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Background

This document contains a brief summary of the outcome of HELCOM FISH-PRO II 3-2016 (Riga 16-18 of February) and a detailed response to the still open issues on the finalization of the HELCOM coastal fish related core indicators (next page). The full [outcome of FISH-PRO II 3-2016](#) is available on the HELCOM Meeting Portal.

Brief summary of HELCOM FISH-PRO II 3-2016

The meeting was focused on planning the next thematic assessment for coastal fish, and continued development of HELCOM core indicators on coastal fish. The meeting can briefly be summarized as follows:

- Experts from Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Germany and Denmark are still lacking national support to take part in the work of HELCOM FISH-PRO II.
- There is also still a lack of funding for coastal fish monitoring in Lithuania, Germany and Denmark. In Germany and Denmark monitoring is project based without long-term funding plans.
- There seems to be a need for improved communication between national State and Conservation contacts and coastal fish experts in several Contracting Parties.
- The next thematic assessment is planned to be finalized during the first half of 2017 including updated indicators until 2015 (possibly 2016). The assessment report will focus on the state of knowledge concerning factors impacting coastal fish indicators, current status of coastal fish communities (based on core indicators) and review of potential cost-effective measures for coastal fish.
- Updated core indicators and status assessment (data until 2015) for coastal fish will be submitted for use in HOLAS II in late 2016. An update of indicators and status assessment for HOLAS II (data until 2016) will be submitted in early 2017.
- The development of additional size-related core indicators was discussed. No decision on proposing additional indicators was made.
- Presentations were given from national recreational fisheries projects and projects relating to ecosystem service valuation for coastal fish.
- The outcome of Essential fish habitats workshop which was held in Öregrund on 2-4th of June, 2015, was presented.
- FISH-PRO II will develop a proposal for the continuation of the project at its next meeting in 2017 and State and Conservation was invited to provide their view on potential future objectives for FISH-PRO II to support the development of the project proposal.
- The next meeting will be held in Tallin, Estonia, 13-15 of February 2017.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- take note of the information
- clarify open national issues regarding coastal fish indicators
- guide ongoing development work on indicators as appropriate.
- provide suggestions on potential future objectives for FISH-PRO II to support the development of a project proposal for the continuation of FISH-PRO II, as requested by FISH-PRO II 3-2016.

Progress report from HELCOM FISH-PRO II on the continued development of the core indicators for coastal fish

Below in bold are the still open issues regarding the HELCOM coastal fish related core indicators, and in italics the response and planned actions of the FISH-PRO II group.

Open national issues

Coastal fish key species

- Study reservation by Germany on the applicability of the GES-boundary as monitoring data to verify the boundary is not available.

German experts are contacting national State and Conservation experts to resolve this issue

- View by Sweden on the combination of baseline and trends approach for GES in the same sub-basin should be addressed in the future

The FISH-PRO II 3-2016 meeting stated that the more data (monitoring areas) are included within an assessment unit, the higher the confidence of the status assessment of that unit. Difference between the approaches will be reflected in the associated confidence assessment, which is foreseen to give a higher confidence for the base-line approach (long time-series) compared to the trends approach (shorter time-series). In summary, the confidence will be higher the more data is included, so the meeting didn't see a conflict between the two alternative (and comparable) approaches to assess the status of coastal fish communities. In a few years' time, it will be possible to apply the base-line approach to more data series as a result of longer time-series over time.

Coastal fish key functional groups

- Study reservation from Lithuania that in Lithuania cyprinids are very few in the coastal zone so the use of this parameter in the indicators needs to be further clarified

Lithuanian experts are investigating this further during spring 2016

Ongoing development work

- Consider developing a table communicating which key species was used for which assessment unit in the evaluation (questions have been raised by report-readers)

This will be included in the upcoming assessment of coastal fish

- Confidence of the evaluation: consider if this could be displayed using a map as it is stated in the current report that confidence varies between regions

This was discussed during the HELCOM FISH-PRO II 3-2016 meeting in Riga 16-18 of February. In the coming thematic assessment for coastal fish the confidence in assessment per assessment unit will be displayed, either as an additional column in a table summarizing the status across monitoring areas and assessment units, or as a separate map. The concept for assessing the confidence will be further developed during 2016 and will rely either on the questionnaire planned for use in HOLAS II as developed within the BalticBOOST project.

- Relevance of the indicator, most important pressures

This is an important but still very challenging issue for coastal fish. As coastal fish communities have a local population structure and local responses to pressures, the most important pressures likely differ across areas. To date, there are studies showing the importance of climate, eutrophication, habitat availability, fishing and predation from cormorants for coastal fish indicator status. Even if there are on-going attempts, there are currently no studies using a more overall approach to consider all potential pressures in concert over the

whole Baltic Sea region. We believe that a meta-analysis approach combined with modelling work is needed to approach this challenge. Hence, to date we cannot conclude which pressures are of highest significance in general for the coastal fish indicators. This instead needs to be addressed from case to case considering for example the role of climate, eutrophication, habitat availability and fishing. A review of this and the current state of knowledge will be presented in the next thematic assessment. Potentially, this work could also consider the impact scores developed for the Baltic Sea pressure and impact index within HOLAS II, e.g. based on the expert survey planned to be conducted within the TAPAS project during 2016 (provided that the time-lines can be aligned).

- Develop data-arrangements

This is already initiated within WP 1.2 of the BalticBOOST project. More specifically, we are currently setting up a database for coastal fish core indicators (acronym COOL). The database will include information on for example area, assessment unit, country, data provider, species and status for the coastal fish indicators. During autumn 2016, the database will be updated with indicator data until 2015, and during coming years, each Contracting Party will be responsible for updating the indicator data periodically. The outline, structure and arrangements for updating the coastal fish core indicator database (COOL) was agreed by the HELCOM FISH-PRO II meeting in Riga 2016.

The COOL-database will, due to computational difficulties, not harbour algorithms by which the status of the indicators could be directly calculated and assessed. Currently, we hence have to rely on the assessments of GES outside of the database, and the database will mainly be used to store indicator information including information on the latest status of the indicators.

Aggregation principles

In the next thematic assessment include a concept for how to aggregate coastal fish indicator results from different monitoring areas within the same assessment units, and across assessment units. This concept will be further developed during 2016 and will either rely on "the majority rule", or if possible (pending the time-line of the processes can be aligned) the approaches to be implemented within the HOLAS II.