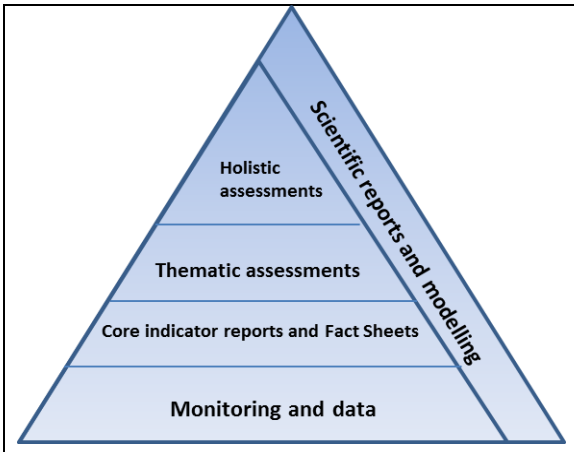
Attachment 3

HELCOM Assessment System

1. System

1.1 Data from the joint monitoring programmes as well as the indicator reports and thematic assessments form a continuous chain towards holistic assessments. Modelling and scientific reports play an important complementary role in explaining and linking pressures, state and impacts and providing guidance for future responses. Scientific research is an additional important source of information for defining newly emerging concerns.

1.2 Generation of data through monitoring is the basis of HELCOM's monitoring and assessment pyramid (Figure). The data is processed through various assessment steps from indicators to specific and holistic assessments and information is increasingly integrated towards the top of the pyramid.



HELCOM's monitoring and assessment pyramid linking monitoring and data to holistic assessment

1.3 The HELCOM assessment system operates in six-year cycles that are synchronized with other international requirements. During the assessment cycles Core Indicator reports and Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets are updated regularly, leading to periodically produced thematic reports and eventually holistic assessments. Thematic assessments cover the themes of the BSAP (biodiversity, eutrophication, hazardous substances and maritime activities) but also other themes as required also by relevant policies. Pollution Load Compilations, assessments of radionuclides, and assessments of the threat status of Baltic Sea species and biotopes/habitats and the related Species and Biotopes Information Sheets are also regularly updated. The assessment information will be forwarded to decision-makers (ranging from individual consumers to high level policy makers) to provide knowledge basis for taking action.

1.4 To link monitoring and data to assessments it is important:

- to agree and document rules for aggregating data in the various assessment contexts
- to set out assessment procedures transparently at all relevant levels, from parameters and indicators to themes and holistic assessments. E.g. parameters and indicators should be assigned assessment criteria/thresholds/targets and assessment processes for easy reference.

2. Main themes

2.1 HELCOM assessments, as well as the supporting monitoring, should be targeted at identified environmental concerns in the policy areas where HELCOM continues to act, especially eutrophication, hazardous substances (including artificial radionuclides), change of biodiversity (including fish) and habitat degradation, and problems arising from shipping and other uses at the land/water boundary and of the marine space (e.g. construction). In addition, the holistic assessments will provide overviews of anthropogenic pressures and human activities acting as drivers of those pressures and this information will support a socio-economic analysis. HELCOM will continue to act on newly emerging issues with detrimental effects to the marine environment.

3. Features

3.1 The assessments build on data produced within the HELCOM monitoring programmes and additional data, e.g. research data, provided by the Contracting Parties as well as data made available by other organisations e.g. on human activities or pressures.

3.2 HELCOM assessments should be timely, scientifically sound, reliable, and approved in consensus. The assessments should employ the ecosystem approach including anthropogenic pressures, and their effects on the marine environment including cumulative and synergetic effects. They build on the HELCOM set of core indicators which are commonly agreed as Baltic-Sea-wide assessment cornerstones addressing all important single elements of state, pressures and impacts.

3.3 In addition to assessments of environmental status and pressures, HELCOM compliance reporting such as the Baltic Sea Action Plan Index of Actions is adding information on activities and programmes of measures to improve or maintain the quality of the Baltic Sea environment. HELCOM should seek to gain synergy between reporting on the status of implementation of Baltic Sea Action Plan, Ministerial Declarations, HELCOM Recommendations and other international reporting requirements (such as the MSFD) and link their results to HELCOM's status/impact assessments.

3.4 While HELCOM assessments should be Baltic specific, the information content as well as their timing should be harmonized with other reporting requirements, especially those obliging presentation of information for the Baltic Sea e.g. at the European level.

3.5 HELCOM assessments should be designed to support not only Baltic-wide analysis but to support also assessment requirements of the Contracting Parties at smaller scales.

3.6 HELCOM should strive to develop interactive web-based services to support assessment procedures.

4. Assessment products

4.1 HELCOM's assessment products consist of:

a) HELCOM **Core Indicator reports** which address all central assessment elements required by the BSAP, allowing classification of the environmental state into status classes, and facilitating the implementation of the MSFD for those Contracting Parties that are also EU members;

b) **Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets** which are updated regularly to provide timely information on how the HELCOM objectives are met;

c) **Thematic assessment products** which cover various topical themes, e.g., inputs (e.g. Pollution Load Compilations), eutrophication, hazardous substances (including radioactive substances) and biodiversity are to be produced periodically. In addition, varying themes such as assessment of climate change in the Baltic Sea region and assessment of ecological coherence of the network of marine protected areas may be produced as necessary. Assessments of the threat status of Baltic Sea species and biotopes/habitats should also be regularly updated and be complemented by Biotopes Information Sheets on the threatened species and biotopes/habitats. The reports should consist of a technical/scientific (science for management) section, including assessment of confidence, a policy implications section, as well as a future outlook section.

d) **Holistic assessments**, which cover the status of the Baltic Sea, pressure and resulting impacts and effects including cumulative and synergetic effects, socio-economic aspects and link science and management as well as provide a basis for formulation of supplementary national and regional policies and measures.

4.2 Data from coordinated monitoring programmes as well as Core Indicator reports complemented by Baltic Sea Environmental Fact Sheet information as well as thematic assessment products form a continuous chain towards holistic assessments where modelling and scientific reports play an important complementary role in explaining and linking pressures, state and impacts and providing guidance for future responses.

4.3 Assessment procedures will be well documented to allow their coherent use for regional and national purposes.

4.4 All HELCOM assessment products are made freely accessible on the internet and prints will be reproduced of some of them.

5. Core indicators and Baltic Sea Environmental Fact Sheets

5.1 Core indicators, Baltic Sea Environment Fact sheets and Species and Biotopes Information Sheets provide information on the status of the environment and information that is needed to evaluate the severity of environmental problems and distance from environmental targets, objectives, goals and vision. The HELCOM set of core indicators simplifies a complex reality by condensing information of analysed data collected in monitoring programmes. The Core Indicator reports are linked to the Ecological Objectives (EcoOs) – i.e. the indicators show how the targets and EcoOs are met.

5.2 HELCOM Core Indicators and Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets should be primarily based on variables in the HELCOM monitoring programmes. Each indicator by itself tells something about the one issue it represents but virtually nothing about larger features or the system as a whole. When the indicators are integrated they can show the conditions and trends of the system e.g. human pressures and impacts on major components or themes (e.g. eutrophication, biodiversity, impacts of hazardous substances of the ecosystem).

5.3 Core Indicators are linked to anthropogenic pressures and provide a measure of the distance from a target level. The target level reflects the boundary of good environmental status. Core Indicators with targets are designed to be applicable for integrated thematic and holistic assessments.

5.4 Descriptive Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets describe the development of a variable related to an environmental issue and provide crucial supportive and background information that can also be utilised for compiling assessment reports.

5.5 Species and Biotopes Information Sheets address those species and biotopes/habitats of the Baltic Sea that have been evaluated as being under a risk of extinction in HELCOM red list assessments.

5.6 Core indicator reports and fact and information sheets will be published on the HELCOM website. HELCOM assessment products will make use of the information presented in these.

5.7 The structure of the HELCOM Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets follows the fact sheet structure of EEA in principle.

5.8 The Core Indicator reports and Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets are updated regularly by the responsible institutions.

5.9 The scientific-technical content of the Core Indicator reports and Fact Sheets is reviewed and adopted by HELCOM MONAS supported by other HELCOM groups. HELCOM HABITAT is responsible for the content of the Species and Biotopes Information Sheets.

5.10 A list of responsible institutes and data centres providing Core Indicator reports and Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets should be kept up to date by and at the HELCOM Secretariat and scrutinised by HELCOM MONAS on a regular basis.

6. Thematic assessment reports

6.1 Thematic assessment reports assessing how HELCOM strategic goals are met are produced periodically within the six-year assessment cycle addressing primary themes of eutrophication, hazardous substances and biodiversity but also varying other themes especially informing Ministerial Meetings and the public (e.g. BSAP implementation, climate change, protected areas). The thematic reports are scheduled taking into account corresponding reporting under other international fora, such as reporting under EC/EU directives and as guided by HELCOM GEAR.

6.2 The thematic reports should consist of three main sections: “Science for management”, “Policy implications” and “Future outlook”.

6.3 The thematic reports assessing HELCOM’s strategic goals are Core Indicator driven and they provide status classifications for the Baltic Sea for the themes at hand. In addition, the reports provide compilations of information on the level and trends in anthropogenic pressures that act on the assessed theme. The assessments also utilise information provided by relevant Baltic Sea Environment Fact Sheets and use necessary information and data collected and reported under other fora as well as provided by the scientific community.

6.4 Production of thematic assessment reports requires close cooperation of Contracting Parties within HELCOM subsidiary bodies and cooperation between the different HELCOM subsidiary bodies.

6.5 In addition to pressure and state assessments, HELCOM compliance reporting is adding information on the success and effectiveness of measures to improve or maintain the status of the Baltic Sea. HELCOM should seek to gain synergy between reporting on the status of implementation of strategies and HELCOM Recommendations and other international reporting requirements and link their results in HELCOM environmental assessments.

7. Holistic assessments

7.1 Holistic assessments of ecosystem health are produced periodically every six years and the assessment cycle is synchronised with other international assessments and reporting obligations so as to support the development of initial assessments under the MSFD by those Contracting Parties that are also EU member states.

7.2 Holistic assessments evaluate how the HELCOM vision with strategic goals and ecological objectives has been met, link environmental changes to pressures and provide advice for subsequent decision making. In addition, the holistic assessments contain information on socio-economic aspects related to the use of the Baltic Sea ecosystem.

7.3 The holistic assessments will cover all possible aspects of the BSAP, and MSFD for those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States, including marine litter and noise, and especially various features of biodiversity. They will build on the core indicator information and all possible other information that is relevant to assess the pressures, impacts and status, including the socio-economic analysis. The holistic assessments should also assess the risk of not reaching the objectives and targets related to achieving and maintaining the good environmental status.

7.4 Holistic assessments should be produced using standard methodology to allow for comparison between the assessments over time. Integrative assessment tools such as HOLAS for state indicators and Baltic Sea Pressure and Impact Indices will be used.

7.5 Production of a holistic assessment requires close cooperation, of Contracting Parties, observer organizations and the scientific community as well as cooperation across HELCOM bodies.