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## Background

The HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2013 adopted the [HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy](#) which contains as Annex 2 the HELCOM Data and Information Strategy. The HELCOM Data and Information Strategy lays out principles for data availability in relation to HELCOM assessment products.

This document recalls the HELCOM Data and Information Strategy and outlines issues that have been raised in making the data publically available in relation to biodiversity assessments in the second HELCOM holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea.

## Action requested

The Meeting is invited to

- recall what HELCOM Data and Information Strategy states in relation to making available data used in assessments
- take note that national data sources used for biodiversity themes currently includes both regular monitoring data and also data from other sources such as non-governmental institutes resulting in possible limitations for re-use of data thus contradicting the open data policy defined in HELCOM Data and information strategy and take action and coordinate nationally to make sure that data reported to HELCOM indicators is not restricted.

## Data availability principles

### HELCOM Data and Information Strategy

The [HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy](#) contains the HELCOM Data and Information Strategy as its Annex 2, which provides the principles for data management and access to the data held in the regional data pool as a result of joint coordinated monitoring and other data compilation activities. The HELCOM Data and Information Strategy explicitly defines that all HELCOM monitoring data should be openly accessible via web services or as downloadable dataset.

The HELCOM Data and Information Strategy specifically details the following principles:

(para 1.1) The HELCOM data and information activities should make possible reliable assessment as described in the HELCOM Assessment system. The HELCOM data and information activities should facilitate access of the general public to environmental information and this is done e.g. by making spatial data and information available in the HELCOM Map and Data Service on the HELCOM web page

(para 2.1) HELCOM data and information system rely on data derived from publicly funded monitoring programmes by the Contracting Parties but the Contracting Parties may also report data collected by private bodies, e.g. compliance monitoring related to environmental permitting

(para 4.1) All HELCOM monitoring data should be openly accessible online via web services or downloading functionality using common standards and ensuring that relevant quality control and validation procedures are implemented.

(para 4.2) Access to data contained in working documents presented to HELCOM or its subsidiary bodies can be restricted.

It should be noted that the HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy guides all the work related to data collection activities within HELCOM framework, relating to all assessment themes. Thus the approach on making indicator data publicly available applies to all HELCOM data. The data should be made available on a relevant aggregation level which is to be defined for specific topics.

### Public consultation and information under the EU MSFD (Art 19)

The HELCOM Contracting Parties being also EU member states that intend to use the indicator evaluations and assessments results for MSFD reporting purposes are to meet the requirements of the EU MSFD Article 19 on 'Public consultation and information', which states 19(3);

With regard to access to environmental information, Directive 2003/4/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2003 on public access to environmental information shall apply.

[...] Member States shall provide the Commission [...], in particular the review of the status of the marine environment in the Community under Article 20(3)(b), with access and use rights in respect of data and information resulting from the initial assessments made pursuant to Article 8 and from the monitoring programmes established pursuant to Article 11.

Therefore it should be noted that in case HELCOM indicator is planned to be used for MSFD reporting purposes, the Art 19 requirement on public access can be a requirement for HELCOM core indicators.

### Concerns on data availability and access noted during 2016 regional biodiversity data collation efforts

For the purpose of timely delivery of biodiversity related monitoring data for HELCOM core indicator calculations for the second HELCOM holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea carried out in the HOLAS II project, regional biodiversity datasets have been collated during 2016. Biodiversity data has been collated both from existing databases and by developing new regional databases for which ad hoc datacalls have

been issued. The work to collate regional datasets based on the Contracting Parties submissions have encountered issues regarding the options for making the data publically available, and suitable formats and levels of aggregation still need to be agreed on.

HELCOM Secretariat initiated the development of thematic biodiversity databases for coastal fish, birds and seals under EU co-financed HELCOM project BalticBOOST WP1.2 (see document 3MA-3). The development of the regional biodiversity databases at HELCOM has taken the data requirements of the core indicators into account. The data models applied in the databases have been developed to cater for the mandatory parameters of the core indicators. During 2016 ad hoc data calls were made by the HELCOM Secretariat to the HELCOM State and Conservation Contacts, in order to collate the first datasets to be included into the databases (See Annex 1, Annex 2). Once developed and operationalized, the databases developed through BalticBOOST for coastal fish, birds and seals are to be included in the regular HELCOM data collection framework.

The data submitted in response to the data calls in 2016 contains both data from regular national monitoring data and data stemming from non-governmental sources. It should be noted, that the data calls (Annex 1, Annex 2) specified that Contracting Parties that wish to submit data from non-regular monitoring sources can do so, however that it should be noted that the data will be used to create regional HELCOM data sets that will be made publically available on a relevant aggregation scale.

In response to the 2016 data calls the HELCOM Secretariat received comments by some non-governmental data providers that the submitted raw data can not to be made publically available. This is particularly the case for several data for birds and coastal fish. Additionally, it has been stated that for seals and birds, issues of sensitivity are also a reason for not wishing to make underlying data available e.g. exact location of haul-out sites and nesting areas. It should be noted that submission of restricted data is contradicting the open data policy defined in HELCOM Data and information strategy.

Some possible solutions to making the data available are however available:

- For birds, a method for flagging data from non-governmental sources is under consideration. A suitable level of aggregation on which the data can be made publically available is to be determined.
- For seals, SEAL EG 10-2016 opened the reporting format, in particularly related to the level of aggregation that should be used in reporting. Intersessional data format drafting group was established to finalize the format in order to be able to submit updated data request as soon as possible with revised format based on proper aggregation level which would be suitable for the distribution indicator.

## Annex 1.

## Datacall - waterbird core indicators

HELCOM Secretariat requests Contracting Parties to HELCOM to report abundance data on waterbirds, to be submitted by **30 April 2016** to the Secretariat. Data are to be submitted to HELCOM Secretariat Data Administrator Joni Kaitaranta ([joni.kaitaranta@helcom.fi](mailto:joni.kaitaranta@helcom.fi), +358 46 850 9206) who is also to be approached regarding any questions on the data call.

**NB: Data submission template provided as separate attachment file “AbundanceCoastalTemplate.xlsx”**

**RATIONALE FOR DATA REQUEST**

HELCOM Secretariat requests data on waterbird surveys with the aim of calculating the status assessment for the HELCOM core indicators on waterbirds;

- Abundance of waterbirds in the wintering season, and
- Abundance of waterbirds in the breeding season,

as an input to HOLAS II and to support other HELCOM activities for policy purposes.

The data requested to be submitted to HELCOM by the Contracting Parties will be used to calculate the status of the two waterbird core indicators. The indicator evaluations will be delivered as input to the HELCOM second holistic assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) by the end of 2016. An update of the indicator evaluations is planned to be carried out in 2017 with the aim to include offshore data from 2015 coordinated winter survey and monitoring data for 2016.

The waterbird core indicators calculate the status using a modern baseline approach starting in 1991. Providing the abundance estimation data for the full period is requested to ensure that the latest available data is included in the indicator calculation from all Contracting Parties and for all the relevant species.

**DATA USE POLICY**

The requested data will be compiled to a Baltic wide HELCOM dataset.

According to [HELCOM data and information strategy](#), all data collected for HELCOM assessment purposes should be openly accessible. The unrestricted datasets submitted by national data providers will be made publicly available as a HELCOM dataset using HELCOM bird database (see further details below) and [HELCOM Map and Data service](#) as relevant. Contracting Parties may also report data collected by private bodies, e.g. compliance monitoring related to environmental permitting. For transparency and replicability of the assessment, the underlying data should be openly available on a relevant level of aggregation and documented with proper metadata on lineage and sources. Each compiled dataset will contain a metadata sheet containing lineage information on national data providers. In case reuse and redistribution of national- or private data has to be restricted according to conditions applied by the data provider, the restrictions should be flagged by the national data provider in both observation metadata and if relevant the spatial area or scale that it applies to.

**DATA REPORTING**

Data should be reported using the **provided excel template** for the selected species. Primarily, raw data should be reported. Guidance on reporting has been developed by the Lead Country experts working on the core indicators.

In cases when data is not readily available to be reported in the format primarily requested Contracting Parties are advised that data can be submitted in other formats for the purposes of this data call, however Contracting Parties are advised that future data submissions are to be made in the format relevant for the HELCOM bird database. In cases where Contracting Parties are not able to provide data in the requested format, the planned reporting format should be informed to the HELCOM Secretariat at first convenience. Any spreadsheet (e.g. xls or ods), database (e.g. dbf) or text (e.g. csv or tab) format that can be read in general office spreadsheet software such as Microsoft Excel can be used. Contracting Parties are further advised that in cases where their resources do not allow to filter for the specified species, all species available can be reported.

#### HELCOM BIRD DATABASE

Data reported by Contracting Parties through this data call will serve as a first entry of data into the new HELCOM bird database. The database is currently being developed in the project [HELCOM BalticBOOST](#) work package 1.2. The HELCOM bird database to be hosted at the HELCOM Secretariat, is being developed to cater for bird survey data from both the coastal- and the offshore areas of the Baltic Sea. The data model for coastal data will be based on the format used in Wetlands International and for the offshore data the format is based on the ESAS format.

The database will be used to support the Contracting Parties of HELCOM that are also EU Member States in the reporting on EU MSFD Article 8 in 2018 to provide a publically available snapshot of the data used in the assessment. The snapshot of the data underlying the status assessment will provide aggregated values for specified spatial units and the species of relevance.

#### REQUESTED DATASAT: SCOPE AND SPECIFICATIONS

The temporal coverage of the activity should last from 1.1.1991 until 31.12.2015.

The dataset should contain the following information:

Dataset	Attribute and unit
1. Coastal survey – wintering period	Abundance: individuals of selected species
2. Coastal survey – breeding period	Abundance: breeding pairs or individuals (+ conversion factors) of selected species

## Annex 2.

## Data call – Seal abundance and distribution core indicators

HELCOM requests the Contracting Parties to HELCOM to report abundance and distribution data on seals, to be submitted by **5 October 2016** to the HELCOM Secretariat. Data are to be submitted to HELCOM Secretariat Data coordinator Joni Kaitaranta ([joni.kaitaranta@helcom.fi](mailto:joni.kaitaranta@helcom.fi), +358 46 850 9206) who is also to be approached regarding any questions on the data call.

**NB: Data submission template provided as separate attachment file  
“HELCOM\_SEAL\_AbundanceDistribution\_template.xlsx”**

**RATIONALE FOR DATA REQUEST**

HELCOM Secretariat requests data on seal monitoring with the aim of calculating the status assessment for the HELCOM core indicators on seals;

- Distribution of Baltic seals, and
- Population trends and abundance of seals,

as an input to HOLAS II and to support other HELCOM activities for policy purposes.

The data requested to be submitted to HELCOM by the Contracting Parties will be used to calculate the status of the two seal core indicators. The indicator evaluations will be delivered as input to the HELCOM second holistic assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS II) by the end of 2016. An update of the indicator evaluations is planned to be carried out in 2017 with the aim to include offshore data for 2016.

The seal indicators should be calculated based on all the coordinated Baltic-wide surveys and all available data.

If historical data has been provided to the HELCOM core indicator calculation in the previous update cycle, only update of latest years not included in the previous indicator assessment is requested.

**DATA USE POLICY**

The requested data will be compiled to a Baltic wide HELCOM dataset.

According to [HELCOM data and information strategy](#), all data collected for HELCOM assessment purposes should be openly accessible. The unrestricted datasets submitted by national data providers will be made publicly available as a HELCOM dataset using HELCOM seal database (see further details below) and [HELCOM Map and Data service](#) as relevant. The Contracting Parties may also report data collected by private bodies, e.g. compliance monitoring related to environmental permitting. For transparency and replicability of the assessment, the underlying data should be openly available on a relevant level of aggregation and documented with proper metadata on lineage and sources. Each compiled dataset will contain a metadata sheet containing lineage information on national data providers. In case reuse and redistribution of national- or private data has to be restricted according to conditions applied by the data provider, the restrictions should be flagged by the national data provider in both observation metadata and if relevant the spatial area or scale that it applies to.

**DATA REPORTING**

Data should be reported using the **provided excel template** for the selected species. Guidance on reporting has been developed by the Lead Country experts working on the core indicators and developing the HELCOM Seal database in HELCOM BalticBOOST project.

#### HELCOM SEAL DATABASE

Data reported by the Contracting Parties through this data call will serve as a first entry of data into the new HELCOM seal database. The database is currently being developed in the project [HELCOM BalticBOOST](#) work package 1.2. The HELCOM seal database to be hosted at the HELCOM Secretariat, is being developed to cater for seal distribution and abundance data based on the format developed with the seal experts and taking into account synergies with equivalent OSPAR format.

The database will be used to support the Contracting Parties of HELCOM that are also EU Member States in the reporting on EU MSFD Article 8 in 2018 to provide a publically available snapshot of the data used in the assessment. The snapshot of the data underlying the status assessment will provide aggregated values for specified spatial units and the species of relevance.

#### REQUESTED DATASET: SCOPE AND SPECIFICATIONS

The temporal coverage of the activity should last from beginning of surveys until 31.12.2015. If historical data has been provided to the HELCOM core indicator calculation in the previous update cycle, only update of latest years not included in the previous indicator assessment is requested.

The dataset should contain the following information (attributes):

Dataset	Attribute	Data type (description)
Abundance and distribution	Species	Text (Codelist: Species as abbreviation: GS=Grey seal, HS=Harbour seal, RS=Ringed seal)
	Country	Text (Codelist: Country as in European union two character country designation)
	Site	Free Text (Name of count site)
	Latitude	Number (Latitude coordinate of count site in WGS84 decimal degrees, 6 decimals)
	Longitude	Number (Longitude coordinate of count site in WGS84 decimal degrees, 6 decimals)
	Natura2000ID	Text (If the count site is inside Natura2000 area, specify the Natura2000 code, e.g. "DK00EY133")
	Year	Number (Year as in YYYY)
	Month	Number (Month in MM)
	Day	Number (Day as in DD)
	Count	Number (Count of individuals as integer)
	Count_type	Text (Codelist: Site or Transect observation)
	Estimate_type	Text (Codelist: Minimum, maximum, modelled)
	CV_Estimate	Number (In case of repeated count, please provide any available estimates of the variability in repeated counts in the form of the coefficient of variation (standard deviation / mean) of replicate counts)
	Number_surveys	Number (Number of surveys as integer)
	Method	Free text (Survey method text description)
Source	Free text (Data provider organization)	