

BSAC report on HELCOM WG FISH meeting

1-3 November 2023

BSAC was represented by the ExCom Chair and the Executive Secretary

HELCOM presented the work from the other working groups in the past year.

At the last meeting WG Fish had invited WG BioDiv to support WG Fish in the implementation of BSAP Action S52 (“Define necessary complementary measures by 2024 in relevant policy (fisheries, environment etc.) areas to improve the size/age structure for fish stocks, including cod”), particularly by contributing with proposals for the list of prioritised stocks as well as identifying potential additional measures and their effectiveness at improving size/age structure. **HELCOM WG BIODIV Group recommended to prioritise, as a starting point, the work on sprat, herring, cod, salmon, flatfish and eel species.** Additional protection measures should be considered for these species.

WG BIODIV also scoped available fisheries measures, grouped the measures thematically, considered the effectiveness of the measures in securing positive biodiversity outcomes, the effectiveness of the measures at improving the size and age structure of fish stocks and the feasibility of implementing the measures. Measures were grouped as:

- restrictive measures (gear, seasonal, spatial, closure, catch quantity, size)
- proactive measures (gear, restoration, planning, bioengineering, enforcement)

CCB added information that ICES WKD3C3 SCOPE was to deliver some advice on size/age by end of January 2024.

The BSAC secretariat raised the question of the potential need to engage experts such as scientists but also stakeholders including NGOs and fishers to give input on both the effectiveness and feasibility.

HELCOM secretariat explained that the WG BIODIV is composed of scientists, Member States (MS) representatives and some NGOs. All have background on biodiversity conservation.

HELCOM FISH PRO will become an expert group called EG Coastal Fish and will work on the targeted coastal fish assessments when needed.

Some Member States reminded that the BALTFISH group is there to work on fisheries management. HELCOM could give some input, but it was not its role to define measures for fisheries management.

Some MS reminded that the costs of measures should also be evaluated.

The BSAC secretariat signalled that it will share with HELCOM the BSAC recommendations on the Action Plan as these include recommendations on selectivity. In addition, BSAC will discuss this question with ICES during the MIAC meeting on the 18th January.

The FISH Working Group decided to **compile and summarise the recommendations by WG BioDiv, complement it with input by WG FISH, and present it as input to the wider discussion within HELCOM, EU joint special group, BSAC and other stakeholders and processes relevant for the implementation of Action S52.**

The FISH Working Group was invited to save the date for the **Baltic Sea Stakeholder Conference on 29 February 2024, arranged jointly with the PROTECT BALTIC project**, focusing on stakeholder interaction in relation to expanding the restoration and spatial protection measures in the Baltic Sea (document to be submitted). The BSAC will inform members about this meeting through its website and newsletter.

The session looked then at the funding needs for each relevant action of the BSAP. The BSAC secretariat mentioned that it could work with HELCOM and BALTFISH on joint workshops on different topics, including seals and gear developments.

Germany highlighted the national decision to have a fisheries commission working on ecosystem based fisheries. A workshop will be organised in 2024 to look at this topic and present the conclusions of the ongoing work in the MS. A similar work was ongoing in Denmark and results were expected by November 2023.

HELCOM cooperation

- HELCOM cooperation with BALTFISH

The new Presidency of BALTFISH has been working mainly on TACs and will now focus on other matters including harbour porpoise. BALTFISH had planned to have a meeting focused on eel but noted that the Commission and the BSAC had similar plans. Some cooperation was needed with this respect.

The BSAC EBM WG Chair informed that the BSAC EBM WG had met on the 27th September. He also thanked HELCOM for the presentation on HOLAS 3 and the PROTECT project. He also recalled the BSAC advice on eel and the Joint Special Group.

- **HELCOM cooperation with BSAC**

The BSAC Secretariat presented the key BSAC actions from its work programme and specifically the ones which required cooperation with HELCOM.

The workshop on seals on cormorants was also presented by the Chair of ExCom, it attracted more than a hundred participants and featured discussions on the ongoing research and management in place.

Migratory Fish

HELCOM decided that the FISH M group, looking at migratory fish, will be chaired by CCB.

With reference to migratory fish, there was concern with some MS not reporting correctly the data on fish migration.

HELCOM has a draft recommendation on managing large and medium rivers to ensure river connectivity for fish migration. The session was invited to consider the recommendation and recommend its approval.

The BSAC signalled that if any future meeting of FISH M discussing the recommendation is open to observers, there might be interest from BSAC members to follow its work.

PERMAGOV project

The PERMAGOV project was presented. PERMAGOV is aimed at improving EU marine governance so that it can better meet the goals and objectives of the European

Green Deal. PERMAGOV will achieve that by piloting a novel multi-level governance approach in nine case studies around Europe, targeting four broad topics of key importance to sustainable development. These topics are characterized by multi-layered governance arrangements (e.g., local, national, EU, international) that interact with the European Green Deal.

See more: <https://helcom.fi/helcom-at-work/projects/permagov/>

Blue Mission BANOS

The Blue Mission BANOS CSA project was then presented. The EU mission 'Restore our Ocean, Seas and Waters by 2030' will advance concrete solutions to protect the EU's ecosystems and biodiversity, prevent and eliminate pollution and make the blue economy carbon-neutral and circular. As the mission establishes lighthouse projects, 'Blue Parks', and improved digital knowledge systems, wider engagement of stakeholders is needed. The EU-funded Blue Mission BANOS project will act as a facilitator and knowledge broker to inspire, engage and support stakeholders in politics, industry and science across the Baltic and North Sea (BANOS) basins, to channel resources effectively towards the Mission Ocean objectives. The consortium includes active research institutes, networks/clusters and funding agencies and will work with regional and governance structures.

See more: <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/101093845>

WG FISH workplan

The meeting reviewed its workplan.

In relation to action S40¹, the Session acknowledged the need to consider the purpose and use of data to be collated, acknowledged the direct relevance of the input collected in the post-HOLAS 3 review for identifying a list of species and recommended organising a dedicated session during IC WG FISH 3-2024 with the view of coming to an agreement on the list of species at IC WG FISH 4-2024. **The Session welcomed that input by BSAC to support the implementation of the action can be provided in advance of IC WG FISH 3-2024, e.g., in the form of a list of proposed species with rationale included. The secretariat explained that it could put forward an agenda item for the ExCom of January to ask BSAC ExCom's views about the priority species and the data collection needs.**

¹ Identify by 2024 fish species for which there is a need for better data for identified purposes, such as setting threshold levels. Utilize dedicated programmes and projects to facilitate recording and reporting of data for these species by 2025 to support the identification and implementation of measures to achieve good environmental status.

With regards to Action B17², there will be a Fish M meeting dedicated on this next year in addition to a specific meeting on salmon.

With regards to Action S43³, HELCOM highlighted that BSAC is also mentioned there and good help the work when looking at potential technical measures.

With regards to Action S52⁴, the EBM Chair highlighted that BSAC is requesting more information and discussions on selectivity. Questions will be raised to ICES in January.

This specific action might be discussed in a dedicated meeting of WG FISH in Autumn 2024.

With regards to Action S54⁵, BSAC was included in the discussion on seals.

The next HELCOM Fish meeting will take place between 11 and 15th March and between 4th and 8th November.

² With the aim to protect and restore eel population, determine which measures set out in the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), EU Eel Regulation and other relevant instruments would benefit from regional cooperation on a Baltic-wide level. Finalize by 2024 and implement by 2025 a Baltic coordinated programme of such measures.

³ Reduce the negative impacts of fishing activities on the marine ecosystem and to this end, support the development of fisheries management including technical measures to minimize unwanted by-catch of fish, birds and marine mammals and achieve the close to zero target for by-catch rates of relevant species by 2024, especially the Baltic proper population of harbour porpoise by 2022.

⁴ Define necessary complementary measures by 2024 in relevant policy (fisheries, environment etc.) areas to improve the size/age structure for fish stocks, including cod.

⁵ Share information among Contracting Parties, the Baltic Sea Fisheries Forum (BALTFISH) and Baltic Sea Advisory Council (BSAC) on non-lethal mitigation measures or other ways to manage seals-fisheries interactions and implement those measures by 2025, as appropriate.