

Terms of Reference of the HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Protected Areas (EG MPA)

Purpose

The HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Protected Areas (EG MPA) works under the mandate of the HELCOM Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration (WG BioDiv) and contributes to the development and implementation of a consistent region-wide protection framework for the Baltic Sea covering both marine protected areas (MPA) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs), as well as the implementation of the relevant actions under the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP).

Duties

The duties of the Expert Group are to:

- I. Support the identification and establishment of regional governance for protection in the Baltic Sea, in line with ecosystem-based management, including but not limited to:
 - a. Contribute to the development of regional protection objectives as well as protection and management targets.
 - b. Contribute to the development of a shared regional understanding of conservation terminology.
 - c. Contribute to and support the development of biodiversity indicators to track the effect of area-based marine conservation and restoration.
 - d. Contribute to the development of methodology for assessing the status of marine spatial protection, including the development of a hierarchy for pressure causing impact on biodiversity.
 - e. Contribute to the development of a Baltic Sea MPA portal and ensure its longevity and maintenance.
 - f. Exchange information on new activities and legislation related to marine protected areas.
- II. Support the management efforts in relation to spatial protection in the Baltic Sea including:
 - a. Implementation of actions and measures for marine spatial protection and management including linking management across areas and borders.
 - b. Support carrying out ecologically relevant assessments related to marine spatial protection, covering areas both inside and outside of the protected areas as needed, including the implementation of protection related measures, their effectiveness and the linkage between measures, pressures and the effect on biodiversity features.
 - c. Identify and suggest needs for further marine spatial protection actions and measures.
 - d. Contribute to and guide the development of marine protected area related regional monitoring guidelines.
- III. Support the work on restoration in marine protected areas.
- IV. Share best practices and solutions amongst Contracting Parties and practitioners e.g. under MPA MANET, for addressing issues related to the designation, planning and management of marine spatial protection and restoration.
- V. Support the work and initiatives of HELCOM MPA MANET and the MPA managers in their work to implement effective spatial protection management.
- VI. Support the revision of HELCOM Recommendation 35/1 as soon as possible but latest by 2028 and the regular update of HELCOM MPA database.
- VII. Support HELCOM's work on other international commitments, e.g. the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the future EU Restoration Law and the CBD Global Biodiversity Targets.

Expected outcomes

Expected outcomes of the work conducted by the Expert Group on Marine Protected Areas are detailed in the 2-year workplan of the Expert Group, regularly updated by the Expert Group and approved by the Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration (WG BioDiv).

Organization of work

The Expert Group will meet when necessary, however at least once a year, and will operate predominantly via online meetings.

Members of the group consist of nominated delegates from the Contracting Parties and participation is open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures. Additional experts and representatives of organizations can be invited as guests to the meetings by the HELCOM Secretariat in consultation with the Chair.

The Expert Group will elect a Chair and Vice-Chair for a 2-year mandate period. The maximum mandate period for the Expert 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 Terms of Reference are to be reviewed by EG MPA every four years and any amendments are to be presented to WG BioDiv for approval.