



Terms of Reference for the OSPAR/HELCOM Joint Expert Group on Non-Indigenous Species (JEG NIS) 2025-2028

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

Background

The OSPAR/HELCOM Joint Expert Group on Non-Indigenous Species (JEG NIS) was established in 2021, through merging the existing OSPAR Expert Group on NIS and HELCOM experts.

This group is to be led by two co-chairs representing the two conventions: the OSPAR co-chair is Peter Staehr (DK) and the HELCOM co-chair is Sergej Olenin (Lithuania). The co-chairs ensure that the joint group's activities meet the needs of each of the respective conventions. Experts are encouraged to work on issues across conventions, as the work benefits from the wider expertise of all expert members and the exchange of knowledge and information across conventions. The group is composed of experts from a wide range of backgrounds including government bodies and academic institutions. This ensures a mix of applied and theoretical scientific expertise to support robust outputs relevant to NIS assessment and management.

Members are encouraged to participate as much as possible in all the groups' activities. The joint group provides analysis and interpretation of the results of the OSPAR and HELCOM indicator assessments, providing thereby a large-spatial scale perspective.

The call for establishing the joint expert group was to deliver OSPAR QSR-2023 and HELCOM HOLAS 3 assessments in connection with NIS. The main task of the JEG NIS remains to support the work towards the OSPAR Intermediate Assessment 2028 and HELCOM HOLAS 4. In particular, JEG NIS will contribute to delivering the common indicator assessment for newly arrived NIS and a data product for the distribution and abundance of NIS. Additionally, the group will work to harmonize the data collections and assessment methods for NIS.

JEG NIS work themes

These Terms of Reference provide a thematic overview of the work that is to be carried out by JEG NIS, in cooperation with JTG BALLAST & BIOFOULING¹, the Joint ICES/IOC/IMO Working Group on Ballast and Other Ship Vectors (WGBOSV) and the ICES Working Group on Introductions and Transfers of Marine Organisms (WG ITMO) as well as with relevant EU-level work on D2 of MSFD. Tasks under each theme will be specified on an annual basis in the workplan of JEG NIS.

1) Data and Databases

JEG NIS will support the development of data formats and contribute, as needed, to the development of the required links among existing databases possibly modified to be fit for purpose, to facilitate assessment of new introductions and impacts of NIS, as well as the success of possible management measures.

OSPAR

Under OSPAR there is no agreed data-arrangements for NIS. A one-off data call was issued for QSR 2023 purposes. Previous work of the OSPAR NIS EG have identified AquaNIS and JRC EASIN as possible solutions for long-term data storage and processing through a centralised approach. AquaNIS has been indicated, as

¹ JTG BALLAST & BIOFOULING is a joint HELCOM-OSPAR expert group with a remit on preventing introduction of non-indigenous species through ship ballast water and hull fouling. The Terms of Reference of the group are regularly reviewed by the OSPAR EIHA Committee and HELCOM WG Maritime.

the preferred option by OSPAR BDC, noting that annual inputs to the database are secured and quality assured by ICES.

HELCOM

HELCOM NIS monitoring programme currently utilizes the AquaNIS database, complemented by data from other coordinated monitoring, as the data source for the HELCOM assessments. A web service has been developed which links the ICES Biological community database to the Decision Support Tool in the Joint Harmonised Procedure, which is already linked with AquaNIS, thus enabling harvesting of NIS observations reported to ICES as part of HELCOM COMBINE as well as NIS observations reported to AquaNIS.

Work under this theme includes:

- a) providing proposals for improving and harmonizing formats for data submissions under both conventions,
- b) identifying data issues associated with the databases and/or specific datasets,
- c) prepare data sets for assessments according to the quality requirements and make them available in accordance with data use and access policy,
- d) specifying technical aspects of how to make data stream processes operational, e.g. automating delivery of indicator assessments through scripts.

2) Monitoring

Work under this theme includes:

- e) providing a forum for discussion of monitoring programmes, focusing on developing joint or coordinated monitoring where possible,
- f) providing updates to OSPAR CEMP guidelines and appendices, HELCOM monitoring programmes and guidelines when required,
- g) providing expert opinion on the development and implementation of new monitoring strategies and guidelines for NIS.

3) Assessments

Work under this theme includes:

- h) ensuring information flow with regular communication to both convention secretariats relevant to JEG NIS and/or general NIS related issues,
- i) providing updates of indicators to be delivered regularly, frequency to be decided with the priority to deliver assessments for the OSPAR Intermediate Assessment 2028 and HOLAS 4, including thematic assessments,
- j) further developing the candidate indicators and/or developing new indicators, where a need has been identified by the Conventions or by MSFD (D2) at the EU level,
- k) developing integration methods and other aspects of indicator assessment, which require further development to be in line with EU MSFD assessment requirements according to COM DEC 848/2017,
- l) contributing NIS related information to assessments carried out by other relevant groups.

4) Ad hoc expert consultation

Responding as needed to queries from the parent organisations and their respective subsidiary bodies, such as JTG BALLAST & BIOFOULING, relating to NIS issues by providing input or expert opinions.

5) Other Matters

The group will also consider other matters in accordance with its approved workplan.

Ways of working

JEG NIS annual meetings

Annual meetings shall be organised and should be timed, where possible, to immediately precede a relevant convention meeting to ensure delivery of inputs to ongoing work in the respective parent organisation. The format for the meetings will consist of one physical meeting followed by an online meeting, when possible. The responsibility for preparing and organising the meeting is with the co-chairs.

Intersessional work

JEG NIS may be asked for expert opinion to be delivered based on intersessional work (i.e. at more frequent intervals than outlined in the workplan or which are not aligned with the timetable of the annual meeting). Therefore, the annual meeting cycle and reporting format of the group may not necessarily be the most appropriate forum in which to deal with such requests (e.g. due to mismatched deadlines).

Correspondence and intersessional work between relevant group members should be used to provide a timely delivery of required outputs.

Delivery of results

Progress updates are to be provided regularly. For OSPAR, progress updates are to be provided by the lead to ICG-COBAM, and for HELCOM to the WG Sea-based Pressures. Deliverables developed and submitted intersessionally shall be appended to the progress report of this group.

The group, or a co-chairs as representatives of the group, can deliver communications or expert opinions when required (including at short notice, if possible) and independent of the annual timing of the JEG NIS meetings. If possible, such responses should be summarised in the annual report.

Group membership

Membership of JEG NIS is obtained by experts seeking nomination from their national delegations to either OSPAR or HELCOM.

The JEG NIS co-chairs, if substantiated, can also invite non-members to attend the annual meeting or to take part in intersessional work. Invited experts should demonstrate particular skills that are relevant to the delivery of a specific request. A list of members and their affiliations is available on the [HELCOM Meeting Portal](#).

The group is open to connect with other relevant groups and networks.

This group is led by two co-chairs representing both conventions. There is currently no limit on the length of tenure of each co-chair. This arrangement should be reviewed by members on an annual basis.

Convention specifics

OSPAR

JEG NIS reports to OSPAR's Biological Diversity Committee (OSPAR BDC) via the Intersessional Correspondence Group on Co-ordination of Biodiversity Assessment and Monitoring (ICG-COBAM). There is also a need for JEG NIS to collaborate with national leads to deliver actions on OSPAR's Environmental Impacts of Human Activities (EIHA) Committee, via ICG-POSH.

HELCOM

JEG NIS will report to the HELCOM WG Sea-based Pressures. JEG NIS will be required to collaborate, as needed, with national leads and co-leads of HELCOM indicators related to NIS and with national leads of HELCOM Recommendations.

The group may also work on other HELCOM projects that support the commitments mentioned above.