



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature
Conservation

STATE & CONSERVATION
4-2016, 4J-1

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Document title	Draft Terms of reference for the intersessional expert network on benthic habitat monitoring
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Submitted by	Secretariat
Reference	Outcome of STATE & CONSERVATION 3-2015, Paragraph 6J.12

Background

HOD 48-2015 agreed that the further indicator development in HELCOM will be based on a Lead Country approach and appointed national experts and that the development should be taken forward using HELCOM expert groups, projects and networks as a platform for the development of the indicators.

HOD 48-2015 furthermore requested HELCOM groups, projects and networks to prioritize their role as platform for development of indicators and providers of support for HELCOM assessments and to make arrangements for the work as necessary.

To accommodate the new request, the Terms of reference of the intersessional expert network on benthic habitat monitoring has been revised in consultation with the Chair and participants of the network.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- endorse the terms of reference of the intersessional expert network on benthic habitat monitoring.

Draft Terms of reference Intersessional expert network on benthic habitat monitoring

The duties of the expert network are to:

- A. Develop monitoring and survey methods suitable for different benthic biotope and habitat types, including to:
 - Share information on and summarize existing and planned national benthic habitat monitoring, methods and programmes
 - Review existing methods and techniques for benthic habitat monitoring for extent and quality of habitats and biotopes
 - Further develop monitoring and survey methods suitable for different habitat types
 - Develop proposal for harmonization of methods and develop joint HELCOM guidelines for methods and monitoring strategies, building on what has been developed in the BALSAM project and other relevant projects.
 - Consider in the development of methods and guidelines the different benthic habitat monitoring needs of e.g. the BSAP, MSFD, HD, MSP
 - Strengthen the development of benthic habitat indicators in close cooperation with other HELCOM initiatives.
- B. Act as a platform for discussion and review of HELCOM indicators on benthic communities and habitats being developed by Lead Countries and appointed experts;
- C. Update the core indicator reports at regular intervals as decided in HELCOM;
- D. Support timely and quality assured delivery of indicator based assessments of benthic communities and habitats;
- E. Provide expert input to HELCOM work related to benthic communities, habitats and biotopes.

To fulfill these duties the expert network will in the period 2015-2018:

1. Develop proposal for harmonization of methods and develop joint HELCOM guidelines for monitoring of benthic biotopes, based on the work to develop the HELCOM pre-core indicator on the distribution, extent and patterns of benthic biotopes, including to:

Prepare by STATE & CONSERVATION 4- and 5-2016

- A summary of existing and planned national benthic habitat monitoring, methods, programmes and projects
- A work plan on how to achieve harmonization of habitat monitoring methods in the Baltic Sea area
- Review and comparison of monitoring needs for different relevant policies

Achieve by end of 2016:

- An update of the BALSAM catalogue on monitoring and survey methods, by widening the expertise through participation from all Contracting Parties of HELCOM, and with the aim of feeding into the HELCOM Monitoring Manual
2. Support Lead Countries in the further development of HELCOM core and pre-core indicators on benthic communities and habitats, namely,
 - a. in the development of GES-boundaries for the indicators for which the GES-boundaries have not yet been adopted with the aim of adoption by the end of 2016 at the latest,

- b. review the further development of pre-core indicators according to the prioritizations of STATE & CONSERVATION 2-2015 and GEAR 11-2015.
 - c. coordinate the work plan of the expert network with Lead countries on development of benthic related core, pre core- and candidate indicators harmonized with other HELCOM activities such as HELCOM BalticBOOST and TAPAS project.
3. Support in cooperation with Lead countries and appointed experts the update of the core indicator reports and indicator evaluations on benthic communities and habitats by early 2017 and further update the reports as relevant by early 2018, or as otherwise agreed in the HOLAS II project;

The network will consist of experts nominated by the Contracting Parties and will be open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures. The network will report to and receive guidance from the State and Conservation Working Group.

The mode of work for the expert network will be mainly via correspondence and online meetings facilitated by the Secretariat, with physical meetings being organized as needed. A Chair for the network will be elected. The products will be handled at HELCOM Meeting Portal workspaces dedicated for the aim. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the network.