



## Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Expert Group on dredging/depositing operations at sea (EG DREDS) 2022-2024

Adopted by HOD 61-2021

Depositing of dredged material is one of the pressures that is to be considered within the holistic assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea. The HELCOM Spatial Pressure and Impact Assessment (SPIA), which is used for the assessments, reflects the spatial distribution of human induced pressures and impacts on different ecosystem components, including benthic species and biotopes. Dredging/depositing operations is one of the human activities which impacts the ecosystem components.

HELCOM Recommendation 36/2, adopted by HELCOM 36-2015 on 4 March 2015, recommends that the Contracting Parties follow the HELCOM Guidelines for Management of Dredged Material at Sea and that the Contracting Parties report on the national data on management of dredged material according to the Reporting Format of the HELCOM Guidelines.

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) of the European Union included seafloor integrity into the list of descriptors for determining good environmental status. The MSFD also identified the physical loss and physical disturbance to the sea-floor and human activities which may be caused by e.g. dredging/disposal of dredged material; impact on the seabed of commercial fishing, boating, anchoring; exploration and exploitation of living and non-living resources on seabed and subsoil.

HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2018 agreed to do regional work on developing threshold values for the adverse effects of anthropogenic physical disturbance and to develop the necessary regionally coordinated quantitative targets for the reduction of physical disturbance and physical loss caused by human activities. The Ministerial Meeting also committed to elaborate regional and national actions aiming at delivering the necessary reductions in adverse effects of physical disturbance caused by human activities.

### Objective

The HELCOM Expert Group on dredging and subsequent depositing operations at sea (hereinafter – EG DREDS):

- supports reporting and validation of data on dredging/depositing operations at sea;
- facilitates the work of the Pressure Working Group in terms of assessment of environmental pressure caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea;
- cooperate with HELCOM Expert Network on Benthic Habitats (EN BENTHIC) to ensure consistency of data utilized for the assessment of environmental pressure caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea and impact of these activities on benthic communities;
- considers and provides expert input to all relevant actions in the updated BSAP;
- follows up the implementation of respective actions in the BSAP.

### Timeline

The expert group mandate is prolonged for additional three years (2022-2024).

### Tasks

The HELCOM EG DREDS will

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- a. follow up the implementation of HELCOM Recommendation 36/2 including reporting formats and providing suggestions on updates of the documents when it is relevant;
  - b. review and verify the annually reported data on dredging/depositing activities at sea according to HELCOM Recommendations 36/2 and an established verification procedure;
  - c. provide support for the regional consolidated reporting on depositing of dredged material at sea to LC/LP;
  - d. update and improve the HELCOM Recommendation and Guidelines for handling dredged material at sea using the best available knowledge to minimize environmental impact of these activities
  - e. further develop Best Environmental Practice (BEP) and Best Available Technique (BAT) for dredging and depositing operations;
  - f. support controlling the concentration of mercury in dredged material and undertake possible measures to prevent its release during dredging operations and handling of dredged material;
  - g. provide methodological support for the development of the HELCOM information resources on dredging/depositing operations at sea (development pending availability of resources);
  - h. guide the assessment of environmental pressures caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea with the use of the agreed methodology and based on reported data;
  - i. provide expert advice regarding the assessment of environmental pressure caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea in the frame of HOLAS III;
  - j. suggest further developments of the methodology to assess environmental pressure caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea with the aim to contribute to the work on developing threshold values for the adverse effects of anthropogenic physical disturbance and physical loss;<sup>1</sup>
  - k. contribute to elaboration of measures to reduce physical disturbance and loss caused by dredging/depositing operations;
  - l. implement any other specific tasks related to the expertise of the group by requests of the HELCOM Pressure Working Group;
  - m. coordinate their activities with corresponding reporting and assessments activities of OSPAR, with the Contracting Parties members to the two Regional Seas Conventions serving as a liaison and utilizing information exchange between the secretariats, as well as with ICES and EMODNET.

#### The group will deliver (among others)

- a. The further developed methodology to assess environmental pressure caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea;
- b. Regularly updated HELCOM database on dredging/depositing operations at sea (pending availability of resources);
- c. Validated annual datasets on dredging/depositing operations at sea;
- d. Annual draft of consolidated report to LC/LP on depositing of dredged material at sea;
- e. Proposals for HELCOM measures to reduce physical disturbance and loss caused by dredging/depositing operations;
- f. Updates of the data reporting formats on dredging/ depositing operations at sea as may be needed;
- g. Regular reports to HELCOM Pressure Group;
- h. Verification procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> Working on this topic should take into account the decision by the EU regarding assessment methods for the EU MSFD Descriptor 6 and the decision of the EU-MSCG (Marine Strategy Coordination Group) to task the "CIS Technical Group on Sea-Floor Integrity" to further develop assessment methods.

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## Working procedures and timeline

The EG DREDS will report to HELCOM Pressure Working Group and will assist other subsidiary bodies and projects of HELCOM with requested information.

The EG DREDS will meet as often as necessary and will utilise video-/teleconferencing as the major working method, though physical meetings are possible, if appropriate as agreed by the Pressure Working group.

The Secretariat will provide administrative support during the meetings. The EG DREDS will record the outcomes of the meetings in form of short memos.

The EG DREDS will identify tasks that may require additional resources or are long-term tasks and may come up with proposals for projects.

The mandate of HELCOM EG DREDS will last until the end of 2024.

## Resources needed

The Contracting Parties are to nominate their representatives to the Expert Group, and the work will rely on expert participation and contribution of the Contracting Parties. Additional resources will be sought for through various projects. HELCOM Secretariat will provide GIS expertise.