



Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Litter (EG Marine Litter) 2025-2027

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

Purpose

The call for establishing the HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Litter (EG Marine Litter) has been raised through the need to (i) facilitate the implementation of the revised Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter (Recommendation 42-43/3), (ii) develop regional core indicators on marine litter and (iii) carry out regional assessments on occurrence and impacts of marine litter in the Baltic Sea.

The duties of the expert group are detailed in the following sections to be fulfilled in the period 2025-2027, in coherence with similar work undertaken by Contracting Parties in other relevant fora. The Sea-based pressures Working Group will regularly revisit the progress of the work according to these Terms of Reference and will consider arrangements for further work beyond 2027.

Duties

Facilitate the implementation of the revised Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter

As part of the work of the Sea-based pressures Working Group and in cooperation with the Maritime Working Group and other groups as appropriate, the HELCOM EG Marine Litter will:

- Provide expertise to facilitate practical implementation of the HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/3. More specifically, the HELCOM EG Marine Litter will support the Lead Parties for the implementation of individual actions and provide expertise to facilitate implementation of actions with no lead.
- Seek synergies with other Regional Seas Conventions, namely OSPAR, the Bucharest Convention and the Barcelona Convention, Northwest Pacific Action Plan and Arctic Council but also other international fora, such as ICES, the UN, its specialized agencies and the EU. Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States will regularly coordinate with the MSFD Technical Group on Marine Litter.
- Provide expert input, as may be requested by HELCOM working groups e.g. the Maritime Working Group, on relevant measures to reduce further inputs of marine litter from sea- and land-based sources and impacts of marine litter in the HELCOM area.
- Provide expert input to the relevant actions in the updated BSAP, in particular HL31, HL32 and HT6.

Monitoring and assessment

The HELCOM EG Marine Litter will act as the platform for discussion and review of HELCOM indicators on marine litter being developed by Lead Countries and appointed experts. More specifically, the HELCOM EG Marine Litter will support Lead Countries in the further development of HELCOM indicators on marine litter, taking account, as appropriate, of developments on these topics under the EU MSFD for the EU member states namely:

- Increase harmonisation of the beach litter protocol (e.g. litter types and types of beaches) aligned with EU Guidelines (2023).
- Work towards a core indicator on seafloor litter.
- Improve coordinated monitoring programmes for seafloor litter.
- Work towards a core microlitter indicator aligned with the EU Guidelines. Further consideration of different compartments: water column, sediments and/or biota.

- Develop a proposal of a regionally coordinated monitoring sub-programme on abundance and characteristics of micro-plastics as well as other types of anthropogenic particles constituting microlitter.
- Work towards a plastic pellets monitoring indicator.
- Initiate work on a riverine litter monitoring indicator.
- Work on developing baselines and threshold values for maximum levels of marine litter in the Baltic Sea in coherence with similar work undertaken by Contracting Parties under other relevant fora.
- Update the indicator reports at regular intervals as decided in HELCOM.
- Ensure timely and quality assured delivery of indicator based assessments of marine litter.
- Provide suggestions for regional action on monitoring of litter and micro-plastics as well as other types of anthropogenic particles constituting microlitter in rivers in order to identify sources of marine litter.
- If possible, building reliable knowledge base on monitoring of microlitter in storm water, effluents of sewage treatment plants and sewage sludge applied as fertilisers in the environment, taking into account possible HELCOM Hot Spots (to be established) of relevance to this task.

Organization of work

The expert group consists of experts nominated by Contracting Parties and will be open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures. Additional experts and representatives of organizations can be invited to the meetings. The expert group will report to the Working Group Sea-based pressures, which will provide guidance to its work and providing and receiving support from other groups, in particular the Maritime Working Group and EG HAZ, as may be requested.

The mode of work for the expert group will be mainly via correspondence and online meetings, with at least one physical meeting organized annually. A Chair for the expert group will be elected. The products will be handled in the HELCOM Meeting Portal workspace dedicated to this use. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the expert group.