

Terms of reference for the HELCOM Expert Group on Eutrophication 2024-2027

Approved via correspondence in September 2024 by the Source to Sea Working Group.

Purpose:

The purpose of the group is to support and further develop the coordination of regional work on marine and coastal eutrophication, in support of the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan and subsequent commitments. This relates in particular to the following Ecological Objectives:

- Clear water
- Concentrations of nutrients close to natural levels,
- Natural level of algal blooms
- Natural distribution and occurrence of plants and animals
- Natural oxygen levels

Further the group is a platform for exchange of experiences as well as harmonization of methods concerning the work with eutrophication. This work includes, but is not limited to monitoring, data availability, indicator work and assessments.

Duties

The duties of the expert group are to:

Indicators

- Act as a platform for discussion and review of HELCOM indicators on eutrophication and support the HELCOM indicator work by:
 - o Supporting the review of thresholds, if needed, and particularly with relevance for regional coordination.
 - o Supporting the development of relevant targets in order to achieve defined thresholds.
 - o Supporting Lead countries to further develop and review eutrophication indicators, in close cooperation with other relevant HELCOM initiatives. This includes but is not limited to:
 - Updating the core indicator reports at regular intervals, as decided in HELCOM. This includes regular review of the data and assessment products;
 - Assisting to identifying possible new indicators taking into account commitments by Contracting Parties who are also EU member states under the MSFD.
 - Reviewing and guiding the indicator work at all relevant stages, including providing constructive support to the indicator leads, for example by reading and commenting on reports or by providing alternative solutions and text for these indicator products.
 - Assessing and evaluating the data provided by the Contracting Parties, in terms of relevance and importance to the indicators and assessments where the data is used. This entails a quantified confidence of the assessed data.

Assessment

- Review and update the eutrophication assessment manual initially developed by the EUTRO-OPER project at regular intervals to maintain a viable and up-to-date user guide to the eutrophication assessment toolbox;
- Have responsibility for QA/QC guidance of the full eutrophication assessment process from monitoring to assessment products;
- Further develop the eutrophication assessment methodology, including regular scientific review of the agreed threshold values.

Monitoring

- Revise, if need arises, existing monitoring guidelines, or develop new ones, to ensure all relevant parameters for successful indicator assessments is included;

Cooperation

- Cooperate with relevant HELCOM groups to link nutrient inputs, eutrophication state and effects with other relevant ecosystem components, in particular with EG Foodweb, EG Phyto, EG Zoo, EN Clime and EG RedCore.

Expected outputs

Expected outcomes of the work conducted in the frame of the Expert Group on Eutrophication are detailed in the 2-year workplan of the Expert Group, regularly updated by the Group and approved by the Source to Sea Working Group.

Organization of work

The group will consist of experts nominated by the Contracting Parties and will be open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures.

The group will report to and receive guidance from the Source to Sea Working Group.

The mode of work for the expert group will be mainly via correspondence and online meetings facilitated by the Secretariat, the expected frequency being 3-4 meetings per year, of which one has the option of being a physical meeting in Helsinki. A Chair will be elected by the group for a 2-year period. The products will be handled at HELCOM Meeting Portal workspaces dedicated to the aim.

The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the group.

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

Work on indicators will take place within expert group meetings and intersessionally, as required. Where necessary, online meetings will be utilized (e.g. smaller sub-group meetings on specific issues). The Secretariat is available to support experts in establishing and organizing such meetings.