

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR HELCOM WORKING GROUP ON THE STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE CONSERVATION (WG STATE & CONSERVATION)**

The new subsidiary body will cover monitoring and assessment theme as well as nature conservation and biodiversity protection theme in HELCOM with a specific arrangement for its work, including meetings, in order to cater for the needs to efficiently cover both themes:

- two co-chairs representing monitoring/assessment theme and biodiversity/nature conservation theme are to be elected,
- meetings of the WG will be organized in such a way that parts of the meeting covering specific topics under monitoring and assessment theme as well as nature conservation and biodiversity protection theme will be held back-to-back, and common issues to both themes are addressed within a joint session placed in between the theme-wise sessions; agenda will be organized accordingly,
- theme-wise sessions will be chaired by relevant co-chairs and joint sessions are to be chaired by both co-chairs,
- common agenda will be prepared by the co-chairs together with the Secretariat.

Functioning of this arrangement for the work of the new subsidiary body will be evaluated after two years.

A major common topic will be to work across monitoring-indicators-assessment chain in order to provide a stronger basis for coordinated development of the HELCOM thematic assessment tools and a coherent holistic assessment of the ecosystems health, including Baltic Sea Pressure Index and Impact Index.

This requires scrutinizing and integrating on technical-scientific level the outcomes of various expert groups and projects covering most of all eutrophication, hazardous substances and biodiversity, but also linking the relevant results produced by other subsidiary bodies (e.g. pressures from shipping) into a one coherent system.

This arrangement will ensure that nature protection and biodiversity, including marine protected areas, red listing of species and habitats as well as proposing nature conservation and other measures will continue to receive a prominent place in HELCOM work.

The work will follow the assessment cycles and deadlines agreed in Baltic Sea Action Plan and the Ministerial Declarations (Roadmap of HELCOM activities on ecosystem approach), meaning that not all the issues will be taken up on each occasion, but the agenda will be more flexible, planned according to the finalized/upcoming tasks.

The new subsidiary body will have the role to provide the necessary scientific-technical expertise and advice, including review of the content of deliverables produced by working groups, projects and *ad hoc* activities.

The WG will be responsible for producing and contributing, as appropriate, to deliverables and milestones of the Roadmap of HELCOM activities on ecosystem approach, in a manner coordinated with other ongoing HELCOM processes. The WG will cooperate with other subsidiary bodies i.e. on cross cutting issues, including with GEAR to the extent necessary for GEAR to ensure integration and coherence of work to reach Good Environmental Status of the marine environment across the working groups. It will seek synergies with work carried out in other fora e.g. the relevant work undertaken in EU, ICES and OSPAR, and map these into the working programme.

The WG will be complemented with *ad hoc* working arrangements, i.e. expert and correspondence groups, intersessional processes, and projects with specific tasks and limited duration as they are an efficient and flexible way of working to solve specific problems, address urgent issues, and develop clearly identified products according to predefined deadlines. The support by the *ad hoc* arrangements will allow a new working structure to focus their work on reviewing the results, providing advice and guidance, and developing policy recommendations, according to its respective mandate. The Roadmap of HELCOM activities on ecosystem approach will be used as a planning tool for such HELCOM *ad hoc* work.

Based on the general rule that projects are decided by the Heads of Delegation, the Working Group will have an initiative to propose setting up projects.

Meetings will be scheduled to keep up with the HELCOM activities and coordinate with other relevant meetings.

### **Terms of Reference of the Working Group**

1. The duties are to:
  - A. Advise the Commission in carrying out its duties under Article 20 of the Helsinki Convention, especially in relation to Articles 3, 7, 11, 13, 15, 16, 24 as well as Annex V;
  - B. Provide technical and scientific support for the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, Ministerial Declarations and HELCOM Recommendations as well as propose strategies, guidelines and recommendations in the area of its expertise according to the existing priorities as well as requests by the Heads of Delegations and subsidiary bodies;
  - C. Coordinate and implement the monitoring and assessment activities of HELCOM related to biodiversity, and status of and effects on the marine environment with regards to eutrophication, hazardous substances, including radioactive substances, marine litter and underwater noise, as well as integrated assessment of human pressures and their impacts affecting the sea state, thereby implementing the HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy;
  - D. Review, develop and promote the implementation of HELCOM goals for biodiversity protection, nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources;
  - E. Develop, propose and follow-up measures for protection of biodiversity and nature conservation.

To fulfill these duties the Working Group will:

1. Ensure implementation of the HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy, including development of necessary manuals and guidelines i.a. related to quality assurance, taking into account the existing international guidance documents;
2. Be responsible for functioning of the HELCOM Joint Coordinated Monitoring system covering all aspects from flora and fauna of the Baltic Sea to water quality and human pressures;
3. Be responsible for that HELCOM core indicators, with associated targets are developed and operationalized to serve e.g. holistic assessments according to the goals and objectives of the Baltic Sea Action Plan, HELCOM Ministerial Declarations, and the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive for those Contracting Parties also being EU Member States;
4. Guide periodic assessments of:
  - biodiversity, eutrophication, hazardous substances, marine litter and underwater noise, thereby providing building blocks for HELCOM Holistic assessments;
  - threat status of Baltic Sea species and habitats/biotopes;
  - the status and progress towards an ecologically coherent and effectively managed network of HELCOM coastal and marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and strive for harmonized approach in reporting, including its timing taking into account the work on global and European level;
  - regional climate change and its implications on the Baltic Sea ecosystem in cooperation with Baltic Earth (BALTEX), and recommend actions as appropriate;
5. Assess human pressures and impacts as part of the Holistic assessments, e.g. utilizing inputs from other HELCOM subsidiary bodies on e.g. waterborne and airborne inputs of nutrients and hazardous substances, oils spills, etc.;
6. Prepare proposals for measures for the conservation and protection of species and coastal and marine habitats and biotopes and follow up on implementation of measures, e.g. in order to initiate protection of highly endangered species and threatened habitats and biotopes;
7. Further develop the system of coastal and marine protected areas and promote monitoring and research in these areas;

8. Cooperate with, and seek synergies with relevant work carried out in other international organizations and institutions and processes relevant for the group such as ICES, EEA, JRC, OSPAR, Convention on Biological Diversity, MSFD Common Implementation Strategy, etc.;
9. Develop and maintain the regional data and information systems needed to carry out its tasks;
10. Contribute to other deliverables and activities as requested and prioritized by HELCOM.

The Working Group will report to the Heads of Delegation.