



Workplan of the HELCOM Expert Group on Benthic habitats and biotopes (HELCOM EG Benthic), 2025-2026

Approved by the HELCOM Working Group on Biodiversity, Protection and Restoration via correspondence in June 2025.

No	Task	Lead, responsible bodies and interlinked activities	Next steps and comments	Output
Theme: Mapping benthic habitat and biotopes				
1	Cooperation with EMODnet seabed habitat phase 5 and engage with EEA to follow-up on cross-links and revision process (BSAP B32)	Lead: Overall lead by EG Benthic <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - [Sweden] on merging HELCOM HUB into EUNIS (including adjustment and updating the classification of Baltic habitats) - EG Benthic and HELCOM Secretariat on engagement with EMODnet Seabed habitat phase 5 - HELCOM Secretariat on engagement with EEA - HELCOM Secretariat and PROTECT BALTIC on functioning translation matrix Responsible: EG Benthic Interlinked activities:	Regular agenda point during meetings. By 2025: Functioning translation matrix between Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) broad habitat types, Habitats Directive habitats and the European Nature Information System (EUNIS, including NRR), in co-operation with the European Marine Observation and Data network (EMODnet).	Functioning translation matrix between different classification systems with proper documentation explaining the translations. Possibly by 2026: HUB will be merged into EUNIS.
2	Cooperation with EMODnet to identify quality standards (i.e. set of rules) for seafloor habitat mapping and derived products by 2025 (BSAP HT11 and B25)	Lead: EG Benthic with the support of the Secretariat Responsible: EG Benthic Interlinked activities: EMODnet Seabed Habitats	Use of the results of IC HABMAP 1-2024 and cooperation with EMODnet Seabed Habitat. By 2025: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identification of quality standards 	By 2026: common standards for habitat mapping products to improve habitat maps. Long-term: relevant products for CPs and HELCOM indicators.

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			- Identify list of critical developments needs for EUSeaMap in order to be used in indicators.	
Theme: Assessment and indicators				
3	Collect national information on thresholds and approach, share with meeting and discuss strong and weak points (BSAP S67).	Lead: EG Benthic Responsible: Interlinked activities: EU TG Seabed	Continuous process for 2026 to support other relevant tasks (cf. below).	Approval of adjustments the integrated assessment by HOD in Q4 2026.
4	Share experiences on assessing the extent of adversely affected area and identifying issues, challenges and possible solutions (BSAP S67).	Lead: [Sweden] Responsible: Interlinked activities: EU TG Seabed	by Q4 2025: further definition is needed for common understanding. Where is the limit for adversely affected or affected? Presentation during IC EG BENTHIC 5-2025.	Regular information flow for a common understanding.
5	Potential joint WS between OSPAR and HELCOM benthic EGs to share experiences on the use of current indicators at regional level (Issue B of HOLAS RevDev).	Lead: co-lead: Sweden, Germany with support of Denmark, Responsible: EG Benthic and Secretariats Interlinked activities:	Intersessional discussion by Germany, Sweden and Denmark on the relevance of this workshop. Proposal to be shared with EG Benthic and if relevant, workshop to be held in Q4 2025 or 2026.	Sharing experiences between Regional Sea Conventions.
6	Enhancing CumI methods based on national experiences (Issue C of HOLAS RevDev).	Lead: Germany Responsible: Interlinked activities: EU TG Seabed sub-groups	2025: Presentations of national issues regarding CumI (e.g., specific examples by Lithuania and Denmark), further discussion by the group and possible comparison of outcomes. Continuous task to look for funding / dedicated project	Sharing knowledge to prepare a dedicated project. Testing CumI and further adjustments, if needed for HOLAS 4.

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7	Threshold Values for soft-bottom macrofauna in South/South-Westerly regions (BSAP S67 and Issue D of HOLAS RevDev).	Lead: indicators lead (Finland and Sweden) + Germany Responsible: EG Benthic Interlinked activities: EU TG Seabed sub-groups	Q1 2025: the countries sharing these basins should check data availability and the application for South/South-Westerly regions during intersessional work. Continuous discussion by EG Benthic to propose the approach to WG BioDiv and WG Sea-based pressures. Resources to secure the time of the leads and national regional experts involved would be needed.	New threshold values to be approved by HOD in Q2 2026.
8	Better sensitivity scores (CumI and SPIA), higher resolution human activities data, and improved data flows for human activities data for CumI (Issue E of HOLAS RevDev).	Lead: Germany with support of GES4Seas (for CumI) and PROTECT BALTIC project (for SPIA) Responsible: Interlinked activities: EU TG Seabed sub-groups	Q4 2025: suggestion of better sensitivity scores to be discussed by EG Benthic Q3 2026: proposal recommended by EG Benthic for sensitivity scores. Q2 2026: For dataflows, HELCOM Secretariat to inform EG Benthic on possible datacalls / data sources. Certain elements can be carried out under normal processes, but unsure if substantial improvements could be done. A project would be needed to finalize the complete process.	Improvement of CumI and SPIA to be approved by HOD in Q4 2026.

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			Scale of project would determine depth of progress.	
9	Hard and soft substrate vegetation status indicator (Issue G of HOLAS RevDev).	Lead: EG Benthic Responsible: Interlinked activities: EU TG Seabed sub-groups	Possible workshop in 2025 with invited guests. A dedicated group should support the planning of the workshop. Continuous discussion on possible funding / dedicated project.	Indicator approval by HOD in Q4 2026.
10	Improved investigation on temporal trends for softbottom macrofauna community (Issue F of HOLAS RevDev).	Lead: indicators lead (Finland and Sweden) Responsible: EG Benthic Interlinked activities: EU TG Seabed sub-groups	Continuous task under EG Benthic (agenda point) initiated in Q1 2025 with discussions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - which temporal trends? - use of single stations? Is it comparable with the indicator? - Common patterns (i.e. large-scale patterns) overtime in different areas? Aim show results for consideration by WG BioDiv in Q3 2025. Requires resource support from national sources to secure time of indicator leads.	By Q4 2025, improved overview of temporal trends made available.
11	Evaluate and develop approaches to 'take into account' other relevant descriptors and confidence (Issue K of HOLAS RevDev).	Lead: [Sweden and Finland as co-leads] Responsible: Interlinked activities: EU TG Seabed	from Q2 2025: agenda point to EG Benthic meetings to discuss other descriptors to be included into Benthic integrated assessment as well as confidence.	Approval by HOD in Q4 2026.

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			<p>Continuous task to discuss potential project / funding.</p> <p>Regular reporting to WG BioDiv and communication with other HELCOM groups (i.e. EG Eutro).</p>	
12	Evaluate if a functional index (similar to BPc,IPc) calculated from the same samples as BQI could be used as indicator (Issue H of HOLAS RevDev).	<p>Lead: EG Benthic. Lead to be identified after the workshop</p> <p>Responsible: EG Benthic</p> <p>Interlinked activities: EU TG Seabed sub-groups</p>	<p>Late Workshop in Q3 2025 to use input from ICES Benthos Ecology Working Group (BEWG) in May 2025?</p> <p>A designated project would be optimal.</p>	Approval by HOD in Q4 2026.
13	Publish a report/paper on HOLAS 3 integrated assessment system, including test cases (Issue I of HOLAS RevDev).	<p>Lead: HOLAS 3 development team (Indicator leads, EG Benthic Chair, Secretariat).</p> <p>Responsible:</p> <p>Interlinked activities:</p>	Work to be carried in 2025 with contribution by EG Benthic during the meetings (agenda point).	Report to be ready by the end of 2025 to prepare possible adjustments (cf. task 17).
14	Define 'loss', 'disturbance', 'adverse effect', 'risk of loss', 'risk of disturbance' and 'risk of adverse effect', taking into account EU developments on benthic habitats definition, but to also make the definitions more operational and concrete for HELCOM purposes (BSAP S65 and S68).	<p>Lead: (Sweden)</p> <p>Responsible: EG Benthic</p> <p>Interlinked activities: associated work such as ICES workshops and TG Seabed materials and CumI indicator</p>	<p>Definitions to be built on the EU MSFD definition (for a period of two reporting cycles (>12 years) or more) and the ICES WKBEDPRESS and WKBEDLOSS workshops- to further operationalize the definition by considering e.g. observed loss and risk of loss. EU TG Seabed workshop in May/June 2025 may progress the issue. Continuous task to produce definitions by Q2 2026 to be considered by WG Sea-based</p>	More operational and concrete definitions for HELCOM purposes (i.e. related BSAP actions).

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			Pressures. WG BioDiv to be informed on the process.	
Theme: Monitoring				
15	Sharing information on national monitoring methods and programmes	Lead: HELCOM Secretariat Responsible: EG Benthic Interlinked activities:	Continuous, agenda point on regular meetings.	Collation on existing methods to further align common approach on MSFD D6.
16	Target the gaps identified in the HELCOM monitoring programmes of biotopes, habitats, including key habitats and key habitats forming species by 2024 and operationalize continual Baltic-wide monitoring of those biotopes and habitats by 2030 (BSAP HT6 and HT10).	Lead: EG Benthic with the support of the Secretariat Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Regular discussion during EG Benthic meetings on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - on funding opportunities to apply for a dedicated project - sharing information on ongoing process on data calls related to monitoring stations and initiate discussion on potential gaps (e.g. coverage, etc.) <p>WG BioDiv to discuss the topic of operationalization of monitoring since it is not under the mandate of EG Benthic.</p>	Future dedicated project. Develop a proposal on how to improve regional cooperation based on ongoing work (i.e. reviewing monitoring programmes and monitoring station data call). by Q1 2026, to develop a tentative / initial list of prioritized habitats to be monitored to highlight funding needs, for example to keep existing time series.
17	Identify and apply for project(s) to support the work	Lead: EG Benthic with the support of the Secretariat Responsible: EG Benthic Interlinked activities:	Continuous	Potential dedicated project(s) to enhance the work.
Theme: Information flow				

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18	Additional adjustments to integrated assessment based on TG Seabed outputs and any indicator development (Issue J of HOLAS RevDev).	Lead: Indicator leads (Finland and Sweden) and the Secretariat Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Continuous information exchange.	Adjustments to integrated assessment approved by HOD in Q4 2026.
19	Increase visibility and awareness of EG Benthic to ensure that relevant information is shared and can be used for regular work.	Lead: EG Benthic with the support of the Secretariat Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Continuous information exchange.	EG Benthic is aware of other processes and projects which are relevant for the implementation of this workplan
20	Considering the available information under EN Clime to be used in HOLAS 4 (BSAP HT1)	Lead: Secretariat for information flow Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Share information on how to better incorporate climate change in HOLAS 4 products. How to contribute to the implementation to BSAP HT1.	Clear plan to use all relevant information in HOLAS 4.
21	Cooperation with EG Foodweb (BSAP B34)	Lead: EG Foodweb with the support of EG Benthic Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Continuous task, sharing information when relevant.	Short-term: input of EG Benthic to EG Foodweb when needed. Long-term: operational food web assessment for HOLAS 4
22	Input to process of drafting of the HELCOM Action Plan on benthic habitat restoration]	Lead: PROTECT BALTIC project Responsible: PROTECT Baltic project Interlinked activities:	Continuous input from EG Benthic when requested by the project.	HELCOM Action Plan on benthic habitat restoration (2026) with relevant input from EG Benthic.