

# GUIDELINES FOR DESIGNATING MARINE AND COASTAL BALTIC SEA MARINE PROTECTED AREAS (HELCOM MPA<sup>1</sup>) AND PROPOSED PROTECTION CATEGORIES

## 1. General remarks

The main goal of the coastal and marine Baltic Sea protected areas (HELCOM MPAs) is to protect valuable marine and coastal habitats in the Baltic Sea. This is done by designating suitable areas which have particular nature values as protected areas, and by managing human activities within those areas. These sites should form an ecologically coherent network, i.e. a network of protected sites which deliver more benefits than individual MPAs, and be effectively managed.

HELCOM MPAs can be designated in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), in Territorial Waters, Inner Waters and nearshore terrestrial areas.

In principle, national implementation will ensure the conservation of designated HELCOM MPAs. Furthermore, application of the following international protection regimes can be considered in a similar way as a national implementation for the protection of a HELCOM MPA:

- SCI/SAC (EU-Habitats Directive);
- SPA (EU-Birds Directive);
- UNESCO Biosphere Reserve;
- UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site;
- Ramsar Site.

HELCOM Contracting Parties who are also EU Member States are encouraged to, when feasible, designate all appropriate Natura 2000 and MSFD MPA sites also as HELCOM MPAs. If fully implemented areas designated under the EU-Habitats Directive and the EU Bird Directive also fulfil the necessary protection requirements for HELCOM MPAs and as such Contracting Parties who are also EU member states should be under no obligation to take any further action.

IBAs and information stemming from EBSA processes can also be used for the identification of HELCOM MPAs.

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<sup>1</sup> former BSPA

## 2. Protection Categories for HELCOM MPAs

Each HELCOM MPA should be categorised according to the IUCN global classification system for protected areas (see list below). Categories should be assigned based on the primary management objective, as contained in the legal definition on which it was established.

For HELCOM MPAs the IUCN-Categories I-V, which strongly focus on ecological criteria, are recommended for the national implementation:

- Ia Strict Nature Reserve,
- Ib Wilderness Area
- II National Park
- III Natural Monument or Feature
- IV Habitat/Species Management Area
- V Protected Landscape/Seascape
- VI Protected area with sustainable use of natural resources.

## 3. Guidelines for designating HELCOM MPAs

A coastal or marine area of the Baltic Sea Region can be designated as a HELCOM MPA if it meets at least one of the criteria outlined below and if its proposed protection status corresponds with the aforementioned protection IUCN categories, or is a designated Natura 2000 or MSFD site.

One option for the designation of HELCOM MPAs is, in accordance with the recommendations by the IUCN WCPA, to separate a highly protected core area from a surrounding buffer zone. This can be achieved either as a large zoned MPA or as a set of small MPAs with complementary regulations controlling use of the surrounding areas. It is recommended that the minimum size of a HELCOM MPA preferably be 1000 ha for terrestrial parts and/or 3000 ha for marine/lagoon parts.

### Requirements for HELCOM MPAs

All designated HELCOM MPAs should fulfill the following requirements:

#### *a. Aim of protection:*

In a HELCOM MPA particular protection should be given to the species and natural habitats/biotopes and nature types of the marine and coastal ecosystems of the Baltic Sea Area in order to conserve biological and genetic diversity and to protect ecological processes.

#### *b. Management of HELCOM MPAs:*

Management of HELCOM MPAs should be oriented on HELCOM BSEP No.105 Planning and management of Baltic Sea Protected Areas: guidelines and tools (or successor of this document) or for sites which are also Natura 2000 or MSFD MPA sites that they are managed according to the relevant EU directive.

*Exceptions relating to national conservation provisions:*

- a) Regulations of shipping outside the Inner Waters of a state are according to UNCLOS only possible by the International Maritime Organisation (IMO)<sup>2</sup>. To achieve internationally accepted shipping regulations (such as special routing measures, as areas to be avoided or other navigational duties like piloting), a coastal state has to submit a proposal to IMO's "Maritime Safety Committee".
- b) For EU Member States, the management of those fisheries which fall under the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) has to be based on a "joint recommendation" by MS with fishing interests before the Council and the EU-Parliament can decide on a respective delegated (legal) act.

Criteria for designation of HELCOM MPAs

Criteria should be used in the process of identifying suitable areas for designation as HELCOM MPAs and to inform the decision process for how to delineate the identified areas.

1. *Uniqueness or Rarity*

Definition:

Area contains either:

- i. unique ("the only one of its kind"), rare (occurs only in few locations) or endemic species, populations or communities, and/or;
- ii. unique, rare or distinct habitats and/or;
- iii. unique or rare biogeographic qualities or representative of a biogeographic "type" or types and/or,
- iv. existence of unique or unusual geological features.

Rationale:

- The features are irreplaceable.
- Loss would mean the probable permanent disappearance of diversity or a feature, or reduction of the diversity at any level

2. *Special importance for life history stages of species*

Definition:

Area that is required for a population to survive and thrive, for ecological processes or life-support systems, both in the short and long term.

Rationale:

Various biotic and abiotic conditions coupled with species-specific physiological constraints and preferences tend to make some parts of marine regions more suitable to particular life-stages and functions than other parts.

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<sup>2</sup> The Baltic Sea is a **Special Area** identified by the IMO, where the adoption of special mandatory methods for the prevention of sea pollution by oil, sewage or garbage, and prevention of air pollution by ships, as applicable, is required ("MARPOL 73/78 in annexes I, IV, V and VI").

According to IMO, the Baltic Sea needs special protection because it is vulnerable to environmental damage by maritime activities and was therefore identified as **Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA)** except for Russian waters in 2005.

Examples can include:

- Important feeding areas where a species regularly feeds, either continuously or seasonally.
- Important migration routes, wintering and resting and moulting areas for species.
- Important areas regularly used for species reproduction or as juvenile nursery grounds.

### 3. *Importance for threatened, endangered or declining species and/or habitats/biotopes*

Definition:

Area containing habitat for the survival and recovery of endangered, threatened, declining species based the extent of its geographical occurrence or based on the quality of the species, or area with significant assemblages of such species. Area containing a habitat/biotope which is endangered, threatened or declining based on the extent of its geographical occurrence or quality of habitat.

Rationale:

- To ensure the restoration and recovery of such species and habitats/biotopes
- Presence of habitat for rare or endangered species
- Existence of rare or unique habitat for any species

### 4. *Vulnerability, Fragility, Sensitivity, or Slow recovery*

Definition:

Area that contains a relatively high proportion of sensitive habitats, biotopes or species that are functionally fragile (highly susceptible to degradation or depletion by human activity or by natural events) or with slow recovery

Rationale:

The criteria indicate the degree of risk that will be incurred if human activities or natural events in the area or component cannot be managed effectively, or are pursued at an unsustainable rate.

### 5. *Biological Diversity*

Definition:

Area that contains comparatively higher diversity of ecosystems, habitats, communities, or species, or has high genetic or functional diversity. Area that contains species which are important for maintaining the resilience of the ecosystem (e.g. keystone species).

Rationale:

Important for evolution and maintaining the resilience of marine species and ecosystems.

### 6. *Naturalness*

Definition:

Area with a comparatively higher degree of naturalness as a result of the lack of or low level of human-induced disturbance or degradation. Any ongoing economic activities should follow the principles of sustainable use and be oriented towards the aforementioned IUCN protection categories.

Rationale:

- To protect areas with near natural structure, processes and functions
- To maintain these areas as reference sites

- To safeguard and enhance ecosystem resilience

## 7. *Coherence at MPA network level*

The selection and designation process of new HELCOM MPAs should consider the HELCOM goal to achieve an ecologically coherent network of MPAs in the Baltic Sea. For this purpose HELCOM has agreed on four criteria for the assessment of the coherence of the network: Representativity, connectivity, replication and adequacy. They should be considered in the designation process.

### 7.1 Representativity

#### *Definition:*

Representativity is captured by a network when the network consists of areas representing the different biogeographical subdivisions of the sea, which in turn reflect the full range of ecosystems, including the biotic and habitat diversity of those marine ecosystems. This also corresponds to the integrity, or the degree to which the area, either alone or in association with other protected areas, encompasses a complete ecosystem.

#### *Rationale:*

A HELCOM MPA should be a representative ecological functional entity for a Baltic Sea Region or Subbasin. A network should encompass:

- the full range of examples across a biogeographic habitat, or community classification;
- relative health of species and communities;
- relative intactness of habitat(s); naturalness

### 7.2 Connectivity and spacing of HELCOM MPAs

#### *Definition:*

Connectivity in the design of a network allows for linkages whereby protected sites benefit from larval and/or species exchanges, and functional linkages from other network sites. This should account for currents; gyres; physical bottlenecks; migration routes; species dispersal; detritus; functional linkages. Isolated sites may also be included.

#### *Rationale:*

In a connected network individual sites benefit one another.

### 7.3 Replication

#### *Definition:*

Replication of ecological features requires that more than one site shall contain examples of a given feature in the given biogeographic area. The term “features” in this context refers to “species, habitats and ecological processes” that naturally occur in the given biogeographic area.

#### *Rationale:*

Accounts for uncertainty, natural variation and the possibility of catastrophic events by ensuring that a feature is present in more than one site. Features that exhibit less natural variation or are precisely

defined may require less replication than features that are inherently highly variable or are only very generally defined.

#### 7.4 Adequacy

##### *Definition:*

Adequate and viable sites indicate that all sites within a network should have size and protection sufficient to ensure the ecological viability and integrity of the feature(s) for which they were selected. Adequacy and viability will depend on size; shape; buffers; persistence of features; threats; surrounding environment (context); physical constraints; scale of features/ processes; spillover/compactness

## 4. Designation Procedure of HELCOM MPAs

Formal designation of HELCOM MPAs takes place as follows:

1. Contracting States can designate new or enlarge existing HELCOM MPAs at any time. These can represent marine protected areas which have been recently designated nationally, or existing marine protected areas not previously included in the HELCOM network.
2. HELCOM Contracting Parties notify the HELCOM Executive Secretary by official correspondence. In addition, a GIS file (ESRI Shapefile converted to ETRS89LAEA projection), containing polygons of the MPA borders has to be sent to the HELCOM Secretariat via email ([helcom.secretariat@helcom.fi](mailto:helcom.secretariat@helcom.fi)).
3. The HELCOM Secretariat maintains a depository of the received notifications and informs the Contracting Parties of the new HELCOM MPA as soon as possible.
4. HELCOM Contracting Parties commit to provide and maintain the relevant information on the nominated areas in the HELCOM MPA database.
5. Contracting States appoint a person responsible for the maintenance and possible updating of the national HELCOM MPA database entries.

## Annex 1: Glossary

**IUCN:** International Union for Conservation of Nature.

**MSFD:** Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy (Marine Strategy Framework Directive)

**MSFD MPA:** Marine Protected Area established under the auspice of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

**Natura 2000:** a network of nature protection areas in the territory of the European Union. It is made up of Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas designated under the Habitats Directive and the Birds Directive, respectively.

**Ramsar Site:** a wetland site designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention (established under UNESCO).

**SAC:** Special Area of Conservation under the European Commission Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). A site of Community importance designated by the Member States through a statutory, administrative and/or contractual act where the necessary conservation measures are applied for the maintenance or restoration, at a favourable conservation status, of the natural habitats and/or the populations of the species for which the site is designated

**SCI:** Sites of Community Importance under the European Commission Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). A site which, in the biogeographical region or regions to which it belongs, contributes significantly to the maintenance or restoration at a favourable conservation status of a natural habitat type or of a species and/or contributes significantly to the maintenance of biological diversity within the biogeographic region or regions concerned.

**SPA:** Special Protection Area designated under the European Union Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (Directive 2009/147/EC).

**UNCLOS:** The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, also called the Law of the Sea Convention or the Law of the Sea treaty

**UNESCO:** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**UNESCO Biosphere Reserve:** Biosphere reserves are 'learning places for sustainable development'. They are sites for testing interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and managing changes and interactions between social and ecological systems, including conflict prevention and management of biodiversity.

**UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site:** an international instrument to recognize the most exceptional natural places in the world, characterized by their outstanding biodiversity, ecosystems, geology or superb natural phenomena.

**WCPA:** World Commission on Protected Areas under the IUCN.