



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature
Conservation

STATE & CONSERVATION
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Document title	Report on the work of the ad hoc HELCOM Seal Expert Group
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Submitted by	Chair of HELCOM Seal Expert Group

Background

During the last couple of years, the meetings of the ad hoc HELCOM Seal Expert Group have been well attended by managers and researchers from Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Poland, Russia and Estonia and only intermittently by other Contracting Parties.

The group's responsibilities are outlined in HELCOM Recommendation 27/28-2 and among the current focus points are assessments of the management plans for seals which need to be revised or developed according to the Recommendation in order to secure management of the seal management units in accordance with the Recommendation.

The effectiveness of Recommendation 27/28-2 is up for review this year. Sweden will lead this work to assess how well the Recommendation has been incorporated by the Contracting Parties and how the expert group itself fulfills its mandate as outlined in the Recommendation. A draft evaluation of the Recommendation will be prepared in advance of SEAL 10-2016 with the view of finalizing the evaluation at the meeting.

Another important focus point at recent Seal EG meetings has been the development of indicators for assessing the status of the environment according to the Baltic Sea Action Plan and in agreement with the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The core of this work is carried out by Lead Countries while the Seal EG reviews the development plans for marine mammal related indicators.

Ongoing work includes an integrated data structure for marine mammal GES assessments, carried out by the Seal members under the BalticBOOST project. Also, guidelines for monitoring of abundance, distribution (on land as well as at sea) which provide the relevant data are currently being updated or produced.

Under the development of indicators and monitoring of the population condition of marine mammals in the form of nutritional and reproductive status (led by Sweden) there has been disagreement regarding the use of blubber thickness and reproductive status as indicators by Seal members from Poland and Germany. Germany maintains a study reservation on these indicators. This issue needs to be resolved for the work to proceed. The Seal EG health team has been requested to propose indicators to assess the health status of mammals.

The Seal Expert Group has taken initiative to work on incidental catch of marine mammals in coordination with the HELCOM Fish group.

At SEAL 9-2015, Mr. Anders Galatius, Denmark, was re-elected as Chair and Mr. Olle Karlsson, Sweden, as vice-Chair of HELCOM Seal for the years 2016-2018. SEAL 9-2015 drafted Terms of Reference for SEAL 10-2016 for consideration by the State and Conservation Working Group (Outcome SEAL 9-2015, Annex 2). SEAL 10-2016 will take place on 5-7 October, in Hel Marine Station, Poland.

[The Outcome of SEAL 9-2015](#) is available on the HELCOM Meeting Portal and The Terms of Reference for SEAL 10-2016 (Annex 2 of the outcome) have been attached to this document.

Action requested

- take note of the Outcome of SEAL 9-2015
- endorse the attached draft Terms of reference of SEAL 10-2016

Draft Terms of Reference for SEAL 10-2016 (Poland, 5-7 October 2016)

The Seal EG will during its tenth meeting, and in the intersessional period leading up to the meeting;

1. Review Recommendation 27-28/2:
 - a. Lead Country Sweden to prepare a draft assessment of the effectiveness of the Recommendation 27-28/2 by [30 days in advance of SEAL 10-2016].
 - b. Distribution team to provide background information to support the assessment of paragraph 5 of Recommendation 27-28/2 **by 29 April 2016**.
2. Indicators:
 - a. Seal EG expert teams to review the indicator report intersessionally and support Lead Countries in the development of HELCOM core and candidate indicators on seals and harbour porpoise, through written consultations or meetings as needed,
 - b. The Contracting Parties to provide 2015 data, including for abundance, in advance of SEAL 10-2016, and carry out updates of the relevant core indicator evaluations at the meeting with the view to provide updates by early 2017 at the latest, or as otherwise agreed in the HOLAS II project,
 - c. Health team to propose indicators to assess the health status of mammals.
3. Harbour seal LRL related to population structure:
 - a. Tero Härkönen, Sweden, and Morten Olsen, Denmark, to report to the SEAL 10-2016 meeting.
4. Management plans:
 - a. Review new and updated national management plans, to be circulated for discussion at SEAL 10-2016.
5. Databases:
 - a. Intersessional development through the BalticBOOST project to be presented at SEAL 10-2016.
6. Monitoring:
 - a. Transfer the existing monitoring guidelines for abundance of seals to the new template (Anders Galatius), prepare guidelines for distribution of seals (Anders Galatius, Tero Härkönen) and guidelines for offshore distribution of seals (Mart and Ivar Jussi) as agreed by SEAL 9-2015.
 - b. Health team: support Lead Country Sweden in the development of monitoring guidelines on nutritional and reproductive status of marine mammals as proposed by State and Conservation 3-2015.
7. Mitigation measures for seal fisheries interaction:
 - a. Pending out of the Fish Group meeting in May 2016, Finn Larsen, Denmark, to consider making a review of studies on seal-safe fishing gears.