

BSAC Ecosystem Based Management Working Group
Wednesday 27th September 2023
09.00 – 15.30 (CEST)
Online through Zoom

Report

1. Welcome by the Ecosystem Based Management WG Chair Nils Höglund

Nils Höglund, the EBM WG Chair welcomed the BSAC members, observers, representatives of DG Mare, Members States and invited speakers.

2. Formalities for the start of the meeting

Apologies, AOB, and adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

Under AOB was noted a point by a fisheries representative from Latvia on harbour porpoise bycatch in MSC certified fisheries. The Executive Secretary will add information items on the meeting of the Joint Special Group on 6th October and the meeting of the BSAC Chairs with the Commissioner on 18th October.

3. Response from the Commission to BSAC recommendations concerning the development of offshore windfarms and fisheries interactions ([letter received](#))

The Executive Secretary referred to the BSAC recommendations concerning the development of offshore windfarms and fisheries interactions and the letter from DG Mare received on 11th July, praising the work of BSAC EBM Working Group. [...] “The Commission had agreed that there is a need to better understand the effects of large-scale offshore wind deployment on the marine environment and existing activities at sea, such as fisheries [...] The Commission will support a non-recurrent request to ICES on these interactions, taking advantage of several working groups of ICES involved in offshore renewables analysis.[...] I agree that consultation and dialogue with the general public, local communities and stakeholders are crucial [...]”.

The WG Chair asked the BSAC members whether the discussions on the impact of offshore windfarms should continue in the framework of the EBM WG.

A small-scale fisheries representative proposed to support the non-recurrent request to ICES, with a particular emphasis on western herring whose recruitment is affected by OWF. He stated that the WG should consider revisiting the OWF once a year as a standing item of the EBM WG, in order to follow any changes in the EU and Member State policy on OWF.

The WG agreed to express support in relation to the Commission’s non-recurrent request to ICES on interactions between OWF and fisheries, taking advantage of several working groups of ICES involved in offshore renewables analysis.

A representative of the OIG underlined that guarantees should also be given on decommissioning funds.

A representative of anglers drew attention to compensations schemes for damages caused by OWF in France, distributed among the municipalities.

The WG Chair underlined that funding mechanisms differ greatly from one Member State to another and there is a need for greater harmonisation between Member States. He invited the Member States to share their funding mechanisms and compensation schemes for unforeseen damages related to OWF with the BSAC Secretariat for information purposes.

The representative of DG Mare informed that the Commission is currently discussing the scope of the request for advice. The advice will be launched at the end of 2023. She asked the BSAC to address any issues relevant to the advice in a letter to the Commission.

The WG Chair referred to the Pelagic WG discussion on the process of the elaboration of the Commission's requests to ICES. He highlighted that there were good examples of concrete impact in the Baltic such as the western herring stock, impacted by OWF in the area. He added that this an example that could be brought up to the Commission.

A representative of DG Mare explained that this first request was more general, and that later, more specific requests could be put forwards. She invited the BSAC to send remarks in writing. The Commission was also considering making the advice on offshore wind a recurrent request.

A representative of recreational anglers proposed to ask the BSAC ExCom to ask the Commission to deal with setting aside funds for future and for not yet recognised damages.

The WG decided to keep the OWF and fisheries interactions as an information item on the agenda of the EBM WG.

The WG decided to ask the Commission to include in the request to ICES on the effects of OWF on marine environment and existing activities at sea, such as fisheries: decommissioning schemes, compensation schemes for unforeseen future damages and impact on recruitment of some stocks, in particular western Baltic herring.

4. Eel

- Introduction by the Chair of EBM WG, reference to previous BSAC recommendation

The WG Chair referred to the BSAC recommendation on eel¹, produced in 2022. The BSAC is unanimous in calling for stronger focus and a faster pace in implementing national measures with respect to anthropogenic, non-fisheries-related sources of mortality and prioritising measures against IUU fishing. The BSAC asks for improvement in the implementation of the Eel Regulation, also at national level. He also referred to the actions on eel included in the Commission's Action Plan, in which the Commission's calls, among others, for improving the protection of the European eel by adopting or updating existing Eel Management Plans under the Eel Regulation. The plans should include efforts to restore eel habitats, improve the connectivity of rivers and address barriers to migration, and should improve transboundary cooperation².

¹ [previous BSAC recommendation](#)

² [5-Commission-Action-Plan-Feb2023.pdf \(bsac.dk\)](#)

- **Presentation by the Commission of the Package actions (Action Plan) and measures taken by the Member States**
- **Discussion and update on recommendation**

A representative of DG Mare referred to the measures aimed at recovery of European eel listed in the Action Plan. She stated that although the Action Plan had been adopted in February 2023, actions related to eel had been undertaken by the Commission long before. Eel has become one of the priorities at political level. The Commission is aware that the implementation of the Eel Regulation should be enhanced, especially at the Member States level. According to ICES, there is no real progress in the implementation of non-fisheries related measures. The Commission will continue to monitor the implementation of the legislation related to eel and put more attention to encourage the Member States to improve transboundary cooperation and update eel management plans. She referred to the 1st meeting of the Joint Special Group under the Marine Action Plan to be held on 6th October, with the participation of the Commission, Member States, as well as stakeholders as observers, aimed at discussing the implementation of the Action Plan. Progress will be reported by Member States regularly. The Commission addressed the Member States to raise their attention on the actions under the Action Plan. The Commission has prepared an updated draft guidance for the preparation and modification of eel management plans and asked the Member States to provide feedback by the end September. This matter will be discussed in the Joint Special Group.

The WG Chair asked the representative of the Commission to share guidance document for the preparation of the eel management plans³ with the BSAC for the sake of transparency and to facilitate engagement of stakeholders. He underlined that the Joint Special Group is best suited for the discussions on eel since it is to gather environmental and fisheries authorities.

A small-scale fisheries representative asked about any positive signs of decrease in IUU fishing for eel and how is the effectiveness of eel recovery measured.

Another small-scale fisheries representative referred to the EUROPOL⁴ law enforcement activities against eel trafficking, with an increase of over 50 percent in arrests and seizures. However, these enforcement measures are not reflected in the reduction in IUU fishing.

A representative of DG Mare underlined that it is crucial to understand how to measure the success of any action taken to help recovery of eel. This matter is discussed by the Joint Working Group on eels⁵. Cooperation between enforcement bodies puts the problem into the light.

³ During the InterAC meeting on 10th October 2023, Director General DG MARE promised to share the guidance document on eel management plans with the ACs.

⁴ [Law enforcement casts net over 256 eel smugglers | Europol \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵ Joint EIFAAC/ICES/GFCM Working Group on Eels [WGEEL \(ices.dk\)](#)

The WG Chair underlined that engagement in eel protection is unevenly distributed between the Member States. He referred to the recently signed agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction or “High Seas Treaty” that could help protecting eels throughout their life cycle and the asked the Commission whether there are plans to establish an MPA in the Sargasso Sea.

A representative of DG Mare stated that Sargasso Sea Commission has been discussing how to better protect this area. With a new way to prioritise the protection of high seas there could be a better scope for further actions.

In reply to a question asked by a representative of the OIG on non-fisheries related pressures, **a representative of DG Mare** stated that all actions addressed to the Member States will be discussed in the Joint Special Group. The Commission monitors the implementation of environmental legislation. Stakeholder engagement in implementing the measures for eel is important. The Commission monitors the implementation of the Eel Management Plans and measures under the Eel Regulation and next reporting by Member States is in 2024.

A representative of recreational anglers stated that better tools to monitor adult stages of yellow and silver eel should be developed to improve monitoring of the entire stock.

The Working Group decided to send a letter to the Commission requesting to include eel on the agenda of the Joint Special Group and asking to publicly share the draft update of the Eel Management Plan guidance document. The Working Group also decided to recommend to the Commission to enquire on how the agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) or “High Seas Treaty”, recently signed by the EU, could help protecting eels throughout their life cycle, including during their spawning migration to the Sargasso Sea.

5. Discussion on the Commission Fisheries Policy Package

([Action plan](#), [CFP today-tomorrow](#), [Council Presidency Conclusions](#), [BSAC draft reply](#))

The WG Chair referred to the Commission’s Ocean Package published in February. He informed that two key documents will be discussed by the Working Group:

- an **Action Plan** to protect and restore marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries
- a communication on **the CFP** today and tomorrow.

The Executive Secretary presented the structure of the document (in a power point) prepared by the Secretariat, He drew attention to the fact that comments made by Pelagic WG had already been added to the document⁶.

EU Action Plan: Protecting and restoring marine ecosystems for sustainable and resilient fisheries

The Working Group discussed the relevant actions, divided in chapters of the Action Plan.

⁶ [Past Meetings - Baltic Sea Advisory Council \(bsac.dk\)](#)

- **Making fishing practices more sustainable.** Actions to improve fishing selectivity and reduce the impact of fisheries on sensitive species

The Working Group discussed the action aimed at developing threshold values for the maximum allowable mortality rate from incidental catches of the species selected by Member States and adopting fisheries management measures to implement these threshold values. The WG agreed with then previous comments made by the Pelagic WG and welcomed the action to develop the threshold values for bycatches of sensitive species as well as continuous acquisition of data concerning the conservation status of populations of sensitive species.

A small-scale fisheries representative reiterated the comment made during the Pelagic WG, referring to the current mortality threshold for harbour porpoise in the Baltic of 0.7 individuals per year. He stated that with such mortality threshold value, some fisheries segments could be closed very fast. Therefore, the mortality thresholds should be set more realistically and apply indiscriminately. He underlined that measures to avoid bycatch of harbour porpoise are currently applied to gillnet fishery, whereas pelagic trawl fishery is a high risk fishery and does not have any restrictions. Measures to avoid bycatch of harbour porpoise should be applied to all fisheries.

A representative of the OIG referred to the fact that risk of bycatch of harbour porpoise is much higher in static gear fishery. To avoid bycatch of harbour porpoise, better control and avoidance measures such as pingers (ADD) could complement current area closures. However, she drew attention to the fact that widespread use of ADD and their possible interactions with military underwater installations is a matter of concern of the defence authorities in some Member States and should be revisited.

A fisheries representative from Poland underlined that assessment of the bycatch risk in particular fishery should be based on solid information.

The WG Chair proposed to include in the recommendations that avoidance of bycatch of non-target species such as salmon is possible with existing mitigation technics used elsewhere. He underlined the need to cooperate with HELCOM in implementing the Action Plan, including bycatch of sensitive species. He also pointed to the new High Sea Agreement (BBNJ) as an opportunity to strengthen the protection of full range of endangered species.

The Working Group discussed the possibility to use tracking devices to facilitate the recovery of lost fishing gears. **Several fisheries representatives** expressed the opinion that such tracking devices/transmitters are not practical, can only be attached to a floater and are very expensive, especially when used on long gillnets. They underlined that such devices could be used on the condition that they do not interfere with fisheries. **The Working Group** decided not to include the tracking devices in the recommendations and come back to the discussion at a later stage.

The Working Group welcomed the action related to marine litter, to update MSFD programmes of measures to include measures against the loss of fishing gear and fishing related marine litter. Members States should implement such measures for both commercial and recreational fisheries.

The Working Group agreed with comments on selectivity drafted by the Pelagic WG.

The Working Group agreed that the BSAC should recommend to make use of the Fish Stock Recovery Areas that are foreseen in the CFP and underutilised.

A fisheries representative from Poland referred to the implementation of the Technical Measures Regulation and underlined that it should not restrict the use of new, innovative gears. Many innovative solutions are now available to improve fishing techniques and they could only be used if the provisions on technical measures are not overregulated. Selectivity should be referred to in the context of specific objectives and gear specifications.

The WG Chair agreed that the Implementing Act should allow more available solutions to mitigate bycatch of sensitive species.

The Working Group agreed that the BSAC should be included early on in the discussions on innovative fishing gears and give Baltic specific input.

- Securing a fair and just transition for all. Action to achieve a fair and just transition and maximise the use of available funds

A small-scale fisheries representative underlined that incentives for the transition to more resilient fisheries should be provided to the sector. There should be incentives to maintain the existing less harmful gears, rewarding fishers who already use less damaging fishing techniques.

A fisheries representative from Poland underlined that a fair and just transition can only be achieved if it covers the entire sector, not excluding any fleet segment. He pointed out that vessels above 24 m length are excluded from the EMFAF support for the energy transition as well as scrapping.

The ExCom Chair referred to the fact that the existing provisions on the use of EMFAF funding exclude vessels above 24 m in length from engine exchange, but other funding possibilities for this fleet segment should be considered.

A small-scale fisheries representative drew attention to the need to ensure a level playing field between the Member States in relation to the funding opportunities for the different fleet segments, in particular the small-scale fleet.

The Working Group concluded that the funding opportunities should be available to all fleet segments to achieve a just and fair transition. **The Working Group** concluded that the BSAC welcomes the Commission's initiative to facilitate access to funding opportunities and asks for more information about the planned workshop to guide and promote the use of funding to implement this action plan, to be able to observe it.

- Strengthening the knowledge base and research and innovation. Actions to strengthen the knowledge base, research and innovation

A representative of anglers pointed out that recreational fisheries have an impact on fish stocks and specific management techniques can be implemented to reduce this impact. This requires dedicated funding also for recreational fisheries.

A representative of the OIG drew attention to the need to consider other environmental impacts of fishing in the ICES advice. Requests to ICES should also consider the need to implement ecosystem-based fisheries management. In this context, she mentioned Article

17 of the Basic Regulation⁷, referring to the criteria for the allocation of fishing opportunities, including the impact of fishing on the environment.

A small-scale fisheries representative stated that environmental impact of fishing should also be considered in the context of the entire value chain (fishing trip length, processing). With reference to the objectives on the impact of fishing on ecosystem and carbon sequestration, **the Working Group** concluded that funding should be available for research to identify potential impact of fisheries on carbon sequestration pathways. In addition to impacts of fisheries, the need for restoration of habitats important for carbon sequestration should be considered.

The Working Group welcomed the study quantifying the EU's seabed carbon sequestration capacity and underlined the need to achieve common understanding of this issue by widely sharing knowledge and results of the study.

- Monitoring and enforcement. Improve implementation, monitoring and enforcement

A representative of anglers welcomed the amendments to the new Fisheries Control Regulation, related to recreational electronic catch reporting and funding needed to implement it and proposed to include such statement in the recommendations.

The WG Chair proposed to welcome the commitment of the new regulation to channel EMFAF funding into effective and strong actions on monitoring, inspection and enforcement. He also proposed to support the action to allocate appropriate financing for regionalisation and regional Member States groups such as BALTFISH.

The Working Group agreed to include the above-mentioned statements in the recommendation.

With reference to the Joint Special Group, **a small scale fisheries representative** expressed the view that all fleet segments should be represented in the group.

The Working Group agreed to welcome the creation the Joint Special Group that matches past BSAC recommendations to bridge environmental and fisheries ministries work across Member States. **The Working Group** agreed that the Advisory Councils should be informed about progress in the implementation of the Action Plan.

CFP today and tomorrow: a Fisheries and Oceans Pact towards sustainable, science-based, innovative and inclusive fisheries management

The Working Group discussed relevant actions included in the CFP communication.

- **Development of social indicators**

A small-scale fisheries representative drew attention that the BSAC recommendation on social indicators should draw attention to the shortcomings in the indicators used in the STECF report (improved metrics in terms of fishing effort, etc). In this context, he referred

⁷ [Regulation \(EU\) No 1380/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 December 2013 on the Common Fisheries Policy, amending Council Regulations \(EC\) No 1954/2003 and \(EC\) No 1224/2009 and repealing Council Regulations \(EC\) No 2371/2002 and \(EC\) No 639/2004 and Council Decision 2004/585/EC \(europa.eu\)](#)

to Article 17 of the Basic Regulation clearly calling for the application of transparent and objective criteria.

The Working Group agreed to the need to recommend social indicators, that should also consider the support structures for fisheries and to highlight the shortcomings in the indicators used in STECF report. The BSAC should be consulted in the development of socio-economic indicators, in order to ensure proper interpretation of the results presented in the report.

With reference to ecosystem based approach, **the Working Group** fully supported the increased Commission's efforts to develop scientific support for the ecosystem-based approach to EU fisheries management (EAFM).

A small-scale fisheries representative asked to include the need to revise the Baltic MAP as well as technical measures to take account of the changes in the state of the fish stocks and the environment, including the interspecies considerations.

A fisheries representative from Poland underlined that ecosystem based approach should also consider that fishers are also part of the ecosystem. In this context, multiple pressures have to be taken into account, such as the impact of seals and cormorants on fisheries. He emphasised that the importance of including interspecies considerations into the fisheries management and recalled that this issue had been raised by the BSAC during the discussions on the performance of the Baltic MAP in 2019 and at several other occasions later.

Another fisheries representative from Poland raised the issue of pressures from other human activities such as offshore wind developments and their impact on underwater habitats.

The Working Group agreed to add the above-mentioned comments referring to the need to urgently undertake the estimation and quantification of the effects of species interactions need to be undertaken urgently.

A representative of DG Mare stated that, once the multispecies advice is provided, it would be worth considering the criteria on which fisheries should be defined, i.e. by the weakest or the strongest stock.

A small-scale fisheries representative (in the chat) drew attention that if we are aiming to ensure that all stocks have a biomass above B_{MSY} , then it is the weakest stock which provides the threshold for setting multi-species quotas. For that to happen though we need to know what the B_{MSY} levels are.

With relation to the analysis of the criteria used by Member States for the allocation of fishing opportunities at national level by STECF, **a small scale fisheries representative** asked to include the analysis of ITQ systems. The implementation of the landing obligation as an indicator as the level of discarding directly affects the fishing opportunities.

The Working Group agreed to welcome the action to ask STECF to analyse the criteria used by Member States for allocation of fishing opportunities at national level and express interest in an analysis of the ITQ system achievements. The implementation of the landing obligation should also be included as an indicator when evaluating the criteria used for allocation of fishing opportunities at national level.

The Working Group decided to include the comments made during the meeting in the BSAC recommendations and looked forward to the discussions in the Demersal WG the next day.

6. Presentation of HELCOM [HOLAS III Biodiversity Assessment main report](#) and PROTECT BALTIC project by HELCOM

- Presentation
- Discussion

Jannica Haldin, Deputy Executive Secretary, HELCOM presented the third HELCOM holistic assessment (HOLAS 3) that provides a comprehensive overview of the ecosystem health of the Baltic Sea, covering the assessment period of 2016–2021.

The HOLAS 3 reports highlight a broad range of aspects, covering the state of the ecosystem, environmental pressures, and human well-being. HOLAS 3 contributes to a vast sharing of knowledge, and to the development of knowledge, both within and across topics. The assessments will also serve to keep track of the implementation and the effectiveness of the 2021 Baltic Sea Action Plan and functions as a regional contribution to the reporting under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) for those HELCOM Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States. The results of the assessment underpin HELCOM policy, and the information contained in the assessment is incorporated in the ecosystem-based management of the Baltic Sea, as well as in measures nationally, regionally, and globally.

Jannica Haldin presented the five thematic areas of HOLAS 3 thematic assessments. The so-called **DAPSIM** cycle explains the main components which make HOLAS 3 holistic: the assessment strives to provide insights into what **drives** change in the marine ecosystem, analyses how and what **activities pressures** on the ecosystem, how these pressures affect the **state** of the environment and cause **impacts** on biodiversity, the ecosystem and its functioning. Based on this information we then need to establish effective **measures** to minimize these negative impacts.

The production of the Third Holistic Assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS 3) commenced in 2022. To better understand the Baltic Sea environment and our relationship with it, HELCOM periodically prepares holistic assessments of the state of the Baltic Sea, or HOLAS for short. Each holistic assessment captures a comprehensive snapshot at a given moment in the dynamic life history of the Baltic Sea. In 2022, data call concluded at the end of May, and indicator reporting was finalized by the end of the year. In 2023, five thematic assessments were ready by end of March 2023. Summary report will be released in early fall. HOLAS III include 59 indicators⁸, developed to assess the status of selected elements of biodiversity and human-induced pressures on the Baltic Sea. They measure the progress towards regionally agreed targets and objectives. Results indicate whether status is good or not according to each of the core indicators. HELCOM core indicators make up the most detailed level of results, presented in the dedicated indicator reports.

Thematic assessment reports: are divided across 5 topics: eutrophication, biodiversity, hazardous substances, economic and social analyses and spatial pressures and impacts.

⁸ [HELCOM indicators webpage](#)

Thematic Assessment Reports are available in the HELCOM publications library⁹.

The WG Chair asked Jannica Haldin on how HOLAS III report can be used in the context of the Commission's Action Plan.

Jannica Haldin stated that the HOLAS III indicators can be used to assess ecological/environmental status of species. The assessment of bycatch in HOLAS III was done twice, without including bycatch information, and again including bycatch data. The results indicate that where there is more data, the results present more confidence. If confidence is low, HELCOM recommends to use the precautionary principle.

A representative of the OIG asked whether HOLAS III can be used to assess the progress made in relation to the European eel. She also asked where are important carbon sequestration habitats.

Jannica Haldin replied that HOLAS III does not include indicators for the eel. The actual status of the European eel will be included in the updated Red List of Species, to be published in 2024. With reference to the carbon sequestration, Jannica Haldin replied that a map presents areas with high carbon capture and sequestration in the HOLAS III Biodiversity Thematic Assessment report¹⁰. A project looking specifically on ecosystem services in the Baltic will also deliver a more holistic map, indicating carbon sequestration habitats.

Jannica Haldin referred to the large-scale pan-Baltic PROTECT Baltic project¹¹, focused on marine protection. The MPAs will be a fundamental part of the project. The project will also look at ecosystem services and will run until 2028.

A fisheries representative from Poland asked what are the goals of such a long project and whether HELCOM will use the available data on the state of the Baltic in the project. He recalled that some big divergences in data on eutrophication had appeared between HELCOM and the National Marine Fisheries Research Institute in Gdynia in the past.

Jannica Haldin explained that the Baltic Sea is data-rich sea and the available monitoring data will be used during the project. PROTECT Baltic is not doing new research per se, it is a research project aiming to collate the existing information and use this data to optimise protection efforts. The project will also look at the current effectiveness of MPAs and propose measures to improve the protected areas. In order to maximise the effectiveness of the MPA network and adapt them to the changing environment, the project will conduct modelling under climate change scenario.

The WG Chair thanked Jannica Haldin for her presentation and underlined that many measures proposed in the Commission's Action Plan are closely related to the BSAP. He asked the HELCOM representative to inform the BSAC on the launch of the HOLAS III reports and any further steps.

7. Project "[MPA Europe](#)", presentation

⁹ [Thematic Assessment Report on Biodiversity](#); [Thematic Assessment Report on Hazardous substances, marine litter, underwater noise and non-indigenous species](#); [Thematic Assessment of Report on Economic and Social Analysis](#); [Thematic Assessment Report on Spatial Distribution of Pressures and Impacts](#)

¹⁰ [6-HELCOM-Thematic-assessment-of-biodiversity-2016-2021-Main-report.pdf \(bsac.dk\)](#), p.31

¹¹ [PROTECT – HELCOM](#)

Thanos Smanis and Belinda Bramley from MPA Europe presented their project. MPA Europe is funded by Horizon Europe and UK Research and Innovation. The overall objective is to map the optimal location for MPAs in Europe to support transboundary Marine Spatial Planning for a network including as high biodiversity of species, habitats, and ecosystems as possible, and blue carbon stores. The project will also aim at improving the basis for national authorities to include marine areas in climate change mitigation plans and design optimal MPAs including expanding Special Areas of Conservation and increasing levels of protection in existing areas. A further outcome of the project is to maximise the inclusion of species, habitats, and ecosystems within 30% of the area.

The project will use data from Copernicus observations, EMODNET, as well as records of species distribution. The project will look at connectivity and climate change's impact on changes in species distribution. It will create a database of carbon stores in the seabed. It will be based on data from scientists from around Europe and will lead to the publication of a peer reviewed paper and a policy brief. Finally, a blue carbon data set and scoring system will support the management of blue carbon.

A mapping atlas of the optimal MPA network will be produced and will be flexible with future scenarios to be used by stakeholders by 2025. It is to be used as a tool for Member States and it recognizes that there is human activity at sea that needs to be taken into account when working on marine spatial planning.

The project will also engage with Member States to look at case studies.

Project stakeholders are grouped by sea basin (ATL-NS/Baltic/Med/Black Sea) and include ICES, HELCOM, VASAB, Member States administration responsible for MSP and MPAs, MPA scientific projects, NGOs.

In person workshops, in synergy with other initiatives, to discuss possible case studies in the regions but also present first results on blue carbon, marine ecosystems and species data are scheduled in 2024, and in 2025 online workshops along with an international conference on the topic will be held.

The project outcomes could be used to improve the science basis for national authorities to include MPAs in climate mitigation and marine spatial plans. MPA Europe is communicating with PROTECT Baltic project in order not to duplicate work. Information on the project will be communicated to the BSAC. The project has a data driven approach and puts biodiversity into a regional context.

A fisheries representative from Poland asked whether the HELCOM project and MPA Europe will use the same approach and methodology.

The representative of HELCOM pointed out that both PROTECT Baltic and MPA Europe projects are using similar approaches and are cooperating in a constructive way. The HELCOM project focuses specifically on the Baltic, whereas MPA Europe covers the entire European seas area. Different geographical scale of both projects requires some different approaches to modelling.

Thanos Smanis underlined that data for a regional project is easier to obtain. MPA Europe will communicate with HELCOM and PROTECT Baltic project to make sure that the same data is used. He stated that the project plans to use open data, selected by scientific leaders. The project will not consider human pressures, but focuses on biodiversity. The

new data layers and maps produced can be overlaid with human activities. Environmental data used in the project can be found on the project Zenodo page¹².

8. AOB

Please note: the AOB point proposed by a fisheries representative from Latvia on harbour porpoise bycatch in MSC certified fisheries was not discussed due to the absence of the representative to present this point.

Information items:

The Executive Secretary informed that the BSAC received an invitation to participate in an observer capacity in the Joint Special Group on 6th October 2023. The number of BSAC representatives is limited to 5. The BSAC will be represented by the ExCom Chair, the chair of the EBM WG, the Executive Secretary, and 2 ExCom members who declared the will to participate.

The EBM WG Chair informed the meeting that the speaking points for the BSAC representatives in the Joint Special Group will be formulated on the basis of the recommendations drafted during the meetings of all Working Groups and should be validated by the ExCom in due time before the 6th October 2023.

The EBM WG Chair thanked everyone for good discussions.

¹² <https://zenodo.org/communities/mpaeurope/?page=1&size=20>