



Terms of Reference for the Task Force on Migratory Fish Species (FISH-M) under HELCOM Baltic Fisheries and Environment Forum

Approved by HELCOM HOD 41/2013 (para. 3.39, LD 134)

1. Introduction

The HELCOM Contracting Parties agreed by adopting the Baltic Sea Action Plan (herewith referred to as BSAP) on a number of specific actions addressing needed improvement of the situation with migratory fish species to reach a favourable status of the Baltic Sea with regards to biodiversity and nature conservation, including:

- further development and application in all cases of appropriate breeding and restocking practices for salmon and sea trout to safeguard the genetic variability of native wild stocks, by 2012;
- development of national programmes for the conservation of eel stocks as a contribution to a Baltic co-ordinated programme to ensure successful eel migrations from the Baltic Sea drainage basin to natural spawning grounds. For the EU Member States thus implementing the EC Regulation No. 1100/2007 establishing measures for the recovery of the stock of European eel, by 2008;
- the classification and inventorying of rivers with historic and existing migratory fish species (e.g. salmon, eel, sea trout and sturgeon), no later than by 2012;
- the development of restoration plans (including restoration of spawning sites and migration routes) in suitable rivers to reinstate migratory fish species, by 2010;
- the active conservation of at least ten endangered/threatened wild salmon river populations in the Baltic Sea region as well as the reintroduction of native Baltic Sea salmon in at least four potential salmon rivers, by 2009,
- enhancing restoration of lost biodiversity by joining and/or supporting Poland and Germany in reintroducing Baltic sturgeon to its potential spawning rivers.

Some progress has been achieved in implementing the above mentioned provisions of the BSAP, especially regarding classification and inventorying of salmon and sea trout rivers (HELCOM SALAR Project, 2010-2011). Further work on eel management is ongoing in accordance with national eel management plans, as well as bilateral activities addressing migratory fish species (e.g. Finnish-Russian RIFCI Project and development of joint Polish-Russian eel management plan for Pregolya River and Vistula Lagoon). However further work is needed, e.g. addressing development of specific river and habitat restoration plans in prioritized rivers, exchanging of best practices and experiences in river/habitat restoration measures, etc.

Restoration measures applied in highly regulated/dammed rivers may have multi-species benefits contributing to improvement of situation with various migratory fish species. Further exchange of information and dissemination of knowledge and experiences, e.g. on BAT/BEP in river restoration measures among national experts will benefit the implementation of the BSAP by the Contracting Parties.

For this purpose, HELCOM Baltic Fisheries and Environment Forum suggested to establish a Task Force where fisheries and environmental authorities of the Baltic Sea area, as well as other stakeholders can jointly discuss measures related to restoration activities for Baltic migratory fish species.

The Task Force will be established initially for three years, and the terms of reference and the progress made will be reviewed and reported to Fisheries and Environment Forum, with a view to consider continuation of the Task Force beyond this timeframe as needed and decided.

With reference to exclusive competence of the European Union in fisheries management measures in the Baltic Sea, as well as the Agreement between the European Community and the Government of the Russian Federation on cooperation in fisheries and the conservation of the living marine resources in the Baltic Sea, the Task Force will primarily focus on nature conservation and habitat restoration measures and actions in rivers of the Baltic Sea Area.

The Task Force will cooperate with relevant projects addressing protection and restoration activities for migratory fish species in the Baltic Sea Area, as well as with relevant ICES Working Groups, including WG on Effectiveness of Recovery Actions for Atlantic Salmon (WGERAAS) and other respective fora.

The following further defines tasks, procedure and composition for the Task Force on Migratory Fish Species (hereby referred to as the Task Force).

2. Overall tasks of the Task Force

The Task Force will address the above mentioned actions in the HELCOM BSAP where improvement of situation with migratory fish species is needed.

The Task Force will compile information on best practices of improving fish migration throughout the Baltic Sea. Specific tasks of the work will *inter alia* include:

- Discussing and defining best practices to be applied in plans for developing salmon and other migratory fish species (e.g. sea trout, eel, whitefish, river lamprey, sturgeon etc.) populations, managing migratory fish species fisheries and restoring river habitats and migratory routes (taking into account existing experience and on-going/finalised projects),
- Based on the HELCOM BSAP commitments and the indicative list of populations included in [BSEP 126A](#) "Salmon and Sea Trout Populations and Rivers in the Baltic Sea - HELCOM assessment of salmon (*Salmo salar*) and sea trout (*Salmo trutta*) populations and habitats in rivers flowing to the Baltic Sea. (2011)" and HELCOM Recommendations [19/2](#) Protection and Improvement of the Wild Salmon (*Salmo salar* L.) populations in the Baltic Sea Area and [32-33/1](#) Conservation of Baltic Salmon (*Salmo salar*) and Sea Trout (*Salmo trutta*) populations by the restoration of their river habitats and management of river fisheries, deciding on rivers for which restoration plans should be further developed, covering BSAP targets for
 - ten naturally reproducing and original salmon populations, and
 - four original salmon populations to be re-established in their native rivers,with a view to supporting and facilitating the work on these plans.
- Presenting and discussing the drafts of the salmon development and restoration plans by the Contracting Parties, and making a proposal for their content, as well as reviewing plans that are already prepared with regard to their conformity with the proposed best practices.
- In the framework of the Task Force, Contracting Parties as well as stakeholders are invited to continue exchanging views and experience in best practices for restoration activities and other measures related to migratory fish, and discuss such activities in the framework of the BSAP implementation, e.g.
 - common practices for breeding, rearing and releasing salmon as reintroduction in potential salmon rivers,
 - investigating needed improvements for stocking practices (e.g. biological and genetical guidelines), as well as
 - model recommendations for protection and conservation measures such as fish ways for up and down migration, restoration and protection of spawning grounds, fishery regulation for the river and estuaries;

- data collection, especially from the recreational fisheries
- The Task Force will develop and forward concrete proposals on how specific migratory fish related actions of the BSAP could be implemented, also taking into account the outcomes of HELCOM Red List Project regarding status of protection of the migratory fish species

3. Expected outcomes

More specifically the following results will be obtained:

- Advise and assistance in optimising the concrete conservation actions, sharing knowledge on national river restoration experiences and on-going activities, will be provided to FISH/ENV Forum
- Knowledge on best practices for enhancing fish migration in rivers will be disseminated to a broader range of stakeholders, including national and regional authorities and the general public, through Task Force members.
- Harmonised standard/recommendation for minimum requirements for restoration measures will be produced as an input to development of a handbook on Best Practices for the passing of barriers to fish migration and other restoration practices,
- revised project application on implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan by restoration measures to enhance fish migration in selected Baltic rivers, will be updated and prepared for submission for funding (funding source to be defined later).

4. Working procedure of the Task Force

- 4.1 The Task Force will consist of experts from HELCOM Contracting Parties, and is also open to Observers and other expert stakeholders, and their area of expertise should concern restoration activities in Baltic rivers inter alia to enhance fish migration (*cf. the preliminary List in the Attachment*)
- 4.2 The Task Force will be chaired by a chairperson, to be elected at the first meeting of the Task Force.
- 4.3 The Task Force will meet regularly and use the recommendations and outcomes of HELCOM SALAR and HELCOM Red List Projects as the basis, e.g. to elaborate best practices concerning the passing of barriers to fish migration e.g. hydropower facilities.
- 4.4 The Task Force will give advice on and discuss the progress of the restoration and other work, and share lessons learned and make sure that information of the best practices will reach relevant parties in their own countries.
- 4.5 The Task Force will regularly report to HELCOM FISH/ENV Forum.

[Attachment

List of organizations that have expressed their interest to take part in the Task Force:

1. Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet)
2. Technical University of Denmark - National Institute of Aquatic Resources (DTU AQUA)
3. Finnish Game and Fisheries Research Institute (Riista- ja kalatalouden tutkimuslaitos)
4. Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment for North Ostrobothnia, Finland
5. Karlstad University (Karlstads universitet), Sweden
6. Faculty of Bioresources and Nature Usage, Kaliningrad State Technical University, Russia
7. Laboratory of Salmon Population Monitoring, State Research Institute on Lake and River Fisheries (GosNIORKh), Russia
8. Nature Protection Department, Ministry of Environment, Lithuania
9. Latvian Fish Resources Agency
10. Wildlife Estonia
11. Coalition Clean Baltic, NGO]