Outcome of the 15th Meeting of the Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation (STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021)

Introduction

0.1 In accordance with the decision by HOD 59-2020, the 15th Meeting of the Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation (STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021) was convened online on 4-8 October 2021.

0.2 The Joint session was attended by delegations from all Contracting Parties, except EU, an Observer from CCB as well as Invited Guests from the HELCOM BLUES project, Finnish Environment Institute, Coalition Clean Baltic, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, National Institute of Aquatic Resources and Aalborg University.

0.3 The Nature conservation and biodiversity session was attended by delegations from all Contracting Parties except EU as well as observers from CCB and Nordic Hunters Alliance as well as an invited guest from Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries. The List of Participants is contained in **Annex 1.**

0.4 The Meeting was chaired by the Co-Chairs of the Working Group: Marie-Louise Krawack (Denmark), Chair of Nature conservation and biodiversity related topics and Norbert Häubner (Sweden), Chair of Monitoring and assessment related topics. Jannica Haldin, HELCOM Professional Secretary, Petra Kääriä and Laura Kaikkonen, HELCOM Associate Professional Secretaries, acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

Contents

Joint session

Agenda Item 1J Adoption of the Agenda: Joint themes

1J.1 The Meeting adopted items 1J-8J in the Provisional Annotated Agenda as contained in document 1-1-Rev.3.

Agenda Item 2J Matters of relevance for the Meeting and information from the Secretariat

HELCOM

2J.1 The Meeting took note of outcomes of relevant recent HELCOM meetings (document 2J-1).

2J.2 The Meeting took note of the status of the BSAP update process and associated documents (document 2J-2) and the information by the Secretariat on latest developments, including the decision by HoDs to delineate the scope of Actions B11-14 to focus on waterbirds. The Meeting noted the view by Germany that 'birds' would be the proper term and scope for actions B11, B12, B13, B14 in the updated BSAP to be in line with the HELCOM Recommendation 34E/1.

IUCN/WCPA/FAO

2J.3 The Meeting took note of the further plans for organizing a Baltic Sea workshop on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in 2022 jointly with FAO/IUCN as well as preliminary results from the scoping survey prepared to support the workshop (document 2J-3).

2J.4 The Meeting noted that the information session of the webinar is open to a broader audience, as outlined in the document, while the second part of the webinar is mainly aimed at State and Conservation contacts and delegations.

2J.5 The Meeting noted information by Finland on an ongoing process under CAFF and PAME on identification of OECMs in the Arctic.

2J.6 The Meeting invited Contracting Parties who may wish to submit further comments to the document to do so to the Secretariat (petra.kaaria@helcom.fi) **by 15 October 2021**, enabling their inclusion in further planning with the IUCN-WCPA and FAO.

2J.7 The Meeting noted that a three-day OSPAR MPA meeting coincides with the suggested date for the webinar and that there is limited possibility to change the dates.

2J.8 The Meeting took note of the selected case studies on OECMs to be considered at the workshop (document 2J-4).

EU

2J.9 The Meeting took note of the guidance on aligning the MSFD art 8 reporting and the HBD (document 2J-6 and presentation 1).

2J.10 The Meeting welcomed the process and noted that this represents a good opportunity to align HBD reporting with the HELCOM indicator work as well as provide input to EU level processes.

2J.11 The Meeting noted that one of the barriers to closer cooperation on HBD under State and Conservation WG is that the national experts working with HBD reporting do not take active part in the Working Group meetings.

2J.12 The Meeting suggested organizing a workshop on strengthening the link between HOLAS III reporting and HBD reporting, involving the HBD and HOLAS III experts, in spring 2023, invited the Secretariat to organize such a workshop and invited the Contracting Parties to provide input to the organization from the HBD point of view. The Meeting welcomed that Finland and Sweden are willing to support the Secretariat in preparing and planning for the workshop.

2J.13 The Meeting took note of the EU workshop on the assessment of management effectiveness of marine Natura 2000 sites and other EU MPAs, to be held on 13-14 October 2021, and noted that the Secretariat will present the MPA work on management effectiveness carried out under the ACTION project in the workshop.

2J.14 The Meeting noted that the participation to the event is limited to two participants per country.

CBD

2J.15 The Meeting noted that CBD COP 15 will take part in two parts: the first part in virtual format on 11-15 October 2021 and the second part as a face-to-face meeting in Kunming, China from 25 April to 8 May 2022. The finalization and adoption of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework will be addressed during the second part.

2J.16 The Meeting welcomed the cross-referencing of the latest draft of the CBD Global Biodiversity Framework and the updated BSAP (document 2J-5), prepared by the Secretariat. The Meeting took note that a few amendments to the document, based on input provided after submission of the document to the Meeting, are needed and a revised version will be provided. The Meeting noted the initial views by the Secretariat on how this work could be used in the future, including a possible HELCOM publication similar to the one on SDGs, and that there will be a need to update the information once the BSAP actions and the CBD targets are adopted.

Agenda Item 3J Progress of relevant HELCOM expert groups and projects

HELCOM Expert Groups under the guidance of the State and Conservation WG

HELCOM-Baltic Earth Expert Network on Climate Change (EN CLIME)

3J.1 The Meeting welcomed that the Climate Change Fact Sheet was published and launched on 3 September 2021 and is available on the website, thanked the network for the excellent work and publication and noted that the Fact Sheet has already proved useful in national work.

3J.2 The Meeting noted that the current HELCOM Co-Chair of EN CLIME will be on parental leave since April 2022 and will be back in 2023.

3J.3 The Meeting approved the updated ToRs and Work Plan of EN CLIME (document 3J-85), with the inclusion of amendments suggested by Estonia including introducing closer links with the Science Agenda and BSAP as well as inclusion of preliminary outputs of the 2022-2024 Work Plan in the ToRs.

HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MAMA)

3J.4 The Meeting considered the proposal by EG MAMA for addressing the issues raised in relation to establishing precautionary approach level (PAL) for seals in the Baltic Sea (document 3J-1) and noted the

view by the group that, from the ecological and conservation standpoint, inclusion of other species in addition to grey seal could be relevant.

3J.5 The Meeting emphasized that grey seals should be prioritized in the work, however supported including also other seal species where sufficient data is available. The Meeting noted the concern by Denmark that LIFE projects are very time consuming to manage and difficult to co-finance, and Denmark therefore does not consider it the optimal source of funding. The Meeting further supported a joint targeted discussion on the establishment of a project on PAL (e.g., where to apply for funding, etc.), possibly in a dedicated meeting, between EG MAMA and State & Conservation.

3J.6 The Meeting considered the proposed change of management unit structure for harbour seals (document 3J-89) and noted that an assessment separately under each of the four assessment units is suggested. The Meeting noted that this division of management units is already in use in Denmark.

3J.7 The Meeting supported the rationale and scientific basis for the proposal, however noted the study reservations by Sweden and Denmark on implementing the division until the limit reference level (LRL) approach and its application in the indicator and recommendation for these management units has been clarified (i.e. an alternative numerical value has been approved).

3J.8 The Meeting noted that the management units are presented in list format in the Recommendation and that changes in the division of management units would require updating the list of management units in the Recommendation to ensure the correct information is included. The Meeting noted the study reservation by Finland on opening the full Recommendation for revision and supported that only the list of management units should be opened for updating.

3J.9 The Meeting invited EG MAMA to provide a proposed solution to addressing LRL for consideration at HOD 61-2021, should the new management unit division be used for HOLAS III. The Meeting noted that should that proposal not be considered appropriate, the approach applied in HOLAS II would be maintained also for HOLAS III.

3J.10 The Meeting approved that the Terms of References for EG MAMA be amended to be open ended, with a review every 2 years. The Meeting approved the Terms of References for EG MAMA (document 3J-38) with the change in validity and supported preparing a Work Plan for EG MAMA for a 2-year period in the future.

3J.11 The Meeting took note of the distribution of the pupping activity of seals in the HELCOM area (document 3J-101).

Joint OSPAR/ICES/HELCOM Working Group on Seabirds (JWG BIRD)

3J.12 The Meeting welcomed the outcome of the BfN-JWGBird workshop on migratory birds (document 3J-99) and thanked Germany for arranging it.

3J.13 The Meeting considered the final ToRs and the draft work plan for the group on bird migration (document 3J-2) and noted that changes may be introduced by one of the two other host organizations as part of their approval processes.

3J.14 The Meeting noted that the Workshop was of the view that including all species groups of birds migrating over sea areas (e.g., passerines) in the work of the migratory bird group is of high importance. The Meeting further noted that a German project compiling weather radar data from several Baltic Sea stations will start in mid-October. The intention behind the work is to get first impression of migratory activities of all kinds of birds migrating over the Baltic Sea.

3J.15 The Meeting discussed the topical scope of the Expert Group on Migration and agreed to delineate the scope to focus on migration and displacement routes of migratory bird species affecting, or affected by, the Baltic Sea environment and/or human activities taking place at sea.

3J.16 The Meeting took note of the clarification by the Secretariat on the meaning of the suggested text "affecting the BS environment" that the intention was to capture how birds interact with their living environment, affect the Baltic Sea e.g., through the foodweb.

3J.17 The Meeting agreed that the geographical scope of the group should be based on what is ecologically relevant, and that work should be focused where it is most urgent. The Meeting took note of the recommendation by Finland to also consider including the Arctic area, however this would need further input from OSPAR and ICES. The Meeting invited the bird migration group to present a proposal for the concrete geographical scope of the work.

3J.18 The Meeting noted the comment by Finland on work carried out under the CMS regarding flight ways of passerines and highlighted the importance of accounting for other parallel processes and conventions working on bird migration in the ToR to find synergies between expert groups.

3J.19 The Meeting supported the proposal by the Workshop and the recommendation by the JWGBIRD Co-Chairs that the group be a stand-alone Expert Group, reporting directly to State & Conservation. The Meeting emphasised the importance of close cooperation with JWGBIRD and possible other expert fora on bird migration. Towards this end the Meeting agreed that a section on cooperation will be included in the ToRs.

3J.20 The Meeting emphasised that nominations are needed from the Contracting Parties to start the work on bird migration and invited the CPs to provide nominations for the group to the Secretariat (petra.kaaria@helcom.fi) by **29 October 2021**.

3J.21 The Meeting noted the current situation on leads for the Expert Group on Bird Migration and invited the CPs to consider nominating a lead/co-lead for the group.

3J.22 The Meeting agreed on the ToR, pending final amendments based on the comments from the Workshop and State & Conservation to reflect the group's independence from JWGBIRD. The Meeting invited the Secretariat to finalize the ToRs and agreed to submit a proposal for the establishment of an independent group on bird migration to HOD 61-2021. In case HOD agrees, OSPAR and ICES should be approached by the HELCOM secretariat to enquire their interest in taking part in the work also outside the umbrella of JWGBIRD.

3J.23 The Meeting noted the proposal that identifying species to be included in the work could be supported by a vulnerability analysis and further noted the study on the vulnerability of several bird species to onshore wind energy developments in Finland available at: https://www.ornisfennica.org/pdf/latest/21Balotari-Chiebao.pdf

3J.24 The Meeting welcomed the suggestion for an intersessional meeting between interested parties (Germany, Denmark, Finland, and Poland) to further discuss the rationale and practical implications of expanding the scope of the groups work beyond waterbirds and invited Germany to set up the meeting.

3J.25 The Meeting considered the revised draft HELCOM Guidelines for monitoring seabirds at sea, developed by the Lead countries Germany and Latvia, with the support of JWGBIRD (document 3J-86).

3J.26 The Meeting noted that Sweden will provide the Secretariat (petra.kaaria@helcom.fi) with some editorial remarks and agreed to also include e-mail addresses of contacts to the document, however emphasized the need to take into account the needs related to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

3J.27 The Meeting invited the Secretariat to include the changes and approved the HELCOM Guidelines for monitoring seabirds at sea for inclusion in the HELCOM Monitoring Manual and publication on the HELCOM website.

Expert Group on Hazardous Substances (EG HAZ)

3J.28 The Meeting noted that there is currently a need for a new Chair due to the retirement of one co-Chair and the parental leave of the other.

3J.29 The Meeting took note of the considerations in Pressure WG regarding the possibility to expand the mandate and the tasks of EN HZ (document 3J-96), supported the proposal to expand the mandate of the group and agreed to update the name of the group to Expert Group on Hazardous Substance. The Meeting supported that EG HAZ be jointly guided by State and Conservation and Pressure WGs.

3J.30 The Meeting took note of the additional information related to the ToRs of EG HAZ that represents feedback received from the Pressure ad hoc drafting group (document 3J-96-Add.1).

3J.31 The Meeting took note of the plan for reviewing and developing the ToRs of EN HZ (EG HAZ), as outlined in the document background, and noted that once finalised they would be submitted to HOD since the mandate of the group is being significantly broadened.

3J.32 The Meeting agreed on the ToRs for the group (document 3J-96). The Meeting took note of the comment by Germany that establishing, or consolidation of Expert Groups can be considered not to be in line with the aims of streamlining HELCOM processes. Nevertheless, Germany shared the view that these Expert Groups are important to have.

3J.33 The Meeting noted that the currently nominated Polish experts from the Chief Inspectorate of Environmental Protection under EG HAZ will solely work with issues related to monitoring and assessment of hazardous substance.

3J.34 The Meeting took note that the broader mandate and scope of the group may require additional expertise and invited the Contracting Parties to provide additional nominations to the group.

3J.35 The Meeting took note of ongoing discussions and possible plans in OSPAR regarding cooperation on biological effects of contaminants and that any developments resulting from discussion in OSPAR would be transferred back to State & Conservation for review and further comment.

3J.36 The Meeting endorsed the proposal to submit a message to EU WG Chemicals outlining a regional opinion for inclusion of certain substances and sampling matrix types (sediment) within existing EQS threshold value review and prioritisation processes (document 3J-92).

Expert Network on Benthic Habitats (EN BENTHIC)

3J.37 The Meeting agreed on the following plan for the review of the ToRs of EN BENTHIC:

- State and Conservation will review the ToRs and Work Plan and provide comments to the Secretariat (laura.kaikkonen@helcom.fi) by **22 October 2021**
- Secretariat will collate the comments and send the ToRs and WP for final approval **by 28 October 2021**
- Final approval will be carried out via correspondence **by 5 November 2021.**

Quality Assurance of Phytoplankton Monitoring in the Baltic Sea (PEG)

3J.38 The Meeting took note that the PEG-BVOL list for 2021 is now published on the ICES website and can be accessed here: https://www.ices.dk/data/data-portals/Pages/DOME.aspx.

3J.39 The Meeting took note of the comment from Germany that the seasonal success indicator needs to be added to the list in the ToRs and the wish for strong cooperation between PEG and the BLUES project.

3J.40 The Meeting approved the proposal on prolongation of PEG for adoption at HOD 61-2021 (document 3J-4) after inclusion of amendments by Germany and invited the Chair to confirm the correct amount of additional resources the group is requesting.

3J.41 The Meeting welcomed that in 2022, the workshop will be held in Poland.

Zooplankton Expert Network (ZEN)

3J.42 The Meeting took note of the draft ToRs for the Zooplankton Expert Network. The Meeting noted the changes proposed by Germany. The Meeting also took note of the clarification by the Secretariat that CG FOODWEB is, under its current mandate, a temporary correspondence group established to address needs under HOLAS III and that currently there is no dedicated platform under HELCOM to address pelagic habitats, both of which are topics with strong links to both phyto- and zooplankton.

3J.43 The Meeting took note of the clarification that both PEG and ZEN contacts have been included in invitations by HELCOM BLUES for CG FOODWEB meetings and invited the CPs to review the contact list for PEG and ZEN to ensure that the Secretariat is reaching the relevant contacts.

3J.44 The Meeting welcomed the offer by Sweden to Chair the group, supported that intersessional work taking place under the group and noted that statistical expertise is needed in the group in order to appropriately be able to maintain the relevant indicators. The Meeting invited CPs to consider nominating experts with knowledge of statistics for the group.

3J.45 The Meeting in principle approved the final ToRs for the Zooplankton Expert Network for adoption at HOD 61-2021 (document 3J-5), noting the changes proposed by Germany. The Meeting agreed to review the changes proposed by Germany intersessionally, after which the ToRs can be considered approved. The Meeting invited the Secretariat to apply the proposed changes to the ToRs and to circulate the amended ToRs to State & Conservation for final review by **27 October 2021**.

3J.46 The Meeting took note of the list of expert participation in the group.

HELCOM Correspondence Group on Food Webs (CG FOODWEB)

3J.47 The Meeting took note of the recent and upcoming activities of CG FOODWEB (document 3J-7).

Joint HELCOM-OSPAR Expert Group on Non-Indigenous Species (JEG NIS)

3J.48 The Meeting approved the final ToRs of JEG NIS (document 3J-8) for approval at HOD 61-2021. The Meeting noted that Estonia is in the process of raising the study reservation placed at HOD 60-2021.

3J.49 The Meeting noted the clarification by the Secretariat that the work between the JTG BALLAST and BIOFOULING and JEG NIS will be clearly separated to ensure that there will be no duplication of work.

3J.50 The Meeting noted the question by Poland regarding if State & Conservation WG is the appropriate host group for JEG NIS. The Meeting noted the further clarification by the Secretariat that the intention is that the assessment of NIS is intended to be carried out under JEG NIS, which is why it is suggested to be under State and Conservation.

3J.51 The Meeting invited the Contracting Parties to consider co-chairing the group and inform the Secretariat (marta.ruiz@helcom.fi) on a co-Chair nomination.

3J.52 The Meeting took note of the information that Germany is not in the position to nominate a co-Chair for JEG NIS.

Expert Group on eutrophication (EG EUTRO)

3J.53 The Meeting reviewed and approved the ToRs for the years 2022-2024 of the expert group (document 3J-90) and agreed to change the name of the group from "Intersessional network on eutrophication (IN-Eutrophication)" to "Expert Group on Eutrophication "(EG EUTRO)".

3J.54 The Meeting took note that the group's work plan has generally been used as a living document which has been updated by the group throughout the duration of the ToRs and invited EG EUTRO to update the workplan for 2022-2024 in the group's next meeting.

3J.55 The Meeting invited EG EUTRO to ensure close cooperation with the PLC-8 project and Redcore DG in order, e.g., to analyse and better link the threshold values of nutrients and loads/NICs in different assessment units.

EN Noise and EN Marine Litter

3J.56 The Meeting noted that PRESSURE 15-2015 will be invited to consider the updated ToRs for HELCOM EN-Marine Litter as well as the ToRs for EN-Noise for the period 2022-2024 and endorse them for submission to HOD 61-2021 for approval. PRESSURE 15-2015 will also be invited to agree to change the name of the groups from "Expert Network on Marine Litter (EN-Marine Litter)" to "Expert Group on Marine Litter" (EG Marine Litter)" and from "Expert Network on Underwater Noise (EN-Noise)" to "Expert Group on Underwater Noise" (EG Noise).

3J.57 The Meeting invited the contacts of State and Conservation to coordinate nationally and provide their input on these documents through the Pressure contacts.

Projects

Ongoing projects

HOLAS III associated projects

3J.58 The Meeting took note of the overview of progress and events associated with the HOLAS III assessment which have occurred in the interim between STATE & CONSERVATION 14-2021 and STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 (document 3J-9).

3J.59 The Meeting took note of the overview information of the proposed changes to HELCOM Assessment units (document 3J-94-Rev.2).

3J.60 The Meeting invited Denmark to contact the Secretariat (joni.kaitaranta@helcom.fi) to clarify whether national coastal water assessment changes under the WFD have been applied in the HELCOM Assessment unit Level 4.

3J.61 The Meeting confirmed that the change of splitting the Gulf of Finland (number 1 on p.2 of the document 3J-94-Rev.2) should be applied only to the eutrophication assessment.

3J.62 The Meeting considered the proposal to align the Western boundary of Bornholm Basin with the national MSFD and WFD reporting units in German coastal waters (document 3J-35, presentation 2).

3J.63 The Meeting agreed on an intersessional review period for document 3J-94-Rev.2. and invited CPs to provide possible comments to the coastal unit changes to the Secretariat (joni.kaitaranta@helcom.fi) by **1 November 2021**.

3J.64 The Meeting provisionally agreed on the proposed changes and their implementation in the HELCOM Assessment unit datasets available from HELCOM Map and Data Service as well as documented in the HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy for use in HOLAS III and beyond and agreed to submit the proposal for HOD 61-2021 for approval.

3J.65 The Meeting invited the Secretariat to outline the possible implications of implementing eutrophication specific assessment units for the practical application of HELCOM assessments and their related uses. The Meeting agreed to review this discussion paper intersessionally and, if supported, to submit it to HOD 61-2021 as contextual information to support the approval process of changes to the assessment units.

3J.66 The Meeting took note of the information by Sweden that they are in the process of updating their coastal waterbodies and invited the Contracting Parties to provide information on any additional changes, not already reflected in the document, to the coastal Level 4 assessment units to the Secretariat (joni.kaitaranta@helcom.fi) **by 31 December 2021** to ensure the updated units can be used for the HOLAS III assessment. The Meeting endorsed the proposal that any additional proposed changes to Level 4 assessment units received by 31 December 2021 be presented for approval at HELCOM 43-2022.

Data flows related work

HELCOM Data Flow Project (DataFlow)

3J.67 The Meeting took note of the HOLAS III relevant work planned under the project and progress of work under the HELCOM DataFlow project, including more detailed information on Task E as per invitation by STATE & CONSERVATION 14-2021 (document 3J-10).

3J.68 The Meeting emphasised the need to have a list of what quality checks will be included for the reporting of HOLAS III related data on parts 2a-c in the data call and invited the Secretariat to prepare and submit a list of these to State & Conservation WG at latest by the end of the year 2021.

Baltic Data Flows (BDF)

3J.69 The Meeting took note of the HOLAS III relevant work planned under the project and progress of work under the Baltic Data Flows project (document 3J-11, presentation 3).

HELCOM BLUES

3J.70 The Meeting took note of the progress of HELCOM BLUES project data activities (document 3J-12).

HOLAS III Data Call

3J.71 The Meeting took note of information and clarifications regarding the HOLAS III data call (document 3J-13).

3J.72 The Meeting welcomed the information on planned helpdesk session for data reporting during Q1 of 2022 and requested Contracting Parties to nominate experts to join the sessions and inform the Secretariat (joni.kaitaranta@helcom.fi) by **1 December 2021**.

3J.73 The Meeting considered the summary of the data availability for 2021 eutrophication data for HOLAS III, as submitted by IN EUTRO (document 3J-57). The Meeting took note of the information that for 2021 eutrophication data two CPs are unable to meet the set data reporting deadlines (i.e. speeded schedule), however the EG EUTRO experts assure that with a relatively minor modification of the timelines for the indicator assessment result approval of eutrophication indicators, a full 2021 data can be included in the HOLAS III assessment for all Contracting Parties.

3J.74 The Meeting emphasized that such changes should only be considered in exceptional cases and can only be considered for the eutrophication assessment due to the automated data reporting and assessment framework established for this topic. The Meeting also emphasized that any proposed changes must align with the agreed approval processes for HOLAS III, would apply only to 2021 eutrophication data from Germany and Lithuania and would require that CPs agree that the data reported after the official data reporting deadline will go through a data review by Germany and Lithuania only and not be included in official

HOLAS III approval processes. Furthermore, the Meeting emphasized that the results of the eutrophication indicator evaluations would not be presented for approval separately from the indicator reports, contrary to what was previously agreed by HOD. These caveats would need to be adhered to strictly to not jeopardize the integrity of the approved assessment plan and timeline for HOLAS III.

3J.75 The Meeting noted the clarification that EG EUTRO will be the only group submitting indicator results for approval to HOD 63-2022, whereas other results will be submitted already to STATE & CONSERVATION 17-2022, in accordance with the approved plan.

3J.76 The Meeting consequently recommended the following way forward for consideration by HOD 61-2021:

- 2016-2020 eutrophication data, as well as 2021 eutrophication data for all CPs except Germany and Lithuania, will be reported according to the agreed timeline to enable eutrophication data to, to the extent possible, be included in the official HOLAS III data review and approval process.
- 2021 eutrophication data for Germany and Lithuania would be made available for use in the evaluation and assessment by end of September 2022 at the latest, following which the indicator evaluations and the indicator reports would need to be finalized by EG EUTRO by 17 October 2022 at the latest, after which the eutrophication indicator evaluation results would be submitted for approval together with the indicator reports.
- Simultaneously EG EUTRO will prepare the integrated assessment of eutrophication as well as the thematic assessment of eutrophication by 5 December 2022, in line with the approved timeline for all thematic assessments. Should any changes to the eutrophication indicators be required as a consequence of the approval of the indicator results 30 November-1 December 2022 EG EUTRO commits to updating the respective indicator evaluation reports as well as the integrated assessment and thematic assessment prior to the 27 December 2022 deadline, thus meeting the deadline for submission.

Indicators related work

3J.77 The Meeting noted the statement by Denmark that Danish representatives to the Meeting will consider only the scientific and technical aspects of the indicators and threshold values. The final position will be given at HOD 61-2021 and therefore Denmark has a study reservation placed on the use of indicators and threshold values for HOLAS III.

3J.78 The Meeting took note of the clarification by the Secretariat that, in accordance with the HELCOM indicator manual and as presented at the indicator lead information event, the indicator leads are responsible for performing the indicator evaluations for the full spatial coverage of their respective indicators, utilizing the data reported by CPs under the HOLAS III data call.

3J.79 The Meeting took note of the updated information on indicator lead and co-lead countries and the nominated experts appointed for their development (document 3J-14). The Meeting took note of the comment that the e-mail addresses by Finnish contacts are to be corrected (@ymparisto.fi -> @syke.fi and @ym.fi -> @gov.fi).

3J.80 The Meeting noted a duplication of the pre-core indicator *Population structure of long-lived macrozoobenthic* species and invited the Secretariat to amend it.

3J.81 The Meeting invited the Contracting Parties to provide input to the document to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) intersessionally, at the latest by **13 April 2022**.

3J.82 The Meeting approved the proposed updated structure of the indicator reports and website (document 3J-17, presentation 4) and noted the following comments:

- the indicator reports should be downloaded as a PDFs;
- the inclusion of hyperlinks/digital object identifiers (DOIs) within and across reports should be explored;
- the structure should be as flexible as possible to accommodate for possible changes (e.g. to be in line with MSFD Article 8 guidance);
- the search/filter function for MSFD criteria and descriptors should be maintained;
- Core and pre core indicators should be presented separately and clearly differentiated;
- the current categorization of indicators as pressure or state indicators could be further reviewed and a definition of the terms and rationale for division be provided on the indicator page, if maintained.

3J.83 The Meeting invited CPs to provide further comments on functionalities to maintain in the structure to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) by **12 November 2021**.

3J.84 The Meeting noted the clarification by the Secretariat that surveillance indicators are indicators without threshold values and with the intention to provide an early warning system, for example for screening of hazardous substances might be a possible such indicator (further explanation can be found in the HELCOM Indicator Manual).

3J.85 The Meeting took note of the updated overview of overall progress on the further development of HELCOM indicators, outlining current status of development towards HOLAS III (document 3J-18).

Topic: Phytoplankton

3J.86 The Meeting took note of the information that the issues related to plankton data in Denmark persist and may not be possible to solve prior to data reporting for HOLAS III.

Indicator: Diatom/dinoflagellate index

3J.87 The Meeting considered the elaboration of the diatom/dinoflagellate indicator, explaining how the indicator functions, rationale behind the methodology and threshold values, data requirements and outlining the explanatory power of the indicator (document 3J-19).

3J.88 The Meeting highlighted that methodological issues remain with the indicator which require further work and welcomed the willingness of Germany to develop the indicator further and encouraged the German leads to work closely with the BLUES project with regard to the ongoing work to further develop the pelagic assessment methodology.

3J.89 The Meeting endorsed the use of the indicator as a pre-core indicator for selected test cases in HOLAS III.

Indicator: Seasonal succession of dominating phytoplankton groups

3J.90 The Meeting considered the development of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-20, presentation 5).

3J.91 The Meeting noted the concerns by Denmark regarding the proposed reference period, which may commonly fall within a period when the Baltic Sea was already heavily influenced by eutrophication, as well as the effect this has on the proposed threshold values. In addition, it remains unclear if the proposed threshold value reflects an actual threshold between good and poor status.

3J.92 The Meeting noted that Germany placed a study reservation on the threshold values until HOD 61-2021.

3J.93 The Meeting, noting the concerns raised by several CPs, concluded that the indicator needs further development prior to it being considered suitable for core indicator status and consequently did not endorse that the indicator be changed to core-status.

3J.94 The Meeting invited the CPs to provide detailed comments to the indicator leads to guide further development work.

3J.95 The Meeting endorsed the use of the indicator as a pre-core indicator in HOLAS III.

Topic: Zooplankton

Indicator: Zooplankton mean size and total stock (MSTS)

3J.96 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-21 and presentation 5.

3J.97 The Meeting noted the comments by Germany and Poland that the date presented in the document is erroneous and should be amended to the agreed 30 November 2021 and that it needs to be better clarified that the intended way forward is for the setting of threshold values for the Bornholm and Arkona Basins, respectively.

3J.98 The Meeting endorsed the threshold value setting method and the use of the indicator in HOLAS III and noted that further updates should be available by end of November 2021 and will be submitted to HOD 61-2021.

Assessment of pelagic habitats

3J.99 The Meeting considered the proposed approach for assessing the state of pelagic habitats in HOLAS III, as indicated in document 3J-22 and presentation 5.

3J.100 The Meeting took note of different views regarding the inclusion of eutrophication indicators in the pelagic habitat assessments and agreed to come back to this at a later stage when information on what indicators will be endorsed (and at what 'level') in HOLAS III, to what extent and where, is available.

3J.101 The Meeting highlighted further time is required for specifying the topic assessments for pelagic habitats, including the appropriate use of relevant indicator results (once approval of what indicators to include in HOLAS III is complete).

3J.102 The Meeting agreed on the following approach to take the assessment of pelagic habitats forward towards HOLAS III:

- Key contributor meeting will take place in November 2021 (e.g. State and Conservation contacts, BLUES project experts, PEG and ZEN representatives) to further elaborate the approach for the assessment;
- Improved document submitted to HOD 61-2021 outlining the approach, providing context on the proposed use of the indicators, and presenting the proposed way forward for the topic;
- Targeted Assessment Methodology Workshop in spring 2022, where possible jointly with a supporting CP and, in the case of pelagic habitats, the BLUES project and experts from OSPAR NEA PANACEA, utilizing the information of what indicators will be included in HOLAS III, in what format and to what extent;
- Further development of approach document to include technical and methodological information.
- Final approval of technical aspects of methodology stemming from the WS (e.g., integration etc.) at S&C 16-2022.

3J.103 The Meeting welcomed the offer by Sweden to explore the possibility to provide support for 1-2 of the planned Assessment Methodology Workshops in spring 2022.

Topic: Benthic habitats

Indicator: Cumulative impact on benthic biotopes

3J.104 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in document 3J-23, presentation 6.

3J.105 The Meeting took note of appreciation expressed regarding the amount of effort contributed by the leads towards HOLAS III developments, however noted the comments by Denmark and Sweden that towards HOLAS IV further developments will be needed, including for increasing spatial resolution in order to enable the use of the indicator to guide management, especially in coastal areas and to improve data and data management of different pressures such as fisheries and an improvement in the sensitivity score.

3J.106 The Meeting emphasised that in the HOLAS III indicator report gaps and assumptions associated with methodology and the results need to be clearly presented.

3J.107 The Meeting endorsed the change of the indicator name to 'Cumulative impact from physical pressures on benthic biotopes (CumI)'.

3J.108 The Meeting endorsed the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment.

Indicator: State of the soft-bottom macrofauna community

3J.109 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-24, presentation 6).

3J.110 The Meeting invited the Secretariat to issue a targeted supplementary data call for those Contracting Parties that have reported aggregated count/weight values to COMBINE, in particular focussed on HOLAS III data for 2016-2021.

3J.111 The Meeting noted the comment by some Contracting Parties and CCB that it is regrettable that no threshold values for the Bornholm, Arkona and Kattegat basins have been possible to develop.

3J.112 The Meeting took note of the proposal by Germany that should the division of the Bornholm basin proposed for use for the eutrophication indicators be used also for the Soft-bottom macrofauna community indicator it may be possible to still establish a threshold value prior to running the indicator evaluations for HOLAS III.

3J.113 The Meeting agreed to, by **12 November 2021,** explore the feasibility of using the HOLAS III subdivision of the Bornholm basin, proposed for the eutrophication assessment, also for the Soft-bottom macrofauna community indicator. The results of this feasibility exercise are to be submitted to HOD 61-2021 with an invitation for CPs to express their views on splitting the Bornholm basin for the Soft-bottom macrofauna community indicator. The document will also include a proposed way forward for development and approval of the proposed threshold value, should the proposal be supported, as follows: threshold values for one of the two divisions of the Bornholm basin to be prepared and submitted for review to CPs by **20 December 2021,** and approval at HELCOM 43-2021.

3J.114 The Meeting invited the Secretariat to carry out a technical feasibility exercise related to the assessment unit divisions, supported by the relevant indicator leads, to support the process outlined above and towards HOD 61-2021.

3J.115 The Meeting endorsed the use of the indicator for in HOLAS III.

Indicator: Condition of benthic habitats

3J.116 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-25, presentation 6).

3J.117 The Meeting noted the concerns raised by several CPs regarding the current indicator and also the relevance of this indicator to the assessment of overall benthic habitat condition (thus also linked to MSFD D6C5 and processes in EU TG Seabed). The Meeting invited the indicator leads to continue developments towards HOLAS IV, in particular development of localised test cases, but did not support its use in HOLAS III as an indicator.

Assessment of benthic habitats

3J.118 The Meeting considered the proposed approach for assessing the state of benthic habitats in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-26, presentation 6).

3J.119 The Meeting considered that, due to the limited number of indicators for benthic habitats and the unsuitability of the CumI indicator for direct inclusion in BEAT, the BEAT tool may not be the best way forward for preparing an assessment for benthic habitats.

3J.120 The Meeting proposed that the topical assessment of benthic habitats take the form of a qualitative, descriptive synthesised assessment utilizing both indicator evaluation results and other sources. The Meeting highlighted that it is important that coastal areas should also be clearly addressed due to their importance and the potentially high levels of impact.

3J.121 The Meeting agreed on the following way forward on assessment methodology:

- Key contributor meeting will be held in November 2021 to further elaborate approach for the assessment;
- Improved document submitted to HoD 61-2021 outlining the approach, providing context on the proposed use of the indicators and other sources, and presenting the proposed way forward for the benthic habitats assessment;
- Targeted Assessment Methodology Workshop in spring 2022, where possible jointly with a supporting CP, utilizing the information of what indicators will be included in HOLAS III, in what format and to what extent as well as considering other possible sources of information;
- Further development of approach document to include technical and methodological information;
- Final approval of technical aspects of methodology stemming from the workshop at S&C 16-2022.

Topic: Fish

3J.122 The Meeting took note of the information provided by the indicator leads on the barriers preventing reporting of 2021 data on coastal fish and the implications of excluding this data for the indicator (document 3J-27).

3J.123 The Meeting noted that there is a need to clearly define the delineation between species considered as coastal, non-commercial, and commercial and clearly provide this rationale in the HOLAS III assessment.

3J.124 The Meeting took note of the information that Germany has no regular coastal fish monitoring and, therefore, is not able to feed data into coastal fish indicators.

Indicator: Abundance of key coastal fish species

3J.125 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-28, presentation 7).

Indicator: L90 Coastal fish (Size structure of key coastal fish species)

3J.126 The Meeting in considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-29, presentation 7).

3J.127 The Meeting took note of the following comments by Denmark: with the proposed methodology there is a risk that the L90 indicator may fluctuate temporally with sporadic recruitment pulses biasing the size structure of the entire stock. It also changes with climate induced changes in growth and mortality. This risk will be dependent on the population dynamics of the individual stocks (combination of species and area). With respect to setting reference levels for size structure, this could be done through peer reviewed population models (e.g., Cope and Punt 2009, Chong et al 2020). These approaches directly provide the status of fish stock indicators in accordance with agreed reference levels, thus removing the need to define thresholds independently for each species and area.

3J.128 The Meeting further took note of the concerns by Finland regarding the setting of threshold values for perch as those data for perch in Finland are spatially limited and highly localised results cannot be generalised.

3J.129 The Meeting endorsed the indicator as a pre-core indicator and its use in the HOLAS III assessment, however emphasised that the inclusion of threshold values for the HOLAS III assessment remains open until numerical values become available for review but highlighted that in case threshold values are not available for use in HOLAS III the indicator could be used without them to provide trends and an overview.

3J.130 The Meeting invited Denmark and Finland to provide their specific comments to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi), to be directed to the indicator leads, in order for them to take these issues into account when further developing the indicator and threshold values.

Indicator: Abundance of coastal fish key functional groups

3J.131 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-30, presentation 7).

3J.132 The Meeting took note of the comment by Finland that perch, pikeperch, and whitefish are treated as commercial species in the context of Finland's national MSFD reporting.

Indicator: Abundance of non-commercial offshore species (three-spined stickleback, flounder, brill, and dab)

3J.133 The Meeting took note of the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment (document 3J-88, presentation 7), noted that there is a considerable overlap with species which are considered commercial in offshore waters and agreed to come back to the discussion on the way forward for this indicator after the discussion on commercial species has been concluded.

3J.134 The Meeting noted that the species selection had been made prior to the ComFish WS 1-2021 and that the work under HELCOM BLUES had been devised to target species where no full reference points from ICES stock assessments were available.

3J.135 The Meeting noted the comment by Sweden that the assessment of stickleback is of high national importance in Sweden as the potential ecological effects of the species can be considerable.

Assessment of non-commercial fish

3J.136 The Meeting took note that the integrated assessment of non-commercial fish will be done utilizing the BEAT assessment tool (document 3J-31, presentation 7).

Assessment of commercial fish

3J.137 The Meeting took note of the background information prepared relating to the list of species for commercial fish assessment and the recommended approach for assessing the status of commercial fish species stemming from the HELCOM Workshop on Commercial Fish Assessment (documents 3J-95 and 3J-32) and agreed that these documents can be considered superseded by the documents stemming from the HELCOM Workshop on Commercial Fish Assessment (ComFish WS 1-2021).

3J.138 The Meeting considered the recommended approach for assessing the status of commercial fish species stemming from the HELCOM Workshop on Commercial Fish Assessment (ComFish WS 1-2021), held on 28-29 September 2021 (document 3J-102).

3J.139 The Meeting took note of an approach for establishing a list of species to be included in the assessment, based on the recommendation by ComFish WS 1-2021 (document 3J-33).

3J.140 The Meeting took note of the comment by Estonia that the list in the document covers the period of 2015-2019 whereas the HOLAS III assessment will cover the period 2016-2021 and the enquiry regarding if changing the time period would result in any changes to the species proposed for inclusion in the list.

3J.141 The Meeting agreed that, due to the late submission, more time to consider the documents is needed.

3J.142 The Meeting agreed to organise an intersessional State and Conservation meeting (STATE & CONSERVATION 15A-2021) on **28 October 2021**, preferably in the afternoon, to consider the recommendations from the Workshop as well as the species list and invited the CPs to provide written comments on the documents **by 21 October 2021**.

3J.143 The Meeting took note of the recommendations on commercial fish assessment based on ComFish WS 1-2021 (document 3J-102) and supported that a second HELCOM workshop, i.e. Assessment Methodology Workshop, should be held in spring, the focus of which would be on applying a test case in relevant stocks that runs through the entire approach and looks at catch and biomass components (D3C1 and C2) and also adds on suitable age/size/productivity aspects (i.e. MSFD D3C3). This workshop would also test and finalise suitable integration and confidence assessment approaches already outlined in the current process and submit a further elaborated approach to STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2022.

3J.144 The Meeting took note that the Workshop had also addressed resource issues related to the work and identified two major aspects, firstly, the resources involved in holding a second workshop, in particular the preparatory work required, and secondly the resources implications for running the assessment in HOLAS III.

Topic: Waterbirds

Indicator: Abundance of waterbirds in the wintering season

3J.145 The Meeting took note that due to time limitation there has been no progress of work on criteria element lists of wintering birds.

3J.146 The Meeting took note of the comment by Finland that as a result of ice conditions some parts of the Baltic may by default be excluded from the indicator evaluation for some of the years in the assessment period and this should be reflected in the indicator report.

3J.147 The Meeting welcomed the information that several CPs have offshore data available which will be reported and can be used to improve the spatial coverage of the indicator.

3J.148 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in document 3J-36 (presentation 11).

Indicator: Waterbird breeding success

3J.149 The Meeting considered the development of test cases in the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as presented document 3J-37 (presentation 11).

3J.150 The Meeting took note of the correction by Sweden that the species proposed for the test case is in fact common guillemot and not razorbill.

3J.151 The Meeting invited the indicator leads to consider if and how short-term population trends under the EU Birds Directive has been considered when choosing and developing the methodology for the indicator.

3J.152 The Meeting took note of the comment by Denmark that Denmark does not have national data for this indicator.

3J.153 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use to develop test cases in the HOLAS III assessment.

3J.154 The Meeting took note of a comment from Finland that small sample sizes should be accounted for in the analyses for the indicator results.

Indicator: Waterbird habitat quality

3J.155 The Meeting considered the proposed development of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in document 3J-39 (presentation 11).

3J.156 The Meeting took note of the information that the indicator evaluation is run using a largely automated script and that the data layers abundance and distribution of species as well as on human activities are collected or generated through other HOLAS III data channels, thus limiting the resource needs for evaluating the indicator.

3J.157 The Meeting took note of the comment by Finland that for future developments it may be beneficial to utilize information under e.g., MSFD D6C3 and the benthic indicators to support the setting of threshold values for benthic feeders (e.g. diving ducks).

3J.158 The Meeting acknowledged that the indicator name does not fully describe the functioning of the indicator as a spatial risk assessment.

3J.159 The Meeting took note of concerns from Denmark that, while the model is well formulated, the generalizations and multiple information components (pressure layers) included in the modelling procedure impede the ability of the indicator to be interpreted clearly and increases ecological uncertainties and that, consequently, Denmark cannot support the indicator as a candidate indicator in its current form.

3J.160 The Meeting did not endorse the indicator as a candidate indicator and thus currently not for inclusion in HOLAS III. However, the Meeting did support exploring possible solutions to use the work as additional contextual information for the bird assessment in HOLAS III as it was noted that the approach does offer the possibility to assess risk and may provide important guidance when setting measures.

3J.161 The Meeting invited the Secretariat, Denmark, and Germany to hold an intersessional meeting to consider possible ways forward for making use of the work for HOLAS III.

Topic: Mammals

Indicator: Nutritional status of seals

3J.162 The Meeting considered the development of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-40, presentation 8).

3J.163 The Meeting took note of the information that for harbour and ringed seal, where no threshold values currently are in place, the intention is to carry out a trend-based assessment for HOLAS III where data is available.

3J.164 The Meeting noted the concerns of Denmark that the proposed threshold values for grey seal may not be appropriate for Danish waters and that further development should be carried out towards HOLAS IV. The Meeting agreed that should the threshold value be deemed not suitable for some parts, a trend-based approach for Danish data may be a way forward.

3J.165 The Meeting endorsed the development of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-40).

Indicator: Reproductive status of seals

3J.166 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-41.

Indicator: Harbour porpoise abundance

3J.167 The Meeting took note that Denmark will provide detailed comments related to the delineation of the border between the two populations as well as supply further information to support the requests on input within the document. Denmark expressed the wish to see an improved presentation and update related to the Belt Sea population in the indicator. The Meeting invited Denmark to provide the comments in writing to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi).

3J.168 The Meeting took note of the information by Finland that they will review the sightings data and possibly include additional data to the Biodiversity Database, if required.

3J.169 The Meeting took note of the question by Sweden on how the assessment of the Belt Sea population could be coordinated with OSPAR. The Meeting agreed to mandate the CPs which are parties to both Conventions and who share waters in the Belt Sea to jointly come to a shared understanding and propose a way forward prior to HOD 61-2021.

3J.170 The Meeting in endorsed the proposed developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-42, presentation 8.

Indicator: Harbour porpoise distribution

3J.171 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-43 (presentation 8).

3J.172 The Meeting supported the proposal to arrange a workshop to further develop the harbour porpoise distribution and habitat quality indicators and invited the Contracting Parties to inform the Secretariat (petra.kaaria@helcom.fi) of possible interest and funding to host such a workshop.

Assessment of marine mammals

3J.173 The Meeting provisionally endorsed the proposed approach for assessing marine mammals in HOLAS III, as indicated in document 3J-44 (presentation 8).

3J.174 The Meeting took note that Sweden encourages the wider use of additional sources of information, (e.g., peer reviewed literature) to support and provide context in the thematic assessment, and further took note that the final position of Sweden and Denmark on the approach can be confirmed based on outcomes of the discussions related to the indicator integration in the BEAT assessment.

Topic: Bycatch

Indicator: Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gear

3J.175 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-45 for marine mammals and birds (presentation 9).

3J.176 The Meeting took note of concerns expressed by Denmark and Finland regarding the reliance of the indicator on the agreed Limit Reference Levels (LRL) for seal populations as currently the LRL applied for some populations, especially in relation to the proposed splitting of the management units for harbour seal (see para. 3J.6-3J.7), are considered unrealistic from an ecological perspective. The Meeting noted that the approach proposed in the bycatch indicator was not incorrect, but that the problem lies with the LRL values themselves.

3J.177 The Meeting took note of study reservations by Finland, Estonia and Denmark on the seal threshold values and invited Finland, Estonia, and Denmark to inform the Secretariat of their position as soon as possible, and not later than before the HOD 61-2021 (by **28 October 2021**).

3J.178 The Meeting further noted that Denmark wished for close alignment of the threshold values of grey seal with the work done in OSPAR (i.e. 50% of K), while Sweden proposed applying the more precautionary 70% of K approach.

3J.179 The Meeting noted that Denmark has some additional technical questions related to the Belt Sea harbour porpoise population and proposed that making further progress and test cases on porpoise and waterbirds (in particular the mPBR and PVA approaches) available to support the process towards HOD 61-2021 would be valuable to support further decision making.

3J.180 The Meeting noted that Denmark supports the ongoing development work on the indicator regarding birds but informed that in OSPAR the aim is to apply a test evaluation and proposes that the bycatch indicator evaluation be included as a test evaluation in HOLAS III. Denmark cannot finally agree to the approach for threshold values until such a test has been completed and reviewed.

3J.181 The Meeting noted that Estonia is currently carrying out a study related to bycatch and expects the report to be available in February 2022.

3J.182 The Meeting endorsed the general development of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III noting that certain details still needed to be concluded.

Bycatch assessment

3J.183 The Meeting supported splitting the bycatch indicator to present results separately for waterbirds and mammal species. The Meeting considered that this could be considered as a longer-term issue but encouraged that it should be applied in HOLAS III if possible.

3J.184 The Meeting supported the proposal for the HELCOM BLUES project to hold a workshop and inviting all Contracting Parties via EG MAMA, JWG BIRD, and State & Conservation contacts.

3J.185 The Meeting in general endorsed the proposed developments of the indicator for use in HOLAS III (depending on the outcome of the above issues), including the application of indicator within the topic assessment of waterbirds and mammals, as indicated in document 3J-46 (presentation 10).

Topic: Criteria element lists for biodiversity

3J.186 The Meeting considered the draft list of criteria elements for species (document 3J-15) as well as clarifications by the Secretariat regarding how the list has been prepared.

3J.187 The Meeting took note of similar ongoing work in Sweden on identifying relevant fish species for the criteria element lists and welcomed the offer from Sweden to share their approach and the resulting excel files.

3J.188 The Meeting agreed to delineate the further work on the list by firstly focusing on fish, bird, and mammal species, and at a later stage on benthic invertebrates and macrophytes, as the two latter are closely linked to habitats and may be affected by the selection of habitats.

3J.189 The Meeting recognised that there is a need to establish a shared understanding of the methodology for establishing the lists, including guidance or guidelines for transparency.

3J.190 The Meeting acknowledged that there may be a number of species included on the current list, after applying the general guidance provided by Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848, which are clearly unsuitable as criteria elements for the Baltic Sea. The Meeting noted the proposal to send the initial species list to the relevant HELCOM expert groups for review to remove any clearly irrelevant species (due to e.g.,

their sporadic occurrence in the region) as well as provide rationale for the exclusion, however agreed to come back to this once the initial discussion on the methodology has taken place.

3J.191 The Meeting noted the comment by Estonia that in the work to identify criteria element species the availability of data from national monitoring should be considered as a factor for prioritization. The information on species for which monitoring data is being collected can be found under the information reported by CPs to the EU Commission.

3J.192 The Meeting in general supported the approach proposed by the Secretariat and noted that several Contracting Parties would like to be involved in further work.

3J.193 The Meeting agreed to organise an intersessional drafting meeting between Denmark, Finland, Sweden, Estonia, and the Secretariat to delineate the methodology for selecting or excluding species as potential criteria elements and establishing a criteria elements list for species. Other Contracting Parties interested in taking part in the meeting are invited to inform the Secretariat (jannica.haldin@helcom.fi) of their participation by **13 October 2021**.

3J.194 The Meeting considered the criteria element lists of breeding birds (document 3J-16).

3J.195 The Meeting took note that specific comments by Denmark will be sent in writing to the Secretariat.

3J.196 The Meeting supported that there is a need to be strict when preparing the criteria element list and that, consequently, a species should fit into one of the five groups in order to be considered. The Meeting considered that, while data deficiency may be relevant criterion for excluding a species for HOLAS III it should not automatically mean that a species is excluded as a possible criteria element.

Topic: Foodwebs

Assessment of food webs

3J.197 The Meeting considered the approach for assessing food webs in the HOLAS III assessment (document 3J-47).

3J.198 The Meeting took note of concerns from Germany and Finland on the lack of detail regarding the methodology of the proposed approach (ITA) and that without more information Germany cannot endorse the approach. The Meeting supported including further references in the document to clarify the approach. The Meeting took note of the clarification that the approach outlined in the document is also used in ICES WGIAB, as well as published in peer reviewed scientific journals and welcomed that more information will be sent around by the Secretariat on the outlined ITA approach.

3J.199 The Meeting invited the Contracting Parties to send specific comments to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi).

3J.200 The Meeting in principle endorsed the approach, noting the need for more detailed information on the methodology, supported the submission of an updated and improved document outlining the approach proposed for assessing foodwebs to HOD 61-2021, and supported the continuation of the work towards HOLAS III, including a CG FOODWEB and BLUES Workshop in spring 2022 from which further input to STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2022 should be derived.

Topic: BEAT Integrated biodiversity assessment tool (BEAT)

3J.201 The Meeting took note of the outcome of the Workshop on the BEAT tool held on 30 August 2021.

3J.202 The Meeting considered the plan for how to utilize the BEAT tool for the HOLAS III assessment (document 3J-48).

3J.203 The Meeting took note of specific comments from Denmark and Germany on the proposed approach regarding the weighing of marine mammals, birds and fish in the assessment and invited the Contracting Parties to send their comments to the Secretariat in writing (owen.rowe@helcom.fi).

3J.204 The Meeting emphasised the importance of aligning the integration rules in BEAT with the integration rules to be provided in the Art.8 MSFD guidance, as well as using the same separation of status and pressure indicators and invited the BLUES and Baltic Data Flows projects working on the BEAT tool to clearly show how development has taken on board the guidance.

3J.205 The Meeting thanked the developers for the work done but considered that it was premature to endorse the BEAT tool at this point in development process.

3J.206 The Meeting supported organising a series of workshops to support further discussions and development on the integrated biodiversity assessment in HOLAS III. These workshops are to be divided into 1) a designated BEAT workshop for fish, mammals, and birds and 2) a workshop on the pelagic assessment, including a component on assessing pelagic habitats in BEAT (see para. 3J.102). In accordance with the endorsement not to use the BEAT tool for benthic habitat assessment (see para. 3J.119) the Meeting agreed not to include a BEAT component in the assessment methodology workshop on benthic habitats. The Meeting highlighted that in addition to topic expertise from HELCOM expert groups, it is important to ensure representation of participants with relevant policy expertise in these workshops (i.e., State and Conservation and Gear). Any further developments to the BEAT tool stemming from the projects and workshops will be submitted for approval to STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2022 in spring, enabling their use in the HOLAS III assessment.

Topic: Eutrophication

3J.207 The Meeting discussed the proposed threshold values for the new division of the Pomeranian Bay and Bornholm Basin (document 3J-87, presentation 12).

3J.208 The Meeting recalled that STATE & CONSERVATION 14-2021 emphasized that, in the event that it is not possible to agree on threshold values for all areas, the indicator should be used in HOLAS III for those assessment units for which it is applicable and for which threshold values are already agreed.

3J.209 The Meeting endorsed the proposed threshold values for Pomeranian Bay (document 3J-87, presentation 12).

3J.210 The Meeting considered the threshold values for DIN, DIP and Chl-a for the Bornholm Basin, noted that Denmark and Sweden would prefer to retain the previously agreed values stemming from the TARGREV project (Chla – 1.8 ug/l, DIN – 2.5 umol/l, DIP – 0.3 umol/l), and further noted that Poland prefers the newly proposed values developed through recent modelling carried out by Germany. However, the Meeting noted that after further national consultation, and acknowledging the fact that all the proposed values remain within a similar range, the range likely reflects the uncertainties in the models, the TARGREV values are more ambitions, the TARGREV values are better aligned with threshold values in nearby subbasins, and that applying TARGREV values would mean that the threshold value setting approach was uniform across all elements within the subbasin, Poland endorsed the TARGREV values supported by Denmark and Sweden.

3J.211 The Meeting welcomed that, recalling that Poland during the morning session expressed its readiness to endorse the TV for TN and TP calculated by Germany and presented in 3J-87, despite the fact that Poland pointed out that Polish data was not used to calculate TV for TN and TP in the TargRev project, bearing in mind that the assessment of eutrophication needs such important indicators, whereas both Denmark and Sweden do not agree to adopt the new values calculated by Germany, considering the Swedish argument that the TargRev TN value is comparable with the TV values in adjacent waters and additionally that TP value calculated by Germany is identical to the value from the TargRev project, Poland can endorse the TV values for TN - 16.05 and TP - 0.55 for the Bornholm Basin to be used in the HELCOM HOLAS III assessment. The Meeting thanked Poland for their constructive approach.

3J.212 The Meeting endorsed the proposed thresholds for SEA-013A and SEA-013B for the following eutrophication indicators (document 3J-91, presentation 12):

- Dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DIN)
- Dissolved inorganic phosphorus (DIP)
- Total nitrogen (TN)
- Total phosphorus (TP)
- Chlorophyll-a
- Water clarity
- Cyanobacterial bloom index

3J.213 The Meeting endorsed the oxygen debt threshold value for SEA-013A (document 3J-91, presentation 12).

3J.214 The Meeting noted the comment by Estonia that threshold values for nutrients (especially for DIP and TP) should be considered in a joint exercise in the nearest future to harmonize them between the sub-basins and substances.

Indicator: Total nitrogen

3J.215 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-49 (presentation 12).

3J.216 The Meeting took note of the information by Germany that under the current mandate Germany cannot endorse the use of the TARGREV threshold values for the Arkona basin and thus placed a study reservation on the value. The Meeting invited Germany to clarify their position until **HOD 61-2021.**

3J.217 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment. The Meeting endorsed the threshold values for Kiel Bay and Mecklenburg Bay as well as provisionally endorsed the use of the TARGREV threshold values for the Arkona Basin, noting the German study reservation.

Indicator: Total phosphorus

3J.218 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-50 (presentation 12), entailing the three subbasins Kiel Bay, Arkona Basin and Bay of Mecklenburg.

3J.219 The Meeting discussed threshold values for the Eastern Gotland Basin (document 3J-50, presentation 12), noting that progress had not be made, and invited Poland to provide expert input and rationale on their position related to the TARGREV values for TP at the earliest opportunity to the Secretariat (owen.rowe@helcom.fi) so that further development could be planned with the indicator leads on this issue prior to HOD 61-2021. The Meeting noted that currently all other CPs adjoining this subbasin support the proposed TARGREV values.

Indicator: Chlorophyll-a

3J.220 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-51 (presentation 12).

3J.221 The Meeting noted the comment by Denmark emphasising the possible bias against existing threshold values where satellite or ferry box (i.e. remote sensing) data are applied in the indicator evaluation and the suggestion that this issue be considered under future longer-term development in EG Eutrophication.

Indicator: Phytoplankton spring bloom intensity based on chl-a

3J.222 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the pre-core indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in document 3J-52 (presentation 12).

Indicator: Cyanobacterial Bloom Index (CyaBI)

3J.223 The Meeting took note of solutions to concerns raised regarding the indicator (document 3J-89).

3J.224 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in document 3J-53 (presentation 12).

3J.225 The Meeting noted that Poland and Germany are not in the position to agree on changing the status of the indicator as limited development has taken place since its use in HOLAS II.

3J.226 The Meeting noted that Denmark has a study reservation on the indicator and will aim at lifting it during the ongoing national consultation process prior to HOD 61-2021.

3J.227 The Meeting did not agree on the change of the indicator to core indicator status, however endorsed the indicator to be included as a pre-core indicator in HOLAS III for those assessment units where the indicator is considered applicable.

Indicator: Shallow-water bottom oxygen

3J.228 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-54 (presentation 12).

3J.229 The Meeting emphasised the high added value of including threshold values for the indicator for HOLAS III and extended the recommendation that the development work towards threshold values for HOLAS III be allowed to continue in spring 2022, possibly to be presented for approval to HELCOM 43-2022.

Indicator: Oxygen debt

3J.230 The Meeting welcomed the offer by Estonia to lead the indicator.

3J.231 The Meeting took note of document 3J-55 (presentation 12).

Integrated eutrophication assessment tool (HEAT)

3J.232 The Meeting considered the progress in testing the indicator aggregation (document 3J-56) and agreed on the following way forward:

- Targeted Assessment Methodology Workshop in spring 2022, including the test assessment results to be prepared by EG EUTRO, utilizing the information of what indicators will be included in HOLAS III, in what format and to what extent;
- Further development of approach document to include technical and methodological information;
- Final approval of technical aspects of methodology stemming from the continued work at S&C 16-2022.

Topic: Contaminants

3J.233 The Meeting considered and in principle endorsed the ongoing development of improved confidence evaluation for hazardous substances towards HOLAS III, striving to align the confidence aspect of hazardous substances indicators more closely with the approach applied for biodiversity and eutrophication (document 3J-97, presentation 13).

3J.234 The Meeting noted that Finland had not finalised national consultation processes and would provide further comments, if needed, on all hazardous substances documents presented to the meeting. The Meeting invited Finland to clarify their position by **1 November 2021**.

HELCOM Pre-EMPT

3J.235 The Meeting took note of information on progress of the Pre-EMPT project. The project is currently collecting samples through national monitoring, with the deadline of 1 March 2022 to have samples provided to the analytical laboratory.

Indicator: Radioactive substances: Cesium-137 in fish and surface seawater

3J.236 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-59 (presentation 14).

3J.237 The Meeting noted the enquiry from Denmark as to if the European Food Standards Agency also addressed radioactive substances and if so, had such considerations also been included in the development work. The Meeting agreed to address this question to the relevant experts.

Indicator: Diclofenac

3J.238 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-60 (presentation 14).

3J.239 The Meeting welcomed the offer by Finland to take the lead for this indicator.

Indicator: Heavy metals (lead, cadmium, and mercury)

3J.240 The Meeting considered and in principle endorsed the developments of the indicator and its division into three separate metal-specific indicators for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-61 (presentation 14), noting the existing issues and specific study reservations on application of certain components described in the document.

3J.241 The Meeting noted the question by Estonia regarding if supporting parameter (AI, C-org) data in the correct format is available in COMBINE for national data or whether re-reporting might be required. The Meeting took note of the clarification that COMBINE data will be reviewed within EG HAZ and that such issues should be addressed via this process.

Indicator: Copper

3J.242 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in document 3J-62 (presentation 14).

3J.243 The Meeting noted a study reservation by Poland and Germany on the proposed threshold value, noting that Germany needed more time to complete national consultation processes. The Meeting noted the suggestion by Poland to replace proposed EQS 30 milligrams/kg with 40 milligrams/kg to reflect higher natural background concentrations. The Meeting invited Poland to be in direct contact with the Secretariat and EG HAZ experts involved in the indicator development at their upcoming meeting (20 October 2021) and invited Germany and Poland to clarify their respective positions by in advance of HOD 61-2021.

3J.244 The Meeting noted that the indicator has significant value in addressing an at sea source of contaminants and supported the general development of the indicator. Discussion also addressed the importance of finding a suitable approach to establish the threshold value that follows EQS setting guidance to provide a clear toxicological evaluation while also encompassing natural background concentrations.

3J.245 The Meeting was not in a position to endorse the indicator at this stage but supported that the indicator be further considered at HOD 61-2021.

Indicator: Tributyltin (TBT) and imposex

3J.246 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in document 3J-63 (presentation 14).

3J.247 The Meeting noted that Poland will need more time to consider the new threshold value and that Finland would need additional time for national consultation. The Meeting further noted that Sweden would prefer retaining the previously approved threshold value and placed a study reservation on the proposed threshold value.

3J.248 The Meeting invited Poland, Finland, and Sweden to, if possible, clarify their position by the upcoming EG HAZ meeting (20 October 2021), thus enabling EG HAZ to incorporate any needed amendments in the planning of further work.

3J.249 The Meeting noted that the proposed new threshold value and the existing threshold value are well aligned and considered that this should be taken into account in further discussions.

3J.250 The Meeting supported the proposed plan in general, noting the need for solutions to the issues raised above.

3J.251 The Meeting invited the relevant CPs to strive to find a way forward, using EG HAZ as a platform, and provide updated positions and information to HOD 61-2021.

Indicator: Polyaromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and their metabolites

3J.252 The Meeting considered the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-64 (presentation 14).

3J.253 The Meeting noted a study reservation by Estonia, as more time is needed to finalise national consultation processes, and the aim for it to be lifted prior to HOD 61-2021 and noted that Denmark has a study reservation on the application of one threshold value for anthracene in sediment in their national waters.

3J.254 The Meeting supported that the indicator be considered further at HOD 61-2021.

Indicator: Reproductive disorders Malformed amphipod embryos

3J.255 The Meeting considered the indicator and noted the proposal by Sweden to change the status of the indicator to core indicator and the proposal by Denmark that is should be considered a surveillance indicator, however concluded that this proposal would need to be further considered as it was not submitted prior to the Meeting.

3J.256 The Meeting noted the view by Denmark that, due to its nature, the indicator should not be included in the integrated assessment tool CHASE.

3J.257 The Meeting in principle endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-65 (presentation 14).

Indicator: Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCDD)

3J.258 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-66 (presentation 14).

Indicator: Polybrominated biphenyl ethers (PBDE)

3J.259 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-67 (presentation 14).

Indicator: Perfluorooctane sulphonate (PFOS)

3J.260 The Meeting endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-68 (presentation 14).

Indicator: Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB) and dioxins and furans

3J.261 The Meeting in principle endorsed the developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-69, (presentation 14).

3J.262 The Meeting took note of the question by Estonia on whether dioxins and PCBs should be considered separately as has been discussed in EG HAZ and the subsequent clarification that this has not been considered so far.

Indicator complex: Biological effects and sediment cores

3J.263 The Meeting took note of the proposed use of sediment core data in HOLAS III (document 3J-98, noted that Finland and Poland would require more time for national consultation and agreed to come back to the discussion at STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2021. The Meeting noted the comment that Germany can endorse the use of sediment core data but that this should not be compulsory for CPs to monitor.

3J.264 The Meeting in principle endorsed the proposed developments of the Integrated Biological Effects of Contaminants for use in the HOLAS III assessment, as indicated in document 3J-70.

3J.265 The Meeting discussed the issue raised by the EG HAZ team working on biological effects related to the need for resources to further this work and noted that strong development of the topic would be achieved through additional resources (e.g., time available for the experts involved).

Integrated hazardous substances assessment tool (CHASE)

3J.266 The Meeting considered the plan for how to utilize the CHASE tool for the HOLAS III assessment, including the open question regarding whether to use assessment level 3 or 4 for presenting the CHASE assessment results (document 3J-71, presentation 14).

3J.267 The Meeting took note of the comment by Denmark highlighting the need for the underlying indicator evaluations entering CHASE to also retain a prominent role in the HOLAS III thematic assessment of hazardous substances report (and clear presentation in the indicator reports) so that important information is not lost within the integration overview.

3J.268 The Meeting took note of the information that as part of the further development of the CHASE tool being done under the Baltic Data Flows project it should be possible to generate integrated assessment results at both level 3 and level 4. The Meeting concluded that it is challenging to decide on the most appropriate assessment level to be used without seeing the concrete maps. The Meeting agreed that if possible, the integrated assessment for hazardous substances in autumn 2022 should be done at both level 3 and level 4, and the decision on which to include be taken then. The Meeting recognised that the drafting of the Thematic Assessment chapter on hazardous substances is highly dependent on the outputs of the CHASE tool and acknowledged that any such an additional approval step would require that a decision is taken with very short notice and could thus not include extensive national consultation or any extension to the agreed approval period.

3J.269 The Meeting agreed on the following decision process on the correct assessment level:

- In accordance with the approved timeline for the HOLAS III assessment and barring any major obstacles to approval of the results of the hazardous substances indicator evaluations, the integrated assessment in CHASE could be run starting from 17 October 2022. It is at this stage not possible to say when the assessment results will be ready, however as soon as they are available, they will be submitted to State & Conservation contacts for consideration.
- An intersessional State & Conservation WG meeting aimed solely at deciding the assessment level of the CHASE results will be convened as a half day meeting on the **26 October 2022**, thus providing

sufficient time to incorporate the integrated assessment results and their analysis into the thematic assessment on pollution prior to submission to CPs for review by **1 January 2023**.

3J.270 The Meeting in principle endorsed the plan for how to utilize the CHASE tool for the HOLAS III assessment, including the proposal to use sediment cores in the thematic assessment to represent supporting contextual information, noting the need to agree on which assessment level to use in autumn 2022.

Topic: Marine litter

Indicator: Litter on the seafloor

3J.271 The Meeting considered the proposed approach to establish threshold values for the amount and composition of litter on the seafloor indicator (document 3J-72).

3J.272 The Meeting invited the indicator lead and Poland to clarify the open issues in relation to the modelling approach used bilaterally.

3J.273 The Meeting noted that Sweden will provide written comments to the indicator lead via e-mail correspondence.

3J.274 The Meeting noted comments provided by Germany regarding the list of items and the need to review and amend figure 4, which Germany would like to send in writing to Anna Rindorf (DTU Aqua).

3J.275 The Meeting regretted that the indicator lacks data for the Northern Baltic Sea and requested that this is properly reflected when conducting the assessment to avoid misleading conclusions.

3J.276 The Meeting endorsed the proposed approach to establish threshold values for use of the indicator in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-72), pending the study reservation by Poland.

3J.277 The Meeting supported the selection of option one (trend no significantly >0) as threshold value, with the addition of a review clause stating that such threshold value is of an interim nature and will be updated once a threshold value is established at the EU level.

Topic: Underwater noise

Indicator: Distribution in time and space of loud low- and mid-frequency impulsive sounds

3J.278 The Meeting considered the proposed approach to establish threshold values for use of the indicator in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in document 3J-73.

3J.279 The Meeting noted the position by Denmark supporting the work on the indicator, however not being able to approve a threshold value before the ongoing work on the framework to establish threshold values at EU level is concluded.

3J.280 The Meeting recalled that GEAR 24-2021 (Outcome para 5.25-5.26) was of the view that the timeframe for this indicator at EU level is not aligned with HOLAS III, agreed on a contingency plan so that the assessment is conducted based on impulsive noise events reported to the HELCOM registry; if time allows a quantitative presentation of the information including threshold values will be provided, otherwise, a qualitative description will be included in HOLAS III.

3J.281 The Meeting supported conducting a qualitative assessment of the indicator, based on available data and trends.

Indicator: Continuous low frequency anthropogenic sound

3J.282 The Meeting considered the proposed developments of the indicator for use in the HOLAS III assessment as indicated in the corresponding document (document 3J-74).

3J.283 The Meeting noted the comment provided by Finland that while the approach has been agreed on and is supported, important decisions need to be made on indicator species and the amount of sound pressure (in time and area coverage) to find threshold for GES/non-GES.

3J.284 The Meeting took note of the comment by the Secretariat that the EU has granted the HELCOM BLUES project funds for establishing threshold values both for continuous and impulsive noise.

3J.285 The Meeting noted the position by Denmark supporting the work on the indicator, however that Denmark is not able to endorse a threshold value before the ongoing work on the framework to establish threshold values at EU level is concluded.

3J.286 The Meeting noted the view by several Contracting Parties and CCB expressing the importance of setting threshold values for the indicator and supported conducting a qualitative assessment on the indicator, in case threshold values cannot be set, pending the study reservation by Germany and clarification by Poland.

3J.287 The Meeting supported using a threshold value to be established by EU in case it is available in time for HOLAS III, pending clarification by Poland.

3J.288 The Meeting took note of the amendment of the continuous noise assessment as proposed by Germany (document 3J-93).

3J.289 The Meeting agreed to set up an intersessional State and Conservation meeting with the involvement of the relevant noise experts on **4 November 2021** to come to a conclusion about the German proposal presented in document 3J-93, which is linked to the German study reservation, and invited the Secretariat to organise the meeting.

Topic: Acidification

Indicator: Baltic Sea acidification

3J.290 The Meeting took note that work on the indicator is progressing.

Topic: Driver indicators

3J.291 The Meeting considered the approach for how to identify and utilize driver indicators for the HOLAS III assessment (document 3J-75).

3J.292 The Meeting emphasised the importance of developing the driver concept in such a way that it can be utilized to support management, that there needs to be clear and substantiated causal links between the driver and the subsequent driver indicators and that confounding factors (e.g., other factors affecting a driver proxy) need to be clearly presented.

3J.293 The Meeting recognized that the approach has not previously been used in HELCOM and is included in the HOLAS III assessment as a test case. The Meeting noted that for the upcoming HOLAS III assessment the driver indicators are intended to provide contextual information for a limited number of topics, to be decided once the number and type of proxies available becomes clear.

3J.294 The Meeting took note of the information that further work to develop the methodology and identify possible indicators can be done in 2022 as part of the HOLAS III assessment work, thus allowing for more time for improving the approach and enabling closer cooperation with national experts.

3J.295 The Meeting supported the further development of the approach, with close involvement of the Contracting Parties and utilizing both State and Conservation WG and EN ESA. The Meeting invited the Secretariat to hold more frequent targeted meetings as part of the development process to enable CPs to provide guidance and support the work.

3J.296 The Meeting noted that the next meeting on driver indicators will be held on **4 November 2021**, with the aim of being able to submit an updated document for consideration to HOD 61-2021, and experts from State and Conservation and EN-ESA will be invited to participate in the meeting. The Meeting agreed that the meeting should focus on reviewing the methodology and the criteria, as well as scoping and agreeing on ways of establishing causal linkages.

3J.297 The Meeting noted that written comments by Sweden will be provided to the Secretariat (kemal.pinarbasi@helcom.fi).

3J.298 The Meeting emphasised that only existing data should be used for identification and presentation of drivers.

3J.299 The Meeting agreed that the review and approval of causal links and possible driver indicators for inclusion in the HOLAS III product should be done at STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2021.

Assessments and method development related work

Topic: Spatial Pressure and Impact Assessment

3J.300 The Meeting considered the further developed Spatial Pressure and Impact Assessment tool and the resulting information for the HOLAS III assessment (document 3J-76, presentation 15).

3J.301 The Meeting took note of the study reservation by Germany on the tool developments. The Meeting noted the German concern that the number of experts that took part in the sensitivity score review discussions at the SPIA WS was not sufficient and the sensitivity scores are not completely aligned with the corresponding values in the CumI work. The Meeting took note that Germany was of the opinion that the biodiversity data was not collected at a level that it could be enhanced by clipping it by environmental layers and that further comments will be submitted by email.

3J.302 The Meeting took note of the comment by Finland that they in general find the method acceptable to be used in HOLAS III, however indicated two issues that could be further improved: Only use values within the variability in the expert responses (SD or 95%CL) in the Monte Carlo simulation, as opposed to random values across the full spectrum; and consider whether double counting of some biodiversity components is occurring, such as infralittoral sand and Zostera distribution.

3J.303 The Meeting took note of the comment that Denmark in general supports the work but would like to receive further clarification regarding development of the pressure layer on nutrients/eutrophication, and that the value used for the layer should be changed from eutrophication ratio to EQR to align with the change to the eutrophication indicators. Denmark further supported alignment with the CumI and noted that further work was needed, for instance a number of broad habitat types were missing from the list of ecosystem components.

3J.304 The Meeting took note of the comment that Sweden supports both the general work and the suggestion that the sensitivity scores should be aligned between SPIA and CumI. The Meeting took note that for future work on sensitivity, Sweden considers discussing the sensitivity matrix to be more constructive in a WS than through e.g., a survey. Sweden encouraged CPs to ensure that their experts take part in the processes as the quality of the results are improved with more expert input.

3J.305 The Meeting took note of a comment by the Secretariat that in previous discussions between the SPIA and CumI leads regarding the possibility to align the sensitivity score processes, it was concluded that sensitivity scores between these two different assessments cannot be completely aligned. The Meeting welcomed that the Secretariat can return to this issue to see if further alignment would be possible and invited the CumI indicator leads to take part in this discussion.

3J.306 The Meeting supported the further development of the tool and its submission to HOD 61-2021, noting the study reservation raised by Germany.

Topic: Economic and Social Analyses

3J.307 The Meeting noted that technical comments from Finland to all the ESA documents (document 3J-3, 3J77-81) would be submitted to the Secretariat (jannica.haldin@helcom.fi).

3J.308 The Meeting noted that Germany is of the view that all the ESA assessment related documents should be submitted and endorsed at GEAR 25-2021. The Meeting noted that Germany subsequently placed a study reservation on all ESA documents until GEAR 25-2021.

3J.309 The Meeting recommended organising a more substantive assessment methodology Workshop in spring 2022, jointly with the BLUES project Activity 1, which is to incorporate all the various components of the economic and social analyses planned for inclusion in HOLAS III.

Assessment of ecosystem services and ecosystem accounting

3J.310 The Meeting considered the approach for assessing ecosystem services (document 3J-77) as well as the approach for ecosystem accounting for the HOLAS III assessment (document 3J-3).

3J.311 The Meeting noted the specific comments provided by Sweden and that Finland and Denmark if needed will provide comments in writing to the Secretariat (kemal.pinarbashi@helcom.fi).

3J.312 The Meeting noted the comment by Sweden that it would be beneficial to, in the section on gaps and barriers, include possible solutions, where these exist, as well as indications on if this is a gap or barrier which could be overcome prior to HOLAS III or represents a need for long term development.

3J.313 The Meeting emphasized the importance of, where possible, quantifying the links between ecosystem service and ecosystem components, in order to ensure that the importance of ecosystem components with many, but weak, links to ecosystem services are not overestimated and vice versa.

3J.314 The Meeting further emphasized that concretized causal links should, wherever possible, be established between the services and the DAPSIM framework components affecting or affected by the service in question.

3J.315 The Meeting welcomed the interest expressed by several CPs to be actively involved in the work leading up to HOLAS III. The Meeting emphasised that in order to improve the ecological relevance of the assessment results it is of high importance to involve both experts with a socioeconomic background and experts with a background in Baltic Sea ecology in the further development work. This includes topical experts in the HELCOM expert groups and representatives from State and Conservation WG.

3J.316 The Meeting emphasised that upcoming amendments to relevant EU regulation will likely result in some need to amend the methodology and should be considered in marine ecosystem accounting development process.

3J.317 The Meeting in principle endorsed the continued work towards HOLAS III, noting the study reservation by Germany.

Cost of degradation analysis

3J.318 The Meeting considered the approach for, and inclusion of, assessing the cost of degradation for the HOLAS III assessment, where relevant (document 3J-78).

3J.319 The Meeting noted that figures 1 and 2 in the document text were not reviewed by EN ESA 15-2021 and therefore are not part of the Network's statement of support.

3J.320 The Meeting noted that further comments by Denmark will be provided to the Secretariat (luke.dodd@helcom.fi) by **8 October 2021**.

3J.321 The Meeting in principle endorsed the work, noting the study reservation by Germany.

Use of Marine Waters analysis

3J.322 The Meeting considered the approach for, and inclusion of, assessing the use of marine waters for the HOLAS III assessment, where relevant (document 3J-79).

3J.323 The Meeting noted that figures 1 and 2 in the document text were not reviewed by EN ESA 15-2021 and therefore are not part of the Network's statement of support.

3J.324 The Meeting noted that comments by Denmark will be provided to the Secretariat if needed (luke.dodd@helcom.fi) within 1-2 weeks.

3J.325 The Meeting in principle endorsed the work, noting the study reservation by Germany placed until the 25th meeting of Gear on 8-10 November 2021.

Sufficiency and effectiveness of measures

3J.326 The Meeting considered the approach for, and inclusion of, assessing sufficiency and effectiveness of measures for the HOLAS III assessment, where relevant (document 3J-80).

3J.327 The Meeting noted that no topic specific improvements are planned for hazardous substances during the HELCOM BLUES project and further noted the wish by Sweden that a plan for future improvements for hazardous substances in the sufficiency and effectiveness of measures framework be developed during the HOLAS III process.

3J.328 The Meeting took note of the clarification that for HOLAS III the sufficiency of measures is proposed for inclusion under the Measures component of the DAPSIM cycle, and the corresponding subheading of the topical chapters/sections. The Meeting noted that the amount and quality of the information under each subheading, including the one for measures, will vary across topics and that where information is not deemed to be of sufficient quality it can be excluded.

3J.329 The Meeting noted the significant input topic experts provided to the interpretation of the previous SOM analysis and requested that a similar review process be more explicitly included in the project timeline and for any results planned for use in HOLAS III products. The Secretariat clarified that not all topics will see substantial changes to the results, however topic expert review will be arranged for those topics that are substantially changed.

3J.330 The Meeting noted that due to the project timeline and currently available data, the sufficiency and effectiveness of measures analyses would be based on the HOLAS II assessment and cover measures implemented since 2016, as was done during the HELCOM ACTION project.

3J.331 The Meeting in principle endorsed the work, noting the study reservation by Germany and the concerns by Denmark regarding using the same methodology that was used in the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan.

Cost-benefit analyses of measures

3J.332 The Meeting considered the approach for, and inclusion of, cost benefit analyses of measures for the HOLAS III assessment, where relevant (document 3J-81).

3J.333 The Meeting took note of the clarification that, similarly to the sufficiency of measures, cost-benefit analyses results will be included under the subheading/section on measures under the relevant topics.

3J.334 The Meeting in principle endorsed the work, noting the study reservation by Germany.

Proposed/planned projects

Third HELCOM holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea environment (HOLAS III)

3J.335 The Meeting welcomed the initial proposal on ways to provide additional support to CPs to facilitate the approval processes under the HOLAS III assessment, including the possibility to present information on status on contributions, overview lists of national representatives included in the review process through the various expert groups and the use of the CG (document 3J-82), as requested by STATE & CONSERVATION 14-2021.

3J.336 The Meeting noted the comments by Denmark and Sweden supporting the use of an amendment table for the review processes of HOLAS III products, however invited the Secretariat to explore if another approach could be included for very minor changes such as editorial corrections.

3J.337 The Meeting noted that the Chief Inspectorate of Environmental Protection will nominate a contact to the CG in the field of the assessment of the state of the environment. CIEP has no competence for the other components of HOLAS III.

3J.338 The Meeting noted that the document will be submitted to GEAR 25-2021 for further discussion and input.

STRATEGIC LIFE

3J.339 The Meeting took note of the progress on a HELCOM led MPA project proposal submitted to the EU LIFE funding instrument (document 3J-83).

3J.340 The Meeting expressed appreciation for the work carried out so far on the project application.

3J.341 The Meeting noted that as of early September HODs have officially approved HELCOMs participation in the application process as well as that the Secretariat would act as the coordinator of the project should the application be successful.

3J.342 The Meeting welcomed that Poland, who due to ongoing national projects are unable to partner in the consortium, has expressed their willingness to contribute to the process through State and Conservation and other HELCOM fora, including possible data submission.

3J.343 The Meeting noted that the Secretariat is looking into formalising the participation by Latvia in the project before the submission of the concept note.

3J.344 The Meeting took note of the role of the State and Conservation WG in the suggested project.

3J.345 The Meeting noted that the project would significantly support implementing actions under biodiversity segment, as well as actions under the segment on horizontal actions of the updated BSAP, and the main focal area of the project is the implementation of the BSAP.

3J.346 The Meeting took note of the following timeline of the upcoming work: concept note submission on 19 October, submission of full application, in case concept note will be approved, on 7 April, information on approval in early autumn 2022 and start of the project in early 2023, pending approval.

3J.347 The Meeting noted that the topic of complementary funding to the project will be discussed under the Nature Conservation session.

SAMBAH II

3J.348 The Meeting noted that a negative reply to the LIFE application for the SAMBAH II project was received, however, further noted that there are plans for the application to be re-submitted, and the EU Commission has expressed encouragement for the plan.

3J.349 The Meeting thanked Germany for the persistent work on the project application.

HELCOM Red List project

3J.350 The Meeting welcomed that full funding for the project has been secured from the HELCOM budget.

3J.351 The Meeting noted that HOD 60-2021 provisionally approved the draft project for reviewing and updating the HELCOM Red List of species and habitats/biotopes (HELCOM RED LIST II, 2022-2024), pending securing funding of the work, and invited the Secretariat and the State and Conservation Working Group to further elaborate the project description with the aim of submitting a finalized draft to HOD 61-2021 for final approval.

3J.352 The Meeting welcomed the Swedish presentation and clarification on the national red list assessment tool Edit (presentation 16).

3J.353 The Meeting noted that this tool is intended to be used for the species assessment to get preliminary results which are then to be reviewed, and as needed revised, by experts in the red list project teams at the outlined dedicated workshops. The possibility to translate the tool is being explored with Sweden and SLU. Information available from previous assessment can be reviewed and reused in the tool. The Meeting further noted the need to include AOO and EOO in the calculations and welcomed that the Secretariat is looking into developing such a tool with full Baltic Sea spatial coverage, utilizing the species observational data in the biodiversity database.

3J.354 The Meeting further noted that expert opinion can be used as reference in the tool and that the tool doesn't require filling in information under all criteria in order to produce an assessment result.

3J.355 The Meeting invited the Secretariat to explore whether it would be possible to expand the functionality of the BalMar tool to include automated processing of habitat and species data into HUB categories.

3J.356 The Meeting considered the further elaborated project description (document 3J-84) and endorsed it to be submitted to HOD 61-2021 for final approval.

eMSP: Emerging ecosystem-based Maritime Spatial Planning topics in North and Baltic Seas Region.

3J.357 The Meeting took note of the work planned under the new eMSP project. For the Baltic Sea region, the ultimate goal is to update the HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG MSP guidelines approved in 2016.

3J.358 The Meeting invited possible comments to be sent to the Secretariat (florent.nicolas@helcom.fi).

Agenda Item 4J Development and implementation of Recommendations

4J.1 The Meeting took note of the overview of Recommendation reporting deadlines under State and Conservation WG to be presented by the Secretariat (document 4J-1) and recalled the decision by STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020 to consider reporting of 1-2 Recommendations per State and Conservation meeting until the rolling system is in place.

4J.2 The Meeting agreed to come back to the Recommendation discussion at STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2021.

4J.3 The Meeting noted that reporting is planned for Recommendations 17/2, 24/10-R, and 27/28-2 in 2022 and invited the respective lead countries to prepare accordingly.

RECOMMENDATION 10/1 ABNORMAL SITUATIONS IN THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT

4J.4 The Meeting discussed the possible replacement of the Recommendation and noted the information by Estonia that further information will be provided at STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2022.

RECOMMENDATION 21/3 SUSTAINABLE AND ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY TOURISM IN THE COASTAL ZONES OF THE BALTIC SEA AREA

4J.5 The Meeting took note of the current status of the guidelines (document 4J-2), as presented by Latvia.

4J.6 The Meeting noted the specific comments provided by Estonia.

4J.7 The Meeting noted the need for more time to review the document due its late submission, invited the Contracting Parties to provide comments to Latvia (inga.belasova@varam.gov.lv) **by 1 November 2021** and agreed that in case no content related changes are required, the guidelines and proposal to withdraw the Recommendation will be submitted to HOD 61-2021 for consideration with the intention to submit the proposal to HELCOM 43-2022. In case any open issues arise, the document will be further considered at STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2021.

Agenda Item 5J Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets

5J.1 The Meeting took note of the updates to the existing HELCOM Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets since STATE & CONSERVATION 14-2021 (document 5J-1).

Agenda Item 6J Future work

Next meeting

6J.1 The Meeting recalled that STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2022, focusing on Monitoring and assessment, and Joint sessions, will be held on 9-13 May 2022, preliminarily in Germany and STATE & CONSERVATION 17-2022 on 10-14 October 2022. The Meeting agreed to approve the time and place for organisation of STATE & CONSERVATION 18-2023 during STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2021.

6J.3 The Meeting recalled the internal review by State and Conservation carried out in 2018 following which HOD concluded that no change in structure of HELCOM Working Groups will be implemented until the update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan is finalised. The Meeting noted that the functioning of the HELCOM groups in order to best implement the BSAP will be considered in spring 2022.

6J.4 The Meeting agreed to organise an intersessional State and Conservation meeting in spring 2022 to focus only on the strategic discussion and recommendations on the future of the Working Group.

Agenda Item 7J Any other business

7J.1 The Meeting took note of opportunistically collected data from aerial surveys that have revealed spatiotemporal distribution patterns of marine debris in German waters (document 7J-2).

7J.2 The Meeting noted that a conference 'Monitoring of the environmental status and fish stocks of the Baltic Sea – new challenges and innovative approaches' will be organised on 25-26 November 2021, as a hybrid meeting by the University of Tartu, Estonian University of Life Sciences and Tallinn University of Technology.

7J.3 The Meeting reviewed and updated the list of contacts and observers of State and Conservation) as included in **Annex 2**.

Agenda Item 8J Outcome of the Joint themes

8J.1 The Meeting adopted the outcome of the Joint session. The outcome will be available (together with the outcome of the nature conservation and biodiversity session) at the STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 meeting site, together with the documents and presentations considered by the Meeting.

Nature conservation

Agenda Item 1N Adoption of the Agenda: Nature conservation

1N.1 The Meeting adopted Agenda items 1N-7N as contained in document 1-1-Rev.3.

Agenda Item 2N Matters of relevance for the Meeting and information from the Secretariat

HELCOM

2N.1 The Meeting recalled that HELCOM has been accepted to take part in arranging a special symposium on MPA networks as part of the International Marine Conservation Congress (IMCC) and noted that the changed format, due to Covid-19, was considered to not be suitable for the planned symposium and the symposium was withdrawn, with the aim to possibly resubmit the proposal for a future IMCC.

2N.2 The Meeting took note that the Secretariat has been approached by IUCN WCPA on collaborating on a session on OECMs during the 5th international Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC5) that will be held in Vancouver in September 2022 and has accepted the invitation.

EU

2N.3 The Meeting took note that the HELCOM approach for assessing MPA management effectiveness developed under the ACTION project will be presented at the EU workshop on the assessment of management effectiveness of marine Natura 2000 sites and other EU MPAs, 13-14 October 2021. The Meeting noted that the programme of the workshop has been made available on 7 October and the participation is limited to two participants per country.

CBD

2N.4 The Meeting noted that CBD COP 15 will take part in two parts: the first part in virtual format on 11-15 October 2021 and the second part as a face-to-face meeting in Kunming, China from 25 April to 8 May 2022. The finalization and adoption of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework will be addressed during the second part.

IUCN

2N.5 The Meeting took note of that the HELCOM approach for assessing MPA management effectiveness developed under the ACTION project was presented at a dedicated Campus Session on the 7 September at the IUCN World Conservation Congress.

2N.6 The Meeting noted that the Secretariat will mention that the HELCOM approach for MPA management effectiveness is a work in progress and that the methodology will be further considered in the LIFE STRATEGIC project, pending approval.

Agenda Item 3N Development and implementation of Recommendations

3N.1 The Meeting recalled that STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020 agreed to consider the reporting of 1-2 Recommendations per State and Conservation meeting until a rolling reporting system is in place.

RECOMMENDATION 17/2 PROTECTION OF HARBOUR PORPOISE IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA

3N.2 The Meeting considered the revised reporting template for the Recommendation (document 3N-1, presentation 17) and noted that EG MAMA 15-2021 considered the template and was invited to provide comments to it by 8 October.

3N.3 The Meeting agreed that an intersessional approval process for the reporting template will be established once comments by EG MAMA are available.

3N.4 The Meeting noted the extensiveness of the reporting template and underlined the importance of the reporting being as aligned with the process under ASCOBANS as possible and kept as simple as possible.

a. Give highest priority to avoiding by-catches of harbour porpoises, particularly following the recommendations of ASCOBANS and the Jastarnia Plan, in order to achieve the ecological objective of the Baltic Sea Action Plan. By-catch of harbour porpoise, shall be significantly reduced with the aim to reach by-catch rates close to zero, recognizing that the Baltic Proper population of harbour porpoise is more threatened than the WBBK population

3N.5 The Meeting welcomed the presentation on the follow-up and discussion by BALTFISH on the ICES Special Request Advice on EU request on emergency measures to prevent bycatch of Baltic Proper harbour porpoise (presentation 18).

a. take action for collection and analysis of data on pressures such as by-catch, disturbance, including underwater noise, pollutants, changes in food base and prey quality, habitat deterioration, climate change, and human activities associated with the listed pressures;

b. Continue to carry out regular large-scale regional surveys, such as SAMBAH, SCANS and MiniSCANS, of abundance, density and distribution, as well as coordinated national monitoring programmes of harbour porpoise distribution, abundance and density where appropriate

3N.6 The Meeting noted that a negative reply to the LIFE application for the SAMBAH II project was received, however the application will be re-submitted, and the EU encourages the plan.

3N.7 The Meeting emphasised the importance of the SAMBAH II project however regretted that the HELCOM work on harbour porpoise has not progressed while the application process for SAMBAH II has been ongoing and acknowledged the need to consider a possible contingency plan on harbour porpoise related HELCOM work.

3N.8 The Meeting noted that the IWC has expressed concern about the status of the Baltic Sea harbour porpoise and has offered to give assistance with eliminating bycatch in the region.

3N.9 The Meeting noted the LIFE project proposal CiBBRiNA, coordinated by the Dutch Ministry for the Environment, which will focus on bycatch of birds and cetaceans and will be submitted as a SAP under the 2021 LIFE call. The Meeting further noted that HELCOM has been invited to the Stakeholder board and several partners are parties to both HELCOM and OSPAR.

3N.10 The Meeting noted that in Denmark a substantial part of SAMBAH II funding will only be available in 2022 and 2023, and if the project is not initiated in 2022 Denmark must instead undertake national monitoring of the harbour porpoise population and will likely find participation in SAMBAH II difficult.

3N.11 The Meeting agreed to consider the need for a contingency plan for HELCOM harbour porpoise work in STATE & CONSERVATION 17-2022, once qualitative assessments on harbour porpoise for HOLAS III and further information on the SAMBAH II application process are likely available.

RECOMMENDATION 27-28/2 CONSERVATION OF SEALS IN THE BALTIC SEA AREA

3N.12 The Meeting took note of the 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 (document 3N-2). The Meeting agreed that the template servers the needs expressed by CPs in State and Conservation.

3N.13 The Meeting noted that a follow-up meeting to further consider the data requirements and the template will be held on **25 October 2021**.

RECOMMENDATION 34E/1 SAFEGUARDING IMPORTANT BIRD HABITATS AND MIGRATION ROUTES IN THE BALTIC SEA FROM NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF WIND AND WAVE ENERGY PRODUCTION AT SEA

3N.14 The Meeting took note of the plan to increase wind parks in Finland according to the EU strategy on offshore renewable energy, and that related pressures and potential impacts have been taken into account in marine spatial plans. The Meeting further noted that further information on migration routes from the suggested bird migration group will be considered important to this work.

3N.15 The Meeting noted the following information provided by Germany:

The German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN) will finance a research project on bird migration over the Baltic Sea (RADARMOVE). The project, carried out by the Institute of Avian Research (IfV), will focus on migratory bird species which could be directly affected by the marine environment or activities taking place at sea. The justification for this activity is that the quantitative spatio-temporal distribution of migratory events over the Baltic Sea is still largely unknown. IfV already has extensive experience in the use of weather radar data from meteorological services in order to quantify bird migration spatio-temporally with the aim to derive sensitivity maps.

From a technical point of view, such sensitivity maps are urgently needed for the Baltic Sea region. Germany has initiated this project in order to contribute as lead country to the implementation of Recommendation 34E/1 during its HELCOM presidency. First maps will be presented to STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2021, and a report will be ready by the end of the German presidency in June 2022.

Germany (BfN) in cooperation with the HELCOM secretariat has already arranged and conducted an international online workshop on migratory birds in the Baltic Sea from 8 to 9 September 2021 with 50 participants. The Workshop inter alia emphasized that offshore constructions present a threat to all types of birds migrating over sea areas, including songbirds. The outcome of this WS is presented in document 3J-99.

3N.16 The Meeting noted the information that Denmark is also aiming to increase the number of windfarms and looking forward to the work to be produced by the suggested bird migration group. The Meeting further noted that a project to map migrating birds will commence and Denmark will share the results with State and Conservation and the planned migratory bird group once available.

3N.17 The Meeting noted a component in the planned STRATEGIC LIFE project on collating and spatially plotting migration data, and that this could both support and benefit from the work on migration planned under the EG and the CPs.

3N.18 The Meeting noted the discussion on the types of windmills in relation to risks posed to birds.

RECOMMENDATION 35/1 SYSTEM OF COASTAL AND MARINE BALTIC SEA PROTECTED AREAS (HELCOM MPAs)

3N.19 The Meeting recalled the decision of STATE & CONSERVATION 12-2020 to develop a reporting template for the Recommendation and considered the draft template as included in document 3N-3 as developed by Finland in their role as lead country for the Recommendation.

3N.20 The Meeting thanked Finland for the work on elaborating the template.

3N.21 The Meeting took note of the following comments:

- In some instances, it might be useful to include options such as “partially” or “not relevant” (e.g. in relation to the action on HELCOM and OSPAR MPAs).
- There is a need to identify which actions, or parts of actions, are relevant for reporting by CPs and which directly by State and Conservation WG.
- That, in addition to yes/no results, it can be useful to as part of assessing level of implementation include information which allows illustrating progress over time and distance to target, i.e., full implementation.

3N.22 The Meeting supported that for future iterations of reporting the HELCOM MPA Portal could be used to automatize parts of the reporting and invited the STRATEGIC project, pending approval, to consider this when developing the portal.

3N.23 The Meeting acknowledged that with the review and update of the Recommendation planned under the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan the reporting may need to be amended. The Meeting noted the timeline of the revision of the Recommendation is still open and that until an updated Recommendation is adopted the plan for reporting on the Recommendation remains valid.

3N.24 The Meeting supported that considering the reporting implications be considered as an integral part of updating the Recommendation.

3N.25 The Meeting noted that Denmark and Germany will provide written comments to the template to Finland (lasse.kurvinen@metsa.fi).

3N.26 The Meeting considered the formulation of the still open questions and invited the Contracting Parties to provide further input to Finland (lasse.kurvinen@metsa.fi) **by 28 October.**

3N.27 The Meeting agreed on the following timeline for the upcoming work:

- Finland will finalise the reporting template by the end of 2021;
- Recommendation reporting will take place in 19 January-31 May 2022;
- Finland will present the reporting results at STATE & CONSERVATION 17-2022.

a. Follow-up of action 'reach goal of 10% of the marine area in all sub-basins of the Baltic Sea including the EEZ areas beyond territorial waters is covered by MPAs where scientifically justified'

3N.28 The Meeting noted that the Secretariat has updated the GIS layer containing MPA borders based on submitted shapefiles and that updated information can be submitted to the Secretariat at any time.

f. Follow-up of action 'update, when necessary, HELCOM MPA related guidelines and guiding documents in order to keep them in line with new knowledge and compatible with other international criteria'

3N.29 The Meeting considered the instructions for MPA pressure evaluation (document 3N-4) and thanked Finland for their excellent and patient work.

3N.30 The Meeting noted the possible updated information on marine litter by Denmark and invited Denmark to provide input to Finland (lasse.kurvinen@metsa.fi) by **1 November 2021**.

3N.31 The Meeting agreed on an intersessional approval process, pending on the nature of comments (editorial/substantial) to be provided by Denmark.

3N.32 The Meeting noted that once approved, the instructions will be published on the HELCOM website and will be considered as a living document.

h. Follow-up of action 'continuously report the most recent numerical and descriptive data on HELCOM MPAs to HELCOMs data systems (HELCOM MPA database, GIS based map and data service)'

3N.33 The Meeting took note of the responses received under the national reporting on this action for the BSAP update and that, should the STRATEGIC LIFE project prove successful, reporting on this action could be directly linked to the information in the MPA portal.

m. Update, when necessary, HELCOM MPA related guidelines and guiding documents in order to keep them in line with new knowledge and compatible with other international criteria, such as MSFD requirements, in particular those concerning spatial protection measures

3N.34 The Meeting noted that that due to a technical error during the HELCOM website renewal in 2019, the updated version of the MPA designation guidelines, which was approved for publication by STATE & CONSERVATION 11-2019, was lost from the HELCOM website and confirmed that the updated MPA designation guidelines (document 3N-5) can be republished on the HELCOM website.

3N.35 The Meeting noted national information by Denmark regarding 'exceptions relating to national conservation provisions' which could in future updates to the guidelines be updated to also include regulations of pipes and cables outside 12 nm.

Presentations on specific national MPAs

3N.36 The Meeting welcomed the presentation by Denmark on the process for new MSFD MPAs (presentation 19).

3N.37 The Meeting congratulated Denmark on the establishment of MSFD MPAs and welcomed the information that Denmark is considering nomination of some of the areas as HELCOM MPAs.

3N.38 The Meeting took note of interest by several CPs on the legislative and procedural (e.g., public consultation) aspects of the identification and designation process and welcomed that Denmark will share more detailed information with interested parties.

3N.39 The Meeting noted the clarification by Denmark, regarding whether there are any plans to develop management plans for the areas, that the primary aim is to ensure concrete conservation measures are in place and implemented.

3N.40 The Meeting welcomed the presentation by Finland on adjacent transnational MPAs between Sweden and Finland in the Bothnian Bay (presentation 20).

3N.41 The Meeting expressed appreciation for the constructive and broad scope approach to transnational management and planning efforts by Sweden and Finland in the Bothnian Bay.

3N.42 The Meeting welcomed the presentation by Sweden on a new national framework for a network of MPAs (presentation 21). The Meeting noted the step-by-step guidance is available via this website.

3N.43 The Meeting congratulated Sweden on the structured and logical approach and clarification that the database associated with the framework is flexible in what e.g., spatial targets you include and can be used to support planning of conservation measures and MSP and help county administration boards make strategic decisions. The Meeting noted the similarities of the approach to the planned STRATEGIC LIFE project aiming to build a similar structure on the Baltic Sea level.

STRATEGIC LIFE

3N.44 The Meeting welcomed the presentation on the STRATEGIC LIFE application for the period 2023-2028 (presentation 22).

3N.45 The Meeting approved the role of State and Conservation as an advisory board in the proposed project and noted that the advisory board would meet annually under the conservation session of a State and Conservation meeting with the possibility for additional intersessional meetings as necessary.

3N.46 The Meeting clarified that national projects related to actions under the BSAP as well as other LIFE projects count as complementary funding for the planned project, however other LIFE projects do not count towards the required target of mobilized funding.

3N.47 The Meeting invited the Contracting Parties to provide information on national resources already dedicated to, or planned towards, measures and actions to address actions in the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan to the Secretariat (jannica.haldin@helcom.fi) **by 13 October 2021**.

3N.48 The Meeting further noted that more detailed information, also as regards funding, will be requested for the complete application in case the application will succeed.

3N.49 The Meeting welcomed the presentation on the Finnish LIFE-IP BIODIVERSEA enhancing marine and coastal biodiversity of the Baltic Sea in Finland (presentation 23).

RECOMMENDATION 37/2 CONSERVATION OF BALTIC SEA SPECIES CATEGORIZED AS THREATENED ACCORDING TO THE 2013 HELCOM RED LIST

3N.50 The Meeting took note of the reporting results on Recommendation 37/2 (document 3N-6, presentation 24) and thanked Germany for the thorough work.

3N.51 The Meeting noted that for some responses presented in the document Finland has interpreted the question differently than intended by the questionnaire. The Meeting invited Finland to submit updated responses by **22 October 2021** to Germany (gesine.lange@nabu.de).

3N.52 The Meeting noted that as part of a major political push to improve biodiversity Denmark is working on a strategy for red listed habitats and species, including *inter alia* how to better include HELCOM red listed species and habitats in national assessments.

3N.53 The Meeting noted that the Recommendation reporting results will be utilized in national work.

a. Follow-up of action 'Inventory of existing and planned national and regional conservation-, recovery- and/or action plans, and by 2018 review their effectiveness and, if necessary, define future protection needs'

3N.54 The Meeting noted that no updates in information on national conservation plans for species and biotopes categorized as threatened according to HELCOM 2013 Red List have been submitted since autumn 2020 (document 3N-7), noted that the distribution of species and habitats/biotopes can be checked from the HELCOM Map and Data Service and invited the Contracting Parties to submit updated or new information to the Secretariat (petra.kaaria@helcom.fi) when available.

3N.55 The Meeting noted that in the Finnish MSFD Programmes of Measures a task to advance the work on conservation plans for species and habitats/biotopes including a plan on how to proceed has been included.

3N.56 The Meeting took note of the document 3N-8 and presentation 25 outlining the various terms regarding conservation plans.

3N.57 The Meeting noted that additional national definitions exist and invited other Contracting Parties to provide further national definitions to Sweden (jenny.hertzman@havochvatten.se) by **19 August 2022** and agreed to follow-up on the discussion at STATE & CONSERVATION 17-2022.

c. Follow-up of action 'Take measures to reduce transboundary pressures and/or impacts on HELCOM threatened migrating species'

3N.58 The Meeting took note of the response by Germany on the overview of measures recommended by JWG Bird, as well as information provided by Finland during STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2-2020 (document 3N-10-Rev.2).

3N.59 The Meeting noted that Denmark will also provide answers to the recommended measures prior to STATE & CONSERVATION 17-2022.

RECOMMENDATION 37/2 CONSERVATION AND PROTECTION OF MARINE AND COASTAL BIOTOPES, HABITATS AND BIOTOPE COMPLEXES CATEGORIZED AS THREATENED ACCORDING TO THE HELCOM RED LISTS

3N.60 The Meeting took note of the reporting results to the Recommendation (document 3N-9) presentation 26) and thanked Germany for the thorough work and concluded that it provides a good starting point for further work.

3N.61 The Meeting noted that further comments regarding the reporting by Denmark may be provided to Germany (gesine.lange@nabu.de) by **22 October 2021**.

3N.62 The Meeting noted that recent national biotope red listing work has been carried out in Finland according to the HUB classification and the English version of the report has been published and is available at: https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/162487/Baltic_Sea_Red_List_of_habitats_Part_II.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

3N.63

Agenda Item 4N Links to ongoing work under the habitats and Birds Directives

5N.1 The Meeting took note of the following progress related to the work on the EU Habitats and Birds Directives:

- Finland is working on how to improve assessing the structure and function of habitats within HD. During the VELMU inventory programme a mapping study on lagoons and reefs has been conducted including east-west and outer-inner archipelago gradients. Analysis of the results will be carried out during winter 2022 and the results could possibly be used in the future HELCOM indicator work.
- Finland has included the HD marine habitat types into a data system for managing habitat level information. The system contains e.g. information on specific sites and their restoration measures. This data system can be used also for Habitats Directive reporting in the future.
- Denmark is in the process of updating MPA management areas for Natura2000 areas including all the Danish HELCOM MPAs. New baseline assessment was for each area completed in 2020 and the new management plans are under way. Additionally, six new SPAs have been designated, 5 of which are in the HELCOM area and the public consultation has recently ended.

Agenda Item 5N Dedicated session

5N.1 The Meeting recalled that STATE & CONSERVATION 13-2020 agreed for upcoming meetings to identify a relevant theme or topic and include a dedicated session during the meeting to tackling the issue in question, with the aim that this would result in concrete ways forward and the identification of clear future tasks.

5N.2 The Meeting considered how to better incorporate conservation and other topics of biodiversity relevance into the HOLAS process and the State of the Baltic Sea report and provided answers to the following questions, as included in this Miro board:

- What kind of information on conservation/biodiversity should we include in HOLAS III?
- Why (for what purposes) do we want to include it in HOLAS III?
- How do we communicate this the best way in HOLAS III?

5N.3 The Meeting was of the opinion that the output of the session can be used as basis for further consideration on how to highlight biodiversity and conservation as an overarching theme for HOLAS III.

5N.4 The Meeting noted that the outcome of the dedicated session will be used as basis of work in a holistic workshop on the involvement of conservation and biodiversity topics in HOLAS III to be organized in autumn 2022.

5N.5 The Meeting suggested to start the conservation session at STATE & CONSERVATION 17-2022 with the dedicated session.

5N.6 The Meeting took note of the list of proposed topics for a dedicated session (document 5N-1), and took note of the following new suggestions:

- HELCOM as a platform for supporting restoration and its implementation
- MPAs in a changing climate
- Supporting the work on BSAP measures by dedicated S&C sessions.

5N.7 The Meeting agreed that, should the national pledges on restoration be available in time for STATE & CONSERVATION 17-2022 then restoration should be the theme for the 2022 dedicated session. In addition to the national pledges and restoration under the EU BDS the plans for the HELCOM restoration action plan could also be further discussed.

Agenda Item 6N Plans for implementing the work plan and emerging issues

6N.1 The Meeting started consideration on the future of Nature conservation and biodiversity session of State and Conservation and proposed that in the future work should be divided into a Biodiversity WG, focused on all aspects of work related species, habitats, foodwebs and conservation and one WG focused on all aspects of work related to pollution. These WGs could cooperate concretely in relation to the HOLAS assessments to ensure synergies and cooperation.The Meeting supported further discussions at the intersessional State & Conservation meeting in spring 2022 and invited the Secretariat to prepare some initial concepts of such a division.

6N.2 The Meeting invited those Contracting Parties that have not yet provided input to document 6N-1 to do so and submit the information to Germany (christine.wenzel@melund.landsh.de) agreed to consider the updated version of document 6N-1 under the Joint session of STATE & CONSERVATION 16-2022 and invited Germany to submit the document to the meeting.

6N.3 The Meeting supported the proposal to move the expert groups relevant for the work and Recommendations under the Conservation session from the Joint session to the Nature conservation and biodiversity session in State and Conservation meetings and agreed to come back to this discussion in more detail at the intersessional State & Conservation meeting on strategic planning for future work.

Agenda Item 7N Any other business

HELCOM Expert Group on Sturgeon Remediation (EG STUR)

7N.1. The Meeting welcomed the presentation on the progress of implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Sturgeon Remediation (presentation 27), as presented by the Chair of EG STUR.

7N.2. The Meeting noted the proposal by EG STUR for HELCOM Fish to widen the scope of future work addressing migratory fish species by inclusion of all FFH listed species in the Baltic Sea or even all migratory fish species to render the assessments and measures proposed more widely applicable.

7N.3. The Meeting noted the further proposal by EG STUR to the Fish Group to expand the focus of migration facilitation and dam removal also to larger rivers.

7N.4. The Meeting invited EG STUR to the raise these proposals at FISH 14-2022, to be held on 23-25 February and noted that the Secretariat will take them into account when drafting the provisional agenda of FISH 14-2022.

7N.5. The Meeting noted that the State and Conservation contacts could assist the Group in getting in contact with the county administrative board contacts, if needed.

7N.6. The Meeting took note of the concerns on violation of HELCOM Recommendation 40/1 (document 7N-1).

7N.7. The Meeting noted that the 2017 Finnish “Meren Aarteet” publication based on VELMU inventories has been translated into Swedish (“Havets Skattkammare”) and invited those who would be interested in receiving a copy to contact Penina Blankett (penina.blankett@gov.fi).

Agenda Item 8N Outcome of the Nature conservation and biodiversity session

8N.1 The Meeting adopted the outcome of Nature Conservation theme. The outcome will be available (together with outcomes of the joint theme) at the STATE & CONSERVATION 15-2021 meeting site, together with the documents and presentations considered by the Meeting.

Annex 1. List of participants

Representing	Name	Organization	E-mail address
Co-Chairs			
Co-Chair	Norbert Häubner	Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management	norbert.haubner@havochvatten.se
Co-Chair	Marie-Louise Krawack	Ministry of Environment	makra@mim.dk
Contracting Parties			
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Germany	Sven Koschinski	on behalf of Federal Agency for Nature Conservation	sk@meereszoologie.de
Germany	Volker Dierschke	Gavia EcoResearch	volker.dierschke@web.de
Germany	Hannah Lutterbeck	State Agency for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Areas of Schleswig-Holstein, Germany (LLUR).	Hannah.Lutterbeck@llur.landsh.de
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Lithuania	Vytautas Danilevicius	Ministry of the Environment	
Lithuania	Darius Kristonaitis	Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania	
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HELCOM Observer	Hans Geibrink	Nordic Hunters Alliance	hans.geibrink@jagareforbundet.se
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Invited guest	Jörn Gessner	Leibniz Institute of Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries	sturgeon@igb-berlin.de>
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