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Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature
Conservation

STATE & CONSERVATION
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Background

STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019 welcomed the offer by Lead country Germany to develop a reporting format for HELCOM Recommendation 40/1 “Conservation and protection of marine and coastal biotopes, habitats and biotope complexes categorized as threatened according to the HELCOM red lists” and to send it out for review and testing prior to STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020.

STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020 noted specific comments to the reporting template and invited Germany to provide an amended and ready template to be shared with the Contracting Parties by 19 October 2020 for reporting on the Recommendation by 31 December 2020. The deadline for reporting has been extended to end of June 2021.

This document contains the results of the first reporting by the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention on HELCOM Recommendation 40/1 as compiled by Germany. Completed reporting templates were submitted by Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Poland, and Sweden (see Attachment 1).

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the results and use the information as appropriate.

Results of the reporting on HELCOM Recommendation 40/1

Six Contracting Parties (CPs) took part in the initial reporting on HELCOM Recommendation 40/1 “Conservation and protection of marine and coastal biotopes, habitats and biotope complexes categorized as threatened according to the HELCOM red lists”. These CPs were Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), Germany (DE), Poland (PL), and Sweden (SE). Overall, HELCOM currently lists 51 biotopes and habitats according to the HUB classification system and additional eight biotope complexes in accordance with the Habitats Directive, Annex 1 (Fig. 1). Red-listed Baltic photic benthic habitats do not occur in Denmark and Finland and were therefore classified as “not relevant” for these CPs. The same applies to Baltic photic benthic habitats for FI, seasonal ice for DK and DE, as well as aphotic pelagic habitats below halocline for DE and FI. PL reported general data deficiencies except for Annex 1 biotope complexes.

Overall, all CPs need to catch up in implementing the recommendation for all of the red-listed biotopes and habitats. Only for biotope complexes, which are equal to Annex 1 habitats of the Habitats Directive, the recommendation was largely implemented by all CPs.

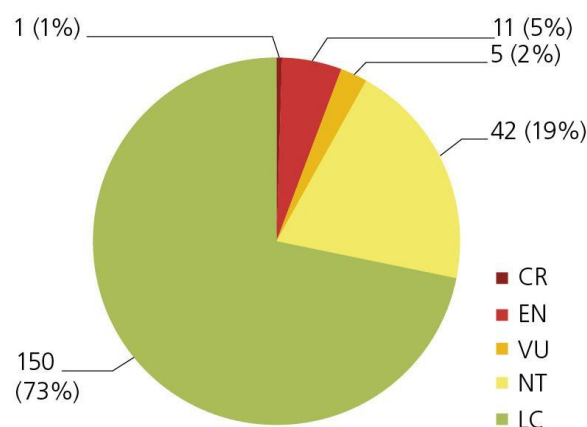


Fig. 1 Proportion of different biotopes, habitats and biotope complexes in HELCOM with different red-list categories (CR = critically endangered, EN = endangered, VU = vulnerable, NT = near threatened, LC = least concern). Reference: <https://helcom.fi/baltic-sea-trends/biodiversity/red-list-of-biotopes-habitats-and-biotope-complexes/red-list-of-biotopes-and-habitats/>

Difficulties in implementation:

CPs named practical and political obstacles in the implementation of the Recommendation 40/1. DE named the challenging process of the implementation of Joint Recommendations on the exclusion of mobile bottom-contacting fishing gears under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). PL mentioned high investment pressure regarding wind farms, bedrock material exploitation and accompanying infrastructure, which complicates the implementation of the recommendation. DK reported about insufficient mapping data and uncertainties in the distribution of related species as difficulty in implementing the recommendation for Baltic aphotic muddy sediments. SE stated that knowledge gaps on the distribution as well as taxonomic difficulties hinder the implementation of the recommendation for Baltic photic and aphotic maerl beds. Moreover, this biotope type is missing in the Swedish MPA guidelines. SE also stated that habitat mapping at HUB level and monitoring of measures are lacking for AB.H1I2 Baltic aphotic muddy sediment dominated by *Haploopsis* spp. and AB.H3L5 Baltic aphotic muddy sediment dominated by *Astarte* spp. and that there are difficulties in monitoring for AB.H2T1 Baltic aphotic muddy sediment dominated by sea pens in deep habitats. Finally, SE mentioned that, at regional level, it is difficult to reduce threats from climate change on AC Baltic Sea seasonal ice and AE.O5 Baltic Sea aphotic pelagic below halocline oxic.

Conclusion from the reporting:

- CPs should strengthen their efforts to implement the recommendation for biotopes and habitats assigned to AA Baltic photic benthos, especially item 6) “to make an inventory of existing and planned national and regional conservation-, recovery- and/or action plans as well as other relevant programmes and measures ...”, item 7) “to review by 2018 the effectiveness of conservation-, recovery- or action plans ...”, item 7.2. “to implement such plans or activities ... by 2021 at the latest” and item 8) “to consider whether any sites justify selection as new or expanded MPAs”.
- CPs should strengthen their efforts to fully implement the recommendation for biotopes and habitats assigned to AB Baltic aphotic benthos.
- CPs should strive for a better protection of Baltic Sea seasonal ice and Baltic Sea aphotic pelagic biotopes and habitats.
- CPs should consider closing implementation gaps for the red-listed biotope complexes, i. e. mapping, reviewing of the effectiveness of conservation measures, selecting MPAs as well as determining and implementing conservation measures.

Implementation status of Recommendation 40/1:

Overall, the recommendation is poorly implemented for biotopes and habitats belonging to “AA Baltic photic benthos”. Only SE has fully included them in their national legislation; and only DE has fully mapped them and determined additional conservation measures (Fig. 2). Prohibitions of activities with negative effects on these biotopes and habitats exist only partly in case of SE and are under consideration for DE. Moreover, only two CPs evaluate or map the effects of new projects in EIAs or similar procedures. Major gaps in implementing the recommendation concern the inventory of existing and planned national and regional conservation plans, the failed review of the effectiveness of conservation plans by 2018, and the selection of new or expanded MPAs. Furthermore, it is questionable whether the implementation of conservation plans or additional activities by 2021 at the latest will be achieved as demanded in the recommendation.

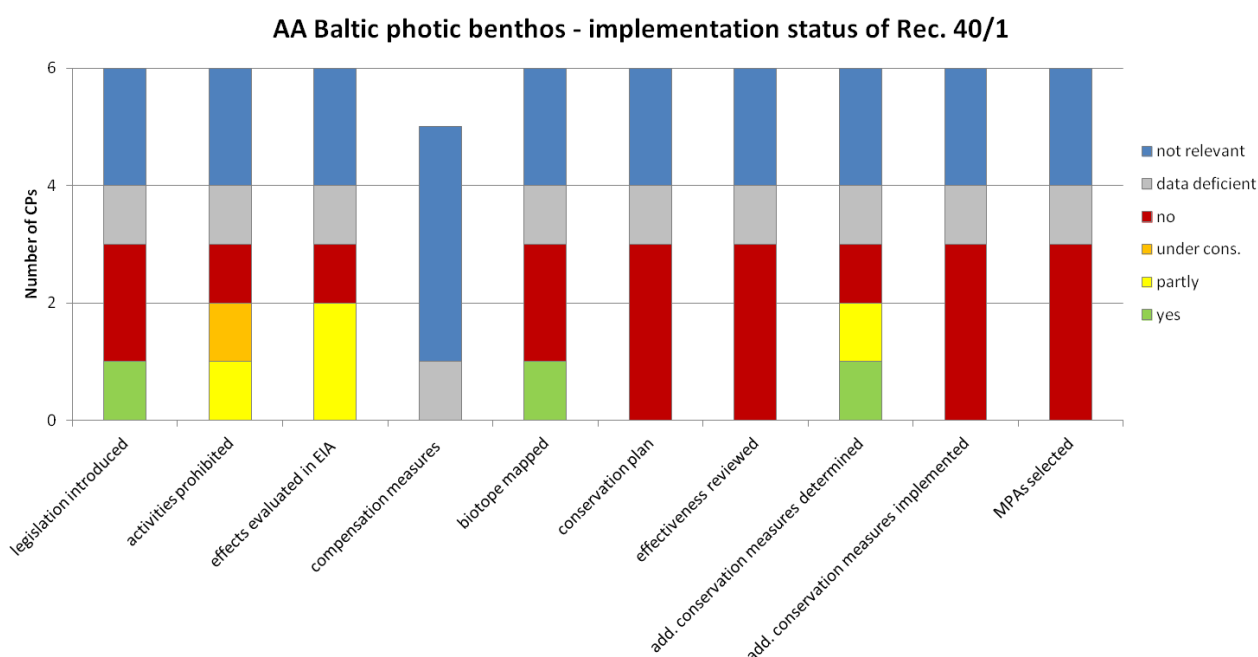


Fig. 2 Overall implementation status of HELCOM Recommendation 40/1 for red-listed Baltic photic benthos. (under cons. = under consideration)

Compared to Baltic photic benthos, the recommendation is generally better implemented for biotopes and habitats assigned to “AB Baltic aphotic benthos”. However, in particular concerning the review of the effectiveness of measures, most of the CPs said that they have not implemented the recommendation yet. This represents an omission because HELCOM recommends achieving it by 2018. Many parts of Recommendation 40/1 are partly implemented (Fig. 3). For DK and SE, which host a high number of benthic species, the implementation status is not identical for all biotopes and habitats belonging to Baltic aphotic benthos. Thus, “partly” means that the recommendation can be fully, partly or not implemented for single biotopes in the case of DK and SE (see Attachment 1 for details). For instance, aphotic muddy sediments are legally protected and mapped to full extent in DK except for those dominated by *Arctica islandica* and *Astarte* spp., which are not legally protected and mapped at all. Therefore, a specific consideration of biotopes at HUB level 6 is necessary here to identify whether and where improvements may be needed.

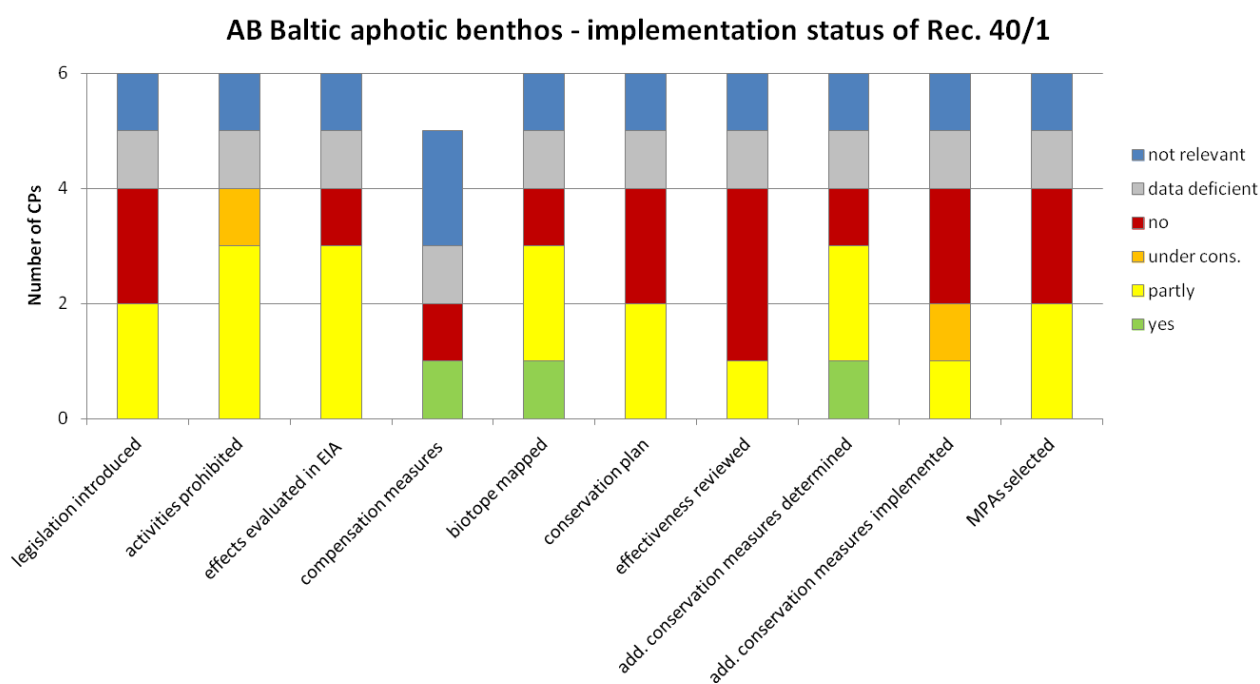


Fig. 3 Overall implementation status of HELCOM Recommendation 40/1 for red-listed Baltic aphotic benthos. (under cons. = under consideration)

Overall, the level of implementation of Recommendation 40/1 is low for “AC Baltic Sea seasonal ice”. Nevertheless, it is fully mapped by FI and SE and SE partly has a conservation plan for Baltic Sea seasonal ice and respective MPAs under consideration (Fig. 4). Moreover, activities negatively affecting this habitat are prohibited/limited in Estonia.

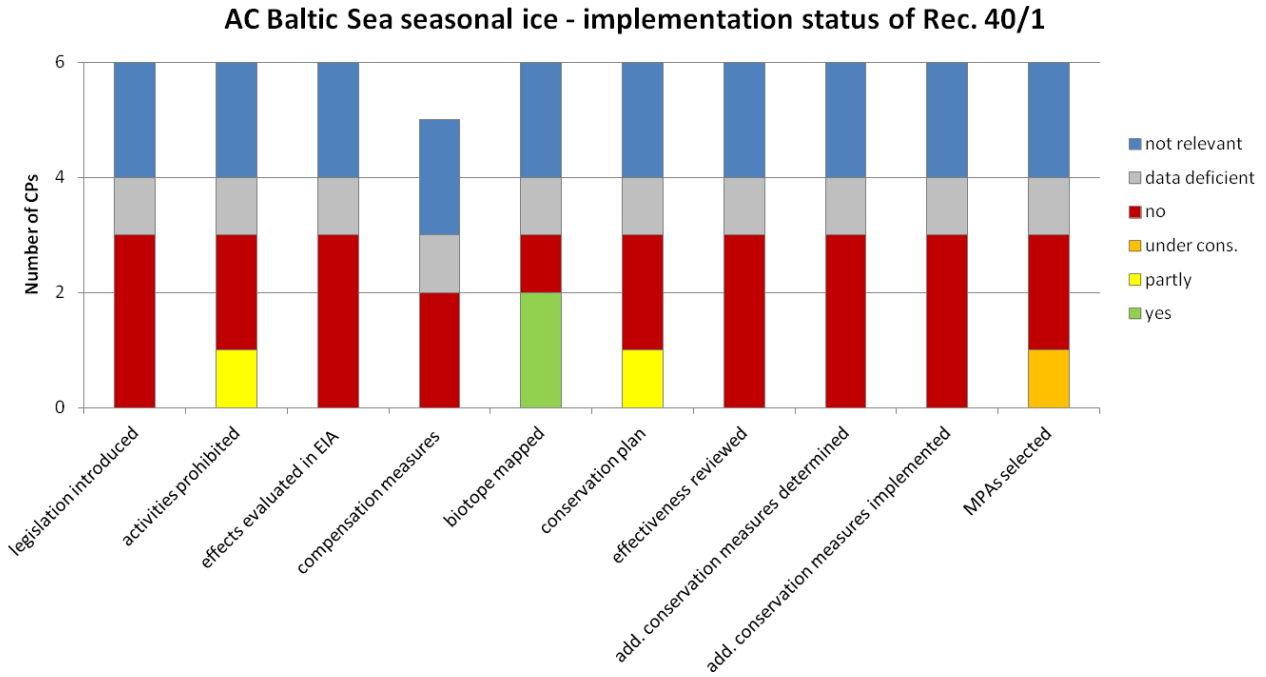


Fig. 4 Overall implementation status of HELCOM Recommendation 40/1 for red-listed Baltic Sea seasonal ice. (under cons. = under consideration)

Similar to Baltic Sea seasonal ice, Recommendation 40/1 is little implemented for biotopes and habitats belonging to the category “AE Baltic Sea aphotic pelagic”. Prohibition and/or limitation of activities with negative effects on red-listed biotopes and habitats is the only recommended action which is partly or fully implemented by the CPs (Fig. 5). The evaluation of new projects in EIAs or similar procedures is under consideration in Denmark and mapping is partly done by SE.

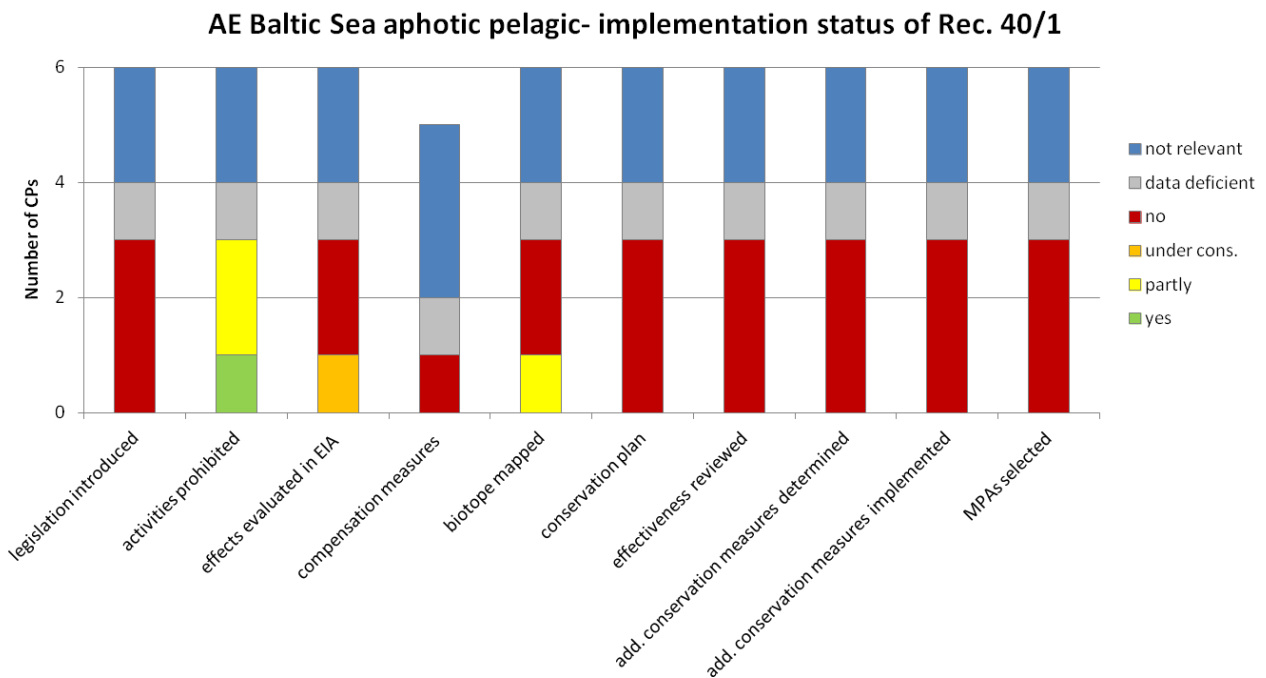


Fig. 5 Overall implementation status of HELCOM Recommendation 40/1 for red-listed Baltic Sea aphotic pelagic. (under cons. = under consideration)

The recommendation is best implemented for biotope complexes. Major parts are fully or partly implemented by all CPs (Fig. 6). However, there are gaps regarding the mapping of the biotope complexes (one CP), the review of effectiveness of conservation measures (two CPs), the selection of MPAs (one CP), as well as the determination and implementation of conservation measures (two CPs).

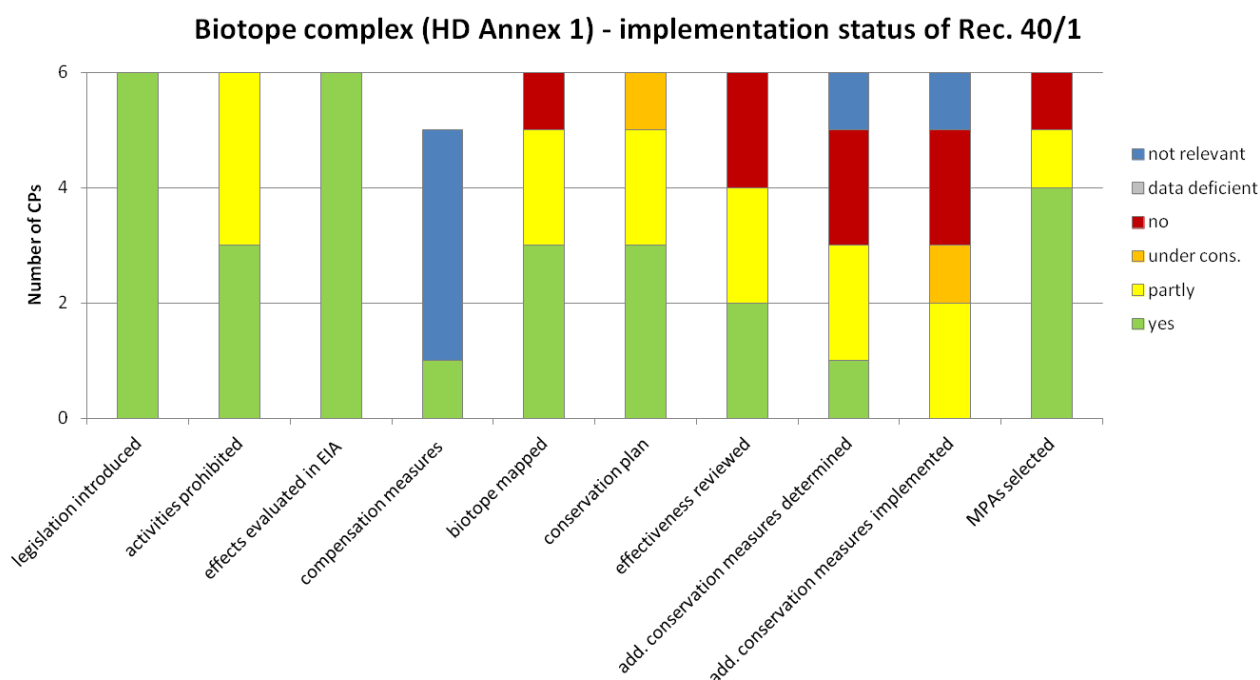


Fig. 6 Overall implementation status of HELCOM Recommendation 40/1 for red-listed biotope complexes. (under cons. = under consideration)

Regional implementation of Recommendation 40/1:

The level of implementation is similar for red-listed HUBs but differs depending on the recommended actions at regional scale (Fig. 7). While CPs stated that international bodies were encouraged to take all appropriate measures in areas of their specific competence, such as in fisheries management or shipping, for the reduction of pressures on biotopes, habitats and biotope complexes or it is under consideration to encourage these organizations, other parts of the recommendation such as monitoring and data exchange with international bodies is not strongly developed. Actions to raise awareness amongst stakeholders and the general public as well as to establish permanent dialogues with stakeholders have the worst implementation record. Only for the category “AE Baltic Sea aphotic pelagic” one CP said that such actions are partly accomplished (Fig. 7d).

A better level of implementation was achieved for biotope complexes (Fig. 8). Only one CP stated that international bodies are not encouraged to take appropriate measures for the reduction of pressures on biotope complexes and that no permanent dialogue with stakeholders has been established.

One CP did not fully answer on questions about actions, which require implementation at regional level.

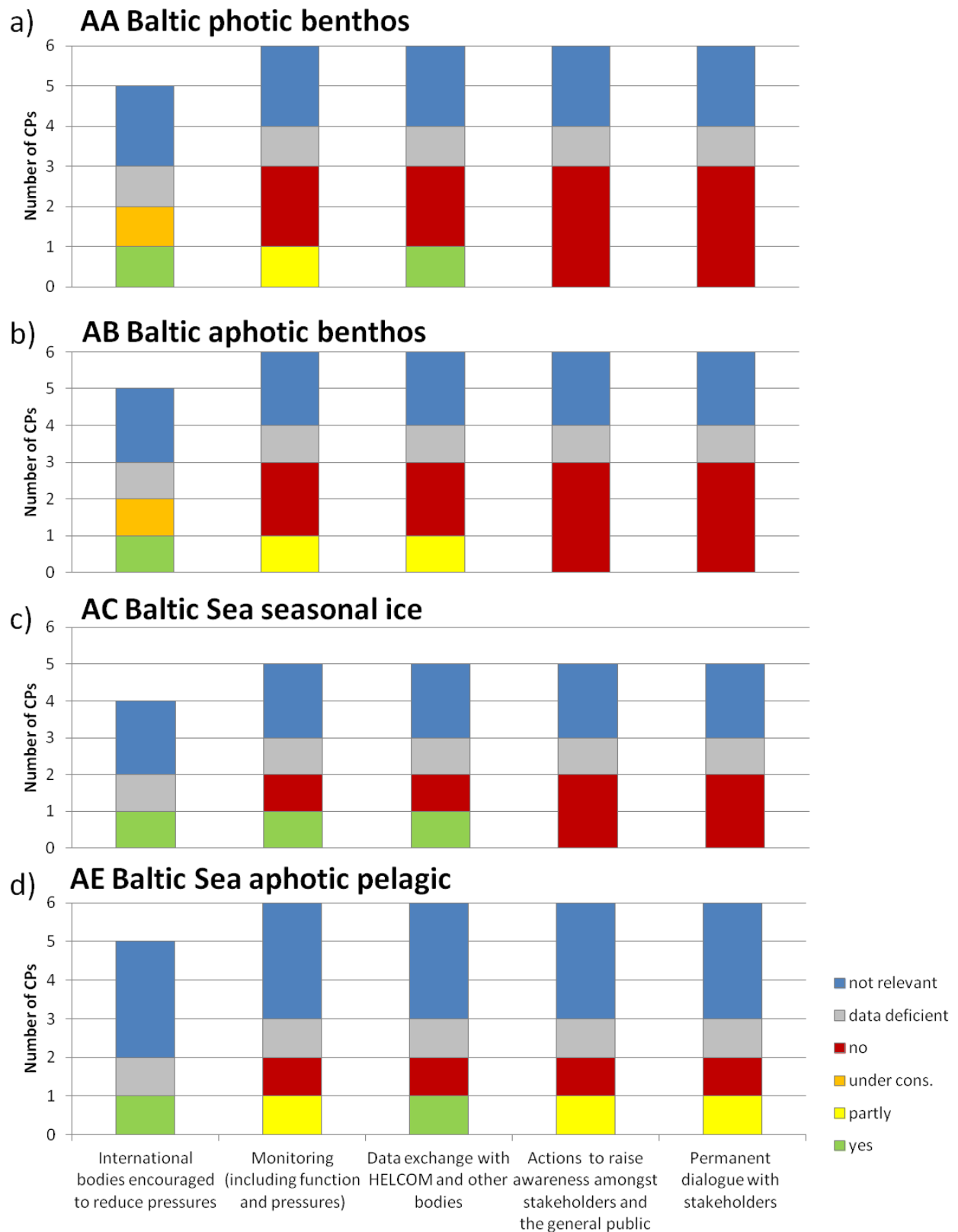


Fig. 7 Implementation status of actions from Recommendation 40/1 for a) AA Baltic photic benthos, b) AB Baltic aphotic benthos, c) AC Baltic Sea seasonal ice, and d) AE Baltic Sea aphotic pelagic, which require implementation at regional level. (under cons. = under consideration)

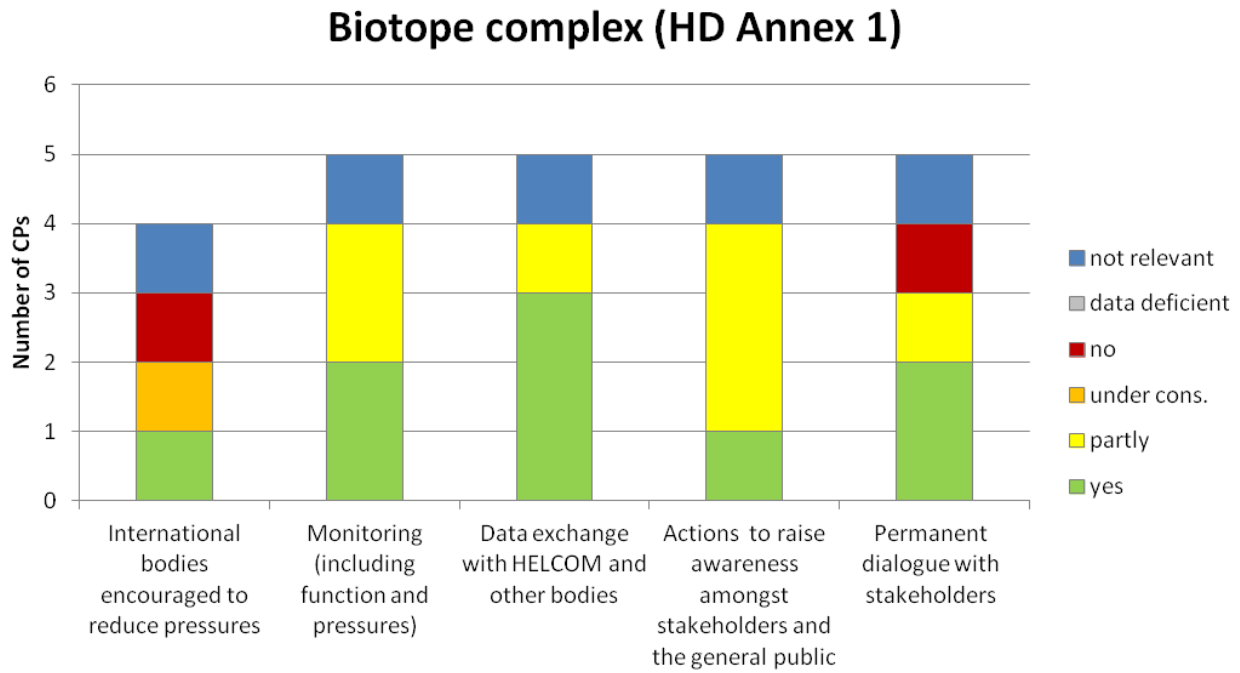


Fig. 8 Implementation status of actions from Recommendation 40/1 for biotope complexes, which require implementation at regional level. (under cons. = under consideration)