



Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Expert Group on Foodwebs (EG Foodweb)

Approved via correspondence in September 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 HELCOM Expert Group on Food Webs (EG Foodweb) will operate predominantly via online communication. Intersessional work will be a key component of achieving the aims of the group and making progress on the topic within HELCOM. The group is time limited.

The time frame of the group is identified to cover the upcoming six years assessment period prior (i.e. holistic assessment) with an option to extend the mandate of the group and/or make the group a permanent part of the HELCOM structure, based on need and evaluation of performance.

Duties and expected outcomes

Based on the work done under HOLAS 3, EG Foodweb aims to:

- 1) Identify the lessons learnt from the HOLAS 3 work on food webs and consider them for future work;
- 2) Define operational steps of the next food webs assessment (e.g. methods to produce the assessment, data call, integration of data, etc.), also considering links to existing assessment frameworks (e.g. BSAP, MSFD, EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, etc.);
- 3) Identify, collate and summarize existing food web information from the Baltic Sea region to support the food webs assessment;
- 4) Develop an overview of existing data to support an assessment of food webs and recommend improvements (e.g. monitoring programmes, databases, etc.);
- 5) Building on existing scientific knowledge, identify and develop a suite of indicators to be proposed as core indicators to carry out assessments of food webs, as far as possible harmonized with other regions (e.g. OSPAR);
- 6) Produce an assessment report on food webs to be integrated in the next holistic assessment and to support the implementation of the BSAP;
- 7) Based on experiences from points 1-6, propose viable and best options for longer term development towards an optimal assessment of food webs in the Baltic Sea.
- 8) Share information about the joint ICES/HELCOM Working Group on Integrated Assessment of the Baltic Sea (WGIAB) and links to ICES advice products.
- 9) Share information on other regional projects/work in the HELCOM Region as well as beyond (i.e. OSPAR).
- 10) Ensure information flow from other HELCOM Expert Groups (e.g. EG PHYTO, EG ZOO, EG BENTHIC, EG MAMA, FISH WG, etc.).

The work in HELCOM on indicators and assessments is driven by the best available scientific knowledge and also considers aspects that may influence the design or application of assessment, including: the need for comparable and harmonized regional assessments, potential sub-regional variation, data availability and

ecologically relevant assessments of status. These factors are key in the development of a solid assessment, and confidence evaluation, that offers the broadest and most inclusive regional coverage possible.

Organization of work

EG Foodweb will be guided by the HELCOM Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration (HELCOM WG BioDiv). Information flow to HELCOM WG BioDiv is a key factor and timely exchanges will increase acceptance of the work. HELCOM Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration may request that specific topics or issues are addressed.

Validity of ToR: Spring 2023 – Spring 2029 (6 years).

A chair(s) will be elected by the members of EG Foodweb for a 2-years term.

The Expert Group will document its meetings. A concise outcome will be adopted before the end of each meeting or by correspondence after each meeting. The outcome is agreed by consensus. HELCOM Meeting Portal will be used to distribute documents (in a restricted access mode) as well as publish the meeting documents, presentations and the outcome (public after the meeting). Access to some documents may be kept restricted. The mode of work for the Expert Group will include correspondence and online meetings facilitated by the HELCOM Secretariat, with physical meetings and workshops taking place as needed.

The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the Expert Group.

The group, with the support of the Secretariat, shall ensure good information flow between the relevant Expert Groups, such as: EG Benthic, EG Eutro, EG Phyto, EG MaMa, EG Zoo, WG Fish, etc.

The Chair(s) will report back to the HELCOM WG BioDiv on the activities of the Expert Group. For HELCOM WG BioDiv, this will take the form of an agenda item at WG meetings.

Contracting Parties nominate experts for EG Foodweb. Additional nominations are anticipated where Experts have knowledge related to the assessment of food webs as an entity (e.g. simulations, models, or field/experimental studies). The nomination of relevant Experts, from existing HELCOM Groups or other sources, is carried out at the discretion of the Contracting Parties.

Updates in the nominations should be submitted to the Secretariat on a regular basis.