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Background

The HELCOM expert network on hazardous substances, established at the HELCOM Heads of Delegation meeting 48-2015, was created to support the HELCOM holistic assessment of the ecosystem health based on hazardous substances. The initial mandate period of this group, 2015-2018 culminated in the production of 10 HELCOM indicators for hazardous substances and the thematic assessment on hazardous substances for the State of the Baltic Sea report 2018 (HOLAS II). The second mandate period, 2018-2021, focused on further developing assessment structures towards HOLAS III, improvements in the coverage, threshold values, and application of existing HELCOM indicators and assessments (including the integrated assessment of hazardous substances), and a number of emerging topics have also been considered (e.g. screening, sediment cores, SOM work, priority substances). The current Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the HELCOM Expert Network on Hazardous Substances (EN-HZ) are set to expire at the end of 2021.

During 2020/21 a separate process was carried out under the guidance of the PRESSURE Working Group to gather relevant information related to how hazardous substances are addressed within HELCOM, to review the background information available and to provide proposals on potential ways forward within HELCOM to improve the manner in which hazardous substances are addressed in the region. This process culminated in the document titled 'Regional policy document on hazardous substances' presented at HOD 60-2021 ([document 5-16](#)). This review process raised the following issues to consider: the need for development of a holistic approach to HELCOM work on hazardous substances, the need to further coordinate regional implementation of various related policies (e.g. WFD, MSFD), the need to strengthen the management cycle for hazardous substances, the need for coordination of regional effort to prevent contamination of the marine environment by hazardous substances, the need for stronger HELCOM involvement in global initiatives related to hazardous substances, and the benefit of stronger cooperation on hazardous substances between relevant HELCOM bodies (e.g. State and Conservation and PRESSURE Working Groups).

The PRESSURE 14-2021 Meeting ([Outcomes paragraph 8.7 - 8.9](#)) discussed practical steps toward implementing some further solutions, concluding that a short-term ad-hoc group within the existing HELCOM structure to support development of proposals towards these aims should be formed (identified as the 'ad-hoc drafting group' hereafter), noting that modifications of existing structures (e.g. EN-HZ) may be more relevant than establishing a new group. HOD 60-2021 ([Outcomes paragraph 5.27 and 5.28](#)) welcomed the review of hazardous substances activities, and the potential proposals for future ways forward, and supported the PRESSURE 14-2021 proposal for the short-term ad-hoc drafting group.

This document represents a revision of the Terms of Reference (ToRs) of the EG HZ group to act as a starting point for discussion both within the group itself and also within the ad-hoc drafting group proposed in PRESSURE 14-2021. The ToRs are set out in the structure utilized under the State and Conservation Working Group and provide a broad overview of general purpose, scope and objectives of the group (some of which may be permanent fixtures or longer-term perspectives than the period of the specific ToRs themselves) and

also provides a more detailed and specific listing of tasks that are then utilized to populate the timeline for the specific period of the ToRs in question, the latter also facilitating follow up on progress within the group itself. The draft ToRs here address the coming 3-year period of 2022-2024 and aim to address both existing issues already required for EG HZ and additionally build in relevant issues from other processes withing HELCOM, including the document and proposals developed within the PRESSURE Working Group.

In addition, to further support the harmonization of efforts related to hazardous substances it is also proposed that this revision would include the combining of the Correspondence Group on Pharmaceuticals (CG PHARMA) with the existing EN-HZ group. This approach would pull together existing strands working on contaminants within HELCOM and provide stronger linkages between aspects where there is clear cross-over (e.g. screening or indicators). A proposal on how this approach can be practically applied is made within the ToRs, building on the current approach within EN-HZ that has been successful in addressing diverse but clearly related topics.

In addition, to further support the bridging of critical expertise within the existing HELCOM structure the revised ToRs include the proposal that EN-HZ becomes a joint Expert Group, providing relevant expertise and reporting to both State and Conservation and PRESSURE Working Groups (additionally supporting other relevant HELCOM processes, groups or needs that may emerge).

To more adequately reflect the work of the group, the change in mandate, and to bring the nomenclature in line with that of other expert groups it is proposed that the name of the group be updated to Expert Group on Hazardous Substances (EG HAZ).

In light of the proposed changes to the groups mandate and remit, and should this be approved, it is likely necessary to consider additional nomination to the group to ensure the relevant expertise is available from all Contracting Parties. Furthermore, approaches (national and regional) to support the effective implementation of the proposed work (e.g. projects) would be valuable. One component related to this was briefly discussed at HOD 60-2021 ([Outcomes paragraph 5.29](#)) where the Secretariat was asked to develop a practical proposal related to an possible extension of resources and competence within the Secretariat, and it is considered that this issue should be directly addressed once the ToRs are in place so that the roles and tasks within that proposal can be fully aligned.

The following procedure is proposed for the development of the ToRs and work plan:

Step 1: The draft ToRs will provided to EN-HZ via the EN-HZ 16-2021 meeting. The same document will be provided to the ad-hoc drafting group. These two groups will provide comments to the draft ToRs. A revised document will be provided to State and Conservation 15-2021 if major revisions are proposed.

Step 2: The draft ToRs, including any additional revisions based on step 1, will be provided to State and Conservation 15-2021 (document deadline 7 September). The meeting action requests will include: commenting the content, endorsing the proposal for a joint Expert Group, and the proposal that further comments are provided nationally through nominated representatives of the PRESSURE Working Group.

Step 3: The draft ToRs, including any proposed revision from State and Conservation, will be submitted to PRESSURE 15-2021. The meeting action requests will include commenting the content and endorsing the proposal for a joint Expert Group.

Step 4: To refine the ToRs prior to submission to HOD, should open issues remain after the Working Group meetings (i.e. Steps 2 and 3) or substantial changes have occurred, the ToRs will be finalized by the ad-hoc drafting group and a brief intersessional process to allow final input and endorsement by EN-HZ, PRESSURE and State and Conservation (via email correspondence).

Step 5: The final ToRs will be submitted to HOD for approval.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- provide comments and suggestions to the existing ToRs (and work plan),
- agree to change the name of the group to Expert Group on Hazardous substances (EG HAZ) to adequately reflect the work of the group.
- agree on the ToRs for the group,
- support the proposal for the expansion of responsibilities and the transformation to being an Expert Group jointly guided by State and Conservation and PRESSURE;
- provide additional nominations to the group to support newly proposed tasks should this expansion of responsibilities be implemented.



HELCOM Expert Group on Hazardous Substances

Terms of Reference (ToR)

Adopted by HOD (via State and Conservation and PRESSURE Working Groups) x-201x

Duration of workplan:

2022-2024.

Background:

The HELCOM expert network on hazardous substances, established at the HELCOM Heads of Delegation meeting 48-2015, was created to consider the HELCOM holistic assessment of the ecosystem health based on hazardous substances. The initial period of this group, 2015-2018 culminated in the production of 10 HELCOM indicators for hazardous substances and the thematic assessment on hazardous substances for the State of the Baltic Sea report 2018 (HOLAS II). The second mandate period, 2018-2021, focused on further developing assessment structures towards HOLAS III, improvements in the coverage, threshold values, and application of existing HELCOM indicators and assessments (including the integrated assessment of hazardous substances), and a number of emerging topics have also been considered (e.g. screening, sediment cores, SOM work, priority substances).

In 2021, to better reflect the work of the group and the change in scope and mandate accompanying the approval of the updated ToRs, the name of the group was changed to Expert Group on Hazardous Substances (EG HAZ).

Purpose:

The purpose of the group is to facilitate and further develop the coordination of regional work on hazardous substances, in support of the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and its relevant goals ('Baltic Sea unaffected by hazardous substances and litter') and subsequent commitments. This relates in particular to the following BSAP ecological objectives:

- Marine life is healthy;
- Concentrations of hazardous substances are close to natural levels;
- All sea food is safe to eat;
- Minimal risk to humans and the environment from radioactivity.

These goals and objectives account for a wide variety of chemical substances and human activities, the management of which necessitate a holistic approach, both on land and at sea, involving measures addressing legacy pollutants (e.g. heavy metals, dioxins, organotins) and contaminants of emerging concern (e.g. PFASs or pharmaceuticals). Such a holistic approach requires crossover between relevant HELCOM groups and a mechanism for identification of regional priorities using best available scientific knowledge, including a process that clearly acknowledges emerging challenges. In addition to regional cooperation on such issues, cooperation with global treaties will also be an important way to address sources of contaminants with inputs occurring beyond the regional boundaries.

The framework for HELCOM monitoring and assessment activities is set out in Articles 16, 17, 18 and 24 of the Helsinki Convention. The Strategy identifies basic principles and common understanding of the good environmental status of the Baltic Sea based on the agreed visions, goals and ecological objectives, and jointly developed quantitative targets and associated indicators. This requires regional coordination and methodological harmonization of national monitoring activities based on the shared best available scientific knowledge. Reliable and region-wise compatible information on the Baltic Sea environmental status should



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be used in policy making at the international, regional and national levels, ensuring that adequate decisions and necessary measures for pursuing good environmental status of the Baltic Sea are taken.

To address these issues, the group will develop plans and documentation towards harmonized monitoring and assessments, develop of a holistic approach for the management of hazardous substances that covers all parts of the management cycle in the Baltic Sea region, provide expert input into HELCOM work related to hazardous substances, and address specific aspects identifies within the following ToRs and workplan. The Work will be guided by the relevant HELCOM Working Groups to ensure solid integration of all developments.

Scope:

The overall scope of the expert Group is to facilitate regional cooperation towards the vision, goals and objectives of the BSAP, including identifying and specifying necessary projects according to the needs under the BSAP and subsequent commitments. In addition, a key aim will be to build towards a holistic regional approach for addressing hazardous substances in the Baltic Sea region (i.e. encompassing the details addressed under objectives and tasks), an approach that ensures regular incorporation of new or emerging issues, and is documented in a clear and implementable way within HELCOM and its existing structure. If possible, the option to implement these projects by national funding or joint research applications should also be considered (e.g. EUSBSR or Interreg). Further, the Group is a platform for exchange of experiences as well as harmonization of methods concerning the work with hazardous substances, indicators and integrated assessments. Consideration should also be given to collaborative work with relevant groups (e.g. other HELCOM expert groups or Working Groups) or organizations (e.g. OSPAR, EU, EMEP, CLRTAP).

Objectives:

The objectives listed below provide a broad overview of relevant issues. These may be long-term/rolling issues that will be permanent fixtures on the ToRs or highly specific tasks identified. The detailed information and requirements to attain these objectives is provided in the subsequent task list that is then utilised to populate the workplan.

- To identify and link national work with HELCOM work;
- To foster an exchange of information related to hazardous substances within the region;
- To provide expert input to relevant HELCOM groups and processes related to hazardous substances;
- To develop a holistic regional approach to address the full management cycle of hazardous substances in the Baltic Sea region;
- To support the improved integration of information on hazardous substances within a causal framework (e.g. loads, measures, etc) into the group's discussion and products;
- Regularly review and maintain an up-to-date overview of substances (including pharmaceuticals) that are considered hazardous and of priority in the Baltic Sea region;
- To support risk-based evaluation for substances where effects may be unknown or there are combined effects, including the further development of biological effects assessments;
- To actively participate in HELCOM processes that address hazardous substances or relevant indicator and assessment development, including providing proposals to HELCOM working groups on requirements such as threshold values and substances of concern:
- To identify funding and project needs and opportunities (national and regional/international) to support the work and objectives of the group.



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Tasks:

The tasks listed below provide a more detailed and step-wise interpretation of the broad objectives and will be used to populate the workplan for the work of the group for the specific period of the ToRs. The tasks of the group cover a wide range of different aspects related to hazardous substances (or contaminants), and can be considered to include all hazardous substances/contaminants that are not encompassed by other designated HELCOM groups (i.e. excludes: marine litter and underwater noise). The group's activities link to the following tasks:

Information exchange

- Identify, discuss and bring to the fore the outcomes of relevant national and regional projects and/or experience so that best practices can be developed on the regional level;
- To foster an exchange of information related to hazardous substances within the region, both between Contracting Parties and within HELCOM processes and groups;
- Bring relevant information from other regional, international and global processes (e.g. UN, EU, WFD, MSFD, Urban Wastewater Directive, River Basin Commissions, other relevant Conventions etc) to the fore to ensure relevant issues are addressed in HELCOM;
- Where required, participate in relevant regional, international and global initiatives, and if required present HELCOM work and developments related to hazardous substances;
- Bring national concerns and achievements to the forum so that latest developments can be considered and necessary proposals made within the HELCOM working structure.

Holistic regional approach

- Review the current summary and proposals provided under the [‘Regional policy document on hazardous substances’](#);
- Review all HELCOM policy initiatives related to hazardous substances and consider their relevance, compatibility with other policies, and their need for renewal/update/removal;
- Carry out a regional review of priority substances (see task below) based on the approach previously discussed within EG HZ (data sources: evaluate national data, HELCOM data, COMBINE data, screening data, relevant regional and international lists);
- Design a process by which such a review can be implemented once during a given management cycle (e.g. as follow up to a HOLAS assessment and/or regional screening campaign);
- Initiate and support the development of measures and proposals to address the BSAP objectives;
- Develop a structured and viable holistic regional approach that establishes a clear and structured strategy to address hazardous substances throughout their management cycle in the Baltic Sea region;
- Include relevant processes detailed below to the holistic regional approach (e.g. application of a causal framework, regular screening, review of priority substances and substances of emerging concern).

Substances of priority and emerging concern

- Maintain an up-to-date overview of hazardous substances (including pharmaceuticals, micropollutants, and substances of emerging concern) and their respective monitoring;
- Regularly review the overview of substances that are considered hazardous and of priority in the Baltic Sea region, adding or removing substances based on best available knowledge;
- Incorporate regular regional screening (target and non-target), and nationally/internationally derived information, into the review process;
- Engage in discussion, and provide expert opinion on what substances are considered as priority, and where appropriate action is required related to these substances;



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- Ensure that new issues/substances of concern, and relevant expert proposals, are highlighted to the relevant HELCOM Working Groups;
- Ensure potential offshore sources of hazardous substances are also addressed via such approaches.

Causal framework

- Maintain awareness of substances of potential risk to the Baltic Sea environment, their sources and pathways, including offshore sources and sources outside of the HELCOM area;
- Collate and exchange information on the use of hazardous substances in the Baltic Sea region, their sources, pathways and loads;
- Evaluate and document potential environmental risk from the identified substances;
- Better incorporate substance input and load information into the group's work (e.g. PLC, EMEP), including within indicator development (e.g. drivers, activities, pressures);
- Support the development and proposal of suitable measures to address hazardous substances or mitigate their impacts, based on the best available techniques and best environmental practices;
- Further develop the hazardous substances work and products to address all relevant stages of the HELCOM causal framework, DAPSIM (e.g. [HELCOM indicator manual, p17](#));
- Explore the potential to develop pressure related evaluations, in cooperation with PLC, inclusive of linking state and pressure components (e.g. status indicators and inputs).

Monitoring

- Review the policy requirements for hazardous substances (linked to the review of priority substances and indicator requirements/development), including the criteria and element requirements of the MSFD;
- Revise existing monitoring guidelines to ensure all relevant parameters for successful indicator assessments is included;
- Review monitoring distribution and structure from the regional perspective and consider existing proposals (e.g. master stations, outputs from BONUS SEAM and FUMARI) and develop proposals to incorporate relevant components;
- Develop monitoring guidelines for all relevant substance or substance groups monitored within HELCOM, and provide guidance on best practice for substances of concern so that harmonized data collection can be beneficial for future assessments;
- In cooperation with HELCOM PLC, develop guidelines for monitoring of hazardous substances in inland waters and at point sources to improve the HELCOM pollution load compilation for hazardous substances;
- Develop relevant monitoring guidelines for other approaches that offer potential insights related hazardous substances (e.g. sediment cores);
- Maintain an updated catalogue of relevant Monitoring and Assessment Guidelines in line with HELCOM processes.

Indicators

- Act as the platform for discussion and review of HELCOM indicators on hazardous substances to support Lead and Co-Lead Countries and appointed experts developing them;
- Review threshold values and methodological requirements in line with any new developments that occur (e.g. EU processes, better scientific knowledge, national processes), and with respect to other commitments by Contracting Parties (e.g. under the EU);
- Propose new indicators of relevance to the region (e.g. to address emerging issues or substances), inclusive of threshold values, and an approach for their development;



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- Identify areas where it is relevant to collaborate or harmonise with external organisations (e.g. OSPAR or the EU) and inform the relevant Working Groups, e.g. when setting new threshold values, reviewing existing ones, developing new indicators;
- Further develop the hazardous substances indicators within the HELCOM causal framework, DAPSIM (e.g. [HELCOM indicator manual, p17](#)), for example to better address loads/inputs, sources and trends;
- Identify possibilities to develop pressure (e.g. input) indicators, including relevant input limits;
- Update the core indicator reports at regular intervals, as decided in HELCOM;
- Ensure timely and quality assured delivery of indicator-based assessments of hazardous substances, including integrated assessments.

Assessments

- Support and validate the development of the hazardous substances tools for the automated calculation of HELCOM hazardous substances assessments (indicators and integrated assessments);
- Further develop a regional approach to address the need for trophic level and tissue specific correlations/correction factors;
- Further develop assessment(s) of biological effects (including linkages to the EG MAMA health team) to address multi-factor (combined) pressures and risk evaluations;
- Further develop the applications of sediment core analyses, including for addressing the evaluation of historic hazardous substances inputs, background concentrations, emerging substances, and the effect of measures;
- Support relevant groups addressing contamination hotspots (marine and terrestrial) and dumped munitions that have potential direct or indirect inputs to the Baltic Sea environment;
- Address the assessment requirements of acute pollution occurrences and support other HELCOM groups (e.g. IWGAS and RESPONSE) to define appropriate monitoring and assessment procedures that also meet policy requirements.

These overall tasks provide the framework to guide the work of the Group on implementation which depends on availability of resources. If possible, the Group might be a platform to develop and apply for external funded projects in order to accomplish the listed objectives.

Reporting

- The Chair(s) will report to State and Conservation and PRESSURE Working Groups regularly, i.e. for the information document deadline of each working group meeting. The activity report should consist of information on activities and developments which have taken place since the previous report, a list of links to the meeting sites of previous meetings or workspaces containing documents, and a list of aspects on which decisions or guidance from those working groups are required. A template for the reporting will be provided by the Secretariat. Relevant Comment and Decision documents will also be submitted to Working Groups as the need emerges.

Membership

The Group will consist of experts nominated by Contracting Parties and will be open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures.



Validity of ToR

The work of the group is open ended in that the requirement for a group to address hazardous substances in line with the objectives of the BSAP is ongoing. However, the ToRs and in particular the workplan will be reviewed and, as necessary revised, every three years.

This review and revision is to take place in line with the relevant HELCOM meetings prior to the end of 2024.

Organization of work

The expert Group will function under and received guidance from the HELCOM Working Groups State and Conservation and PRESSURE and in accordance with 3-year workplan approved by these groups.

The Expert Group will elect a Chair or co-Chairs for the group for a 3-year term.

The mode of work for the expert Group will be mainly via correspondence and online meetings, with physical meetings being organized as needed and via request to the relevant Working Groups. It is proposed that physical meetings may take the form of meetings that address one of a few specific topics (similar in purpose to workshops) where progress would be best achieved in such an environment.

To support the integration of a broader range of expertise and topics, meeting agenda items will be clustered to group related topics as best as possible and thereby allow relevant experts to join. In addition, to strengthen the development on specific topics voluntary 'topic teams' within the Expert Group will be established, i.e. topic teams addressing biological effects or sediment cores, or the development of the holistic approach.

The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the Group. The meetings, documents and products will be handled at HELCOM Meeting Portal workspaces dedicated to this purpose. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the Group.

Workplan

The details of the work plan and timeline will be added once the above broader aspects have been finalized. An example of the work plan and follow up [is provided here](#).

Work plan for 2022-2024:

1. XXXX
2. XXX
3. XXXX
4. XXXX

For a timeline associated with the work plan please see below.

