



Terms of Reference for HELCOM Expert Group on Sturgeon Remediation (EG STUR)

Adopted by HELCOM Heads of Delegation 56-2019

Background:

The development of a Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan (BSSAP) was part of the HELCOM PROJECT “HELCOM STURGEON REMEDIATION” approved by the HELCOM Heads of Delegation 39th Meeting (HOD 39/2012). The Baltic Sea Action Plan states that Contracting Parties should join and/or support Poland and Germany in re-introducing Baltic sturgeon to its potential spawning rivers, and “By 2015, to have the re-introduction program for Baltic sturgeon in place, and - as a long term goal, after their successful re-introduction has been attained - to have best natural reproduction, and populations within safe genetic limits in each potential river”. Poland and Germany informed HELCOM State & Conservation regularly about their progress in re-introducing the species into the historic spawning rivers (in particular Odra- and Vistula river systems).

Starting in 2013, partners from Germany, Poland, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia began work compiling a draft HELCOM Action Plan on Sturgeon.

The 40th Meeting of the Helsinki Commission March 6th and 7th 2019 adopted the Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan.

The implementation of the Baltic Sea Sturgeon Action Plan requires specific activities from the Contracting Parties that need to be followed up and monitored in the frame of the annual reporting obligations. Furthermore, the national activities require some harmonization and cooperation efforts to become effective. State and Conservation 9-2018 took note of the information that there is active cross-border work ongoing within a group of Baltic Sturgeon experts and considered the possibility to link the groups work with that of HELCOM State and Conservation, probably through the establishment of a sturgeon expert network.

It is for this purpose that the project group is to be established as an official HELCOM Expert Group.

Purpose:

The purpose of the EG STUR is to contribute to the implementation of the BSSAP and to give scientific advice to relevant HELCOM bodies. This includes the support of the coordination effort and the outline of best practice technologies for the relevant implementation steps. The EG is intended to be a platform for all matters related to sturgeon conservation and management. It will provide expertise on activities and scientific knowledge related to sturgeon to HELCOM and facilitate collaboration between scientists to prepare scientific publications.

Scope:

The overall scope of the network is to facilitate Baltic Sea regional cooperation for all activities related to sturgeon recovery as outlined in the BSSAP. The BSSAP covers a period of 10 years (2019 – 2029).

Objectives:

The network will strive to ensure that the recovery measures in the Contracting Parties are based on common principles and state of knowledge, pursue the same targets and utilize harmonized methodology to allow the comparison of results.

Further, the network serves as a platform for the exchange of experiences as well as the development of guidelines for the major implementation steps of the BSSAP. The network through the national contact points is to intensify awareness-raising among the public, authorities, NGOs and fishermen as well as their stakeholders by using different media including the Internet and social media.

The network provides and exchanges relevant scientific findings to support the implementation of the BSSAP through coordinated research, the development of harmonized restoration practices, agreed upon methodological approaches for reproduction, rearing, release, and monitoring, common information material for stakeholder and public outreach.

Tasks:

- to support the implementation of the Sturgeon Action Plan and to help reaching the targets of the BSAP.
- to work towards the harmonization of the guidelines (in accordance with the Pan-European Sturgeon Action Plan) with similar approaches in other Macro Regional strategies (Danube, OSPAR, Ionian-Pannonian Strategy) for different sturgeon species.
- to support the Contracting Parties in genetic optimization of broodstock establishment, the development of a multilateral breeding plan and a respective data bank.
- to facilitate the exchange of gametes and fish to secure diverse and functional broodstocks and will provide a common broodstock development guideline.
- to cooperate with all Contact Points and interested HELCOM observers.
- to contribute to HELCOM assessments (such as HOLAS III).
- to, where needed, contribute to the update of the BSAP.
- to provide annual progress reports to HELCOM State&Conservation WG.
- to jointly publish scientific papers and make them available for HELCOM.
- to inform and report on its activities at relevant scientific fora.

These overall tasks provide the framework to guide the work of the network on implementation which depends on availability of resources. If possible the network might be a platform to develop and apply for external funded projects in order to accomplish its objectives (e.g. EUSBSR or Interreg).

Membership

The network will consist of experts nominated by Contracting Parties, including those experts already involved in the project group for the sturgeon Action Plan, and will be open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures. Collaboration with other organizations (such as OSPAR) will also be sought.

Reporting:

The Chair(s) will report to State and Conservation and FISH Working Groups once a year. The report should consist of information on activities, data and developments, a list of links to the meeting sites of previous meetings or workspaces containing documents, and a list of aspects on which decisions or guidance from those working groups are required. A template for the reporting will be provided by the Secretariat.

Work plan:

A work plan for 2019-2021 will be prepared for and elaborated at the first meeting of the network, after which the workplan will be reviewed and updated in the EG STUR meetings prior to the end date of the workplan, to be presented for approval by State and Conservation WG.

Validity of ToRs

The work of the group is open ended. The Terms of Reference are to be subjected to review and, as appropriate, revision by the expert network, endorsement by the HELCOM State and Conservation Working Group and approval by HELCOM Heads of Delegations.

Organization of work

The expert network will function under and receive guidance from the HELCOM State and Conservation Working Group, and will provide support to other groups, in particular to HELCOM FISH Working Group.

The EG can request input from the State and Conservation WG and FISH WG as appropriate.

The mode of work for the expert group will include correspondence and online meetings facilitated by the HELCOM Secretariat, with a physical meeting taking place annually or less frequently as needed. Sub groups might be defined in order to work more thematically. Chair(s) will be elected by the members of EG STUR. The products will be handled at HELCOM Meeting Portal workspaces dedicated to this purpose. The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the network.