



Guidance Document: Processes for aiding decisions on the adoption, development and assessment of OSPAR Biodiversity¹ Common Indicators

Source: BDC 24/12/01, Annex 11

OSPAR Agreement 2024-07

This guidance document can be used by indicator leads and thematic leads to help plan the development of candidate and common biodiversity indicators and their inclusion in future OSPAR Regional assessments. This guidance is derived from a review of the process that had been followed previously to aid decision-making by Contracting Parties on the adoption, development and assessment of OSPAR biodiversity common indicators (see Document ICG-COBAM 23/06/01). The Annexes to this document contain templates to be completed as appropriately by indicator leads or Contracting Party HoDs and submitted to ICG-COBAM and/or BDC.

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¹ Amended following agreement of the BDC Summary Record to make clear that the Guidance only applies to biodiversity indicators falling under the remit of BDC.

Background

1. The first tranche of biodiversity Common and candidate indicators were proposed by ICG-COBAM to BDC in Hell, Norway in 2013 (BDC 13/04/02.Rev.1.) and adopted by OSPAR 2013 (OSPAR 13/21/1, § 3.6 and Annex 4). Most of these indicators are still in the current suite of OSPAR Biodiversity Indicators (see Document 06/02). 17 common indicators of biodiversity and NIS were later included in the Intermediate Assessment 2017. Six years later, 19 biodiversity common indicators were included in the QSR 2023, as well as 9 pilot assessments of candidate indicators (these are listed in Table 1 of document 06/02). Pilot assessments of some common indicators were also carried out in regions where they are not yet adopted. The QSR23 for the first time included integrated assessments of the state for some ecosystem components. These combined the results of one or more indicators to assess if good environmental status had been achieved at an OSPAR region scale.

2. Adoption of common indicators and the publication of assessments, as well as the publication of pilot assessments and integrated assessments all require agreement by the Contracting Parties in each of the regions where they apply. ICG-COBAM's role is to steer indicator leads and thematic leads (re. integrated status assessments) to submit proposals to OSPAR BDC for agreement, who will then recommend adoption or publication to CoG and ultimately the OSPAR Commission. BDC usually meets annually in March or April, CoG in May and the OSPAR Commission in June. Agreement can be sought intersessionally by written procedure, but agreement during full meetings is preferred. This means indicator/thematic leads need to build in sufficient time in their planning to enable proposals to undergo review by Contracting Parties. This provides a greater likelihood of agreement on the final assessments of indicators and their publication in regional assessments such as IA2017 or QSR2023.

3. This document lays out the process that has previously been followed by COBAM indicator and thematic leads to develop biodiversity indicators and to produce assessments for inclusion in IA2017 and QSR2023 (see Figure 1). We invite COBAM to discuss the process, based on past experience and to agree on a process to follow ahead of the next OSPAR regional assessments. Please note that the 2023 meeting of the OSPAR Commission agreed to publish its next integrated assessment in 2028 but noted that the nature of the assessment still needed to be discussed in conjunction with the review of the JAMP.

The process for adopting and developing common indicators.

4. There are up to three stages that need to be completed for a candidate indicator to be adopted as a common indicator:

- a. Proposal for promotion of a candidate indicator to a common indicator (see Annex 1)
- b. Proposal for extending existing common indicators to new regions (see Annex 2)
- c. CEMP guideline and appendices (see Annex 3)
- d. Threshold proposal (if applicable – see Annex 4)

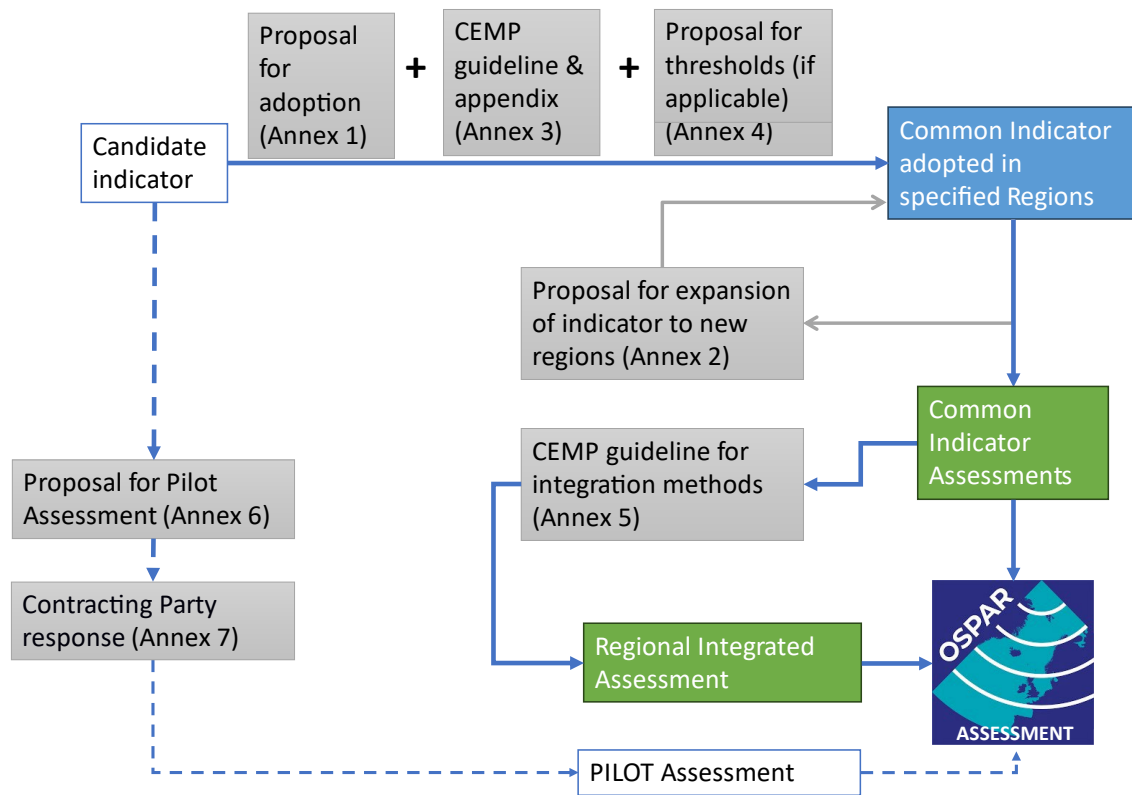


Figure 1: Schematic of the steps Candidate and common indicators need to go through to be included in an OSPAR Quality Status Report.

5. **Adoption of common indicators.** As mentioned above the first tranche of common indicators for biodiversity were agreed altogether by OSPAR 2013. The first indicators proposed for promotion from candidate to Common indicators were submitted by COBAM to BDC 2014 (see BDC 14/02/02, Annexes 3-6) in a format agreed by CoG 2013(2) and included here in Annex 1.

6. When agreeing the first set of indicators OSPAR 2013 also agreed: *“that Contracting Parties retain the option to ‘opt out’ of the application of a common indicator to be used by them within their waters and that Contracting Parties should be invited to explain the reasons and provide justification of their opting out within the relevant Committee where that particular indicator is made operational (monitoring and assessment) (e.g. where there is no significant risk to the marine environment or where the costs would be disproportionate taking account of the risks to the marine environment^[1]; the CEMP opting out conditions”* (OSPAR 2013-1 SR Annex 4).

7. An adapted version of this format was agreed by ICG-COBAM 2019 to present proposals to extend existing common indicators to new regions to BDC in 2020 (see Annex 2). Examples of

[1] Cf. Art. 14(4) MSFD

successful common indicator extension proposals that were agreed at BDC (2) 2020 and BDC 2021, are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: examples of successful proposals for common indicator extensions to new regions.

Common Indicator	Extension to new Region(s)	Document ref
M3 - Seal pup productivity	I and III	BDC(2) 20/4/2.add.1
M5 - Seal abundance and distribution	I and III	BDC(2) 20/4/2. add.2
B1 - marine bird abundance	I	BDC(2) 20/4/2.add4
B3 – marine bird productivity	I	BDC(2) 20/4/2. add.5
M6 - Marine Mammal Bycatch	III and IV	BDC 21/4/6rev1; Add1.
FC1 Recovery in the population abundance of sensitive fish species	IV and V	BDC 21/4/6rev1; Add2.
FC2 Proportion of large fish (Large Fish Index)	IV and V	BDC 21/4/6rev1; Add3.
BH2a Assessment of coastal habitats exposed to nutrient and organic enrichment	I and V	BDC 21/4/6rev1; Add4.

8. **CEMP Guidelines** provide the full technical specifications of all OSPAR Common Indicators included in the Co-ordinated Environmental Monitoring Programme (CEMP). CEMP aims to deliver comparable data from across the OSPAR Maritime Area, which can be used in assessments to address the specific questions raised in OSPAR's Joint Assessment and Monitoring Programme, (JAMP). A CEMP guideline must be drafted, agreed and adopted for an indicator to be adopted as 'common' (see Template in Annex 3). CEMP Guidelines are published [here](#). It should be noted that CEMP Guidelines will be revised as the indicators are further developed.

9. **CEMP Guidelines** are not required for Candidate Indicators, but development of a guideline can help guide development of the necessary information to support adoption. However, the OSPAR Marine mammal Expert Group used the CEMP guideline template (Annex 3) to produce a proposal for a new candidate indicator "Trends and Status of PCBs in marine mammals" (see BDC 19/6/3).

10. **CEMP Appendices** set out details of the agreed monitoring and assessment approaches for each component of these themes including the approaches to be applied to realise coordination of monitoring and assessment. The CEMP Appendices have been adapted to align with the European Commission's requirements for MSFD reporting and are available in the [OSPAR Assessment Portal \(OAP\)](#). The purpose is to assist those Contracting Parties that are EU member states in their national reporting commitments for MSFD Article 11 Monitoring Programmes. The CEMP Appendices must be reviewed annually and updated if necessary, following the [guidance here](#).

11. Some common indicators can be quantitatively assessed, including through the use of **threshold values**. In the preparation of IA2017, justification documents for several assessment values/thresholds to be used for biodiversity indicator assessment were prepared at and following on from BDC (1) 2016 (See ICG-COBAM 19/3/Info.1 and Info.2). However, several of the proposed thresholds were not agreed by CoG(1) 2016. The process for agreeing threshold values only took place very late in the IA2017 process and when thresholds were not agreed, there was no opportunity to address concerns and assessments were prepared without using assessment thresholds.

12. Based on the experience of IA2017 and subsequent discussions between ICG-COBAM, BDC and ICG-MSFD, it was clear that steps were needed to improve the dialogue between technical- and policy delegates in OSPAR. So COBAM 2019 developed a format for proposing thresholds and other quantitative assessment methods (see Annex 4). The aim was to align the decision-making process with the best science available and ensure that policy delegates engaged as early as possible in identifying threshold values.

13. Examples of successful threshold proposals that were later adopted in the QSR 2023 are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: Examples of successful threshold proposals for common indicators.

Common Indicator	Document ref
B3 – marine bird productivity	BDC 21/4/7. add.1
M6 - Marine Mammal Bycatch	BDC 21/4/7. add.3
M4 - abundance and distribution of cetaceans	BDC 21/4/7. Add4.

The process for the integrated assessment of common indicators.

14. During the production of the Thematic Assessments in QSR23, ICG-COBAM was responsible for producing the State chapters. For some themes (ecosystem components) this included an integrated assessment of one or more indicators to assess whether good environmental status had been achieved. Rules for combining indicators were developed by the expert groups and discussed at COBAM, BiTA and BDC before the thematic assessments were presented. CEMP guidelines for integrated assessments of pelagic habitats, marine birds, fish and marine mammals were developed, adopted and published as separate CEMP guidelines [here](#). A separate CEMP guideline template for integrated assessment methods is in Annex 5.

The process for agreeing Pilot Assessments of candidate indicators.

15. A procedure for selecting pilot assessments of candidate indicators for the QSR2023 was agreed at BDC 2020(2) (BDC(2) 20/04/10). The procedure was considered necessary given the number of pilot assessments being proposed. The procedure, shown in Figure 2, required assessment leads to submit proposals for pilot assessments to BDC one year before the completed assessments needed to

be agreed prior to publication. The submission of proposals in advance ensured effort was not expended unnecessarily on pilot assessments that were unlikely to be included in the QSR2023.

16. The first step in the process was for indicator leads to submit details of their proposed pilot assessment, first to ICG-COBAM (see template in Annex 6). Leads were also encouraged to submit any preliminary results that would help others to visualise what the pilot assessment will contain. ICG-COBAM helped to refine the proposals as necessary, before seeking input (via written procedure) from the relevant Contracting Parties in the Regions where the pilot was taking place. The input from Contracting parties focused on the availability of data and resources required to complete the pilot assessment (see questionnaire in Annex 7). COBAM Co-conveners collated the responses and information on each pilot and submitted them to the following BDC meeting (BDC 2021). At BDC 2021, Contracting Parties were asked to agree the list of candidate indicators for which pilot assessments should be developed (see figure 2) and those which should not be taken forward.

17. The pilot assessments that were approved for development by BDC2021 were then progressed towards completion the following year, in parallel with Common Indicator assessments and submitted for approval by BDC 2022.

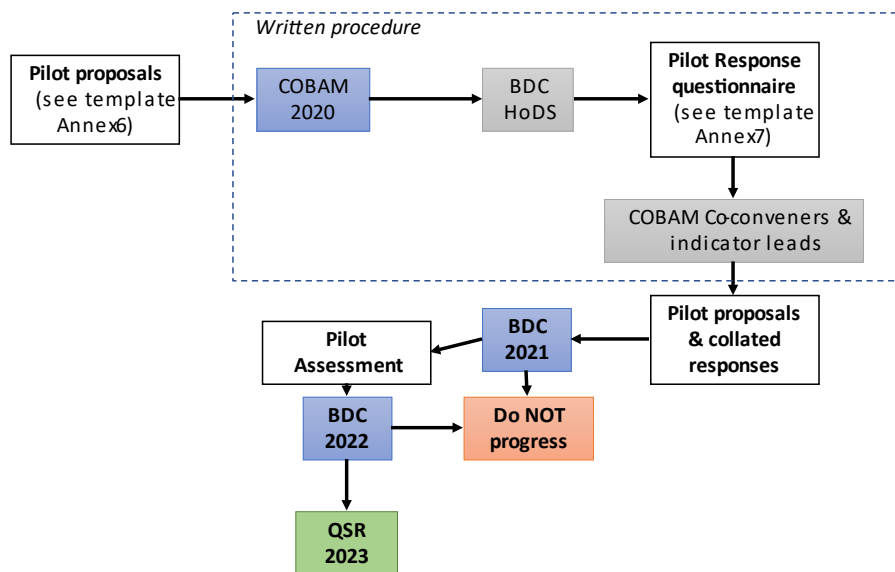


Figure 2: Procedure for selecting biodiversity pilot assessments for the QSR 2023 (BDC(2) 20/04/10).

ANNEX 1 - TEMPLATE - Promotion of a biodiversity Candidate Indicator to a Common Indicator.

Source: Annex 2 -Template for proposals for geographic extension of indicators (ICG-COBAM 19/10/1 Annex 6). Adapted by ICG-COBAM 2023

Procedure for promotion of a biodiversity Candidate Indicator to a Common Indicator:

- i. Indicator leads supported by other relevant experts are to populate section 1, 2 and 3
- ii. Completed template is submitted to OSPAR Secretariat
- iii. OSPAR Secretariat circulates the template to BDC HODs for those Contracting Parties in the relevant Regions.
- iv. BDC HODs respond to section 4 on behalf of each Contracting Party.
- v. ICG-COBAM co-conveners carry out a final check and review of the templates before submission to BDC.

(To be populated by Indicator leads supported by other relevant experts)

(1) Indicator considered for promotion

[INSERT INDICATOR NAME (CODE)]

In which Region(s) should the indicator be adopted as a Common Indicator?

[LIST OSPAR REGION(S)]

(2) Conceptual need for extension

- a. Are the ecosystem components present in all Regions specified above?
- b. What is the value for management in adopting the indicator, e.g. MSFD criteria, or relevant NEAES Strategic Objectives, or requirements identified in the QSR 2023 (e.g. need for regional assessments and comparability between regions, or links to pressures/impacts, including climate change)? Provide a comprehensive explanation on why the common indicator is needed.

(3) Technical aspects

- a. Is it technically possible to monitor?
- b. Is the indicator assessment method technically appropriate?

(4) Resource aspects

(To be populated by BDC HOD on behalf of each concerned Contracting Party)

- a. What experts are in place that could do the assessment and participate in the relevant expert group?

- b. What is the spatial and temporal scope of existing data?
- c. In the medium term (5-10 years): What are the risks to data availability in the future, e.g. monitoring scheme is changed or created?
- d. If it is necessary start new monitoring, what might be the cost, e.g. as personnel equivalent?
- e. Do you support the promotion of this Candidate Indicator to a Common Indicator?

ANNEX 2 - TEMPLATE - Proposal for geographic extension of a biodiversity Common Indicator

Source ICG-COBAM 2019 (ICG-COBAM 19/10/1 Annex 6)

Procedure for proposing an extension to a biodiversity Common Indicator, by completing the template:

- i. Indicator leads supported by other relevant experts are to populate section 1, 2 and 3
- ii. Completed template is submitted to OSPAR Secretariat
- iii. OSPAR Secretariat circulates the template to BDC HODs for those Contracting Parties concerned by an extension to the concerned Region
- iv. BDC HODs respond to section 4 on behalf of each CP
- v. ICG-COBAM co-conveners carry out a final check and review of the templates before submission to BDC

(To be populated by Indicator leads supported by other relevant experts)

(1) Biodiversity indicator considered for expansion

[INSERT INDICATOR NAME (CODE)]

To which Region(s) are you expanding the indicator: **[LIST OSPAR REGION(S)]**

(2) Conceptual need for extension

- a. Are the ecosystem components present?
- b. Where is the indicator used?
- c. Based on b.: What is the value for management in expanding the indicator, e.g. MSFD criteria, or relevant NEAES Strategic Objectives, or requirements identified in the QSR 2023 (e.g. need for regional assessments and comparability between regions, or links to pressures/impacts, including climate change)? Provide a comprehensive explanation on why the common indicator is needed in the new Regions.

(3) Technical aspects

- a. Is it technically possible to monitor?
- b. Is the indicator assessment method technically appropriate for the respective region?

(4) Resource aspects

(To be populated by BDC HOD on behalf of each concerned Contracting Party)

- a. What experts are in place that could do the assessment and participate in the relevant expert group?
- b. What is the spatial and temporal scope of existing data in the region the indicator should be extended to?
- c. In the medium term (5-10 years): What are the risk of data availability in the future, e.g. monitoring scheme is changed or created?
- d. If it is necessary start new monitoring in the respective region, what might be the cost, e.g. as personnel equivalent?
- e. Do you support the extension of this indicator?

ANNEX 3 - TEMPLATE - CEMP Guideline for a Biodiversity Common Indicator

These guidelines should outline the monitoring and assessment requirements for the components outlined within the CEMP and should be developed for each element (i.e. common indicators)

1 Introduction

General introduction to the CEMP component, purpose of the document and overview of the content of the guideline

2 Monitoring

2.1 Purpose: clarify and make explicit **assessment question(s)** and the objective and purpose of any monitoring

Purpose of undertaking the monitoring (e.g.):

- *Assess effectiveness of measures*
- *Assess status of components of the marine environment*
- *Assess effects on the marine environment*

2.2 Quantitative Objectives

The quantitative objectives should include:

- *Temporal trend and spatial distribution for the monitoring programme*
- *Power to detect change*
- *[Sensitivity to a particular environmental target?]*

2.3 Monitoring Strategy: design of specific **monitoring strategy**

- *determine monitoring parameters and their relation to the assessment needs*

2.4 Sampling Strategy - ensure adequate **sampling or observation methodologies**

- *Field sampling and monitoring Equipment*
- *Spatial and temporal sampling*
- *Storage and pre-treatment – (e.g. for plastic in fulmar stomachs, how to store the birds and/or stomachs; dissection of birds to remove stomachs)*
- *Analytical procedures – refer to the technical annexes or explain here any procedures for treatment of the material to do the monitoring (e.g. might be relevant for microplastics or some pelagic indicator work)*

2.5 Quality assurance/ Quality Control

2.6 Data reporting, handling and management

- *Reporting format (Available via a link in the CEMP Appendices)*
- *Data metadata schema (Link to ODIMS, INSPIRE compliant)*
- *Confidence levels in data*

- *Data flows described (Additional to information in CEMP Appendix)*

3 Assessment

3.1 Data acquisition

- *How you extract the data specifically for your assessment question*

3.2 Preparation of data

- *Normalisation of data (If it has come from different monitoring methods)*
- *Aggregation and integration of data acquired*

3.3 Assessment criteria

- *Defining assessment unit/scale (Temporal and spatial)*
- *Baseline/ reference level*
- *Environmental target*

3.4 Spatial Analysis and / or trend analysis

- *Statistical analysis (e.g. Method for trend analysis, Establishment of confidence limits)*

3.5 Presentation of assessment results

- *Consideration of target audience and appropriate communication style*
- *Assessment metadata schema (link to ODIMS)*

4 Change Management

- *Responsibility for follow up of assessment (e.g. if the monitoring is not adequate) (Tech sub group -> Committee e.g. for Beach litter – ICG-ML->EIHA)*

ANNEX 4 - TEMPLATE – Biodiversity Indicator threshold proposal

Source: ICG-COBAM 19/03/03, Annex1.

Indicator name	<i>Input name</i>
Status of threshold value	<i>New/revised common/resubmitted candidate delete as appropriate</i>
If revised or resubmitted provide justification	<i>If a revised threshold value or a previously developed threshold value that is being resubmitted for consideration provide a justification on why the it has been revised or resubmitted, including how it differs from previous versions.</i>
Proposed threshold values	<p><i>What threshold is proposed?</i></p> <p><i>Absolute value?</i></p> <p><i>Absolute multivariate value?</i></p> <p><i>Range?</i></p> <p><i>Trend?</i></p> <p><i>Other what? Combination?</i></p> <p><i>Reference value</i></p> <p><i>Reference condition</i></p> <p><i>Modern baseline</i></p> <p><i>Historical baseline</i></p> <p><i>Deviation from specific value</i></p> <p><i>Other what?</i></p> <p><i>Regional specificities if applicable (e.g. different value in different region).</i></p>
Source	<p><i>Adopted from another instrument (directive, agreement etc)</i></p> <p><i>Adapted from another instrument</i></p> <p><i>Developed specifically for the common indicator (if so, relationship to existing thresholds and targets)</i></p>
Basis	<p><i>What is the conservation objective?</i></p> <p><i>Provide an explanation of the underlying logic behind the development of the threshold value. Provide evidence where possible for the use of the proposed threshold value presenting sources if applicable.</i></p>
Regionality	<i>Given an indication of which regions the proposed threshold values can and cannot be applied to. Provide justification on why the proposed threshold values cannot be applied to some regions, if applicable.</i>
Consensus and robustness	<i>Has consensus been reached in the expert group? Yes/No – comment if needed</i>
Policy consideration	<i>Describe what aspects have been taken into account to facilitate policy consensus considerations. Describe the process and steps taken to date in developing the proposal and presenting it for discussion</i>

ANNEX 5 - TEMPLATE - CEMP Guideline for biodiversity thematic assessment integration methods

Title: CEMP Guideline for [biodiversity component] thematic assessment integration method

These guidelines should outline the method for thematic assessment integration as applied for the QSR 2023 thematic assessments.

1 Introduction

General introduction, purpose of the document and overview of the content of the guideline

2 Description of the integration method

2.1 Overview of the approach

This is the description of the integration method, including the steps for conducting integration. Include any outstanding challenges for integration at this stage of development or any other consideration you feel is helpful to include.

2.2 Description of the assessment units being applied

Use this section if appropriate

2.3 Presentation of results

Expression of the results of the thematic integration and provide any worked example of what the results would look like in the thematic assessment – e.g. colours used, key and rules for applying relevant colours.

2.4 Confidence assessment

3 Change Management

Describe the chain of responsibility for follow up of assessment and iteration of the thematic integration guideline (e.g. if the monitoring is not adequate) (Tech sub group - > Committee e.g. for biodiversity indicator integration – expert group > ICG-COBAM - BDC)

4 References

ANNEX 6 - TEMPLATE - Proposal for a biodiversity Pilot Assessment

Source: BDC(2) 20/04/10

To be completed by indicator assessment leads

Indicator name and code	<i>(Input name e.g. B5 – seabird bycatch)</i>
Assessment lead	<i>(Input Individual(s) and CP(s))</i>
Status of indicator	<i>New/ Common/ Candidate (delete as appropriate)</i>
Justification for pilot assessment inclusion in QSR 2023	<i>(e.g. to test and demonstrate a Candidate indicator; to test an indicator in a new region; to test a new method for an existing indicator)</i>
Relevant MSFD GES Criteria	<i>(Please list relevant GES criteria from the 2017 MSFD Commission Decision e.g. D1C2)</i>
Relevance to other agreements/legislation/guidance	<i>(Please list other agreements/legislation/guidance or policy instruments that this indicator assessment will contribute to)</i>
Geographic scope	<i>(Name Regions or sub-divisions of regions, naming the CPs this potentially applies to)</i>
Data requirements	<i>(Provide details of Parameters, periodicity, time-series dates etc)</i>
Data call deadline	<i>(Provide dates for datacall and indicate if the datacall is specific to this pilot or will be used for other indicator assessments also)</i>
Brief description of assessment methodology (incl as relevant any proposed threshold/baseline values)	<i>(Please also attach preliminary results, if available, that may help others to visualise what the pilot assessment will contain.)</i>
Other information	<i>(Provide a brief description of other information about the pilot that is not included above)</i>
Expert level Consensus and robustness of indicator concept	Has consensus been reached in the expert group on the technical feasibility and relevance? Yes/No <i>(provide comment if needed)</i>

ANNEX 7 - TEMPLATE - Contracting Party response to a biodiversity Pilot Assessment proposal

Source: BDC(2) 20/04/10

To be completed by BDC HoDs from CPs that are relevant to the pilot assessment

Indicator name and code	<i>(Input name e.g. B5 – seabird bycatch)</i>		
Contracting Party		Region (s)	
1. Can you contribute data to the pilot assessment?	<i>Yes/No (add a comment as relevant)</i>		
2. Can you contribute experts to this pilot via the relevant expert group?	<i>Yes/No</i>		
3. In principle, do you support the inclusion of this pilot assessment in the QSR2023	<i>Yes/No (please give reasons)</i>		