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Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature
Conservation

STATE & CONSERVATION
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Document title	Extracts from recent HELCOM meetings of relevance for State and Conservation
Code	2J-1
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Agenda Item	2J – Matters arising from other meetings of relevance for the Working Group
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Background

This document contains extracts from relevant HELCOM meetings held since the last meeting of the State and Conservation Working group.

1. [HOLAS II 4-2015, 24-25 November 2015, Berlin, Germany](#)
2. [HOD 49-2015, 10-11 December 2015, Helsinki, Finland](#)
3. [HELCOM TAPAS Workshop on the HOLAS II Pressure and Impact Index, 28-29 January 2016, Helsinki, Finland](#)
4. [HELCOM BalticBOOST workshop on the HOLAS II hazardous substance assessment, 2-4 February 2016, Copenhagen, Finland](#)
5. [GEAR 13-2016, 10-11 February 2016, Berlin, Germany](#)
6. [HELCOM BalticBOOST workshop on the HOLAS II biodiversity assessment tool, 11-12 February 2016, Copenhagen, Denmark](#)
7. [HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG 12-2016, 24-25 February 2016, Gdansk, Poland.](#)
8. [HELCOM 37-2016, 10-11 March 2016, Helsinki, Finland](#)

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information.

1. The fourth meeting of the Project for the development of the second holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II 4-2015), 24-25 November 2016, Berlin, Germany

DEVELOPMENT OF CORE INDICATORS

- The Meeting noted that for use in HOLAS II indicators with GES-boundaries need to be adopted by HOD in December 2016 and be presented for technical review by the previous relevant Working Group meetings (e.g. Pressure 5-2016 on 24-28 October 2016, State and Conservation 5-2016 on 7-11 November 2016).
- The Meeting took note that Lead countries are currently in place for 30 indicators and co-Lead countries are in place for all indicators further noting that Lead countries are in particular missing for indicators on benthic communities and biotopes and for hazardous substances.
- The Meeting discussed that for marine litter the only indicator that likely can be operational by end of 2016 is the beach litter indicator and encouraged Contracting Parties to contribute to the development work and ensure that data and an operational core indicator is ready for use in HOLAS II.
- The Meeting proposed that the stage of development of the indicators should be clarified for each pre-core and candidate indicator and that an evaluation should be made to indicate which indicators that can likely be ready, with GES-boundaries or comparable GES assessment criteria, for use in HOLAS II i.e. that can be adopted by HOD in December 2016 and be presented for technical review by the previous relevant Working Group meetings.
- The Meeting proposed that for indicators where GES criteria are not likely to be in place by end of 2016 it should still be considered how information contained in them could be included in the 2nd holistic assessment.
- The Meeting supported the continuation of development of all indicators for the time being, also those that may not be ready by end of 2016 and encouraged Contracting Parties to provide resources for the development of pre-core and candidate indicators.
- The Meeting noted that in order to produce a first version of the holistic assessment by mid-2017, data need to be in place by autumn 2016 at the latest and recalled that the reporting deadline for data held by ICES is in September. The Meeting welcomed that all Contracting Parties are committed to submit the requested data to the COMBINE database, or other database solutions, by this time.

THEMATIC ASSESSMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS

- The Meeting took note that the four essential components for the HOLAS II biodiversity assessment are the tool development, indicator development, data arrangements, and to carry out the assessment. The development of the tool will be accomplished under the BalticBOOST project WP 1.1 and two HELCOM workshops are planned during 2016 to guide the development of the tool.
- The Meeting took note that data required for the assessment of core indicators for the holistic assessment need to be delivered by September 2016 at the latest to give the opportunity for HELCOM expert groups, projects and networks to update the indicator evaluations by early 2017 for further use in the biodiversity assessment.
- The Meeting noted the preliminary proposal to carry out the biodiversity assessment centrally based on indicator evaluations supplied by relevant expert groups, networks and projects, that a workspace would be set up, if possible, for evaluation by Contracting Parties, and that a workshop could be arranged to quality assure the results in spring 2017.

- The Meeting recalled that the 2nd holistic assessment will primarily be based on the regionally agreed core indicators however that the use of supplementary national indicators have been considered by the project and that principles for tentative use of national indicators was proposed by HOLAS II 3-2015. The Meeting agreed that a decision of the use of supplementary indicators will take place when a more complete picture of available indicators is in place e.g. by HOLAS II 5-2016.
- The Meeting took note that guidance for the reporting of descriptor 8 and descriptor 9 is still being developed through the review of the GES decision, including how to consider the requirements for assessing hazardous substance under the Water Framework Directive. The Meeting recalled that at present it is proposed that the assessment under the MSFD should follow the list of priority substances as a minimum and to use EQS for those substances in territorial waters while outside this zone it is proposed that in addition, other substance lists and threshold levels can be used such as developed by Regional Seas Convention. The Meeting recalled that the GES-boundaries for HELCOM core indicators are based on EQS and aligned with the requirements of the WFD.
- The Meeting discussed the assessment of hazardous substances in territorial waters and whether to make direct use of the results of WFD assessment of chemical status in HOLAS II or whether to use the CHASE tool to integrate indicator evaluations also for coastal and territorial waters. The Meeting agreed to test the use of the CHASE tool in territorial waters as well as beyond to compare the results with the WFD assessment of chemical status, analyse the results (cf. EUTRO-OPER), and to come back to the issue when the comparison has been made, possibly at HOLAS II 5-2016. The organization of such comparison will be addressed at the first hazardous substance workshop.
- The Meeting discussed and agreed that a separate assessment will be carried out for descriptor 8 and descriptor 9 as the aim of the two descriptors are different and thresholds stem from different sources. The Meeting noted that the CHASE tool is mainly to be developed to serve the purposes of descriptor 8 using core indicators with GES-boundaries based on EQS.

ASSESSMENT OF HUMAN ACTIVITIES AND PRESSURES

- The Meeting took note of the outcome of the HOLAS II Pressure Index workshop [HOLAS II Pressure Index WS 1-2015, 13 November 2015]. The workshop focused on considering the spatial data sets to include and the development of impact scores to be used in the assessment of the Baltic Sea Impact Index (BSII). The Meeting took note of the proposal to aggregate certain sets of proposed data in order not to get an overrepresentation of pressures and activities for which several specific data sets are used.
- The Meeting took note of the presentation of the LiACAT tool. The tool is a software to support the collation and analysis of literature information for use in impact assessments and could be used in HOLAS II to provide metadata analyses of data from literature studies related to pressures and impacts on ecosystem components. Key information added to the tool, based on a common classification system, is the relationship between pressures and ecosystem components and the impact from pressures as evidenced from scientific literature.
- The Meeting discussed the setting of impact weight scores and supported the proposal to use a combination of the LiACAT tool and expert based judgement compiled via a common questionnaire to be organized by the TAPAS project.
- The Meeting discussed for which human activities and pressures that the collation effort for spatial datasets should be made for use in the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact Index, revised the prioritization made by the workshop as contained in document 5-2 Rev1-Add1, and mandated the Secretariat to collate the information with the aim to further develop the spatial datasets on human activities and pressures given the priority score 2.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ANALYSES

- The Meeting took note of the Outcome of the HOLAS II Workshop on Social and Economic analyses and the key issues identified for carrying out the ESA work of HOLAS II.
- The Meeting took note that to provide analyses of the use of marine water and costs of degradation, four essential components are eventually needed: the selection of approach (marine water accounting or ecosystem services or a combination of the two), the selection of themes, activities or sectors to assess (e.g. recreation/tourism, fisheries, eutrophication), to define a baseline for the analyses (a period to be aligned with the status assessments), and to get access to relevant data.
- The Meeting took note that the ESA workshop had developed a conceptual model where the marine water account and ecosystem services approaches are combined with the DPSIR framework to arrive at a HOLAS II ESA model. The framework is based on establishing causal links between activities, environmental status and ecosystem services (based on UK NEA approach) as a basis for an analysis of economic consequences. The Meeting noted that the causal link between activities and pressures will be elaborated through the BalticBOOST project WP 3.3 and proposed to link this activity to the development of the ESA framework.
- The Meeting took note that through the TAPAS project it will be possible to develop a 'manual' for the ESA work in HOLAS II, assess the availability of relevant data, and identify common denominators between countries, however that the project will not carry out any analyses. Two workshops are planned under the TAPAS project, the first one being proposed for April 2016 and the second for autumn 2016.

THE NEXT MEETING OF THE PROJECT

- The Meeting agreed to convene HOLAS II 5-2016 on **26-28 April 2016**.

2. THE 49TH MEETING OF HEADS OF DELEGATION (HELCOM HOD 49-2015) 10-11 December 2015, Helsinki, Finland

Matters arising from the HELCOM Groups***Pressure***

- The Meeting welcomed the offer by Germany to lead development of the registry of sources of impulsive underwater noise and related indicator.
- The Meeting took note of the information on the status of reporting and assessment of dredging and exploration of mineral resources in the Baltic Sea (document 4-32), provided feedback to the Secretariat regarding the focus of such assessment and welcomed the information that Pressure WG at its next meeting will consider both the assessment methodology and related improvements in reporting, taking into account similar work in OSPAR. The Meeting requested that also the Maritime Working Group is involved in improving the assessment of dredging activities/depositing of dredged material.
- The Meeting decided that the next PLC assessment (PLC-7) will be made in 2019 based on the monitoring data from 2017. The Meeting recognized that the PLC assessment routine needs re-consideration, since the "traditional" PLC products have changed their character, and the focus in periodic PLC is much more now on source apportionment and effectiveness of measures. Also coupling of future PLC assessments and CART assessment needs to be further considered by Pressure WG.

- The Meeting discussed the first draft of the CART assessment (accessible via a link circulated by the Secretariat) and appreciated efforts made by the experts involved in preparing the assessment. The Meeting noted that a few of the Contracting Parties had some further suggestions for improvements, however, recognized that the assessment should be published without further delay as clear indications where the Baltic Sea region stands with respect to CART are urgently needed.
- On the basis of the above, the Meeting agreed to publish the CART assessment as preliminary results with the understanding that these are scientific results.
- The Meeting noted the start-up of the project on operationalization of the nutrient reduction scheme follow-up system (MAI-CART OPER, 2015-2017) including the outcomes of the project workshop on 1 December 2015 and approved the implementation plan of the project and requested that also a user manual is prepared by the project.
- The Meeting considered the draft roadmap to build a knowledge base on underwater noise (document 4-21) and the revised version based on the comments by Russia (document 4-21 Rev.1), noting that the draft was also considered by HELCOM MARITIME 15-2015, which should be made more clear on the cover page. The Meeting approved the roadmap as included in **Annex 2**, pending clarification of the study reservation by Russia by **31 January 2016**.
- The Meeting took note of the progress in setting up the registry for impulsive underwater noise (document 4-22) and recognized the opportunity to join the OSPAR regional registry being set up in ICES with minimal cost, allowing timely fulfillment of the Ministerial commitment.

Fish

- The Meeting agreed on an option for HELCOM to be involved as a partner in the SUSFISHING project for restoration of sea trout rivers in the Baltic Sea (presentation 4 from HELCOM FISH 3-2015) to support activities of the Task Force on migratory fish species.
- The Meeting took note of the draft HELCOM Recommendation on sustainable aquaculture in the Baltic Sea as editorially revised intersessionally (document 4-10).
- The Meeting discussed the follow up of the Recommendation, once adopted, regarding BAT/BEP for aquaculture in the Baltic Sea region and noted the different views of the Contracting Parties on the approach and further process in developing BAT/BEP.
- The Meeting agreed on the need to clarify this issue before adoption of the Recommendation and agreed to establish a correspondence under the lead of [the HELCOM FISH Chair] to pave the way to be able to agree on the Recommendation and its follow-up at HELCOM 37-2016.
- The Meeting took note of the information by the EU, as a follow up to FISH 3-2015 considerations on international agreements for the management of eel stock, that an eel management plan has been prepared by Poland and the Russian Federation and that, following the scientific assessment of the plan, the European Commission will consider approving the plan as it is expected to contribute to the improvement of the stock status and its recovery.

Gear

- The Meeting noted that 14 future HELCOM actions are proposed as the result of the coordination efforts relating to national PoMs that have taken place in the process of documenting regional coordination of programmes of measures (document 4-26).
- The Meeting took note that Germany here, as in other places and due to a formal study reservation, is not in a position to agree on any of the proposed future actions. The Meeting noted the specific study reservation by Germany on action 1.
- The Meeting welcomed the progress of the HOLAS II project and acknowledged the need for Contracting Parties to ensure national expertise and deliver required data according to the timetable of the project.

- The Meeting exchanged views on the planned consultations within countries with regard to HELCOM assessments to be used for other reporting obligations and expressed the view that this issue requires careful consideration in order to maintain the scientific quality of the HELCOM assessment products. The Meeting noted that a questionnaire will be circulated to GEAR contacts to clarify national requirements on the consultation process.
- The Meeting endorsed in principle the “Joint documentation of the regional coordination of the programme of measures” noting a study reservation on the document by Russia and invited Russia to clarify the study reservation by **11 January 2016**.
- The Meeting agreed to delegate the deliberation of remaining comments and finalization of the text in the Joint documentation to GEAR 13-2015 and requested GEAR to update the document to reflect the finalization of national programmes of measures (by 28 February 2016 at the latest). The Meeting clarified that as soon as GEAR has finalised the joint documentation, it can be made available for reporting under the MSFD, for those HELCOM countries which are also EU member states.
- The Meeting agreed to keep and update Annex 3 of the draft Joint documentation on Programmes of measures to reflect the outcome of the meeting regarding future actions, taking note of the study reservations raised at the Meeting.

Maritime and Response

- The Meeting adopted the Terms of Reference for the Joint HELCOM-OSPAR Task Group on Ballast Water Management Convention Exemptions (HELCOM-OSPAR TG BALLAST) for 2015-2016 (document 4-31) with the information that HELCOM considers the footnote as deleted.
- The Meeting adopted the proposed core pressure indicator on oil spills affecting the marine environment (document 4-9) with the change that Figure 1 (page 5) should include both flight hours and estimates of volume of spills, and pending the confirmation by Germany by end of this year.
- The Meeting approved the proposal for HELCOM Project on Maritime Assessment to enable involvement of the needed expertise and took note of the outline of the Maritime Assessment (document 4-23).

Follow-up system for HELCOM agreements

- The Meeting took note of the presentation by the Secretariat of the draft assessment of accomplishment of HELCOM actions implemented at a regional level and the test case of an action implemented at the national level, carried out by the Secretariat as requested by GEAR 12-2015 (document 4-15, 4-15 Att 1).
- The Meeting recalled that the system covers actions committed under the Baltic Sea Action Plan and 2010 and 2013 Ministerial Declarations as well as HELCOM Recommendations adopted since the BSAP.
- The Meeting noted that the evaluation criteria for the follow-up of actions have been reviewed by HELCOM Working Groups during 2015. The Meeting further noted that the aim is to create a web-based implementation database with possibility to extract results and to visualize results based on a set of pre-defined figures and that the technical completion of the system is supported by resources from the EU co-financed BalticBOOST project.
- The Meeting welcomed the system as a transparent way to follow progress of accomplishment of HELCOM commitments and was of the view that it will simplify the reporting by Contracting Parties.
- The Meeting agreed on a step-wise approach on the reporting where two themes would be reported by mid-February 2016 and two themes by end of February 2016 and invited the countries to finalize the reporting according to this time-table as far as possible. For one specific theme with the fewest number of actions, still to be identified, all Contracting Parties are requested to prioritize reporting by mid-February in order to be able to present results at HELCOM 37-2016.

State and Conservation

- The Meeting took note of the presentation by Lead Country Germany on the draft HELCOM Recommendation on Conservation of Baltic Sea species categorized as threatened according to the HELCOM red list (document 4-12).
- The Meeting recalled that all Contracting Parties but Denmark were ready to adopt the final draft HELCOM Recommendation on 'Conservation of Baltic Sea species categorized as threatened according to the HELCOM Red List' at HELCOM 36-2015. The Meeting took note of the information that while intersessional consultations have taken place, Denmark's study reservation remains and furthermore took note that the Danish national concerns are related to the costs of developing species specific conservation plans and evaluating the red listed species in EIA-like procedures as well as questioning the efficiency of protecting species that are naturally rare such as red listed species in the Kattegat area (documents 4-38 and 4-39).
- The Meeting welcomed the willingness of Germany to continue leading the finalization of the Recommendation and the offer to continue the further elaboration of the text bilaterally with Denmark and *via* consultation of all Contracting Parties, e.g. through written procedure or an online meeting, as appropriate, with the view to reaching an agreement in time for adopting the Recommendation at HELCOM 37-2016. All Contracting Parties will be consulted on time e.g. through written procedure or the organization of an online meeting as appropriate. Against that background the Meeting, furthermore, agreed to start with the second Recommendation on "Conservation of Baltic Sea underwater biotopes, habitats and biotope complexes threatened according to the HELCOM Red List" only upon finalization of the first Recommendation.
- The Meeting considered the draft Recommendation 'Co-operation and coordination of research vessel based monitoring in off-shore areas and procedures for granting permits for monitoring and research activities' as presented by the co-Chair of State and Conservation (document 4-14).
- The Meeting took note of the following comments and revised the Recommendation accordingly:
 - o to place the reference to UNCLOS as paragraph 3 of the pre-amble;
 - o to remove reference to UNCLOS Article 247 and 248 in paragraph d);
 - o to phrase paragraph d) according to the following: "to facilitate granting of permits, to carry out monitoring and research activities in the framework of the HELCOM coordinated monitoring programme in the exclusive economic zones, fishing zones, continental shelves or territorial waters, aiming at within six weeks from the time of the request."
- The Meeting took note of the of the study reservation by Russia on paragraph c, since granting of one year permits may not be in accordance with national legislation, and that Russia will clarify the position by **17 December 2015**. Taking note of the study reservation by Russia, the Meeting endorsed in principle the draft Recommendation for adoption by HELCOM 37-2016.
- The Meeting agreed to establish a HELCOM intersessional expert network on eutrophication and agreed to the draft Terms of Reference as contained in document 4-13.
- The Meeting welcomed the outcome of the EUTRO-OPER project and took note that the pre-core indicators developed by EUTRO-OPER will not be finalized by end of the project and that in order to finalize them Lead Countries are needed to ensure their continued development as well as resources for modelling to develop GES-boundaries for three of the indicators. The Meeting noted the view of Finland, Germany and Sweden to continue the project in 2016 with support of a part-time project manager. The Meeting agreed to continue the project for a limited period 3-6 months and welcomed the offer by Germany to contribute to the work financially.
- The Meeting took note of the working arrangement for continued development of indicators (document 4-20) and recalled that it is based on a Lead Country approach and a more continuous engagement of HELCOM expert groups, networks and projects, as agreed by HOD 48-2015. The

Meeting noted that a key task for HELCOM experts groups, network and project is to carry out the updating of indicator evaluations for core indicator reports as well as for the 2nd holistic assessment.

- The Meeting encouraged Contracting Parties to take the lead on development of indicators where Lead country offers are lacking, noting that this is in particular the case for indicators related to hazardous substances and benthic communities and habitats.
- Noting the study reservation by Germany, the Meeting agreed, while taking into account a respective German reservation (see para 4.54), to further consider the core indicator on incidental by-catch under the Fish Group as well as the State and Conservation Working Group as regards defining the maximum allowable catch of species.
- The Meeting welcomed that Denmark is lifting the study reservation on GES boundaries for the core indicators on Abundance of waterbirds in the wintering season, Abundance of waterbirds in the breeding season, Hexabromocyclododecane (HBCDD), Perfluorooctane sulphonate (PFOS), Polybrominated Diphenyl, Ethers (PBDE), Metals (Cd, Pb, Hg) and Radioactive substances (document 4-33).
- The Meeting took note that Germany is not in a position to lift their reservation on the core indicators due to matters of national administration (cf paragraph 4.54).
- The Meeting considered the information by CCB on pending issues from HELCOM STATE & CONSERVATION 3-2015 (document 4-19):
 - o proposal to consider the revision of HELCOM Assessment on Marine Sediment Extraction in the Baltic Sea, as an input to the Holistic Assessment,
 - o proposal to relevant HELCOM groups to consider developing an international agreement to protect European eel population under the CMS Convention as current legal frameworks are not enough.
- The Meeting noted the support expressed by Sweden to consider all potential measures to protect the eel, including the proposal for development of such international agreement to protect the European eel population.

MSP WG

- The Meeting took note that the Guideline for the implementation of ecosystem-based approach in Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) in the Baltic Sea has been agreed by the Working Group and requested, to consider the conservation aspects in accordance with the ecosystem approach, that the guidelines are consulted with State and Conservation WG before the adoption by HOD.

Next meeting of the Working Group

- The Meeting agreed to hold the next meeting of the HELCOM Heads of Delegation (HOD 50-2016) on 15-16 June 2016 and welcomed the offer of Estonia to host the meeting.

3. HELCOM TAPAS Workshop on the HOLAS II Pressure and Impact Index, 28-29 January 2016, Helsinki, Finland

HELCOM TAPAS is an EU co-financed project with the task to develop the Baltic Sea Pressure and impact index to be used in the HOLAS II project. The TAPAS project runs from January 2016-June 2017 while the component related development of the Pressure and Impact index will be finalized by December 2016. The development of the index is to be guided by through two HELCOM workshops with participation of experts from HELCOM Contracting Parties and also by the HOLAS II core team and HELCOM Working Groups Pressure and State and Conservation. The first workshop was held 28-29 January 2016 at the premises of the HELCOM Secretariat, Helsinki, Finland.

The aim of the workshop was to guide the development of the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact index, building on the outcome of HOLAS II workshop already held on the topic (HOLAS II Pressure Index WS 1-2015, 13 November 2015, Helsinki) and previous guidance from the HOLAS II core team.

Main conclusions from the Workshop are related to (access full [Outcome of the workshop](#)):

- Collation of datasets to use in the assessment, including the preparation of metadata information and spatial data set fact sheets,
- How to set the spatial and temporal extent of the pressure in relation to particular human activities,
- Tentative 'products' of the pressure assessment in HOLAS II,
- Aggregation of data set for the assessment and links between pressures and human activities,
- How to set the impact scores for the BSPII and planning of the expert questionnaire,
- Inclusion of literature information in the setting of impact scores.

4. HELCOM BalticBOOST workshop on the HOLAS II hazardous substance assessment, 2-4 February 2016, Copenhagen, Finland

HELCOM BalticBOOST is an EU co-financed project with the task to develop a tool for Integrated assessment of hazardous substances (CHASE 3.0) to be used in the HOLAS II project, the project is also tasked with developing the data-arrangements for HELCOM hazardous substance core indicators. The project runs from September 2015-December 2016. The development of the tool is to be guided through two HELCOM workshops with participation of experts from HELCOM Contracting Parties.

The aim of the workshop was to support the development of data-arrangements for the hazardous substance core indicators and the further development of a tool for integrated assessments of chemical status for use in HOLAS II, building on previous guidance from the HOLAS II core team.

Related to the development of indicators, the workshop stressed that without additional Lead Countries as well as co-Lead on the hazardous substances indicators the availability of operational and approved hazardous substance indicators for use in HOLAS II may be limited.

Main conclusions from the Workshop are related to (access full [Outcome of the workshop](#)):

Core indicators development work and data-arrangements

- Statistical treatment of data in the core indicators
- Development of HELCOM workspace for hazardous substances as a tool for managing the indicator data-flow from COMBINE
- Data availability and extraction from COMBINE for indicator testing and HOLAS II
- Comparison of COMBINE data-fields to EIONET data fields. In this regard the workshop recommended to State and Conservation 4-2016 to report all monitoring data through COMBINE, as critical differences in the major fields were identified in the EIONET metadata.

Assessment tool development

- CHASE compatibility with the WFD assessment approach
- Hazardous substance assessment to meet HOLAS II dual purposes of follow-up of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and the Marine Strategy Framework. In this regard the workshop recommended to test the hazardous substance assessment tool according to five approaches that meet different identified assessment needs.
- Assessment principles, e.g. appropriate level of HELCOM assessment units, use of compartments in CHASE, use of OAO approach between compartments, how to address confidence in the assessment.

5. THE THIRTEENTH MEETING OF THE GROUP FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH (HELCOM GEAR 13-2016), 10-11 February 2016, Berlin, Germany

MATTERS ARISING FROM OTHER MEETINGS OF RELEVANCE TO GEAR

- The Meeting took note that a draft European Commission proposal for a revised decision on GES criteria has been presented to the MSFD Committee, including guidelines for application rules, with the aim of adoption by June 2016 and that work is ongoing to develop guidance on the MSFD Article 8 assessment.

COORDINATION AND INFORMATION RELATED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ECOSYSTEM APPROACH AND RELATED POLICIES

Programmes of Measures

- The Meeting considered the consolidated version of the Joint documentation and the update of its Annex 3 (**document 3-1**).
- The Meeting took note that Germany can accept Annex 3 if Action 1 on 'Blue-catch crops/mussel farming' is deleted. The Meeting noted the German view that there is a risk that the agreed nutrient reduction targets in HELCOM may be undermined by proposing economic activities such as mussel farming as a solution to the eutrophication problem in the Baltic Sea. The Meeting agreed to delete action 1 from Annex 3.
- The Meeting agreed to the revised Joint Documentation as in document 3-1 Rev 1.
- The Meeting recalled the aim to finalize the Joint document by 28 February and recognized that for several countries the national PoMs will not be ready by this date and also not by 31 March 2016 which is the reporting deadline for MSFD Article 13 while the finalization of national PoMs may have implications for the listing of planned measures as indicated in Annex 1 of the Joint documentation.
- The Meeting agreed that the Joint documentation should be made available through a web-link by 31 March 2016, highlighting on the cover page that Annex 1 contains draft measures since some countries, to be specified, have not yet concluded their national consultation processes.

ACTIVITIES OF RELEVANT HELCOM PROJECTS AND PROCESSES

- The Meeting considered the data views developed by the EUTRO-OPER project and appreciated the possibility to zoom in on specific areas and requested the Secretariat to investigate the possibility to select visualization of national areas and results.
- The Meeting took note of the ongoing development of HELCOM core indicators as informed by the Secretariat. The Meeting noted that for some elements/descriptors there are still gaps in the set of core indicators and urged Lead and co-Lead Countries to prioritize the development of indicators to be able to approve additional core indicators and GES-boundaries at HOD in December 2016 and agree on their use in HOLAS II.
- The Meeting took note of the progress of the HOLAS II project and planned activities in 2016-2018 ([document 4-1](#)) (document 4-2).
- The Meeting noted the wish from Germany to consider the use of assessments under the Habitats Directive and WFD in the HOLAS II work and to address the technical development of assessments tools for biodiversity and hazardous substances at the next State and Conservation meeting.

- The Meeting took note of the results of the questionnaire regarding national consultation processes that was circulated by the Secretariat prior to the meeting with the view to discuss the timing, content and organization of consultations related to the 2nd holistic assessment (document 4-1).
- The Meeting noted that all HELCOM countries responding to the questionnaire or represented at the meeting intend to make use of HOLAS II results as the basis for the 2018 MSFD reporting of Article 8. Several countries expressed the view that what is presented for public consultation should be nationally oriented, e.g. focus on status in national waters. The Meeting recognized the importance to continue discussion on the use of HOLAS II nationally including the details of the outcome consultation process. The Meeting also invited Russia to contribute with their considerations on how they intend to use HOLAS II results.
- The Meeting noted that the HOLAS II first results will be available by mid-2017, allowing countries to use and translate the material and carry out national consultations. For comments provided through the consultation process to be fed into the HOLAS II updating, they should be delivered by the end of February 2018 further noting that the German consultation period is 6 months by law, and that Germany can provide input to the HOLAS II project by May 2018 at the earliest.
- The Meeting discussed the option to have a regional consultation on the HOLAS II report that could be oriented in particular towards an international audience in the Baltic Sea region possibly using the HELCOM web-site as a consultation platform. The Meeting felt that the possibility of regional consultation on HOLAS II could be further explored, recognized that a public event could also draw attention to the work of HELCOM.
- The Meeting discussed the need to develop a common understanding and provide the Contracting Parties with common information on the aims for the consultations and how to manage national consultation processes and their results in finalizing HOLAS II and agreed that this issue should be on the agenda of GEAR 14-2016.

UPCOMING AND EMERGING ISSUES

- The European Union informed the Meeting on the ongoing preparation of the MSFD Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) work programme for years 2016-2018. The Meeting took note of the aim to bring the work programme for approval to the Marine Directors in June 2016.
- The Meeting considered which activities and issues in HELCOM could be of relevance to the planned CIS with a view to sharing this information to create synergies, taking note of the proposal of HELCOM input to MSFD CIS work programme 2016-2018 contained in document 5-1. The Meeting invited Contracting Parties to submit comments to the document to the Secretariat (ullali.zweifel@helcom.fi) **by 19 February 2016**. The input could be further structured according to the updated MSFD CIS work programme if made available in time before the submission deadlines for the MSCG meeting to be held 7 April 2016. A consolidated version will be circulated for an intersessional agreement by GEAR for two weeks. The Meeting agreed that GEAR Chair will follow up on the CIS development in case it will be desirable to provide further input also at a later stage.
- The Meeting recalled that GEAR 12-2015 agreed to address the ongoing revision of environmental targets that is taking place by several EU Member States at the next meeting of the Gear Group.
- The Meeting noted that most countries have not come very far in these discussions but that for environmental targets a more national approach will likely be taken than for GES boundaries. The Meeting still underlined the importance of coordinating and seeking coherence as regards the work on environmental targets and proposed that related activities under the BalticBOOST project (loss and damage to seabed habitats, noise) would be presented and discussed at GEAR 14-2016.

NEXT MEETING OF THE GROUP

- The Meeting agreed to organize the next meeting of the GEAR group on 10-11 May 2016.

6. HELCOM BalticBOOST workshop on the HOLAS II biodiversity assessment tool, 11-12 February 2016, Copenhagen, Denmark

HELCOM BalticBOOST is an EU co-financed project which includes the task to develop a tool for Biodiversity assessment to be used in the HOLAS II project. The project runs from September 2015-December 2016. The development of the tool is to be guided by through two HELCOM workshops with participation of experts from HELCOM Contracting Parties, HOLAS II core team and the State and Conservation Working Group. The first of the two workshops was held on 11-12 February, 2016 at the premises of NIVA Denmark, Copenhagen, Denmark.

The aim of the Workshop was to support the development of a tool for Biodiversity assessment to be used by the HOLAS II building on the outcome of HOLAS II workshop already held on the topic (HOLAS II Biodiversity WS 1-2015, 15 June 2015, Gothenburg, Sweden) and guidance given by the HOLAS II core team.

Main conclusions from the Workshop are related to ([Outcome of the workshop](#)):

- Indicators to be included in the assessment
- Spatial scales of the biodiversity assessment
- Technical requirements for the tool in relation to the HELCOM core indicators
- Aggregation methods for integrated assessment of biodiversity
- Classification in the final output of the assessment
- Estimation of confidence in the assessment
- Tentative 'products' of the biodiversity assessment in HOLAS II

7. THE TWELFTH MEETING OF THE HELCOM-VASAB MARITIME SPATIAL PLANNING WORKING GROUP (HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG 12-2016), 24-25 February 2016, Gdansk, Poland.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL BALTIC ROADMAP 2013-2020

- The Meeting recalled that the Guideline for the implementation of ecosystem-based approach in MSP was agreed by HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG 11-2016 and was informed by the HELCOM Secretariat that HELCOM Heads of Delegation requests the Guideline are consulted by the HELCOM State and Conservation Working Group (S&C) before adoption by HODs. Accordingly the Guideline will also be put forward for adoption by VASAB CSPD/BSR.
- The Meeting invited Ms. Penina Blankett, Co-chair of HELCOM S&C and member of HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG, as well as Co-chairs of the MSP WG to facilitate the upcoming process of additional consultations and emphasized the importance of national coordination between the groups and organizations.
- The Meeting welcomed an offer by Germany to organize a one day HELCOM-VASAB workshop on MSP and ecosystem approach in autumn 2016 and invited members of the MSP WG to provide input to the agenda of the workshop. The Meeting agreed that the workshop could be organized within the "MSP" week in November 2016 (c.f. the second Baltic MSP Forum on 23-24 November 2016).

ASSESSMENTS AND DATA FOR MSP

- The Meeting took note of the outcomes of the meetings of the Baltic Sea Region MSP Data Expert Sub-group held on 1-2 October 2016 and 19-20 January 2016 (document 5-4) presented by the Chair of the Sub-group, Ms. Katarzyna Krzywda, Poland. The next meeting will be held on 12-13 April 2016 in Gothenburg, Sweden.

- The major task of the MSP Data Expert Sub-Group is to elaborate the document describing minimum input and output data requirements for transboundary consultations of the plan. An applicability of the data from some international sources (databases) has been discussed within the Group in order to avoid double work for data collection.

PLANNING FUTURE WORK AND A NEW WORK PLAN

- The Meeting considered the action on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in MSP and vice versa (document 6-1), were positive towards the action as a joint activity between the HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG and HELCOM S&C and agreed, as a first step, to request Contracting Parties/Member States to inform how MPAs are taken into account in the MSP, which could be used to amend information in the country fiches.

8. THE 37TH MEETING OF BALTIC MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION COMMISSION (HELCOM), 10-11 March 2016, Helsinki, Finland

NEXT HELCOM MINISTERIAL MEETING

- The Meeting considered the next Ministerial Meeting, tentatively planned for 2018, using document 3-2 as background for discussion and supported the idea to organise high level sessions on the planned topics with the participation of ministers during 2016 and 2017 to ensure high-level level interest in HELCOM work.
- The Meeting considered potential topics for the Ministerial Meeting and recognized that both 2nd HELCOM holistic assessment of the ecosystem health (HOLAS II) and nutrient reduction scheme provide possibilities to take stock of HELCOM achievements in improving the status of the marine environment and to consider strategic directions for further HELCOM work, while marine litter and costs of degradation of the marine environment are of potential focus, too.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE SUBSIDIARY BODIES

- The Meeting noted that the 'Joint documentation on coordination of Programmes of Measures' was finalized by the Gear meeting as mandated by HOD 49-2015, to be made available via a URL address by 31 March 2016. The Meeting requested Russia to clarify their study reservation on the Joint Documentation as soon as possible.
- The Meeting took note that that Gear group is preparing, upon invitation, an input to the Marine Strategy Framework Directive Common Implementation Strategy (MSFD CIS) work programme for the years 2016-2018 with the intention to submit the input to the meeting of the Marine Strategy Coordination Group on 7 April 2016.
- The Meeting noted that Contracting Parties through the Gear group are sharing information on the use of the 2nd HELCOM holistic assessment of the ecosystem health and have initiated a discussion on how to arrange the consultation on the first version of assessment report that will be prepared by mid-2017 in order to have a common approach. The Meeting stressed the importance to coordinate national time tables so that the joint regional products such as HOLAS II can be made full use of.
- The Meeting recognized that a key issue for the success of the HOLAS II project is to have a set of agreed HELCOM core indicators ready by end of 2016 and encouraged the Lead and co-Lead Countries on indicator development to prioritize this work during 2016.
- The Meeting endorsed organizing the next meeting of GEAR on 10-11 May 2016, Gothenburg, Sweden.

- The Meeting took note of the clarification on the status of the future HELCOM actions (document 4-15) and that all listed actions are agreed except for Regional Baltic Underwater Noise Roadmap 2015-2017. The Meeting considered the revised Underwater Noise Roadmap 2015-2017 containing an additional reference to IMO as proposed by Russia (document 4-17) and adopted the Roadmap.
- The Meeting decided that Pressure WG should be the main group responsible for the Action to 'Assess the role of [internal nutrient reserves][stored nutrients] in the Baltic and potential management measures' with possible contribution by State and Conservation WG as relevant.
- The Meeting requested the identified responsible working groups (document 4-15) to consider how to initiate the actions.

HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG

- The Meeting expressed willingness from the HELCOM side to continue the good co-operation with VASAB and recognized the unique set-up of the HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG as well as its added value in facilitating coherent elaboration and implementation of maritime spatial plans across the borders in the Baltic Sea. The Meeting emphasized the tangible results achieved by the group, including incorporating an ecosystem approach into MSP.
- The Meeting took note of the view by EU that the WG is a good example of sea-basin cooperation on MSP that can also facilitate the work of the Contracting Parties being EU countries to implement the MSP Directive.
- The Meeting supported the prolongation of the work of the HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG.

NOx Emission Control Area (NECA)

- The Meeting considered the draft roadmap for the Baltic Sea and the North Sea NECA as included in document 4-3, introduced by Denmark. The Meeting welcomed the information that the remaining country Finland has also clarified its position and can now agree on the NECA Roadmap included in document 4-3.

State and Conservation Working Group

- The Meeting took note of the introduction by the Co-Chair of State and Conservation WG Mr. Urmaz Lips on the draft Recommendation on Co-operation and coordination of research vessel based monitoring in off-shore areas and procedures for granting permits for monitoring and research activities (document 4-1) and welcomed the information by Russia that they can lift the study reservation on the Recommendation.
- The Meeting adopted the Recommendation on Co-operation and coordination of research vessel based monitoring in off-shore areas and procedures for granting permits for monitoring and research activities as HELCOM Recommendation 37/1.
- The Meeting took note of the introduction by Lead Country Germany on the draft Recommendation on Conservation of Baltic Sea species categorized as threatened according to the 2013 HELCOM red list (document 4-9). The Meeting expressed its appreciation to Germany, and especially Mr. Dieter Boedeker for leading the work and facilitating the consultations on the Recommendation that have taken place since its presentation to HELCOM 36-2015.
- The Meeting took note of the proposal of the European Union to add reference to the Habitats and Birds Directive to the preamble of the draft Recommendation.
- The Meeting noted that all Contracting Parties could accept to add such reference being a factual clarification and agreed to amend paragraph 8 of the preamble of the draft Recommendation by making specific reference to the Habitats and Birds Directive according to inserted text in italics:
 - o BEING AWARE that those Contracting Parties being also EU Member States, have to coordinate their activities regarding threatened species with the implementation of relevant EU Directives, *such as the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and Birds Directive (2009/147/EC)*, and the Common Fisheries Policy as relevant,

- The Meeting adopted the Recommendation on Conservation of Baltic Sea species categorized as threatened according to the 2013 HELCOM red list' as HELCOM Recommendation 37/2.
- In this context, the Meeting also took note of the suggestion by Germany to consider in the next revision of the HELCOM Red lists a more in-depth analysis of the natural dynamics and ecological peculiarities of the Baltic Sea and their influence on the population of all species groups. Currently, for instance, benthos' species, which are naturally rare and/or at the edge of their distribution range were only evaluated when a combination of continuing decline in the population, range, or quantity and quality of their habitats could be detected for the HELCOM area (see e.g. page 26 in BSEP No. 140). Another suggestion for future evaluations is to look deeper into the occurrence and distribution of species, subsequently, to episodic natural processes such as saltwater inflows. Germany asked to come back to these questions at State and Conservation 4-2016, 7-11 April, Schwerin, Germany.
- The Meeting welcomed the offer by Germany to take the lead on the planned development of the HELCOM Recommendation on conservation plans for species, habitats and biotopes which are at risk of extinction according to the 2013 HELCOM Red list.
- The Meeting considered the final draft report 'HELCOM Ecological coherence assessment of the marine protected areas network in the Baltic Sea' that has been developed under the State and Conservation Working Group with financial support from the Nordic Council of Ministers (document 4-12).
- The Meeting noted the following corrections to the report:
 - o clarification on the mentioned 60% target for assessing representatively of landscapes i.e. that is was used in the HELCOM 2010 assessment of ecological coherence, inspired by a European Commission Guidance document for the application of the habitats directive in the marine environment.
 - o correction of Table 15: entry of row 6, right most column with countries, changed from Germany to Denmark. The Meeting furthermore agreed on the deletion of the sentence on page 53, paragraph 2, starting with "The remaining 37%...".
- The Meeting welcomed the results of the ECONET project, approved the 'HELCOM Ecological coherence assessment of the marine protected areas network in the Baltic Sea' including the corrections presented to the Meeting, and agreed to publish the report in the Baltic Sea Environment Proceedings, pending clarification on the study reservation by Russia **by 31 March 2016**.

Aquaculture Recommendation

- The Meeting considered the draft HELCOM Recommendation on sustainable aquaculture (document 4-10) and Finnish comments to the draft (document 4-13) as well as the outcome of the Correspondence work on follow up of the draft Recommendation led by Mr. Marcin Ruciński, Chair of HELCOM FISH (document 4-11) .
- The Meeting considered the revised draft Recommendation (4-10 Rev1, 4-10 Rev2) and adopted the Recommendation as HELCOM Recommendation 37/3.

Implementation follow up

BSAP follow up

- The Meeting took note of the presentation by the Secretariat on the progress of the visualization of the BSAP-follow-up system and noted that the reporting, as agreed by HOD 49-2015, of national actions under the Baltic Sea Action Plan and the Ministerial Declarations 2010 and 2013 is advancing but is not yet completed by all countries (Presentation x).
- The Meeting welcomed that the BSAP explorer provides a transparent presentation of HELCOM achievements and acknowledged that it offers useful information also for the national level, can be used to support prioritization of the actions not yet implemented, and for raising public awareness.

- The Meeting agreed to report the accomplishment of remaining national actions by 31 March 2016 by responding to the questionnaires and requested the countries to inform the Secretariat when the reporting has been finalized.
- The Meeting expressed the wish to make BSAP explorer open in April 2016, after the reporting by 31 March, and agreed to do so even in case of partially incomplete information.

Eutrophication

- The Meeting took note of the information by the Chair of the Pressure WG Mr. Lars Sonesten on the current status of the implementation of the HELCOM nutrient input reduction scheme and In his presentation, the Pressure WG Chair highlighted the importance of further adjustments of the PLUS database, MAI CART OPER project as well as timing, completeness and quality of data collection and reporting.
- The Meeting noted that additional measures and investments have taken place in the coastal countries since the MAI/CART assessment period (up to 2012) and therefore, further reduction of nutrients inputs to the sea can be expected. At the same time, the Meeting recognized that there is a substantial time-lag between the reduction of inputs and positive effects in the marine environment, therefore, any early signals of the recovery are of importance to capture and communicate.
- The Meeting recognized the challenge of achieving a good environmental status of the Baltic Sea with regard to eutrophication and re-confirmed that it is a pan-Baltic issue concerning all Contracting Parties and which needs to be addressed in a holistic way and with involvement of other sectors in HELCOM work.
- The Meeting took note of the outcome of the 'Project on making HELCOM eutrophication assessments operational (EUTRO-OPER)' (January 2014 – December 2015) (document 4-14).
- The Meeting noted that project activities related to indicators will continue as 'EUTRO-OPER EXTENDED' and that financial support from Germany provides resources to cover some of the activities proposed by the Intersessional network of eutrophication experts.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- The Meeting took note of the information by Russia on the preparations of the 17th International Environmental Forum Baltic Sea Day which will be held in St. Petersburg 22-23 March 2016 (document 7-5) and invited all Contracting Parties and stakeholders to attend the event.
- The Meeting took note of the information by Finland on a stakeholder seminar organized by PA Nutri in Gdansk, Poland on 14 April 2016 which will be devoted to the measures to reduce input of nutrients to the Baltic Sea.
- The Meeting took note of the WWF booklet: How to safeguard the seas with ecosystem-based management (document 7-4) and appreciated the efforts to promote understanding of ecosystem approach.
- The Meeting took note of the information from Sweden that in the preparation of the Annual Forum of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR), to be held on 8-9 November 2016, it is now possible to propose topics for seminars until 17 May 2016 (strategyforum@si.se).

NEXT MEETING(S) OF THE COMMISSION

- The Meeting decided to arrange the next meeting of the Commission on 28 February - 1 March 2017 in Helsinki. A preliminary reservation for HELCOM 39-2016 has been made for week 10 in March 2018.