



Workplan of the HELCOM Expert Group on Marine Mammals (HELCOM EG MaMa), 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: Management plans for marine mammals				
1	<p>The national representatives of EG MaMa are requested to review the new and updated marine mammals national management and action plans from their respective countries, for example against the guidelines developed by SEAL 8-2014 for seal species.</p> <p>Implementation of BSAP actions B19, B20, B21, B23</p>	<p>Lead: Secretariat to keep track of information flow, countries to contribute.</p> <p>Responsible: Countries and EG MaMa as well as Secretariat.</p>	<p>Ad-hoc report to EG MaMa</p> <p>2025: Finland to submit document on new management plan and review by Sweden in lines with guidelines as approved by SEAL 9-2015.</p> <p>All Contracting Parties are invited to share with EG MaMa new or updated management plans or related planned activities.</p> <p>Dedicated session on exchange of information on experience in developing and implementing management plans with practical questions or issues to be discussed by the group in 2025.</p>	<p>Finalise, if needed, and continue to implement national or local conservation and/or management plans for grey seals (B19).</p> <p>Finalise, if needed, and continue to implement national conservation and/or management plans for ringed seals (B20).</p> <p>By 2026, updated overview of management plans and best practices to support the development and implementation.</p> <p>Continuous: review management plans for harbour porpoise and harbour seals.</p>
Theme: Assessment / indicators				
	<p>Address knowledge gaps regarding (related to issue F of HOLAS RevDev)</p> <p>Implementation of BSAP action B8 (i.e. contaminants) and HT6</p>			

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2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> health indicator (grey and harbour seals, harbour porpoise) 	Lead: Germany with the support of the Marine Mammal Health Team Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Scoring method for lungs pathology for harbour porpoise to be reviewed by EG MaMa during 2025. Inform/request guidance from WG BioDiv (Q2 2025, Q1 2026, Q3 2026).	Output to be confirmed (test case/indicator?) Candidate or pre-core indicator (i.e. harmonization among the CPs on methods) for HOLAS 4.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nutritional status of seals (i.e. blubber thickness on grey seal) 	Lead: Sweden with the support of the Marine Mammal Health Team Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Explore options for method developments for bringing data from new regions using drones footages during 2025 meeting of EG MaMa and feasibility to use it for future HOLAS Progress of the Marine Mammal Health Team to be presented to EG MaMa and inform/request guidance from WG BioDiv (Q2 2025, Q1 2026, Q3 2026). Information on adjusting TVs for grey seals to be presented during 2025 EG MaMa meeting with updated methodology. Approval of new threshold values for grey seal by HOD in Q4 2026.	HOLAS 4: updated and operationalized indicator. Long-term (for HOLAS 5?): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand indicator to other seal species; - Data from new areas for grey (to be confirmed) and harbour seal.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reproductive status indicator of seals (grey seal) 	Lead: Sweden with the support of the Marine Mammal Health Team Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Long-term: explore methods for harbour seal, ringed seal. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information on adjusting TVs for grey seals to be presented during 2025 EG MaMa meeting with updated methodology; - Approval of new threshold values for grey seal by HOD in Q4 2026. 	Updated of existing core indicator for grey seal. long-term (HOLAS 5): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - harbour and ringed seals, harbour porpoise; - new methods to cover new areas and species

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			Denmark to share information on using drones for harbour porpoise (early survival and birth rate) during next meeting of EG MaMa and feasibility to use it for HOLAS 4. Secretariat to reach Finland to check their involvement (e.g. dataflow, etc.).	(e.g. harbour porpoise), for example using drones.
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> considering including PCB in existing or future indicators. 	Lead: Germany with the support of the Marine Mammal Health Team Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Sharing updates during 2025 EG MaMa meeting on progress on the OSPAR PCB indicator for potential use in HELCOM area and discussion on next steps. 2025 EG MaMa meeting: the countries to share information on collected data and initiatives (e.g. regular monitoring?) and Germany to update the group on this topic.	Review of available data and what has been done and collected in the region, cooperation with other relevant bodies and projects, for example on birds.
	Review data availability for harbour porpoise (issue C of HOLAS RevDev) BSAP HT6			
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abundance 	Lead: Indicators lead (Sweden and Germany) with the support of the Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team Responsible: Interlinked activities:	CUMBIAH project will start in spring 2025, if funded is secured. The project plans to analyze SAMBAH 2 results and work on developing TVs late 2025 until 2027. - Baltic Proper population: results might not be ready by 2027 but abundance estimates	Proposal to be submitted to WG BioDiv in 2027.

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			<p>from SAMBAH could be re-used;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Belt Sea population: latest SCANS survey results to be used. <p>2025: Inform WG BioDiv during the spring meeting of the one year delay from HOLAS RevDev plan on TVs proposal (i.e. anticipated in late March 2027).</p>	
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution 	<p>Lead: Indicators lead (Sweden and Germany) with the support of the Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team</p> <p>Responsible:</p> <p>Interlinked activities:</p>	<p>Updated layer not available for HOLAS 4 for Baltic proper population.</p> <p>Belt Sea population: SCANS survey results to be used with new methodology.</p>	<p>New method to be developed for HOLAS 5, test case would be needed to be sure that it is optimal for Belt Sea population.</p>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Habitat quality 	<p>Lead: Indicators lead (Sweden and Germany) with the support of the Harbour Porpoise Abundance and Distribution Team</p> <p>Responsible:</p> <p>Interlinked activities:</p>	<p>Belt Sea: no output available on time for HOLAS 4 from CUMBI AH project (if funding secured).</p> <p>Baltic proper: no output available on time for HOLAS 4 from SAMBAH II project.</p>	<p>no output for HOLAS 4 but might be used for HOLAS 5.</p>
9	<p>Continuation of the work on the development (i.e. data availability and threshold values) of the indicator “Number of drowned mammals and waterbirds in fishing gears” and report to EG MaMa (issue D of HOLAS RevDev)</p> <p>BSAP B8, S44, S48</p>	<p>Lead: Germany and Poland</p> <p>Responsible:</p> <p>Interlinked activities:</p>	<p>Consideration by EG MaMa in 2025 if results from CIBBRINA project on RLA for Belt Sea harbour porpoise can be used for HOLAS 4.</p> <p>CIBBRINA developing mPBR, RLA and other methods for grey, harbour and ringed seals and harbour porpoise,</p>	<p>fully updated/operational indicators (i.e. data calls, threshold, etc.).</p>

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			<p>output to be ready in 2027. EG MaMa to be informed in 2025 and 2026 on methods and results.</p> <p>Improvement of fisheries-based data from national initiatives/projects.</p> <p>Progress to be shared with WG BioDiv in Q2 2025, further work by indicator leads, Poland and Germany and EG MaMa for approval of data and threshold values in Q4 2026 by HOD.</p>	
	Review data availability, assessment methods and threshold values for seals: (issue B of HOLAS RevDev)			
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seal Abundance 	<p>Lead: Sweden with support of Denmark and Seal Population, Abundance and Distribution Team</p> <p>Responsible:</p> <p>Interlinked activities:</p>	<p>Definition of carrying capacity would need dedicated project, maybe not under the HOLAS 4 timeframe. PAL project on grey seal to initiate the work: EG MaMa to be informed in 2025 and 2026.</p> <p>Inform WG BioDiv 2025 spring meeting that adjusting TVs using carrying capacity and population models cannot be achieved.</p>	full operational indicators (i.e. data calls, assessment method, threshold, etc.).
11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seal Distribution (distribution at sea: issue E of HOLAS RevDev) 	<p>Lead: Denmark and Sweden with support of the Seal Population, Abundance and Distribution Team</p> <p>Responsible:</p> <p>Interlinked activities:</p>	<p>Issue E of HOLAS RevDev: Denmark to present telemetry project during 2025 meeting of EG MaMa for grey and harbour seals and discussion on how integrate this information in HOLAS 4 and HELCOM work (i.e. regular monitoring).</p>	<p>full operational indicators (i.e. data calls, assessment method, threshold, etc.).</p> <p>Maps deriving from modelling sea distribution and habitat suitability</p>

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			2025: EG MaMa to discuss collecting ringed seal telemetry historical data.	as contextual information (grey seal and harbour seal).
12	Review of the integration rules under BEAT and parameters under the indicators to ensure ecological consistency (issue H of HOLAS RevDev)	Lead: indicators leads Responsible: EG MaMa and WG BioDiv Interlinked activities: Other Regional Sea Conventions (i.e. OSPAR), WG GES related process	<p>Integration rules under BEAT should reflect ecological consistency: the use of OOA for a parameter can bias the assessment. There is a need to review this aspect in advance of HOLAS 4. It is also important to maintain alignment with EU MSFD Article 8 guidance on the issue and cooperate closely with relevant processes in such work.</p> <p>Presentation and discussion on integration rules during 2025 EG MaMa meeting.</p> <p>CIBBRINA to share results in mid-2026 to support discussions on integration rules.</p> <p>Test case to harmonize assessment results of HD and MSFD for grey seal and harbour porpoise to be communicated to spring 2025 WG BioDiv meeting and further actions if needed.</p> <p>Revised integration rules to be approved by HOD in Q4 2026.</p>	Better integration rules for HOLAS 4.
13	Knowledge gaps on all threats for the western Baltic harbour porpoise	Lead: Denmark, Sweden and Germany with support of Poland to initiate the process	[late implementation of BSAP action, planned initially by 2023]	List / format to be decided in 2025 by EG MaMa.

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	population have been specified and listed (BSAP B8)	Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Plan for the work to be presented during 2025 meeting of EG MaMa. 2025: Poland to initiate the process, and task for relevant countries to check how the current report on B8 can be used / specificities for western population to be identified.	List of threats and knowledge gaps. Recommendations on mitigation measures.
Theme: Dataflows on marine mammals				
14	All Contracting Parties to provide annual quality data on the mortality, including information on bycatch and illegal killing, of Implementation of BSAP action S48	Lead: Secretariat for information flow and EG MaMa (CPs) to contribute Responsible: WG BioDiv. Interlinked activities:	Annual reporting via the overview of dataflows to EG MaMa and communication with WG BioDiv and WG Fish. Overview of dataflows available on the EG MaMa workspace	Ensure to gather the best available/reliable/realistic data on marine mammals mortality in the Baltic Sea.
15	The Contracting Parties are requested to report to the HELCOM/ASCOBANS Database on Harbour Porpoise (sightings, strandings and by-catch) prior to EG MaMa meeting by providing the data to the HELCOM Secretariat. BSAP B10.	Lead: Secretariat for information flow, EG MaMa (CPs) to contribute Responsible: EG MaMa and Secretariat Interlinked activities:	Continuous process Annual reporting via dataflow overview and sharing information during EG MaMa meeting on the latest reporting by the CPs. Overview of dataflows available on the EG MaMa workspace	Continuation of data gathering towards HOLAS 4.
16	The Contracting Parties are requested to report metadata on PAM to be made available on a relevant HELCOM data service Specify data needs for future. BSAP B10.	Lead: Secretariat for data flow and online availability of data with EG MaMa (CPs) to contribute Responsible: EG MaMa and Secretariat Interlinked activities:	Continuous process. Annual reporting, sharing information.	Producing an overview of available data across the Baltic Sea. Uniformed PAM data format for the HELCOM area.

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			Secretariat will inform EG MaMa in 2025 on solution to publish the metadata online. Overview of dataflows available on the EG MaMa workspace	
17	Sharing information on the progress of the ASCOBANS European marine mammals stranding database, including geographic information, and to propose how to harmonize the HELCOM data collection with this initiative	Lead: Germany to inform regularly EG MaMa Responsible: EG MaMa Interlinked activities:	Continuous process. 2025: Germany to share the outcome of the 2024 ECS workshop on the database.	Recommendation on how to make available such data for the HELCOM Area as part of the European database.
18	The Contracting Parties are invited to share information on uncommon sightings in the HELCOM Area	Lead: Secretariat with contribution from EG MaMa (CPs) Responsible: Secretariat Interlinked activities:	Continuous. Ad-hoc reporting from CPs to the Secretariat based on data flow overview available on the EG MaMa workspace . Presentation of reported data during each EG MAMA meeting. The Secretariat will investigate with ICES if data is available for the HELCOM Area and present to EG MAMA in 2025 how it could be included as historical data.	Functional information flow to gather data on uncommon sightings of marine mammals. Summary to be presented by the Secretariat during the meetings of EG MaMa.
Theme: Monitoring and guidelines				
19	Review relevant monitoring programmes related to marine mammals BSAP HT6	Lead: EG MaMa Responsible: EG MaMa Interlinked activities:	Continuous.	Updated monitoring programmes in line with MSFD reporting.

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20	Proposing new monitoring programme to address coordination gap on harbour porpoise Baltic proper population.	Lead: Denmark and Sweden Responsible: Interlinked activities:	SAMBAH 2 management team meeting in February 2025 to develop a proposal paper to be submitted to WG BioDiv and WG GEAR in 2025.	Concept for coordinated monitoring programme.
21	Increase common seals monitoring practices during pupping season (issue G of HOLAS RevDev)	Lead: Estonia, Sweden Responsible: Interlinked activities:	<p>2025:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meeting (during winter 2024-2025) of Seal Population, Abundance and Distribution during to initial discussion on revision of monitoring guidelines (harbour and grey seals) based on current methods, as well as on methods for ringed seal pupping monitoring methods; - EG MaMa meeting: review of results from Seal Population, Abundance and Distribution Team meeting and recommend possible revision of monitoring guidelines for grey and harbour seals; - Overview of discussion from Seal Population, Abundance and Distribution Team meeting on next steps for ringed seal. <p>Updated guidelines, if needed, to be approved by HOD in Q4 2025 and clear message to HOD (Q4 2025) on resources need to have a better regional overview and breeding success of seal species.</p>	<p>Updated monitoring guidelines for grey and harbour seals.</p> <p>clear message if monitoring guidelines on ringed seals to be developed or not.</p>

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22	The monitoring guideline for the draft target organ health indicator for marine mammals will be further improved intersessionally and presented at EG MaMa BSAP HT6	Lead: Indicator lead (Germany) Responsible: Indicator lead Interlinked activities:	Continuous. The health team will annually share information to EG MaMa on the progress.	Draft of the monitoring guideline for the health indicator.
23	The Harbour Porpoise Distribution and Abundance indicator team will continue the work on drafting monitoring guidelines for distribution and abundance intersessionally and present at EG MaMa. BSAP HT6	Lead: Harbour Porpoise Distribution and Abundance indicator lead (Sweden and Germany) Responsible: Indicator lead Interlinked activities:	Input from CUMBIAH project. Continuous. The Harbour Porpoise Distribution and Abundance indicator team will annually share information with EG MaMa on the progress.	Guidelines for PAM and visual surveys to be further drafted. Monitoring guidelines to be approved by HOD in Q2 2026, with initial review by WG BioDiv for applicability under MSFD Art. 11.
24	Follow-up of existing monitoring guidelines (i.e. nutritional and reproductive status, distribution and abundance) and to update them if needed BSAP HT6	Lead: Relevant indicator leads/co-leads Responsible: Relevant Indicator leads/co-leads Interlinked activities:	Continuous, sharing information during each EG MaMa meeting, if needed.	Have up-to-date monitoring guidelines.
Theme: cooperation with other organizations (e.g. international agreements) and relevant projects/initiatives				
25	Finland and Poland to report on activities of ASCOBANS and the Chair of Jastarnia Group, to report on activities of the Jastarnia Group to EG MaMa	Lead: Poland Responsible: Secretariat and relevant contacts Interlinked activities:	Continuous, sharing information at each EG MaMa meeting.	Operational information flow.
26	Share information on potential future projects in the HELCOM Area and of relevance for EG MaMa (Several BSAP actions under the segments on biodiversity and sea-based activities)	Lead: All CPs + Secretariat Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Continuous, sharing information at each EG MaMa meeting.	Operational information flow.

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27	Sharing current knowledge and initiative on harbour porpoise prey depletion in line with the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee (AC) (and potentially for seals) Contribution to BSAP action B34 on food web assessment	Lead: [Poland] Responsible: EG MaMa Interlinked activities: EG Foodweb	2025: Denmark, Germany and Poland to draft clear questions on prey depletion to be considered by EG Foodweb Long-term: Support of the group to EG Foodweb work, if requested.	Contribute to development of the definition of prey depletion in relation to small cetaceans (cf. ASCOBANS for harbour porpoise) and seals. Contribution to EG Foodweb work (cf. BSAP action B34) by 2026 (indicator for food web).
28	Initiate discussion with EG Noise to map impulsive and continuous noise exposure to marine mammals in the HELCOM Area BSAP actions: S57, S59, S60, S61	Lead: Secretariat Responsible: Secretariat with the Chair of EG MaMa Interlinked activities: EG Noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2025: meeting between chairs of both EGs; - Possible joint workshop by the end of 2025. Long-term: cooperation with EG Noise.	Maps highlighting noise with the current knowledge of marine mammals potential distribution and suitable habitat. Inclusion of such information in noise indicators for HOLAS 4 (format to be defined).
Theme: Marine mammals and fisheries interaction				
29	Present progress from the data collection, assessment and mitigation measures related to bycatch BSAP actions: S43, S44, S45, S46, S47	Lead: Poland (tbc) with support of the Secretariat Responsible: EG MaMa Interlinked activities: cooperation / sharing information with BALTFISH and HELCOM FISH Working Group for the BSAP actions and activities of these groups	Continuous, CPs sharing information during EG MaMa meetings. Bycatch mitigation toolbox to be presented when available.	Making available up to date information to EG MaMa. Operational mitigation toolbox on bycatch mitigation developed under WG Fish (2025) with input from EG MaMa.
30	Follow up on the progress regarding the ICES Special Request Advice on Emergency Measures for Harbour Porpoise BSAP actions S45, S46, S47, S48	Lead: Chair of Jastarnia Group Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Continuous, sharing information during EG MaMa meetings.	Making available up to date information to EG MaMa.
Theme: HELCOM recommendations and other relevant tropic(s)				

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31	Follow up of HELCOM Recommendations on Marine Mammals	Lead: Poland (Rec. 17/2) and Sweden (Rec. 27/28-2) Responsible: WG BioDiv Interlinked activities:	Continuous.	Updated reporting to HELCOM recommendations.
32	Present progress on drafting a preliminary project proposal for PAL (Precautionary Approach Level) for grey seal in the Baltic Sea	Lead: Denmark with the support of Estonia, Sweden and Germany Responsible: EG MaMa Interlinked activities:	2025: - budget to be finalized and information to be shared to EG MaMa meeting; - information on flipper tag methodology to be shared.	Project proposal / funding to further work on PAL for grey seal.
33	Update of Limit Reference Level for harbour seal and update management unit structure for harbour seal (Issue A of HOLAS RevDev)	Lead: Denmark Responsible: EG MaMa Interlinked activities:	Annual report to EG MaMa if possible to be utilized for HOLAS 4. Update the group on the preparation of genetic dataset to support future population genetic work.	long-term: project proposal for new LRL + management unit structure and supporting information.
Theme: intersessional activities of the EG MaMa teams				
The Marine Mammal Health Team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities at EG MaMa meetings which are not already covered in previous tasks, for example:				
34	Communication between team members Intersessional work	Lead: Team lead (Germany) Responsible: Team lead (Germany) Interlinked activities:	Continuous communication within the team.	Up to date information shared with team members.
35	Presentation from the team on intersessional activities and relevant topics.	Lead: Team lead (Germany) Responsible: Interlinked activities:	Continuous / inter-assessment update.	Document submitted to EG MaMa meetings with up-to-date information shared with EG MaMa / communication flow between the team and EG MaMa.
The Seal Population, Abundance and Distribution Team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities at EG MaMa meetings which are not already covered in previous tasks, for example:				

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36	Communication between team members Intersessional work	Lead: Team lead (Estonia) Responsible: Team lead (Estonia) Interlinked activities:	Continuous communication within the team.	Up to date information shared with team members.
37	The Seal Population, Abundance and Distribution team is requested to collate metadata, with the support of the Secretariat, on the existing telemetry tag deployments and present the results to provide information of distribution of seals at sea (issue E of HOLAS RevDev)	Lead: Team lead (Estonia) Responsible: Team lead (Estonia) and Secretariat Interlinked activities:	Continuously sharing information on telemetry tags deployments during EG MaMa meetings. Denmark to show initial results during 2025 EG MaMa meeting for grey and harbour seals. Regular discussion with EG MaMa on how to utilize telemetry data (data flows, production of maps, etc.) aiming to show distribution at sea.	Up-to-date information shared with EG MaMa. Q4 2026: approval by HOD on a regional overview and summary of information available to be used as complement of information for HOLAS 4?
38	Presentation from the team on intersessional activities and relevant topics	Lead: Team lead (Estonia) Responsible: Team lead (Estonia) Interlinked activities:	Continuous / inter-assessment update.	Document submitted to EG MaMa meetings with up to date information shared with EG MaMa / communication flow between the team and EG MaMa.
39	Countries to present the results of annual seal survey results for ringed, harbour seal and grey seal	Lead: Team lead (Estonia) Interlinked activities:	Regular report to EG MaMa of the previous year meetings. Continuous.	Up to date information shared with EG MaMa.
40	Collate counts data to produce trend curves for all species and management units to be presented on the HELCOM website	Lead: Team lead (Estonia) and Chair with the support of the Secretariat Responsible: EG MaMa Interlinked activities:	Chair of EG MaMa to provide figures updated annually to the Secretariat, to be presented to 2025 meeting of WG BioDiv. Longterm: regular report to EG MaMa meetings – continuous.	Updated information displayed on HECOM website.

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The Harbour Porpoise Population, Abundance and Distribution Team is requested to inform on their intersessional activities at EG MaMa meetings which are not already covered in previous tasks, for example:				
41	Communication between team members Intersessional work	Lead: Team lead / Indicators leads Responsible: Indicators leads Interlinked activities:	Continuous communication within the team.	Up to date information shared with team members.
42	Presentation from the team on intersessional activities and relevant topics	Lead: Team lead (Germany and Sweden) Interlinked activities:	Continuous.	Document submitted to EG MaMa meetings with updated information shared with EG MaMa.