



## Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature  
Conservation

STATE & CONSERVATION  
15-2021

Online, 4-8 October 2021

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<b>Document title</b>	Template for summarizing information stemming from annual seal monitoring
<b>Code</b>	3N-2
<b>Category</b>	INF
<b>Agenda Item</b>	3N - Development and implementation of Recommendations
<b>Submission date</b>	27.9.2021
<b>Submitted by</b>	Secretariat

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### Background

STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020 invited EG MAMA to annually report count data to the HELCOM Biodiversity Database (once the functionality is enabled) and to annually provide a document to the autumn meeting of State and Conservation Working Group containing a table presenting the number of seals by species and management unit, confidence information as well as population trend curves.

The meeting invited the Secretariat to prepare a document template for submission to EG MAMA 15-2021 to support the work. The meeting noted that data on harbour seals will only be obtained during autumn and thus will be reported for the previous year. The meeting noted that alternative methods for surveying ringed seals are being considered in EG MAMA to account for the increasing frequency of milder winters and consequent poor ice conditions.

Annex 1 of this document is part of HELCOM HOLAS III seal count data reporting format on reporting aggregated counts per assessment unit, which could be used for this purpose. By combining reporting of aggregated and more detailed count data to be annually reported, the reporting exercise could be more aligned and well documented.

[EG MAMA 15-2021](#) meeting took note of the HELCOM HOLAS III Data call and associated parts in the data call related to seal indicators and associated reporting resources (guideline and formats). The meeting agreed to continue the discussion on the appropriate level of reporting count data intersessionally within the Seal distribution and abundance team to evaluate the extent of the assessment units used by HELCOM together with the Secretariat soon after the meeting, in order to agree what is possible from a data reporting viewpoint.

### Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the draft template for summarising information stemming from annual seal monitoring, as well as an update on the progress of enabling reporting of count information to HELCOM BioBase.

## Template for summarizing information stemming from annual seal monitoring

STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020 invited EG MAMA to annually report count data to the HELCOM Biodiversity Database (once the functionality is enabled) and to annually provide a document report count data to the autumn meeting of State and Conservation Working Group containing a table presenting the number of seals by species and management unit, confidence information as well as population trend curves.

The meeting invited the Secretariat to prepare a document template for submission to EG MAMA 15-2021 to support the work. The meeting noted that data on harbour seals will only be obtained during autumn and thus will be reported for the previous year. The meeting noted that alternative methods for surveying ringed seals are being considered in EG MAMA to account for the increasing frequency of milder winters and consequent poor ice conditions.

### HELCOM Biodiversity database updates

HELCOM Biodiversity database will be further developed in HELCOM BLUES project to cater for count information and haul-out site aggregation-based counts during 2021. Counts per HELCOM assessment unit can be also recorded, or on any other meaningful aggregation level as deemed necessary.

[Document 2-7](#) in EG MAMA 15-2021 meeting contains status and next steps for data on marine mammals in HELCOM Biodiversity database.

### EG MAMA 15-2021 discussion on reporting formats and aggregation levels

[EG MAMA 15-2021](#), Outcome para 3.27-33 meeting took note of the HELCOM HOLAS III Data call and associated parts in the data call related to seal indicators and associated reporting resources (guideline and formats).

3.27 The Meeting took note of updates to the HELCOM biodiversity database regarding seals as presented by the Secretariat ([document 2-7](#)).

3.28 The Meeting took note of the HELCOM HOLAS III Data call and associated parts in the data call related to seal indicators and associated reporting resources (guideline and formats)

3.29 The Meeting discussed the implications of the proposed changes to seal count data collection, particularly with regard to changing the reporting format to correspond to the approach applied in OSPAR by including reporting on haulout site-level. The Meeting recalled previous discussions on the proper level of detail for reporting seal count data, agreeing that it is not ideal to record individual haulouts or point locations, as the specific location of haulouts changes annually and it is not possible for all Contracting Parties to count and report data on a haulout level.

3.30 The Meeting took note of the position of Finland, on the preferred approach to use aggregated counts to ICES squares ((ICES Statistical rectangles, Baltic Sea ecoregion).

3.31 The Meeting acknowledged that changing the reporting may result in duplicate data or complications in the reporting if assessment units are delineated differently than what is being monitored within the countries.

3.32 The Meeting took note that the reporting template has a designated category for reporting counts per HELCOM assessment unit level 2, which should allow possibility to allow reporting of aggregated count data, in addition to more precise spatial resolution of the observations.

3.33 The Meeting agreed to continue the discussion on the appropriate level of reporting count data intersessionally within the Seal distribution and abundance team to evaluate the extent of the assessment

units used by HELCOM together with the Secretariat soon after the meeting, in order to agree what is possible from a data reporting viewpoint. Those members of the expert group who wish to take part in the discussion are invited to send an email about the interest to the team leader Ivar Jüssi ([ivar.jussi@gmail.com](mailto:ivar.jussi@gmail.com)).

#### Current draft template

The reporting template on reporting seal count data on various scales is defined in HELCOM HOLAS III data call. [The reporting template](#) (Excel) contains sheet "AU\_units\_template", which could be used for reporting of count data per assessment unit or other type spatial aggregation unit (Table 1).

The planned meeting of seal distribution and abundance team soon after EG MAMA (in October 2021) could look into utilization of the AU\_units\_template for reporting count data in addition to defining the feasible aggregation level of detailed count data.

Table 1. Attributes in AU\_units\_template sheet in HOLAS III seal reporting format.

Attribute	Data type	Mandatory/optional field	Description
species	Text	Mandatory	<b>Codelist:</b> Grey seal, Harbour seal, Ringed seal HELCOM Level 2 assessment unit: Codelist: Kattegat, Great Belt, The Sound, Kiel Bay, Bay of Mecklenburg, Arkona Basin, Bornholm Basin, Gdansk Basin, Eastern Gotland Basin, Western Gotland Basin, Gulf of Riga, Northern Baltic Proper, Gulf of Finland, Åland Sea, Bothnian Sea, The Quark, Bothnian Bay
assessment_unit	Text	Mandatory	Year to which count value pertains to
year_collected	Number	Mandatory (optional if start-end period is defined)	
start_year_collected	Number	Optional	Start year of total count period (start of monitoring period, if relevant)
start_month_collected	Number	Optional	Start month of total count period (start of monitoring period, if relevant)
end_year_collected	Number	Optional	End year of total count period (start of monitoring period, if relevant)
end_month_collected	Number	Optional	End month of total count period (start of monitoring period, if relevant)
count_value	Number	Mandatory	Number of individuals: Count value (integer)
count_unit	Text	Mandatory	<b>Codelist:</b> Total count, total pups
count_estimate	Text	Mandatory	<b>Codelist:</b> Minimum, total
count_method	Text	Mandatory	Survey method as text, e.g. "Aerial observation"
data_host	Text	Mandatory	Data host organization
restriction	Yes/no	Mandatory	Yes/no: whether any information is restricted for this observation, that cannot be shared freely).
restriction_description	Text	Mandatory if restriction=yes	If restriction=yes, reason why data cannot be shared freely
notes	Text	Optional	Free text field additional information, if relevant

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1	species	assessment_unit	year_collect	start_year	c_start_month	end_year	cc_end_month	count_value	count_unit	count_estim	count_meth	data_host	restriction_y	restriction_c	notes
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Figure 1. Screenshot reporting template excel sheet.