Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Correspondence Group on Pharmaceuticals (HELCOM CG PHARMA)

(Approved by HOD 51-2016)

Background

In the 2010 HELCOM Ministerial Declaration, the Contracting Parties of HELCOM agreed to 'further assess the environmentally negative impacts of pharmaceuticals and other substances that are not monitored regularly, with the aim as a first step to assess in a coordinated manner their occurrence in the Baltic Sea and evaluate their impacts on the Baltic biota' (HELCOM 2010). The commitment was followed up by the 2013 Ministerial Declaration, in which the Contracting Parties agreed 'to collect more information and assess the state of contamination with pharmaceuticals and their degradation products of the aquatic environment' (HELCOM 2013).

The EU directive 2013/39/EU considers the contamination of water with pharmaceutical residues as an emerging environmental concern (European Commission 2013). Diclofenac, 17-beta-estradiol (E2), 17-alpha-ethinylestradiol (EE2) and estrone (E1), a breakdown product of E2, and three macrolide antibiotics erythromycin, clarithromycin and azithromycin are included on the first 'watch list' under the EU Directive 2013/39/EU.

HOD 50-2016 approved the publication of the Status report on pharmaceuticals in the Baltic Sea region and noted that the Status report has to be followed by elaboration of measures addressing reduction of input of pharmaceuticals into the environment. PRESSURE 4-2016 had decided to establish an expert group to work further in order to suggest further actions on pharmaceuticals in the Baltic Sea region.

Objective

The HELCOM Correspondence Group on Pharmaceuticals (hereinafter - CG PHARMA):

- provide a scientific background for the regional environmental policy regarding pharmaceuticals in the environment;
- provide a scientific background of suggestions on the regional actions to minimise environmental impact by release of pharmaceutical substances
- serve, in cooperation with PA Hazards of EUSBSR, as a platform for regional dialog on the various environmental aspects of the use of pharmaceutical substances and treatment of the wastes and other matters containing pharmaceuticals in the Baltic Sea region.

Tasks (to be amended as necessary)

The CG PHARMA will

a. elaborate suggestions on prioritization of pharmaceutical substances against the risk they pose to the environment with the view to include them into the HELCOM priority list;
b. facilitate HELCOM work on assessment of the environmental risk from pharmaceutical substances;
c. elaborate suggestions on regional needs in monitoring of pharmaceutical substances in the environment and thus provide input to the work of State & Conservation Group;
d. provide regional guidance on methods and technics for monitoring of the selected pharmaceutical substances in the aquatic environment, to assure compatibility and comparability of the data obtained through national monitoring programmes, and thus provide input to the work of State & Conservation Group;

e. guide collection of national data on selected regionally prioritized pharmaceutical substances (including agricultural usage and diffuse sources) to fill in gaps in regional knowledge on sources and pathways of pharmaceuticals into the environment;
f. [further develop HELCOM indicators on pharmaceuticals] and contribute to preparing the State of the Baltic Sea Report within the HOLAS II project by mid-2018;
g. elaborate suggestions on research needs to identify threats posed by pharmaceutical substances to the environment;
h. elaborate suggestions on regional recommendations and guidelines on upstream measures to prevent/minimise input of pharmaceutical substances into the environment e.g. promotion of take-back systems, handling medical waste, public awareness, etc.;
i. establish a dialog with relevant stakeholders, organize regional stakeholder meeting(s) and elaborate suggestions on environmental practices and technical solutions for waste water management to prevent/minimise input of pharmaceutical substances into the environment;
j. cooperate with regional and global projects in the sphere of the expert group expertise;
k. cooperate with international organizations and institutions acting in the field of the group expertise, in particular, PA Hazards/EUSBSR, EC, UNESCO, UNEP, SAICM, etc.;
l. follow up implementation of measures aimed at prevention/minimizing of impact by pharmaceutical substances on the environment;

Deliverables (among others)

a. priority list of pharmaceutical substances posing a risk to the environment in the HELCOM area;
b. recommendations, guidelines and other regional documents regarding monitoring of pharmaceutical substances in the environment for consideration by State & Conservation Group;
c. overviews of the regional data, filling in informational gaps;
d. regional projects aimed at filling in gaps in knowledge on environmental risk from pharmaceutical substances;
e. suggestions for regional action to minimize environmental risk from pharmaceutical substances;
f. regular reports to HELCOM State and Conservation and Pressure Groups.

Working procedures and timeline

The work of the CG PHARMA will be based on the findings of the Pharmaceutical Report and should take up recommendations herein, such as filling the data gaps that have been identified in the report.

The CG PHARMA will report to Pressure Group and will assist other subsidiary bodies and projects of HELCOM with requested information.

The CG PHARMA will assure cooperation with HELCOM State&Conservation group regarding the issues related to the methodologies and technics used for monitoring of the pharmaceutical substances in the marine environment through involvement of the representatives of this HELCOM group and submission of the relevant materials to the group for consideration.

The CG PHARMA will coordinate activities related to elaboration of HELCOM core indicators on pharmaceutical substances through close cooperation with the HELCOM expert network on hazardous substances.

The CG PHARMA will involve experts of various specializations to provide relevant expertise to fulfil the task of the correspondence group.

The CG PHARMA group will meet as often as necessary and will utilise video-/teleconferencing as the major working method, though physical meetings are possible, if appropriate.

The Secretariat will provide administrative support during the meetings. The CG PHARMA group will focus on elaboration of proposals, documents and products, and will record the outcomes of the meetings in the form of short memos.

The CG PHARMA group will identify tasks that may require additional resources and may come up with proposals for projects.

The mandate of the CG PHARMA group will last for an initial period of 3 years which can be extended for further years.

Resources needed

The Contracting Parties are to nominate their representatives to the group, and the work will rely on expert participation and contribution of the Contracting Parties. Additional resources will be sought for through various projects.