



## Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

Joint intersessional meeting of State & Conservation and Pressure WGs STATE & PRESSURE 1-2022

Online, 21 February 2022

# Outcome of the Joint intersessional Meeting of the Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation and the Working Group on Reduction of Pressures from the Baltic Sea Catchment area

## (STATE & PRESSURE 1-2022)

### Introduction

0.1 The Joint intersessional Meeting of the Working Group on the State of the Environment and Nature Conservation and the Working Group on Reduction of Pressures from the Baltic Sea Catchment area (STATE & PRESSURE 1-2022) was held online on 21 February 2022.

0.2 All the Contracting Parties to the Helsinki Convention, except for European Union and Russia, attended the Meeting, as well as an Observer from CCB. The List of Participants is contained in **Annex 1**.

0.3 The Meeting was chaired by Mr. Lars Sonesten, Chair of Pressure Working Group as well as Ms. Marie-Louise Krawack and Mr. Norbert Häubner, Co-Chairs of State and Conservation Working Group. Ms. Lotta Ruokanen, Ms. Jannica Haldin and Ms. Susanna Kaasinen from the HELCOM Secretariat acted as secretaries of the Meeting.

### **Agenda Item 1 Opening of the Meeting**

1.1 The Meeting adopted the Agenda of the Meeting as contained in document 1-1.

### **Agenda Item 2 Individual Working Group scoping sessions**

2.1 The Meeting was divided into two scoping sessions where members of each Working Group worked separately to list the tasks of the groups, scope strengths and weaknesses in the group's work since their respective establishment in 2014, as well as foreseen challenges/barriers for future work in implementing the BSAP actions. The results of the scoping session were collected into a Miro board.

### **Agenda Item 3 Joint session on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)**

3.1 The Meeting took note of and compared the results of the individual scoping sessions and provided the following views (**Annex 2**).

3.2 The Meeting discussed the strengths and positive aspects of the work of the groups and identified the following general themes (for a full overview please see Annex 2 in Excel format):

- Mandate and scope of work and strategic approaches
- Expertise and knowledge
- Holistic perspective
- Support from e.g. Observers, regional authorities and the Secretariat
- Workflows, organisational culture/Constructive and supporting atmosphere

3.3 The Meeting noted that the strengths between the groups were quite similar especially related to the working mode and atmosphere in the group and acknowledged that these strengths are not associated with the structure and tasks of the group. The Meeting emphasised that effort should be made to ensure the positive work environment is maintained irrespective of possible changes of the structure.

3.4 The Meeting discussed the weaknesses and threats and identified the following general themes (for a full overview please see Annex 2):

- Scope is too broad: lack of time and expertise and excessive document load
- Cooperation between and roles of HELCOM groups and unclear division of tasks
- General and procedural issues
- Lack of resources or contribution
- More fun needed

3.5 The Meeting discussed the possible challenges and barriers related to the implementation of the BSAP and concluded on the following general themes (for a full overview please see Annex 2):

- General
- Need for prioritization
- Need to establish clear roles and routes to cooperation
- Lack of resources and CP engagement
- Commitments outside HELCOM
- Practical uncertainties linked to reorganization

#### **Agenda Item 4 Potential renewal of the HELCOM working structure**

4.1 The Meeting took note of the technical guidance document on the renewal of the HELCOM working structure (document 4-1) and the proposals for the new structure.

4.2 The Meeting took note of the guidance provided by HOD 61-2021 that the Helsinki Convention should function as the basis for the structure of HELCOM work, acknowledging, however, that the implementation of the actions in the 2021 BSAP is a core aspect of the implementation of the convention and subsequently emphasized that any change in structure should also support the effective implementation of the BSAP.

4.3 The Meeting recalled that the logic behind the 2021 BSAP structure is to more closely reflect the chain of consequence, whereby human activities result in pressures on the environment, which in turn affect the state of biodiversity. The Meeting noted that many of the current subsidiary bodies of HELCOM already tackle distinct parts of the 2021 BSAP, e.g. Response, Agri and Fish Groups.

4.4 The Meeting took note of the clarification that the Secretariat has developed the working proposals at the request of HOD 61-2021 and that focus has been placed on State and Conservation and Pressure Working Groups based on the comments provided by Contracting Parties at that meeting. The Meeting further took note that the proposals from the Contracting Parties, recent outcomes of the meetings of the Working Groups and Meeting of Chairpersons have been taken into account when drafting the working proposal included in document 4-1.

4.5 The Meeting addressed the initial question regarding if there is a need to change the structure and/or division of tasks. The Meeting recalled the extensive list of weaknesses under the current setup, as compiled under Agenda Item 3, and concluded that there is a need to amend the current working mode.

4.6 The Meeting expressed support for that the workload and scope of the State and Conservation Working Group is unsustainable and constitutes a barrier to the successful implementation of the 2021 BSAP. The Meeting recognized that the Pressure WG suffers from similar detriments caused by the broad scope of topics under the groups remit, including fragmentation and lack of synergies. The Meeting further recognised that in a contained system such as HELCOM a change in one part of the HELCOM structure most often necessitates changes across other parts of the structure.

4.7 The Meeting recalled that in 2018, prior to the BSAP update, there was a review of the State and Conservation and Pressure WG's, the consequence of which both groups highlighted the challenges

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stemming from dividing topics (e.g. hazardous substances and eutrophication and nutrients) across multiple groups.

4.8 The Meeting recalled that the joint STATE & PRESSURE meeting was organized to come to a shared understanding on a framework for amending current setup, which could then be discussed in more detailed in the spring Working Group meetings.

#### *Reorganization of work*

4.9 The Meeting discussed the need for restructuring of HELCOM as well as the division of tasks and topics under the responsibility of the two respective groups in the currents structure, having the working proposal as the starting point with two options:

1. Change in structure: biodiversity segment of the 2021 BSAP would be addressed by a new Biodiversity and conservation Working Group, and pollution and eutrophication would be organized under the responsibility of two Working Groups (Pollution and Eutrophication)
1. Change in tasks and working mode: this option retains the current structure but redistribution of the tasks between the current State and conservation, becoming Biodiversity and conservation, and Pressure which would take on the input aspect of eutrophication and pollution matters in addition to sources, pathways and loads.

Under both options the respective groups would work topically across the full management cycle (monitoring, data reporting, assessment, measures) for their respective topics e.g. related indicators and the corresponding topical expert groups.

4.10 The Meeting acknowledged that different stages of the work e.g. the monitoring and the assessments tend to follow a staggered approach where they do not overlap in time, meaning that everything does not need to be done simultaneously. The Meeting took note that the assessments on hazardous substances and eutrophication under HOLAS are almost fully automated using the CHASE and HEAT assessment tools respectively.

4.11 The Meeting agreed that, while it is not sufficient to address the challenges on its own, expanding the role and mandate of EGs in relation to distributing tasks and workload under a future setup should be considered. The Meeting supported that the EGs should be given a more concrete and substantial role in preparing the technical and scientific information and products required by the WGs. The Meeting emphasized that this will require closer cooperation and communication between the WGs and the EGs in the future.

4.12 The Meeting was of the view that e.g. for hazardous substances, gradual finetuning and adjustment of specific tasks might be needed even should the conclusion be that no restructuring is needed.

4.13 The Meeting took note of the view of the Swedish Pressure representative that separation of eutrophication and hazardous substances to two distinct groups like described in Figure 7 of the document 4-1 risks creating silos as many of the activities and sources are the same especially regarding point sources. The Meeting recalled that many of these matters are tackled currently within the Pollution Load Compilation (PLC) projects reporting to the Pressure WG and considered that there might be other processes under HELCOM which could be similar to the PLC and benefit from a process/project-based approach.

4.14 The Meeting took note that also currently in the Pressure Working Group the workflows related to eutrophication and pollution are mainly separate with separate experts attending separate parts, and that even though there is a possibility of finding synergies and learning from others that cooperation has been rather limited. The Meeting pointed out that focusing strictly on the redistribution of tasks under the current Working Groups might retain the problem of either silos, redundancy or not improving the holistic approach.

4.15 The Meeting concluded that most of the strengths recognised under Agenda Item 3 concern aspects of work which are not related to a particular structure, and thus are unlikely to be affected by possible changes in structure and task distribution.

4.16 The Meeting considered that a majority of the weaknesses identified are related to the scope of work within the two current groups, with work under both groups suffering detriments from working to cover too many topics. Other weaknesses concerned processes, or distinct matters like possibilities of contribution from the Contracting Parties, which are not directly related to restructuring or redistribution of tasks.

4.17 The Meeting pointed out that option 2 (retaining current structure but redistributing tasks topically in line with 2021 BSAP) could risk giving Pressure Working Group a substantial workload in addition to the already expected new BSAP related workload, even if future work would be more strongly supported by relevant Expert Groups.

4.18 The Meeting took note of the view by the Swedish Pressure representatives that neither shifting a part of the status and assessment work to Pressure Working Group nor splitting the group would be desirable, but that Pressure WG should focus on sources and measures not separating eutrophication from other pressures.

4.19 The Meeting acknowledged that many human impacts on the catchment produce both nutrient, hazardous substances and litter and that there is an inevitable overlap among holistic assessment, PLCs, hot spot work and the national river basin management, and that especially periodic PLC assessment work could be more cross-cutting and directly feeding to the holistic assessment work.

4.20 The Meeting emphasized that the goal is to organize the work thematically so as to ensure a source to sea approach, avoid silos, have the most out of expert work, and arrange communicating between the groups without having the same documents circulating in several groups.

4.21 The Meeting took note of the preference of both State and Pressures representatives from Finland and Germany for option 1, i.e. reorganizing the work to three new groups, biodiversity, eutrophication and pollution workflows in separate groups, as this would facilitate the work of dedicated experts dealing with eutrophication and hazardous substances within the whole management cycle from activities and pressures to status and assessment, not splitting their effort to many different HELCOM groups as currently. The Meeting emphasized that all the working methods should be scrutinized and streamlined as part of the reorganisation.

4.22 The Meeting took note of the proposal by the German Pressure representative that there might be a third option of dividing work under the current Pressure WG: having eutrophication and hazardous substances under the same group as many of the experts are the same for e.g. point source loading and riverine inputs, and having another group for litter, noise and seafloor integrity matters.

4.23 The Meeting took note of the question by CCB on how the hazardous substance matters related to sea-based activities under the current Maritime and Response Working Groups will be considered in the possible restructuring, as these groups can be considered as sector-wise groups but a holistic approach should be aimed for. The Meeting took note of the clarification by the Secretariat that each group has a possibility to consider needed changes in their spring meetings, but that the overall changes are aimed to be kept to the minimum to avoid the possible implementation gap.

#### *HOLAS*

4.24 The Meeting recognized that one of the main challenges with respect to both the scope and the workload of State and Conservation is related to the holistic assessment, which due to its scope requires significant resources from the group, both with regards to expertise and time. The Meeting was of the view that finding a way to address the HOLAS work as a separate process, as a joint exercise of several Working Groups, from the beginning of the next six-year HOLAS cycle might solve that problem.

4.25 The Meeting supported that a process-based approach could be a constructive solution for future HOLAS assessments, should the different parts of the assessment be topically divided across several WGs. The Meeting took note of that Figure 10 in document 4-1 outlines how such a process-based approach could be done for HOLAS assessments, by which the preparatory phase consists of topical work under relevant Working Groups and the assessment phase would be carried out together by the Groups using a platform approach.

4.26 The Meeting pointed out that adjustments might be needed in the detailed structure between the proposed HOLAS platform and the Working Group or Expert Group responsibilities, shifting most of the preparatory work from Working Groups to Expert Groups, Working Groups would concentrate on more strategic matters and prioritization, and some indicator and assessment tool related work could also be carried out within the platform.

#### *Conclusions*

4.27 The Meeting pointed out that the Gear Group could support other groups with overarching matters in relation to both coordinating the HOLAS work and implementation of the BSAP actions e.g. when updating the Work Plans of the Working Groups every other year to help groups address gaps and barriers, identify synergies or overlaps etc. The Meeting suggested that this could be done within a Meeting of Chairpersons, possibly back-to-back with a Gear Group meeting. The Meeting also recalled that in the Meeting of Chairpersons in January one of the outcomes was that regular exchange and cooperation among all the Groups should be established, discussing cross-cutting issues twice a year between the WG meetings and before the HOD meetings.

4.28 The Meeting concluded that, while there is support for both options presented in document 4-1, as well as the option presented in para. 4.22, it was not possible to settle on one option to use as a framework for further work in Spring 2022.

4.29 The Meeting invited the Group Chairs, together with the Secretariat, to form a drafting team to develop the proposals presented in Figures 7, 9 and 10 in document 4-1 as well as the proposed third option further intersessionally, based on the input provided by the Meeting. This should account for input collected during the scoping sessions under Agenda items 2 and 3 and place emphasis on details like how the Expert Groups will support the WG work and how the major tasks like HOLAS would be organized as a process and how related EG and WG level tasks would be organized, with a distinct timeline.

4.30 The Meeting further invited the drafting team to submit the proposals to PRESSURE 16-2022 and STATE&CONSERVATION 16-2022, respectively, for further consideration and approval of what recommendation and rationale each group will submit to HOD 62-2022 for discussion and agreement.

#### **Agenda Item 5 Any other business**

5.1 The Meeting did not discuss any other matters.

#### **Agenda Item 6 Closing of the Meeting**

6.1 The Outcome of the Meeting was adopted via correspondence.

## Annex 1. List of participants

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