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Submitted by	Chair of IN-BENTHIC

Background

The intersessional network on benthic habitat monitoring was established at the first meeting of State and Conservation WG (STATE 1-2015) with the aim to follow up the activities related to monitoring of benthic habitats and especially continue development of monitoring methodology and related indicators started by WP6 of BALANCE Project.

All HELCOM Contracting Parties, except Denmark and Russia, have nominated members to the network that has held on-line meetings and communicated via correspondence.

The first meeting of the intersessional expert network on benthic habitat monitoring was held 16-17 February in Tallinn, Estonia. The full outcome of the meeting is available in the meeting portal [IN-BENTHIC 1-2016](#). The meeting elected Mr. Georg Martin, EMI, as chair of the network. The meeting considered next steps needed to fulfill the requests of the terms of reference (see meeting document 4J-1).

Important highlights of the discussions of IN-BENTHIC 1-2016:

1. The meeting discussed the revision and proposals for amendments of ToR. The intersessional network was originally established to cover topics of benthic habitat monitoring, and current requests have broadened the scope of the network to also cover other aspects of benthic monitoring and assessment e.g. support in development of benthic core indicators.
2. The meeting agreed on a working programme with allocation of responsibilities to specific experts containing for example
 - Chair to develop a roadmap by autumn on how to achieve harmonization of habitat monitoring methods in the Baltic Sea based on the summary of existing plans and methods,
 - Aquabiota is leading the updating monitoring guidelines developed in the BALSAM project based on comments received from Contracting Parties with the aim to submit update guidelines to STATE & CONSERVATION 5-2016.
3. The Meeting discussed the request from STATE & CONSERVATION 2-2015 on clarifying the definition of 'landscape' and 'detailed landscape mapping' and recommends to use the terminology as defined in HELCOM HUB, and not to use the term 'landscape' as this is not a requirement in any legal framework, and noted that the term 'predominant habitat' in the MSFD context is defined as EUNIS Level 2 which corresponds to HELCOM HUB Level 3.
4. Next meetings will be conducted with frequency of one meeting per year with option to have several Skype meetings and written communication before each S&C meetings.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the Outcome of IN-BENTHIC 1-2016.