



Baltic Marine Environment Protection Commission

HELCOM Workshop on Seal-Fisheries Interactions

SFI WS 1-2019

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Document 3	Proposal for group work during the HELCOM Workshop on Seal-Fisheries Interactions
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The Meeting is invited to consider the attached plan for the group discussions during the HELCOM Workshop on Seal-Fisheries Interactions.

DRAFT**Group work during the HELCOM Workshop on Seal-Fisheries Interactions
(SFI WS 1-2019)**

It is proposed to divide participants into two/three groups, to discuss the below issues. The group division and allocation of topics will be decided at the Workshop, based on the number and expertise of participants.

During the BSAC Ecosystem based management working group organized in October 2017, and the BALTFISH symposium on seal – fish/fisheries interaction in the Baltic Sea organized in March 2019, several problems were noted, as well as possible solutions identified. Taking into account HELCOM's long lasting experience in managing and collecting monitoring data on Baltic Sea seals, and discussing also seal-fisheries interactions, it should be a natural next step to join forces and make an attempt to work jointly on possible solutions concerning mitigation measures, which are acceptable both for the environment and fishermen.

The groups are requested to discuss the questions below and provide views and proposals for solutions.

Fisheries

Since Baltic Sea grey seal populations have started to recover (starting from the beginning of 2000) after a heavy decline, the problem with seals destroying the nets and taking the catch started to appear, mainly among coastal small-scale fishermen using set nets. At the beginning, the problem appeared in the northern part of the Baltic Sea. Nowadays most Baltic Sea coastal States report that seal-fisheries interactions takes place.

Several solutions how to cope with the problem have been already proposed during the BSAC and BALTFISH meetings. The groups are requested to discuss the questions and usability of proposed solutions/mitigation measures for fishermen (see below) also in a regional perspective (usability of different solutions in different areas of the Baltic Sea), including pros and cons.

1. **Implementation of seal safe gear:**
 - a. How can we get innovation going to find new gears or new ways to fish? What conditions have to be fulfilled?
 - b. **Seal scares** (also to enable fish spawning): Do you think such devices could be an effective mitigation measure? Negative side effects on other species?
2. **Non-lethal mitigation:**
 - a. **Compensation systems** as a short term solution. Do you think that some kind of compensation system can have the potential to be a long-lasting solution?
 - b. **Limiting seal protection measures (in some haul out sites and/or Natura 2000 sites?).** Do you think that such a solution can be implemented taking into account requirements set under Habitats Directive? Do you think this solution can be accepted by the public?
 - c. **Benefits from having seals** (tourist attraction, labelling of products coming from seal safe gears). Do you see a potential in developing beneficial solutions from having viable seal populations? How should that be organized?

3. **Hunting and culling:**

- a. Do we know if it is an effective tool to manage seal and fisheries interaction issues?
- b. Who/how to cover costs of culling, removal and handling of carcasses etc?
- c. Do we have knowledge and tools available to evaluate the effectiveness of a cull?

Are you aware of other solutions which could be considered as a way out to mitigate seals-fisheries interactions? Or other issues not mentioned above which should be considered here?

Biodiversity/ seal populations

There is an ongoing discussion about the status of seals in the Baltic Sea.

We know that the three different seal species in the Baltic Sea have very different status and different life cycles. The grey seal is the most widespread seal and the one causing problems. However, also the grey seal status is very different depending on sub-region (ref. HELCOM HOLAS II).

The groups should discuss the following questions:

1. Do we have sufficient knowledge of seal populations status? Is monitoring sufficient?
2. Today, we establish target reference, limit reference and precautionary approach levels in accordance with [HELCOM Recommendation 27-28/2](#) on conservation of seals in the Baltic Sea area. Are the set reference points relevant or do they need adjustment, other area divisions etc.?
3. Is a Baltic wide management of seals called for, or should seals be managed in sub regions only?
4. Would a cull in one area inhibit grey seals to increase its range into new areas?
5. Do you see seal bycatch as a threat to populations status? What opportunities of obtaining reliable seal bycatch data are there?

The next steps

Recognizing that this issue is not only an important issue for HELCOM, but also for BSAC and BALTFISH, the groups are requested to discuss:

1. What kind of regional approach should be taken to be able to propose, and implement specific regional solutions (as discussed above) concerning seals in the Baltic Sea?
2. How should the work on possible regional HELCOM/BSAC/BALTFISH joint solutions be organized?
3. What could the role of each of these organizations in this process be? What could the role of NGOs be?

The update of the Baltic Sea Action Plan

Finally, taking into account that HELCOM is in a process of updating the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP), the groups are invited to propose any input/action to the revised BSAP. How should the issue of seals-fisheries interactions be reflected in the updated BSAP, including timeframe/deadline for fulfilling the proposed actions? For example, are we missing knowledge, tools etc. to manage seals and evaluate effectiveness of measures? Are new actions or changed actions needed such as updating existing HELCOM Recommendations?