

Workplan of EG BENTHIC

This Workplan is valid for a three-year period (beginning November 2022) and is to be reviewed and revised by the Expert Group and approved by State and Conservation WG or its successor. The last column of the table contains comments from EG BENTHIC on the implementation.

EG BENTHIC recognized that tasks 1.2, 4.3 and 4.6 could be prioritized in the work of the EG.

These overall tasks provide the framework to guide the work of the Expert Group, the implementation of which depends on the availability of resources. If possible, the Expert Group might be a platform to develop and apply for external funded projects in order to accomplish the listed objectives.

Yellow highlight indicates annual meetings, **pale blue** indicates provisional plans or work that is continuous, and **dark blue** indicates more affirmative plans.

* Denotes tasks in the updated Baltic Sea Action Plan, with the target year of the BSAP actions denoted when available from the EG BENTHIC perspective

Task	Action	2022	2022	2022	2022	2023	2023	2023	2023	2024	2024	2024	2024	Comments from EG BENTHIC on the implementation
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
1.1	Share information on and summarize existing and planned national benthic habitat mapping methods and programmes													
1.1.1	Workshop + report, on habitat mapping, following a WS held in Finland (timing undecided due to covid-19 travel restrictions)													To be held tentatively during the conference “Bringing marine nature back to our lives – the role of science” organized by the Finnish Inventory Programme for the Underwater Marine Environment (VELMU) in Finland in March 2023.

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		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
1.2	Facilitate common approach for identifying habitats in relevant classification systems (HUB; EUNIS and N2000) that exist in several/most HELCOM countries in order to prioritize future work for mapping and assessment.													EG BENTHIC 8-2021 discuss and agree on levels of details of habitats to be included in assessments to have a common approach for the Baltic Sea.
1.2.1	Identify a collection of habitats (HUB and N2000) that exist in several/most HELCOM countries (linked to activity 4.2.1).													
1.2.2	Update the HELCOM Underwater biotope and habitat (HUB) classification where gaps have been identified by 2024 (BSAP B32) *.													Lack of a habitat maps. Possible postponement of this task. The initial step would be to review the existing EUNIS classification in line with HUB to identify gaps.
1.2.3	Data driven validation of translation between different habitat classification systems (HUB, Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) broad habitat types, Habitats Directive habitats and the European Nature Information System (EUNIS)), in co-operation with the European Marine Observation and Data network (EMODnet) (BSAP B32)*.													Unrealistic to finish this action within the schedule for HOLAS 3. The translation between HUB and EUNIS might not be relevant for the national processes, but relevant for regional / EU /

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														HELCOM processes. Potential issues with data confidentiality (high resolution maps).
2.1	Quality standards for habitat maps													
2.1.1	Validate quality standards (i.e. set of rules) for seafloor habitat mapping and derived products by 2024 (BSAP HT 11 and B25)*.													
2.2	Supporting the development and updating of the existing HELCOM habitat maps													
2.2.1	Agenda point at the annual meeting.													
2.3	Share information on the process of identification of conservation values.													
2.3.1	Agenda point at the annual meeting.													
2.4	Ecosystem services*													
2.4.1	Support the work on mapping ecosystem services and the present and potential spatial distribution of key ecosystem components, including habitat forming species such as bladder wrack, eelgrass, blue mussel and stoneworts Baltic-wide (by 2025 in the updated BSAP (BSAP B25) *. Sharing knowledge and information, if available, to support the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Law													EG BENTHIC can support other EG(s) working on ecosystem services but cannot initiate the work. EG BENTHIC is asking for guidance from S&C on how to support
3.1	Share information on and summarize existing and planned national benthic habitat monitoring, monitoring methods and programmes.													
3.1.1	Agenda point on annual meeting.													Link with 3.3.2 on sharing information on future / potential projects.

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3.2	Review existing methods and techniques for benthic habitat monitoring and survey to support assessment of extent and quality of habitats.													
3.2.1	Collate information on existing methods and techniques. Build on existing work and where possible feed into TG work and align its work with work on descriptor 6 at the EU level, e.g. under TG Seabed. Progress on EU level to be shared at each meeting. Agenda point on annual meeting.													[tentatively: linkage with task 1 of this work plan to follow-up ICES WKBENTH activities]
3.3	Facilitate further development of monitoring and survey methods suitable for different habitat types and assessment needs (especially BSAP, MSFD and HD).													
3.3.1	Expand on the review (activity 3.2.1) to include aspects outside of extent and quality, covering BSAP, MSFD, HD and potentially WFD													Proposition to add the WFD related to eutrophication / D6C5
3.3.2	If possible, identify and apply for project(s) to support the work													Linkage with 3.1.1
3.3.3	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). * Contribution from EN BENTHIC related topics, for example on open-sea areas and hard substrates.													
	Facilitate that relevant HELCOM monitoring programs are regionally coordinated and optimised* (BSAP HT6)													
4.1	Review existing methods and techniques for assessing extent and quality of habitats and biotopes, including integration and aggregation methods.													

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4.1.1	Build on existing work and where possible feed into TG work and align its work with work on descriptor 6 at the EU level, e.g. under TG on Benthic Habitats. Progress on EU level to be shared with each meeting. Review to support the state of the Baltic Sea assessment process.													
4.2	Red List Assessment													
4.2.1	Contribute to update the HELCOM Red List Assessments by 2024, including identifying the main individual and cumulative pressures and underlying human activities affecting the red listed species, biotopes and habitats* (BSAP B22 and B28).													EG BENTHIC is willing to contribute by providing input if requested.
4.2.2	Contribute to work on ensuring that by 2030 the HELCOM marine protected area (MPA) network amongst other things provides specific protection to species and biotopes listed as regionally threatened or near threatened in the HELCOM Red Lists / sharing knowledge and information, if available, to support the implementation of the EU Nature Restoration Law													EG BENTHIC is willing to contribute by providing input if requested.
4.3	Support the development of thresholds in order to assess quality and extent of benthic habitats, particularly with relevance for regional coordination.													
4.3.1	Build on existing work and where possible feed into TG Seabed's work and align its work with work on descriptor 6 at the EU level, e.g. under TG													Linkage with 3.2

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	Seabed on Benthic Habitats. Progress on EU level to be shared with meeting (BSAP S67).													
4.3.2	Collect national information on thresholds and approach, share with meeting and discuss strong and weak points (BSAP S67).													
4.3.3	Share experiences on assessing the extent of adversely affected area and identifying issues, challenges and possible solutions (BSAP S67).													
4.4	Identifying possible new indicators.													
4.4.1	Support the indicator review and update process, agenda item to be added at every meeting (BSAP S67).													
4.4.2	Share up-to-date information on newly proposed indicators from scientific publications, projects both inside and outside of the Baltic Sea to prepare HOLAS 4 (BSAP S67).													
4.5	Support Lead countries to further develop and review benthic habitat indicators, in close cooperation with other relevant HELCOM initiatives and initiatives outside HELCOM, e.g. OSPAR and ICES. This includes but is not limited to:													
4.5.1	Supporting the updating the core indicator reports at regular intervals, as decided in HELCOM. Information point by the Secretariat in the agenda at the annual meeting (BSAP S67).													
4.5.2	Reviewing and commenting indicator-based assessments of benthic communities and habitats to enable a timely and quality assured delivery (BSAP S67).													
4.6	Defining loss and disturbance from human activities*													
	With appropriate cooperation with EU TG Seabed and ICES, define a common approach to address the loss of and disturbance to seabed habitats caused by human activities (by 2026) (BSAP S67)*.													

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5.1	Reporting													
5.1.1	Chair to report to each State and Conservation meeting.													
5.2	Other relevant BSAP actions													
5.2.1	Using the HELCOM/Baltic Earth Joint Expert Network on Climate Change as a platform and through committed implementation of the HELCOM Science Agenda, improve the access of policy-makers to scientific information on the impacts of climate change together with multiple other pressures on the Baltic Sea marine environment through periodic updates of the HELCOM Climate Change Fact Sheet, and incorporate the possible effect of climate change into the holistic assessment of status as well as effectiveness of measures by 2030 at latest (BSAP HT1)													
5.2.2	Ensure that by 2030 the HELCOM marine protected area (MPA) network amongst other things provides specific protection to species and biotopes listed as regionally threatened or near threatened in the HELCOM Red Lists (BSAP B7)													