



Terms of Reference for the HELCOM Working Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries (HELCOM WG Fish)

Approved via correspondence in March 2023 by the Heads of Delegations.

Purpose

The HELCOM Working Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries (HELCOM WG Fish) of the Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission works with fisheries in relation to the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach to find solutions on how the fisheries sector could further improve coherence with the goals towards reaching good environmental status of the Baltic Sea, taking into account other pressures that may affect fish, their habitats and the possibility for sustainable fisheries. The group provides a platform for identifying and sharing information on fisheries-environmental policy measures and instruments and joint discussion on the Baltic Sea fisheries in the context of the protection of the marine environment, in order to address environmental pressures from fisheries, and consider the environmental conditions affecting ecosystems and fisheries.

It should be recognized that for Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States, the European Union has exclusive competence in the matter of conservation of marine biological resources. The Working Group should create added value, for the HELCOM countries that are EU Member States, in relation to the work on implementation of EU legislation, taking into account the specific needs of the Baltic Sea. The Working Group works at the interface of science and policy and endeavours to ensure that sufficient technical expertise and information are available to support national and regional decision making and implementation processes.

Duties

The duties of the Working Group are:

To advise the Commission in discharging its duties under Article 20 of the Helsinki Convention adopted at the Diplomatic Conference on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area, Helsinki 9 April 1992, especially in respect of matters related to Articles 3 (“Fundamental principles and obligations”), 15 (“Nature conservation and biodiversity”), 16 (“Reporting and exchange of information”), 24 (“Scientific and technological cooperation”) to the Convention, in relation to:

- I) Addressing current and emerging issues related to fish and fisheries, in particular:
 - i. facilitate the work and utilise the results of fish- and fisheries related work of HELCOM groups and relevant projects;
 - ii. contribute to recognising the data gaps that prevent adequately assessing human pressures on the ecosystems in cooperation with relevant bodies, thus contributing to HELCOM holistic assessments;
 - iii. contribute to operationalization of HELCOM fish-related core indicators from the point of view of biodiversity, food webs and seafloor integrity;
 - iv. address fishing practices which have a potential negative impact on conservation goals and/or threatened or declining species and habitats, especially within coastal and marine

protected areas, taking into account environmental issues and processes, such as oxygen depletion, pollution, habitat destruction, and migratory barriers which may affect the quality, abundance and distribution of fish;

- v. further develop co-operation to implement best practices in relation to the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach and with the view to achieve the established objectives of HELCOM, e.g. related to migratory fish species;
- vi. further develop and cooperate to implement best practices in relation to the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach on other components of biodiversity and interactions between fisheries and marine ecosystems.

II) Cooperating with other international organizations

- i. to seek synergies with the relevant work carried out in other fora relevant for the group such as in the European Union, the Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum (BALTFISH), International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), the Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC), other European Regional Seas Conventions, regional and global conventions and related policies and major projects.

III) Supporting and guiding the implementation of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, Ministerial Declarations and HELCOM Recommendations related to fish and fisheries, including:

- i. coordinating the reporting;
- ii. proposing strategies, guidelines and recommendations in the area of its expertise.

Expected outcomes

Expected outcomes of the work conducted in the frame of the HELCOM Working Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries are detailed in the 2-year workplan of the Working Group, regularly updated by the Working Group and approved by the HELCOM Heads of Delegation.

Organization of work

The HELCOM Working Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries consists of authorities and experts from Contracting Parties and is open to Observers according to HELCOM procedures. Delegations from Contracting Parties as well as Observers will identify a lead of delegation who will approve the nominations of the delegation they belong to. Leads of delegations will also approve meeting participants from their delegation. Additional experts and representatives of organizations can be invited to the meetings by the HELCOM Secretariat in consultation with the Chair.

Within HELCOM, the Working Group will seek synergies and cooperate with relevant Working Groups, especially with regards to highly interconnected topics.

The Working Group will cooperate with the Working Group on the Implementation of the Ecosystem Approach (GEAR) with regards to horizontal topics which span the remit of several HELCOM bodies, in particular the ecosystem approach.

The HELCOM Working Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries will hold three meetings in two years (at most one physical meeting per year and other meetings online). Extraordinary intersessional online meetings should only take place if an urgent need arises. The Contracting Parties shall ensure that a delegate with the mandate to negotiate attends the meeting.

The HELCOM Working Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries guides and approves the work of Expert Groups working with topics under the Working Groups' remit, including but not limited to, migratory fish species, fisheries data and sustainable aquaculture. The Working Group has the possibility to propose

the establishment of additional Expert Groups as needed to progress work. The establishment of any new Expert Groups are to be approved by Heads of Delegation. The workplan of expert groups will be revised and approved by the Working Group.

The HELCOM Working Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries will elect a Chair and Vice-Chair for a 2-year mandate period, with the possibility of extension of a maximum of three consecutive mandate periods with the aim to rotate these roles between Contracting Parties.

The current Terms of Reference are to be reviewed periodically, every four years, or as the need arises.

The HELCOM Secretariat will provide administrative support to the working group.

The HELCOM Working Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries reports to the HELCOM Heads of Delegation.

The updated (2023) HELCOM organigram is available [here](#) on the HELCOM website.