Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission



Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Working Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (HELCOM WG GEAR)

Approved via correspondence in March 2023 by the Heads of Delegations.

Purpose

The purpose of the Working Group for the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (WG GEAR) is to work across HELCOM workstreams to support region-wide co-operation on all horizontal strategic elements of regional policy related to HELCOM's work. This work relates primarily to the implementation of the BSAP, as well as on national activities based on other legal frameworks, with the view to facilitate adaptive management and strive for improved state of the Baltic Sea.

The purpose of the work is to provide a platform for horizontal coordination, strategic guidance and, where relevant, policy steer, which includes but is not limited to:

- Baltic Sea Action Plan;
- Holistic Assessment of the State of the Baltic Sea;
- Regional monitoring programmes;
- Climate change;
- Economic and social analyses;
- External policy commitments and processes.

Duties

The duties of the Working Group are:

<u>To advise</u> the Commission in discharging its duties under Article 20 of the Helsinki Convention Helsinki Convention adopted at the Diplomatic Conference on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, Helsinki 9 April 1992 and assist the Heads of Delegation, through the preparation of material and information, in relation to:

- Acting as a strategic level coordination body, providing guidance and ensuring coordination of scientific, technical and management activities of HELCOM, in particular:
 - i. <u>to integrate</u> and <u>utilize</u> the work of other working groups and projects so as to ensure the implementation of the ecosystem approach,
 - ii. <u>to communicate</u> the needs for activities and deliverables (e.g. purpose, timing and alignment of the work with HELCOM commitments) to other HELCOM subsidiary bodies,
 - iii. <u>to see</u> to the timely finalization of implementation processes, following the scrutiny in the scientific, technical and management working groups,
 - iv. <u>to catalyze/facilitate</u> cooperation across HELCOM groups through enabling communication between Group Chairs.
- II) Assisting and guiding identifying funding to implement relevant activities in accordance with the Roadmap of HELCOM activities on ecosystem approach, in particular:
 - i. to propose/initiate projects according to HELCOM needs,
 - ii. to support prioritization and securing of resources to enable implementation

III) Coordinating, guiding and steering the processes for successful implementation of the HELCOM 2021 BSAP and subsequent decisions of the HELCOM Ministerial Meetings, including:

- i. Horizontal coordination of BSAP implementation, e.g. <u>to provide guidance</u> to, and <u>assist</u>, other HELCOM groups in identifying and overcoming barriers and challenges related to the implementation of the BSAP actions, under the remit of the ecosystem approach and ecosystem-based management.
- ii. <u>to track</u> the progress of implementation of the BSAP actions, including analyses based on the reporting to the HELCOM Explorer.
- iii. <u>to explore</u> resources for the implementation of the BSAP actions, both nationally and jointly using HELCOM as a platform. This can include following up on the resources used or planned as well as identifying and supporting securing external resources.
- iv. <u>to coordinate</u> the implementation of the horizontal topics financing and knowledge exchange and awareness raising.
- v. <u>to ensure</u> the periodical review of the Science Agenda to ensure that the science and research needs to implement the BSAP are up to date.

IV) Initiating and coordinating **HELCOM** assessments:

- i. the HOLAS processes (for the preparatory phase in cooperation with the relevant WGs and EGs, for the assessment phase in cooperation with the HOLAS Platform):
- ii. to <u>follow</u> and <u>guide</u> the assessment work under HELCOM to ensure horizontal coordination and that planned work supports HELCOM commitments.

V) <u>Initiating</u> and <u>coordinating</u> the **horizontal aspects of HELCOM monitoring, in particular**:

- i. to <u>coordinate</u> the recurring review and update of the HELCOM Monitoring Manual and Monitoring Programmes.
- ii. to <u>coordinate</u> the HELCOM Monitoring and Assessment Strategy and Data and Information Strategy review and update.
- iii. to work to ensure that identified gaps across the monitoring programmes are filled and that monitoring programmes are regionally coordinated.

VI) Initiating and coordinating HELCOM work on climate change:

- i. to <u>coordinate</u> the identification of, and <u>ensure</u> synergies across, climate change related work under the various work stands of HELCOM.
- ii. to <u>coordinate</u> and help to execute the process of incorporating climate change in HELCOM policies.

VII) Initiating and coordinating **HELCOM work on social and economic analysis:**

- i. to <u>ensure</u> that HELCOMs work on economic and social analysis is aligned with relevant international initiative and the needs of the Contracting Parties.
- ii. to <u>coordinate</u> the efforts to secure data and information to support the work on social and economic analyses.
- VIII) Serving as a platform for exchange of information on related national activities and <u>linking</u> the implementation of the BSAP and subsequent decisions of the HELCOM Ministerial Meetings to activities under other international frameworks e.g. EU directives, EU Green Deal, EUSBSR, UN SDGs, Global biodiversity targets etc. This should be done with the aim of ensuring that national work and measures are developed towards the same directions to meet the common goals and that they incorporate and reinforce the BSAP measures and HELCOM recommendations in national work:

- i. <u>to provid</u>e information and guidance on HELCOMs role in relation to external international policy processes including but not limited to how is HELCOM contributing or interacting with the process, how are the Contracting Parties working with implementation and how could HELCOM contribute or interact with the process.
- ii. <u>to act</u> as the responsible body for the regional coordination for the implementation of the MSFD, for those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States, and including coordination with activities under the Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation, with the aim to achieve respective coherent national marine strategies.
- iii. <u>to identify</u> areas where there is a need for consistency and opportunities for cooperation and coordination between HELCOM and other Regional Seas Conventions, utilizing the regional Action Plans/strategies to identify areas of cooperation and plan ahead.

Expected outcomes

Expected outcomes of the work conducted in the frame of the Gear 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 Gear Working Group consists of experts 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 to the meetings by the HELCOM Secretariat in consultation with the Chair. Chairs of HELCOM groups are invited to take part and/or submit documents to all WG Gear meetings on behalf of their Group. A dedicated session for all HELCOM WG Chairpersons can be arranged in association with the online WG Gear meeting. Where deemed relevant, specific Chairs can be invited to the WG Gear meeting to discuss specific topics or documents.

The Gear Working Group will hold one physical 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. To support the integration of the broader range of expertise and topics required for horizontal coordination, wherever possible, meeting agenda items will be clustered to group related topics and thereby allow relevant representatives to join. In addition, the Group can choose to structure work thematically at the meetings, e.g. through the establishment of topic teams, if deemed beneficial.

The work of the the Gear Working Group will be supported by expert groups. The Working Group guides and approves the work of Expert Groups working with topics under the Working Groups remit, including but not limited to economic and social analysis and climate change. The Working Group has the possibility to propose the establishment of additional Expert Groups as needed to progress work. The updated (2023) HELCOM organigram is available here on the HELCOM website. The establishment of any new Expert Groups are to be approved by Heads of Delegation. The workplan of expert groups will be revised and approved by the Gear Working Group.

The Gear 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 Gear Working Group reports to the HELCOM Heads of Delegation.

Cooperation and interaction

HELCOM Heads of Delegation

The WG GEAR functions as a platform to assist HODs in the ongoing horizontal steer of HELCOM activities, as well as to prepare material and processes to support decision making in HODs.

HELCOM Groups

The integration and coherence between the HELCOM groups, and coherent implementation of the ecosystem approach in HELCOM, will be the specific role of the WG GEAR. In practice this requires that the WG GEAR supports the planning of activities to ensure regional coordination, track progress on, and assist groups in, the implementation of HELCOM actions across all HELCOM groups. This includes guiding the development in relevant projects and of relevant deliverables to ensure they provide added benefit to HELCOMs work. The WG GEAR will also continue to serve as initiator of the processes and review the relevant deliverables to guarantee that these have an optimal timing and content responding to management and policy needs. By this, the WG GEAR will be facilitating the work and decision-making of the Heads of Delegation, and HOD will have possibility to focus the discussions on more strategic and policy relevant issues, since the scientific-technical outcomes will be coordinated from the management needs perspective by the WG GEAR. The WG GEAR, however, will not be expected to verify scientific-technical content of any deliverables and that task should rest on the other subsidiary bodies. Following review in other subsidiary bodies these types of products and results are to be submitted directly to HOD for approval and/or adoption.

External policy processes of relevance for HELCOM

The WG GEAR will provide horizontal analyses of relationships between activities of HELCOM and external policy process at various scales (regional, EU, inter-regional and global) and propose ways on how to improve synergies in the implementation as well as coordination between HELCOM and relevant external processes.

The Group will serve as a regional instrument for the national work of the HELCOM EU Contracting States in implementing the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive. For the MSFD related coordination for those Contracting Parties that are also EU member states, the tasks of the group will in particular cover Articles 8 (Assessment), 9 (Determination of good environmental status), 10 (Establishment of environmental targets), 11 (Monitoring programmes), 13 (Programmes of measures), 14 (Exceptions) and 15 (Recommendations for Community action).

It will also include coordination with activities under the Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation.