



Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Expert Group on Underwater Noise (EG Noise) 2025-2027

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

Purpose

The call for establishing the HELCOM Expert Group on Underwater Noise (EG Noise) has been raised through the need to (i) facilitate the implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Underwater Noise, (ii) develop regional core indicators on underwater noise and (iii) carry out regional assessments on occurrence and impacts of underwater noise 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 for further work beyond 2027.

Duties

Facilitate the implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Underwater Noise

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 Noise will:

- Provide expertise to facilitate practical implementation of the HELCOM Recommendation 42-43/1. More specifically, the HELCOM EG Noise will support the Lead Parties for the implementation of individual regional actions and provide expertise to facilitate implementation of actions with no lead.
- Seek synergies with other Regional Seas Conventions, namely OSPAR, the Barcelona Convention and the Bucharest Convention, Northwest Pacific Action Plan, but also other international fora, such as 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 Noise.
- Provide expert input, as may be requested by HELCOM working groups e.g. the Maritime Working Group, on relevant measures to reduce pressures and impacts from underwater noise sources in the HELCOM area aiming, in the long-term, at addressing adverse effects of underwater noise on marine species identified as sensitive to noise, whilst safeguarding the potential of the Baltic Sea for sustainable human activities.
- Provide expert input to relevant actions in the updated BSAP, in particular S54-S63 and HT6.

Monitoring and assessment

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

- Develop and operationalize common indicators and associated definition of Good Environmental Status (GES) related to underwater noise for application in the assessment of the state of the Baltic Sea marine environment. In particular:
 - Further adjustment of the continuous noise indicator in relation to noise sensitive species, assessment areas (MRUs) and LOBE values.

- Further development of the continuous noise model to include recreational boating and fishing vessels.
 - Represent offshore windfarms installations and operations in the assessment.
 - Improve the quality of impulsive noise data assessment in relation to effects range for the different type of sources including naval sources as well as assessment areas (MRUs).
- Act as a platform for discussion and review of HELCOM indicators on underwater noise being developed by Lead Countries and appointed experts. In particular, support the Lead Countries in the further elaboration of the underwater noise indicators.
 - Update the indicator reports at regular intervals as decided in HELCOM.
 - Review the state of the art knowledge on impacts of anthropogenic noise on marine species identified as sensitive to noise in the Baltic Sea and in particular the cumulative impacts of noise from multiple activities.
 - Update information on available and suitable noise mitigation measures in the Baltic Sea.
 - Assist countries in the reporting of national monitoring data on continuous noise and impulsive noise events to the already established regional databases, to ensure availability of high-quality data for regular assessment of the state of underwater noise in the Baltic Sea area.
 - Contracting Parties to improve data reporting to the impulsive noise registry including the provision of value coding.
 - Contracting Parties to improve data reporting to the continuous noise database.
 - Continue working on the analysis of sensors, devices and methods used to measure underwater noise to ensure the reliability and repeatability of the collected data.

Organization of work

The expert group will consist of experts nominated by the 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 cater for cross-sectorial expertise to carry out the tasks as needed. The expert group will report to the Sea-based pressures Working Group which will provide guidance to its work and providing and receiving support from other groups, in particular the Maritime Working Group (on IMO related issues), the HELCOM-VASAB MSP Working Group and EG MaMa, as may be requested.

The mode of work for the expert group will be mainly via correspondence and online meetings, with physical meetings being organized as needed. The expert group is Chaired by Jakob Tougaard (Denmark). 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.