



Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MaMa)

Approved via correspondence in April 2024 by the HELCOM Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration

Purpose

The overall purpose of the HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MaMa) is to facilitate regional cooperation in relation to marine mammals in the HELCOM Area and to support the implementation of the relevant actions of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, HELCOM commitments and other existing international frameworks such as the EU MSFD, EU Habitat Directive, EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)/ Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS), etc.

The Expert Group on Marine Mammals (EG MaMa) is under the remit of the HELCOM Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration (WG BioDiv).

It is to function as a coordinating framework and a platform to harness the expertise of leading scientists on marine mammals, and to make this expertise available to policy makers as well as planners. The Expert Group ensures that up to date information on marine mammals is accounted for in regional processes.

Duties

The duties of the Expert Group are to:

- 1) Serve as a platform to share information on national management and action plans for marine mammals,
- 2) Consolidate the existing indicators and if possible, develop new indicators to provide relevant regional assessments based on the best available data or knowledge on marine mammals' populations, threats as well as on food webs,
- 3) Ensure relevant information and dataflows to support the work on monitoring and assessment,
- 4) Ensure that the existing HELCOM monitoring guidelines related to marine mammals are up to date to provide the best possible information on abundance, distribution, health, threats, mortality and habitat on marine mammals, and to update or develop monitoring guidelines when relevant,
- 5) Ensure the cooperation and information sharing with other organizations such as international agreements (e.g. Convention on Migratory Species (CMS) / Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS) and relevant projects or initiatives (e.g. the Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum (BALTFISH) and Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC),
- 6) Share up-to-date information on marine mammals and to ensure the cooperation with relevant HELCOM bodies,
- 7) Serve as a platform to support and report the implementation of the HELCOM Recommendations related to marine mammals.

Expected outcomes

The work of EG MaMa aims to:

- 1) Continue to strengthen regional cooperation on the topic of marine mammals to develop methods and provide relevant results (updated indicators, integrated assessment, etc.) for the next HELCOM Holistic Assessment (HOLAS) to give a comprehensive overview of the ecosystem health status of the Baltic Sea,

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- 2) Ensure the implementation of relevant BSAP actions,
 - 3) Continue to serve as a regional platform for sharing the latest information on monitoring and relevant research on marine mammals,
 - 4) Continue the coordination and development of monitoring of marine mammals in the Baltic Sea.

Organization of work

Concrete tasks for the Expert Group will be presented in the work plan. The work plan is valid for a two-year period but should be reviewed and updated on an annual basis to ensure that the timeline and planned work remains relevant. This task list enables long-term planning and delivery of significant products that may require several components to be developed during consecutive years.

The tasks described in the workplan aim to drive the work of the Expert Group as well as the three teams under EG MaMa:

- Marine Mammal Health Team
- Seal Population, Abundance and Distribution Team
- Harbour Porpoise Population, Abundance and Distribution Team.

These teams aim to support the experts to work intersessionally. A team leader organizes and supports the work of each team. The teams should report annually, via a document submitted to the meeting, the latest activities carried by the team.

Membership of the Expert Group is obtained by nomination from their national HELCOM delegation. It is important that all members of the Expert Group have a firm connection to their national delegations. The Expert Group Chair can also invite non-members to attend individual meetings or to take part in intersessional work as deemed relevant. Invited experts should demonstrate particular skills that are relevant to the delivery of a specific request. HELCOM observers are invited to nominate a representative for the Expert Group.

The Expert Group will meet at least once a year and decides if more meeting(s) is/are needed. The annual meeting will be held physically while other meetings may be held online.

The Expert Group is encouraged to connect with other relevant HELCOM bodies if relevant (e.g. EN Clime , EG Foodweb, EG Noise, HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG, WG FISH, etc.). The Expert Group should report on the latest activities to the meetings of the HELCOM Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration (WG BioDiv).

The Expert Group will elect a Chair and Vice-Chair for a 2-year period. Boths posts can be reconducted to a maximum of 6 years.

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

The Terms of Reference are to be reviewed in 2030.