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Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature
Conservation

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Background

The project for the development of the Second Holistic Assessment of Ecosystem Health in the Baltic Sea will give an update of the environmental status of the Baltic Sea and evaluate progress towards reaching the goal of Good Environmental Status of the Baltic Sea.

The HOLAS II project was initiated in December 2014. The progress of the project within its first 10 months was summarized for STATE & CONSERVATION 3-2015 ([Document 4J-4](#)). The current document summarizes the progress of the HOLAS II project with a focus on developments since then and plans forward.

Action required

The Meeting is invited to take note of the information.

The HOLAS II project in brief

HOLAS II will give an update on the overall state of ecosystem health in the Baltic Sea. The assessment will follow up on the goals of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, and will be developed so that the results will support reporting under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) by those Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention that are also EU member states.

Methods, tools and data arrangements for the assessment are developed as part of the project, with important contributions from the supporting EU co-funded projects BalticBOOST and TAPAS.

The main components of the assessment are:

- **Distribution of human activities and pressures** in the Baltic Sea. Cumulative impacts are assessed using the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact Index.
- **Assessment of good environmental status** using core indicators, and integrated assessments of Biodiversity, Eutrophication, Hazardous substances and an assessment of Maritime Activities.
- **Economic and social analyses** to support regional assessments of the use of marine waters and cost of degradation.
- **Measures** to reach good environmental status.

Based on preliminary discussions at HOLAS II 1-2014 and HOLAS II 2-2015 it was proposed that main results of the assessment are published in a circa 90 pages report available in print and for download as pdf, while more detailed information will be presented as associated products in the form of web based information, downloadable fact sheets and thematic reports, still to be defined.

Table 1. Tentative timeline overview of the HOLAS II project.

	2014		2015				2016				2017				2018	
	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2
Planning and project initiation																
Outline of the assessment																
Indicator development- Core indicators																
Propose and test indicators and spatial data sets to be included																
Data arrangements																
Tool and method development																
Final data submission for inclusion in HOLAS II																
Agree assessment methods to be applied (HOD 51-2016)																
2017 assessments																
Evaluation of assessment results																
Comments and review by WGs of the first assessment in spring 2017																
GEAR to consider with a view to national consultation, spring 2017																
First assessment results (HOD June 2017)																
Updates as needed																
Writing and evaluation																
Updated report, June 2018 (HOD)																

Summary of recent activities and plans forward

Supporting projects

A considerable share of the development work required to meet the goals of HOLAS II takes place within the HELCOM coordinated EU co-financed [project BalticBOOST](#), and since January 2016 also within the [TAPAS project](#). The TAPAS project will run for 18 months and will contribute by developing:

- Approaches to assess the spatial distribution of human activities and pressure using the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact Index,
- Data sets on ecosystem component layers needed for this assessment and the development of the pre-core indicator 'Distribution pattern and extent of benthic biotope',
- The economic and social analyses,
- Web interfaces for data arrangements.

Recent meetings

The Fourth meeting of the HOLAS II Core team was held on 24-25 November, 2015 ([HOLAS II 4-2015](#)). Among other things, the meeting agreed on spatial data sets to be used in the assessment of human activities and pressures based on the proposed revised Annex III of the MSFD, made the first plans for how to assess the pressure-related descriptors in HOLAS II, and considered the proposed analyses of economic and social analyses. The meeting also covered conceptual work on the hazardous substances assessment.

The progress of HOLAS II was presented to HOD 49-2015 on 10 December, 2015 ([document 4-5](#)).

The assessment of human activities and pressures

Data sets to be included

A workshop to support the first development of the BSP II was held on 13 November 2015 in Helsinki, Finland in order to support and provide guidance to the development work (HOLAS II Pressure Index WS 1-2015). The workshop considered and proposed spatial data sets to be included in the analyses, concerning pressures and human activities as well as ecosystem components and planned the way forward on how to develop the impact weight scoring. The final list was agreed on by HOLAS II 4-2015.

A process is currently ongoing at the Secretariat to collate the spatial data sets which will be used in the assessment. The updated information will be available in the HELCOM Data and Map service and serve the assessments within HOLAS II as well as other HELCOM activities.

Main part of the spatial data sets on pressures and human activities are foreseen to be obtained directly at the regional scale by the aid of ongoing projects and existing HELCOM expert groups. In parallel, a **national data request for data on human activities and pressures is ongoing** with a deadline on **15 April**, with the aim to fill identified data gaps in HOLAS II as well as support other HELCOM purposes such as MSP. A **national data call for data on benthic species and biotopes** as supervised by State and Conservation is currently finalized.

Development of the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact Index

The further development of the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact index will be conducted as part of the HELCOM TAPAS project. A TAPAS workshop to support the development of the Pressure and Impact index was held on 28-29 January, 2016 ([HELCOM TAPAS Pressure Index WS 1-2016](#)). A key focus of the workshop

was to plan for setting the impact scores that will be used in the Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact index in order to give the expected impact on different pressures on key ecosystem components. The impact scores are proposed to be based on literature information where such is sufficiently available and by structurally collated expert knowledge for other variable combinations.

The assessment of good environmental status

The status assessments will build on the HELCOM core indicators, as developed within HELCOM and by ICES for commercial fish (under the assessment of MSFD Descriptor 3). Some core indicators still need to be further developed during 2016 in order to ensure that quantitative definitions of GES are available and continued development of pre-core and candidate indicators is important to fill gaps in the current set of core indicators. The assessment of maritime activities will build on information and data from HELCOM Maritime Assessment, planned to be finalized by the end of the 2016. In addition, marine litter, underwater noise and non-indigenous species are assessed.

The assessment approaches to be used by HOLAS II are to be agreed on within 2016, in order to carry out the first assessments in spring 2017. In order to support this development, workshops to support the development of integrated assessment tools are being held as part of the BalticBOOST project, for Hazardous substances on 2-4 February, 2016 ([HELCOM BalticBOOST HZ WS 1-2016](#)) and for Biodiversity on 11-12 February, 2016 ([HELCOM BalticBOOST Biodiv WS 1-2016](#)) (see documents 4J-7 and 4J-8 to this meeting).

The assessments will primarily be based on data from the period 2011-2016. The deadline for data to be used in the assessment is September 2016 (see document 3MA_4 to this meeting).

Economic and social analyses

The assessment of economic and social impacts will mainly be taken forward as part of the TAPAS project within 2016. The project is led by SYKE, Finland, with SEI Tallinn, Estonia as a co-lead. In addition, a project researcher is hired at the Secretariat to support the work on part time during 2016. The project will focus on developing a data collation process for regional economic data and outlining a draft economic assessment on a selected theme at regional scale based on the marine water account approach and the ecosystem services approach. A workshop planned to focus on assessing the use of marine waters is planned for 11-12 May, 2016 in Helsinki, Finland.

Next HOLAS II Core team meeting

The next meeting of the HOLAS II Core Team ([HOLAS II 5-2016](#)) will take place on 26-28 April, 2016 at the HELCOM Secretariat. The meeting will guide the development of assessment tools and frameworks to be applied, plan the assessment of pressure-based descriptors, and initiate the plans on how to present the results from HOLAS II.