOM BLUES;
 - Updating the coastal fish monitoring guideline with possible new Lithuanian and German data.



Expert Group on Sturgeon Remediation (EG STUR), see also doc 4J-104

- **Chair: Mr. Jörn Gessner, Sweden**
- The overall scope of the Expert Group is to facilitate Baltic Sea regional cooperation for all activities related to sturgeon recovery as outlined in the Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan (BSSAP). The BSSAP covers a period of 10 years (2019 – 2029).
- During the annual meeting of EG STUR between January 23-25th 2020, at the ABBA Hotel, Berlin, the Group further collected information on the implementation of the Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan in the signatory countries while at the same time prioritizing the activities that are of short term relevance to the fulfilment of the plan. Emphasis was set on the development of guidelines which will be carried out in a collaborative effort with the Danube Sturgeon Task Force, a group of volunteers under the PA6 of the EU Danube Strategy. The guideline development groups will be further strengthened by collaborators from the Adriatic-Ionian region and from western European collaborators. In the first instance, these guidelines will focus on the Actions 1-5 (Category 1 and 2). Further actions will primarily target stakeholder involvement and outreach.
- A second meeting was held September 26-27 September 2020 online where priorities for work in 2020 and 2021 were revised. In order to increase the visibility of the EG STUR, the participation in, or presence at, meetings of HELCOM Fish, ICES WGDIAD, as well as contacts to the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) and the outreach to DG ENV and DG MARE were discussed. HELCOM Fish, BSAC and indirectly DG ENV are reached through the Vice Chair of FISH, Katarzyna Kaminska. In ICES WGDIAD, Jörn Gessner will take over the role as contact.
- To further increase the outreach of the Group in accordance with the Items 14-16 of the BSSAP, the groups started an Instagram, Facebook account to provide current information on the measures undertaken and to facilitate contacts with the stakeholder groups (see the joint EG Accounts: Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Baltic-Sturgeon-Conservation-Recovery-105315531028998/> and Twitter: <https://twitter.com/balticsturgeon/>)



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 Group's annual meeting planned at Helgoland in 2020 had to be cancelled due to Covid-19 travel restrictions and the date for an online meeting replacing this meeting has not been scheduled.
- An intersessional JWGBIRD meeting on the Marine Bird Habitat Indicator was held online on 3 November 2020 and was attended by 22 experts. 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 is specified on an annual basis.
- In 2020 the work has included planning for the assessment of breeding and wintering birds for HOLAS III, furthering work on bycatch and setting up specific subgroup work on bird migration.
- Other activities of the Group have included the participation of JWGBIRD experts in EN CLIME, the finalization of the guidelines for monitoring seabirds at sea, review of the SOM report, writing proposals for the Science Agenda and BSAP, and scoping of external experts in the planned sub-group on bird migration. The timing of the Group's next meeting is to be decided.



Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA)

- **Chair: Anders Galatius, Denmark**
- **Vice-Chair: Morten Tange Olsen, Denmark**
- The 14th meeting of the Expert Group on Marine Mammals was held online on 22–24 September 2020. Two intersessional EG MAMA meeting (EG MAMA 14a-2020 and 14b-2021) were held 19 November 2020 and 27 February 2021 respectively, focusing on acoustic monitoring data of harbour porpoise. In addition a joint S&C/EG MAMA meeting (STATE&CONSERVATION 13E-2021) was held on the 2 March 2021, focusing on the development of indicators and Precautionary Approach Levels.
- The main focus of work of the Expert Group during 2020 was on drafting new guidelines for monitoring, indicator development to support HOLAS III and issues related to management of seals and human induced pressures. The Group also worked to provide input to the Sufficiency of Measures analysis as well as revising and developing monitoring guidelines.
- The Group has been taking work forward and sharing information through the four dedicated teams: the intersessional team for seal populations, the intersessional team for seal distribution, the Harbour Porpoise team and the Marine Mammal Health Team. T
- he Marine Mammal Health Team is planning to host a Workshop with practical sessions focusing on harmonizing monitoring practices when COVID-19 travel restrictions are lifted.
- The next meeting will be held on 14-16 September 2021 and has been provisionally decided to be held in Odense, Denmark, depending on the



Correspondence Group on Foodwebs (CG Foodweb)

- **Chair: will be elected at next meeting.**
- Has held its first meeting in April 2021, focusing on improving the assessment of foodwebs for HOLAS III.
- Works in cooperation with the BLUES project.
- Documents submitted to the meeting.



Joint Expert Network on Climate Change (EN CLIME)

- **Co- Chairs: Markus Meier, Baltic Earth, Jonas Pålsson, HELCOM**
- 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.
- In 2020 the Group has produced the first peer reviewed draft Baltic Sea Climate Change Fact Sheet containing concise key messages on climate change effects on 34 parameters, identified by EN CLIME as being of relevance for science and management. In 2020, the Group held four online meetings.
- In 2021 the group has held two meetings.



MPA Managers Network (MPA MANET)

- The latest meeting of the Group was in the form of a capacity building workshop on stakeholder interaction in MPA management, which took place from 9-12 September 2020 in Vaasa, Finland.
- In 2020 and 2021 the planned physical workshops have been cancelled due to restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

