



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature
Conservation

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Background

In 1996, HELCOM created a first Project Group for rehabilitation of Baltic Sea sturgeon. The actual project is running until 2017.

The HELCOM sturgeon rehabilitation PG has the goal to re-establish viable natural populations of Baltic Sea sturgeon (*Acipenser oxyrinchus*). In 2013, EUSBSR granted funding to start works on a larger scale re-introduction project, which would address the issue through mutual cooperation of nature conservation and fisheries. Project partners from Germany, Poland, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia have been working on drafting a project proposal for further financing. The project kicked-off with a workshop held in Warsaw, 18-20 September 2013 and continued with a workshop in Berlin, 16-19 January 2014. A third, final, meeting took place in Vilnius, 5-8 May 2014.

This document illustrates the state of the art of HELCOM sturgeon project and informs about possible future funding sources for the finalization of the HELCOM Baltic Sturgeon Action Plan.

Action requested

The Meeting is invited to:

- take note of the document and
- discuss the progress made and future perspectives for the rehabilitation of the Baltic Sea sturgeon.

Progress report HELCOM PG on Baltic Sturgeon Remediation (October 2016)

The HELCOM PG on Baltic sturgeon remediation, comprising members from Denmark, Sweden, Germany, Poland, Kaliningrad Oblast, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Finland, applied for LIFE+ project funding in October 2015 in order to continue the joint efforts to bring back the Baltic sturgeon in a coordinated and collaborative project. The following five main activities for a successful remediation and the establishment of a self sustaining population of the Baltic sturgeon have been identified:

1. Development of the Baltic Sturgeon Action Plan as a framework for future joint work,
2. the establishment of a joint broodstock in three facilities to establish a risk split safety policy,
3. releases of juveniles to establish self sustaining populations of the Baltic sturgeon in 6 rivers of its past range, utilizing offspring of the ex situ facilities as well as additional imports of F1 fish to increase the genetic basis of the reintroduction program,
4. monitoring of the performance of the fish released and adaptation of the rearing, transport and release approaches to increase fitness for survival, as well as a strong communication campaign addressing the major stakeholders with the aim to increase awareness and compliance in the fishery sector, and to prevent further habitat degradation by the involvement of the inland navigation sector,
5. these measures were to be accompanied by actions to increase the awareness in the general public, provide education tools for schools to improve the knowledge on conservation management through direct involvement in the measures taken.

By April 2016 the response was provided by the LIFE unit, that the project would not be considered for funding although it fulfilled the criteria due to constraints in availability of funds.

Due to a lack of adequate funding, the measures for the remediation of the species were reduced to an absolute minimum, trying to maintain the minimum releases (for 2015/16 see table) through alternative institutional funding by third parties. The resources to conduct a scientifically appropriate monitoring and for the opportunity to increase the outreach in communication into the fisheries sector were lacking. Collection of catch reports continues on a voluntary basis by the partners throughout the range. It is apparent though that the numbers of reports are extremely variable and do not allow any conclusion on the population development or the adverse impacts. Here, a more detailed and more focused approach concerning the determination of the population development, the role of by-catch and the resulting management measures is considered inevitable to be able to develop adaptive management approaches and strategies. As such a joint approach towards a standardized monitoring as discussed in the first meeting of the HELCOM Task Force on Migratory Fish in the Baltic seems highly desirable.

Due to variable, inconsistent feedback by the LIFE unit towards two subsequent applications in 2014 and 2015, the PG decided to apply for an Interreg project in 2017 to secure the minimal funding for the communication activities. For the development of broodstock, the production of offspring and monitoring would be applied for under regional funding programs within the EMMF funding strand. These applications are being currently developed and elaborated.

With regard to the Baltic sturgeon restoration Action Plan, contributions of the partner countries were considerably delayed by the affirmative response upon the project application. According to the current state of the progress by the end of 2016 the first draft version is to be ready for internal review by the PG members. Due to the lack in financial support, the drafting process is considerably slower than planned at the onset of the PG but a revised version is to be available for the Helsinki Commission meeting in 2017.

PG Chair J. Gessner

Encl:

Table 1: Releases of *A. oxyrinchus* in the tributaries to the Baltic Sea in 2015 and 2016

Country	Releases 2015			Releases 2016		
	Feeding fry	fingerlings	0+/Yearlings	Feeding fry	fingerlings	0+/Yearlings
Estonia	0	0	1500	0	0	?
Germany	265000	36150	265	650000	110000	3700
Kaliningrad Oblast	0	0	0	0	0	0
Latvia	0	0	1000	0	0	0
Lithuania	0	27078	2448	0	30400	1000
Poland	0	44000	20	0	37000	56