Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation

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Background

Documents 4J-12 and 4J-13 presents the pre-core indicators 'Distribution, pattern and extent of benthic biotopes' and' Cumulative impact on benthic biotopes'. This documents contains Swedish comments to the two documents.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to take note of the Swedish comments on the assessment proposal

Swedish comments on the Pre-core indicator on 'Distribution, pattern and extent of benthic biotopes' – proposal to shift status to core indicators and "cumulative impact on benthic biotope"

Distribution, pattern and extent of benthic biotopes

We thank Estonia for the work and that they took the initiative to start this work. Despite of the comments we are impressed by the work.

The indicator concept should be further revised before it could be used for HOLAS II, specifically we would like to raise the following comments:

- property "area" : it should be emphasized whether this property is equivalent with "area" within the habitat directive or if not it should be made clear what the differences are and why it was chosen to deviate from the definition within the habitat directive
- property "extent" should be renamed and called "range" if the same parameter is to be assessed in HOLAS II as in the habitat directive, if these parameters are not identically it should be made clear why a different approach was chosen.
- it should be defined how different "areas" of a certain habitat type could be combined to assess "extent". So far no guidelines are provided in the assessment protocol. We would suggest to use a maximal distance between grids as in the habitat directive (a max of 5 "10x10km" grids between different "areas". Furthermore the maximal grid size for modelled area should not exceed 5x5 km grid size.
- The quality of the habitats should only be assessed by using biotic parameter, i.e. status of typical species. Pressure evaluation as summarized in table 4, page 10, should be excluded from the assessemnt of this indicator I
- The integration of the two indicators "Distribution, pattern and extent of benthic biotope" and "Cumulative impact on benthic biotope" could provide a holistic assessment of habitats in the HELCOM region in the future after HOLAS II. The link between indicators would be the habitat type assessed. If necessary aggregation of habitat types could be considered to be able to integrate the assessments of these indicators. That would imply that the assessment in HOLAS II should focus on area, extent and possibly status of typical species and relevant pressures would be assessed only in "Cumulative impact on benthic biotope" in the future (*lowest priority could be discussed after HOLAS II, if the pressures are excluded from the indicator "Distribution, pattern and extent of benthic biotopes"*).
- The list of habitat types assessed in the indicator should be discussed further during assessment in HOLAS. It should be agreed on HELCOM level which habitats will be assessed. This would be in line with the revised Com decision which might demand regional lists of criteria elements (habitat types).
- The definition of confidence of the assessment should be revised accordingly:
  1 (low) – estimate based on modelling or grid size =5x5km
  2 (intermediate) – estimate based on modelling or grid size <5x5km and >1x1km
  3 (high) – estimate based on actual data or modelled data and grid size <1x1km
- Threshold values for the assessment should be defined after habitat types. If a HELCOM wide habitat list is agreed on, a specific threshold for all three properties should be defined for every habitat types. This would make it possible to define thresholds accordingly to the specific sensitivity of the respective habitat types.
- Integration rules between area, extent and quality should be discussed in cooperation with BEAT team (*low priority, could be discussed while assessing the indicator*).

- The indicator needs to be tested outside Estonia, but this could be done prio or parallel to the assessment in the HOLAS II (*low priority, could be done while assessing the indicator*).
- For now we cannot accept the promotion to core, but we would like to include the indicator as much as possible in HOLAS II, if necessary just certain properties of the indicator, e.g. area (extent) and extent (distribution). Despite we would like to see that the indicator is developed further in future. The proposed assessment is essential for any holistic assessment in the Baltic Sea.

Cumulative impact on benthic biotope

- The pressure list (table 1) should also include ”Tourism”, ”Water traffic” and ”Ditching”. The categorization of secondary and primary pressure should be avoided and substituted by a categorization according to depth. Swedish coastline is highly diverse and the pressures, mentioned above, are essential for the assessment of cumulative impact along the Swedish coast.
- The assessment should not be done under WG Pressure. The work should be done under State & Conservation in the EN benthic habitats