



Document title	HOLAS III assessment of marine mammals
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Background

The HOLAS III assessment follows a structure which aims to ensure robust results and traceability across the several steps which are integral to a usable holistic approach. Each of the steps of the process represents a progressively more integrated assessment result, eventually culminating in the holistic assessment report State of the Baltic Sea (see Figure 1 for a conceptual overview). This document presents the plan for assessment of marine mammals, which builds on the relevant indicator reports and other relevant information and in turn constitutes a chapter in the Thematic assessment report on Biodiversity (red highlight in Figure 1 indicates which step in the process is addressed by the content of this document).

Holistic summary report: State of the Baltic Sea

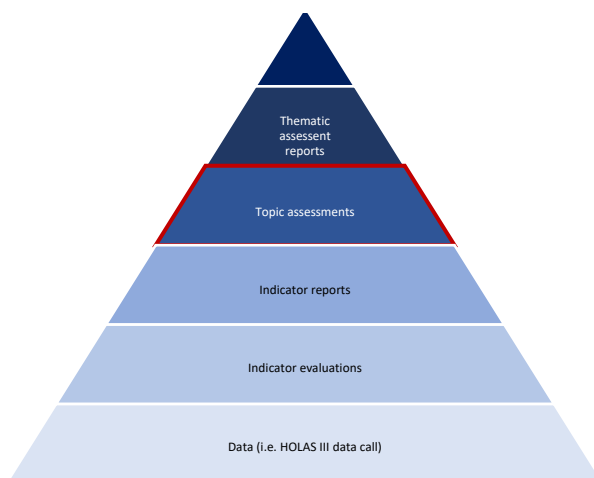


Figure 1. Conceptual overview of the HOLAS III assessment structure and the progressive integration of results.

This document contains an overview of indicator components related to marine mammals and addresses the utilization of these in HOLAS III. The overview considers how the separate components are compiled and combined and represent the assessment of marine mammals in HOLAS III, for example how the indicator evaluations form the basis of the indicator reports, which, supported by scientific contextual information assess a topic (Topic Assessment) that is then included in a Thematic assessment (e.g. Biodiversity). The above conceptual overview outlines the general flow of information within this process and the segment identified in red is the focus of this document.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to consider and endorse the proposed approach for assessing marine mammals in the HOLAS III assessment.

The assessment of marine mammals

The assessment of marine mammals in HOLAS III will include the three seal species (the grey seal, harbour seal and ringed seal) and the harbour porpoise, and builds on the information and results from the respective indicator evaluations for these species. Overall the assessment will be constructed of quantitative assessment components, qualitative assessment components, and other supporting contextual information. The aim is to produce an overall summary of the status of these species (and the ecosystem component marine mammals) within a designated chapter of the HOLAS III Thematic Assessment of Biodiversity. The input of the indicator leads and the EG MAMA group will be critical in forming the overall assessment within HOLAS III.

The figure below aims to summarise the approach, though the component parts may also be influenced by decisions made on these individual parts, (as represented in the documents addressing those specific component parts).

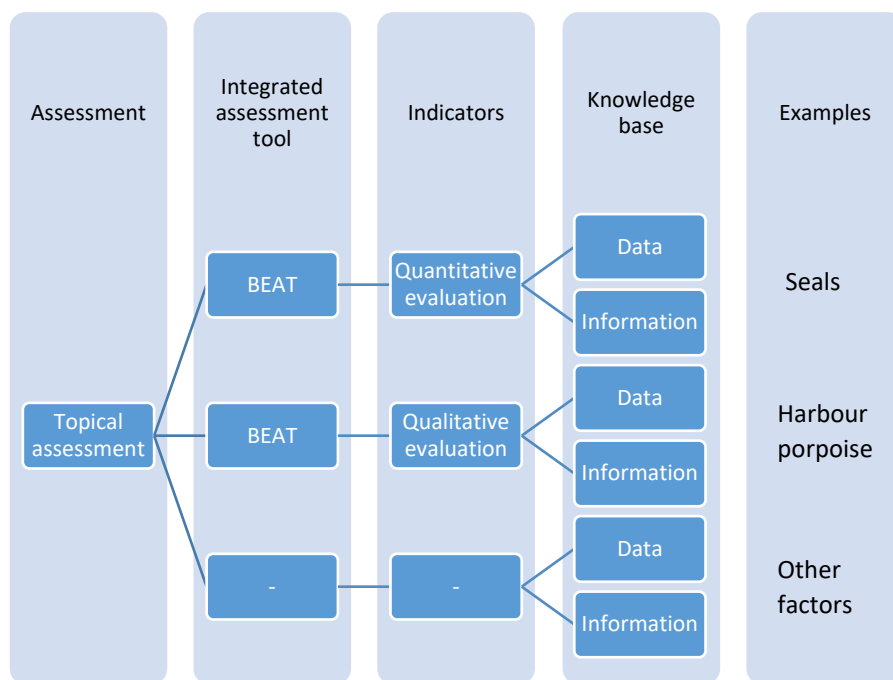


Figure 2. Process and component parts of assembling a topic assessment under HOLAS III

Note, bycatch is currently not directly presented in the above schematic as there remain open questions on how to use the resulting assessment in HOLAS III. It could be used in three ways in the above diagram: 1) Data-Indicator-Topical assessment, Data-Indicator-Integrated assessment-Topical assessment, or 3) via the channel marked as 'other factors'.

Indicators anticipated or available for HOLAS III

The following indicators will be (or are expected to be) available for HOLAS III.

- [Distribution of Baltic Seals](#) – all three seal species (as applied in HOLAS II),
- [Population trends and abundance of seals](#) – all three seal species (as applied in HOLAS II),
- [Nutritional Status of Seals](#) (being further developed from HOLAS II, see document 3J-40 to this meeting),
- [Reproductive status of seals](#) (being further developed from HOLAS II, see document 3J-41 to this meeting),
- Harbour porpoise distribution (see document 3J-43 to this meeting),

- Trends in abundance of harbour porpoise (see document 3J-42 to this meeting).
- [Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gear](#) (see document 3J-45 to this meeting).

In brief, the further developments being carried out for the Nutritional and Reproductive status of seals indicators aim to provide a broader spatial coverage than applied in HOLAS II, include all seal species, and include all viable data from all Contracting Parties. The new developments related to harbour porpoise, including the work being carried out under the [HELCOM BLUES](#) project, aim to develop initial qualitative assessment for the Belt Sea populations and provide qualitative assessments for the Baltic Proper population, the latter being based on an extensive review of historical records and reporting.

Similarly, an additional and highly relevant indicator addressing bycatch ([Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gear](#)) is also being further developed under the HELCOM BLUES project. This indicator aims to further develop on the outcomes of the joint OSPAR-HELCOM Workshop on Incidental bycatch (e.g. threshold value setting approaches) and on the risk mapping approach carried out under the HELCOM ACTION project work package 1. The further developments of this indicator are presented in documents 3J-45 and 3J-46 to this meeting).

[Inclusion of the indicators in the integrated biodiversity assessment \(BEAT\)](#)

The existing, modified, and new indicators will be included in the BEAT integrated biodiversity assessment for HOLAS III. The specific details of how this can be achieved are the subject of document 3J-48 to this meeting. The current proposals would enable all the indicators listed above to be included in BEAT, though the specific details of this remain open in some aspects.

[Additional information](#)

The above indicators alone, and their integration via BEAT, do not provide a complete and comprehensive overview of the status of marine mammals in the Baltic Sea. It will therefore be critical to include other supporting contextual scientific information in the designated section ('topical assessment') for marine mammals within the HOLAS III Thematic Assessment of Biodiversity. This information may for example rely on peer reviewed scientific publications, national or regional reports, or other documentation of relevance for example EU level or regional red lists. In addition to providing the scientific and ecological context to the existing indicators the thematic assessment will address other issues that are currently not directly addressed with the current indicator consortium, for example: habitat quality, other pressures, dispersal behaviours, feeding habits, or food web related factors. Inclusion of relevant factors within the thematic assessment report will provide context to existing regional assessments and also complement those assessments where gaps exist.