



Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration (HELCOM WG BioDiv)

Approved via correspondence in February 2023 by the Heads of Delegations of the EU and the Contracting Parties to HELCOM that are also Member States of the EU.

Purpose

The Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration (HELCOM WG BioDiv) of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission works to secure and restore viable populations of all native species, natural distribution, occurrence and quality of habitats and associated communities as well as functional, healthy and resilient food webs in the Baltic Sea, towards the goal of a healthy and resilient Baltic Sea ecosystem. The Working Group works at the interface of science and policy. It ensures that sufficient technical expertise and information, including coming from monitoring and assessments, are available to support national and regional decision making and implementation processes, for the purpose of ecosystem-based management in the Baltic Sea region.

Duties

The duties of the Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration Working Group are:

Advise the Commission in discharging its duties under Article 20 of the Helsinki Convention adopted at the Diplomatic Conference on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, Helsinki 9 April 1992, especially but not limited to, to Articles 3 (Fundamental principles and obligations), 7 (Environmental impact assessment), 15 (Nature conservation and biodiversity), 16 (Reporting and exchange of information), 24 (Scientific and technological co-operation).

- I. Identification of current and emerging issues related to **Baltic Sea biodiversity and the Baltic Sea ecosystem, including foodwebs**, supporting the implementation of actions and measures to improve the status, as well as tracking the level of implementation and assessing the effect of HELCOM commitments on biodiversity and ecosystems, in particular:
 - i. Contribute to and guide the development and evaluation of biodiversity and ecosystem related indicators;
 - ii. Contribute to and guide the development of methodology for assessing biodiversity and ecosystem status and risk, as well as the implementation of these assessments;
 - iii. Support the assessment of the effectiveness of the implementation of the biodiversity and ecosystem related measures;
 - iv. Share best practices and solutions for addressing issues related to Baltic Sea biodiversity and ecosystem and exchange information on new activities and legislation;
 - v. Identify and prioritize needs for further actions and measures and propose new initiatives to close identified gaps.
- II) Identification of current and emerging issues related to the **protection of species, habitats and biotopes, as well as the ecosystem and its functions**, supporting the implementation of actions and measures for protection and management, as well as tracking the level of implementation and assessing the effect of protection measures, in particular:

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- i. Contribute to and guide the development of methodology for assessing status of protection in the Baltic Sea, as well as the carrying out of assessments related to protection, including the implementation of protection related measures and their effectiveness;
 - ii. Share best practices and solutions for addressing issues related protection and exchange information on new activities and legislation;
 - iii. Identify and prioritize needs for further protection actions and measures and propose new initiatives to close identified gaps.
- III) Identification of current and emerging issues related to the **restoration of species, habitats and biotopes, as well as the ecosystem and its functions**, supporting the implementation actions and measures for restoration, as well as tracking the level of implementation and assessing the effect of restoration measures, in particular:
- i. Contribute to and guide the development of methodology for assessing status of restoration efforts, as well as assess the implementation of restoration related measures and their of effectiveness;
 - ii. Share best practices and solutions for addressing issues related to restoration and exchange information on new activities and legislation;
 - iii. Identify and prioritize needs for further restoration actions and measures and propose new initiatives to close identified gaps.
 - iv. Identify and share information on potential synergistic effects of restoration with the goals and objectives targeted by other Working Groups.
- IV) Identification of current and emerging issues related to **impacts and effects of climate change on species, habitats and biotopes, as well as the ecosystem and its functions**, supporting the implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation actions and measures, as well as tracking the level of implementation and assessing the effect of measures as pertains to biodiversity and ecosystem function, in particular:
- i. Contribute to and guide the development of the Climate Change Fact Sheet and other climate change relevant work and assessments;
 - v. Share best practices and solutions for addressing issues related to climate change and exchange information on new activities and legislation;
 - vi. Identify and prioritize needs for further climate change actions and measures and propose new initiatives to close identified gaps.
- V) Further develop and coordinate the **monitoring activities of HELCOM related to species, habitats and biotopes, as well as the ecosystem and its functions, and their protection and restoration**, thereby contributing to implementing the HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy and adaptive management, in particular:
- i. Contribute to and guide the development of biodiversity and ecosystem related regional monitoring guidelines;
 - ii. Establish and ensure persistent regular data flows and management for biodiversity and ecosystem data;
 - iii. Contribute to the review and update of the HELCOM Monitoring Manual for the topics relevant for biodiversity and ecosystem.
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- VI) **Cooperate** with other international organizations
- i. to seek synergies with the work carried out in other fora relevant for the Group such as in the European Union, other Regional Seas Conventions, global and regional conventions and related policies and major projects.
- VII) **Support and guide the implementation of relevant HELCOM commitments** such as the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, Ministerial Declarations and HELCOM Recommendations related to biodiversity, protection and restoration, including:
- i. coordinating the reporting;
 - ii. reviewing, updating and proposing strategies, guidelines and recommendations in the area of its expertise.

Expected outcomes

Expected outcomes of the work conducted by the Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration Working Group are detailed in the 2-year workplan of the Working Group, regularly updated by the Working Group and approved by the HELCOM Heads of Delegation.

Organization of work

The Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration Working Group consists of nominated delegates from Contracting Parties and is open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures. Delegations from Contracting Parties as well as Observers will identify a lead of delegation who will approve the nominations of the delegation they belong to. Leads of delegations will also approve meeting participants from their delegation. Additional experts and representatives of organizations can be invited as guests to the meetings by the HELCOM Secretariat in consultation with the Chair.

The Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration Working Group will hold one physical meeting and one online meeting per year. Extraordinary intersessional online meetings should only take place if an urgent need arises. In the physical meetings, the Contracting Parties shall ensure that at least the lead of a delegation or another delegate with the mandate to negotiate attends the meetings physically.

Within HELCOM the Working Group will, as relevant, seek synergies and cooperate with other Working Groups, especially with regards to highly interconnected topics such as the status of, and pressures impacting on, the seabed and bycatch. The Working Group will cooperate with the GEAR WG with regards to horizontal topics which span the remit of several HELCOM bodies.

The work of Working Group is supported by expert groups. The Working Group guides and approves the work of a number of Expert Groups working with topics under the Working Groups remit, including but not limited to phyto- and zooplankton, fish, waterbirds, marine mammals, foodwebs, spatial protection and spatial protection management. The Working Group has the possibility to propose the establishment of additional Expert Groups as needed to progress work. The establishment of any new Expert Groups are to be approved by Heads of Delegation. The work plan of expert groups will be revised and approved by WG BioDiv.

The Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration Working Group will elect a Chair and Vice-Chair for a 2-year mandate period. The maximum mandate period for a Working Group Chair should be three consecutive mandate periods, consisting of 2 years per period, resulting in a maximum consecutive mandate period of 6 years.

The current Terms of Reference are to be reviewed periodically, every four years, or as the need arises.

The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the working group.

The Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration Working Group reports to the HELCOM Heads of Delegation.

The updated (2023) HELCOM organigram is available [here](#) on the HELCOM website.