



Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Expert Group on dredging/depositing operations at sea (EG DREDS) 2025-2027

Approved via correspondence by WG Sea-based Pressure in November 2024

Purpose

Depositing of dredged material is one of the pressures that is to be considered within the holistic assessment of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea. The HELCOM Spatial Pressure and Impact Assessment (SPIA), which is used for the assessments, reflects the spatial distribution of human induced pressures and impacts on different ecosystem components, including benthic species and biotopes. Dredging/depositing operations is one of the human activities which impacts the ecosystem components.

HELCOM Recommendation 36/2, adopted by HELCOM 36-2015 on 4 March 2015, recommends that the Contracting Parties follow the HELCOM Guidelines for Management of Dredged Material at Sea and that the Contracting Parties report on the national data on management of dredged material according to the Reporting Format of the HELCOM Guidelines.

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) of the European Union included seafloor integrity into the list of descriptors for determining good environmental status. The MSFD also identified the physical loss and physical disturbance to the sea-floor and human activities which may be caused by e.g. dredging/disposal of dredged material; impact on the seabed of commercial fishing, boating, anchoring; exploration and exploitation of living and non-living resources on seabed and subsoil.

The HELCOM Ministerial Meeting 2021 adopted the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), including the objectives “*Activities affecting seabed habitats do not threaten the viability of species’ populations and communities*” and “*Minimize input and impact of hazardous substances from human activities.*”. Under the “Hazardous substances and litter” segment and the “Sea-based activities” segments of the BSAP, HELCOM Contracting Parties committed to concrete actions to achieve the objectives.

The HELCOM Expert Group on dredging and subsequent depositing operations at sea (hereinafter – EG DreDs):

- supports reporting and validation of data on dredging/depositing operations at sea;
- facilitates the work of the HELCOM Sea-based pressures Working Group in terms of assessment of environmental pressure caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea;
- cooperate with HELCOM Expert Group on Benthic Habitats and Biotopes (EG Benthic) to ensure consistency of data utilized for the assessment of environmental pressure caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea and impact of these activities on benthic communities;
- considers and provides expert input to all relevant actions in the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP); and
- follows up the implementation of respective actions in the BSAP.

Duties

The HELCOM EG DreDs will

- a. follow up the implementation of HELCOM Recommendation 36/2 including reporting formats and providing suggestions on updates of the documents when it is relevant;
- b. review and verify the annually reported data on dredging/depositing activities at sea according to HELCOM Recommendations 36/2 and an established verification procedure;

- c. provide support for the regional consolidated reporting on depositing of dredged material at sea to the London Convention/London Protocol (LC/LP);
- d. regularly update and improve the HELCOM Recommendation and Guidelines for handling dredged material at sea using the best available knowledge to minimize environmental impact of these activities;
- e. contribute to the further development of Best Environmental Practice (BEP) and Best Available Technique (BAT) for dredging and depositing operations;
- f. contribute to elaboration of measures to reduce physical disturbance and loss caused by dredging/depositing operations;
- g. support controlling the concentration of mercury in dredged material and undertake possible measures to prevent its release during dredging operations and handling of dredged material;
- h. provide support for the development of the HELCOM information resources (e.g. the HELCOM Map and Data Service and annual reports) on dredging/depositing operations at sea (development pending availability of resources);
- i. guide the assessment of environmental pressures caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea with the use of the agreed methodology and based on reported data;
- j. provide expert advice regarding the assessment of environmental pressure caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea in the frame of HOLAS 4;
- k. suggest further developments of the methodology to assess environmental pressure caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea with the aim to contribute to the work on developing threshold values for the adverse effects of anthropogenic physical disturbance and physical loss;¹
- l. implement any other specific tasks related to the expertise of the group by requests of the HELCOM Sea-based pressures Working Group; and
- m. coordinate their activities with corresponding reporting and assessments activities of OSPAR, with the Contracting Parties members to the two Regional Seas Conventions serving as a liaison and utilizing information exchange between the secretariats, as well as with ICES and EMODNET.

The group will deliver (among others)

- a. the further developed methodology to assess environmental pressure caused by dredging/depositing operations at sea;
- b. regularly updated HELCOM database on dredging/depositing operations at sea (pending availability of resources);
- c. validated annual datasets on dredging/depositing operations at sea;
- d. annual consolidated report to LC/LP on depositing of dredged material at sea;
- e. proposals for HELCOM measures to reduce physical disturbance and loss caused by dredging/depositing operations;
- f. updates of the data reporting formats on dredging/ depositing operations at sea as may be needed;
- g. regular reports to the HELCOM Sea-based pressures Working Group; and
- h. verification procedures.

¹ Working on this topic should take into account the decision by the EU regarding assessment methods for the EU MSFD Descriptor 6 and the decision of the EU-MSCG (Marine Strategy Coordination Group) to task the "CIS Technical Group on Sea-Floor Integrity" to further develop assessment methods.

Organization of work

EG DreDs will report to The Working Group on Reduction of Pressures from Sea-based sources (HELCOM WG Sea-based pressures) and will assist other subsidiary bodies and projects of HELCOM with requested information.

EG DreDs will meet as often as necessary and will utilise online meetings as the major working method, though physical meetings are possible, if appropriate as agreed by the Sea-based pressures Working Group.

The Secretariat will provide administrative support during the meetings. EG DreDs will record the outcomes of the meetings in form of short memos.

EG DreDs will identify tasks that may require additional resources or are long-term tasks and may come up with proposals for projects.

The mandate of HELCOM EG DreDs is prolonged from 2025 until the end of 2027.

Resources needed

The Contracting Parties are to nominate their representatives to the Expert Group, and the work will rely on expert participation and contribution of the Contracting Parties. Additional resources will be sought for through various projects. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide GIS expertise.