

**Memo of the Second Informal Consultation Session of the HELCOM Expert Group on
Underwater Noise and the OSPAR Intersessional Correspondence Group on Underwater
Noise
(IC EG NOISE and ICG NOISE 2-2024)**

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Introduction

0.1 The Second Informal Consultation Session of the HELCOM Expert Group on Underwater Noise and the OSPAR Intersessional Correspondence Group on Underwater Noise was held in Helsinki, Finland on 17 September 2024.

0.2 The Session was attended by Delegations from Belgium, Denmark, EU, Finland, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and UK, as well as HELCOM Observers from Coalition Clean Baltic and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES), and OSPAR Observer from IOGP. IFAW - International Fund for Animal Welfare also attended the Session as invited guest. The list of participants is contained as **Annex 1**.

0.3 Mr. Jakob Tougaard, Chair of EG Noise together with Mr. Nathan Merchant and Mr. Niels Kinneberg, Co-Convenors of ICG Noise, acted as Co-Moderators of the Session.

0.4 Ms. Franziska Bils, OSPAR Officer, Mr. Markus Helavuori, Professional Secretary, and Ms. Marta Ruiz, HELCOM Associate Professional Secretary, acted as Secretaries of the Session.

0.5 The Session was welcomed by the Co-Chairs.

Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

1.1 The Session adopted the Agenda as contained in **document 1-1**.

1.2 The Session supported the proposal by the Chair of EG Noise to include a discussion on the joint registry of impulsive noise to Agenda Item 4.

Agenda Item 2 Update on HELCOM activities

2.1 The Session took note of a HOLAS Review and Development (HOLAS RevDev) Update Autumn 2024 (**document 2-1**).

2.2 The Session considered the HOLAS RevDev workplan for the topic of underwater noise, as set out in Attachment 1 of document 2-1. The Session considered if any additional detail and clarity is needed and whether the initial attempt at prioritization of topics within the HOLAS RevDev workplan on underwater noise is suitable for use as a starting point for discussion. The Session was of the view that the workplan is, in principle, suitable to be forwarded as it is to HELCOM WG Sea-based pressures for consideration.

2.3 The Session discussed some of the most critical priorities, as also detailed in Attachment 1 of document 2-1, and in particular the need to improve data reporting to the impulsive noise registry, the lack of compatibility between categories, and the need to further adjusting the continuous noise indicator in relation to noise sensitive species, assessment areas (MRUs) and LOBE values.

2.4 The Session noted that for HOLAS 3, underwater noise was modelled using AIS data of commercial ships, and that for HOLAS 4 the intention is to further develop the continuous noise model to include recreational boating and fishing vessels by using e.g. VMS data. In this context, the Session noted that there may be synergies in relation to assessing fishing effort and by-catch using VMS data from fishing vessels.

2.5 The Session recognized the need to coordinate efforts related to these tasks with OSPAR.

2.6 The Session took note of an update on the implementation of the Regional Action Plan on Underwater Noise (RAP Noise) (**document 2-2**).

2.7 The Session discussed inter alia action 6 and noted that in the UK using deflagration and bubble curtains is becoming standard practice, and that Germany is developing nature friendly national guidance for UXO clearing. The Session further took note of BSAP action S34 on developing BAT/BEP for managing munitions in the Baltic Sea, noting that underwater noise mitigation measures will be part of the BAT/BEP. The Session further noted that three new EU funded projects (MUNIMAP, MUNIRISK and MMinE-SWEePER) are expected to contribute significantly to this work.

2.8 The Session recognized that it would be useful if both HELCOM and OSPAR Contracting Parties could share information on ongoing activities in relation to guidance or BAT/BEP for managing munitions, which would be useful for the implementation of action 6.

2.9 The Session further discussed action 8 on establishing a common reporting system for planned activities likely to produce impulsive noise, and noted that a project would be needed to make progress on implementing the action. In this context, the Session noted that the UK has a [noise registry](#) which is forward looking, making use of information on permits. The Session noted that this is interesting in relation to MPAs where harbour porpoise occur, and enables studies on cumulative effects and assessment so that measures can be put in place to avoid that the noise level limits are exceeded.

2.10 The Session took note of action 10 on establishing common HELCOM criteria for injury and disturbance, as well as common exposure limits.

2.11 The Session discussed action 22 on a Baltic Sea wide cooperation of port authorities to introduce novel initiatives, such as harbour fee systems, in order to set incentives for voluntary quiet vessel operation. The Session noted that a working group to develop such incentives has been established in Germany. The Session recognized that for such an incentive system to work, it would need to be harmonized and supported throughout the region and internationally.

2.12 The Session took note of action 32 on strengthening the cooperation with OSPAR on development of common and/or compatible indicators, databases and assessment methodologies, and noted that the present Session is directly contributing to this action.

2.13 The Session took note of action 34 on reducing the impact from leisure boats by establishing a discussion with producers of echosounders and fishfinders with the goal of introducing standards for noise emission from echosounders, fishfinders and engines of leisure boats. The Session recognized that such standards could potentially be developed jointly with OSPAR. The Session took note that CCB is in the process on putting together a project in relation to this action.

2.14 The Session took note of a follow up on the implementation of the BSAP actions related to underwater noise (**document 2-3**).

2.15 The Session considered action S57 specifically, which inter alia relates to noise from recreational craft and commercial vessels. The Session noted the relevance of the [DEMASK project](#) in the North Sea in this regard, and that there are plans for an application for EU LIFE funding for a project to specifically address noise from recreational craft in the Baltic Sea. The Session also noted that a Finnish national project is also looking into noise from recreational craft, with particular emphasis on speed limitations and time-area restrictions.

2.16 The Session took note that Germany is planning to submit a document to IC WG MARITIME 3-2024 and IC WG SEA-BASED PRESSURES 4-2024 in relation to BSAP action S55 and RAP Noise action 19 and ask for the establishment of a correspondence group to develop the BAT/BEP based on the inventory chapter on shipping.

2.17 The Session encouraged Contracting Parties to take the lead on joint actions which are still lacking a lead, to ensure that progress in implementation is being made and that the target years for completion are met.

2.18 The Session took note that a HELCOM Informal Consultation Workshop on improving the assessment of the impact of underwater noise on noise sensitive species ([IC WS NOISE IMPACT 1-2024](#)) will be held on 18 September 2024 at the premises of the HELCOM Secretariat. The Session noted that

the workshop is particularly relevant in relation to RAP Noise action 10 as discussed in paragraph 2.10 above.

Agenda Item 3 Update on OSPAR activities

3.1 The Session took note of a report on progress from ICG-Noise based on a progress report to the OSPAR EIHA Committee (**document 3-1**). The Session noted that the new chapter on shipping in the OSPAR inventory on noise mitigation measures has been approved in June 2024. The Session invited the OSPAR Secretariat to share a link to the publication also with contacts and observers of EG Noise, when available.

3.2 The Session took note of **document 3-2** containing options on how and whether to incorporate EU MSFD threshold values into OSPAR noise monitoring and assessment.

3.3 The Session discussed the implementation of EU MSFD threshold values at regional level, including the consideration of EC feedback on national MSFD reporting, and took note of the following views:

- the same issue needs to be considered also in the HELCOM context;
- HELCOM and OSPAR need to be proactive within EU TG Noise;
- EU TG Noise did not take e.g. regional experiences with conducting assessments sufficiently into account, when developing MSFD threshold values;
- the MSFD threshold values are not expected to be reopened for discussion in the foreseeable future;
- HELCOM and OSPAR should proceed to implement the MSFD threshold values and try to adapt them to the regional specificities;
- it would be useful to define the roles of Regional Seas Conventions and EU TG Noise in relation to the development and implementation of threshold values and the conducting of assessments, in order to improve cooperation and avoid duplication of efforts;
- the EC would appreciate to receive written comments about experiences and proposals regarding the role and process of EU TG Noise;
- Contracting Parties and Regional Seas Organizations are encouraged to attend the next EU TG Noise meeting in November 2024;
- Contracting Parties need to make their own national interpretations of the MSFD threshold values;
- it is important for Regional Seas Organizations to test the threshold values, making use of regional data, in order to gain experience on their application with a view to future improvement;
- it would be useful to share information among Contracting Parties on how the MSFD threshold values have been interpreted and implemented;
- Contracting Parties are, to a large extent, making use of regional assessments (OSPAR QSR and HELCOM HOLAS) for MSFD reporting purposes. For that reason, it is important to ensure that the regional indicators are compatible with the MSFD;
- the HELCOM Secretariat attends meetings of TG Noise as much as possible, providing updates to relevant HELCOM groups; and
- the EU TG Noise meeting in November 2024 overlaps with HELCOM IC WG SEA-BASED PRESSURES 4-2024.

3.4 The Session recommended to revisit the options on how and whether to incorporate EU MSFD threshold values into OSPAR and HELCOM noise monitoring and assessment as a new Agenda Item at the next joint session of EG Noise and ICG-Noise. The Session noted that threshold values and

methodologies for HOLAS 4 need to be finalized during 2026, and also noted that the OSPAR Intermediate Assessment 2029 and HELCOM HOLAS 4 have similar timelines.

Agenda Item 4 Discussion on topics of joint interest

4.1 The Session took note of the report 'Underwater noise from pile driving. Comparison of German and Danish regulatory frameworks' as contained in **document 4-1**. The Session discussed the report as well as the experiences in Denmark and Germany. The Session noted that the German guidelines were developed more than 10 years ago, and that it may be interesting to evaluate them in relation to recent research on noise levels and environmental effects. The Session also took note that the German Guidelines have been instrumental in driving the development of noise mitigation measures and profit from more than 10 years of experience during the application. Benefits of both guidelines should be taken into account for future development of common guidelines.

4.2 The Session took note of an update on progress in the development of the OSPAR regional action plan for underwater noise (**document 4-2**).

4.3 The Session considered the draft actions of the OSPAR RAP Noise (Annex 1 and Attachment 2) of document 4-2 and took note of inter alia the following views:

- the sequence of actions may need to be reconsidered;
- consistency of terminology and formulation should be ensured;
- some of the draft actions are closely linked to EU policy and may need to be coordinated also in the European Council;
- the drafting of Action 1 is almost completed. A document will be submitted to IMO MEPC 83 in 2025 informing of the action. The action also relates to recreational craft, and consideration should be given to possibly splitting it into two separate actions;
- relevant to draft Action 1, France is initiating a study in relation to the experience building phase of the IMO Guidelines;
- the HELCOM RAP Noise and the actions related to shipping were developed before IMO adopted its revised Guidelines;
- in relation to draft Action 2, HELCOM has other relevant actions that correspond to the OSPAR draft, in addition to HELCOM RAP Noise action 9 referred to in Annex 2 of document 4-2;
- draft Action 3 on seismic surveying needs to take into account various sources of noise, in addition to air-guns. It would also be important to ensure reporting of such noise sources, even if their frequency ranges would be outside of the scope of MSFD reporting requirements;
- in order to meet objectives related to phasing out fossil fuel exploration, it is expected that seismic surveys for such purposes will also be reduced in the future. Such synergies of objectives for different purposes are important to keep in mind;
- for draft Action 4, HELCOM RAP Noise action 10 and 33 are also relevant in addition to action 20 which is already mentioned in Annex 2 of document 4-2;
- draft Action 5 relates to HELCOM RAP Noise action 6 and 7 and BSAP action S58. In addition, it was noted that consideration could be given to also address oil and gas;
- in relation to draft Action 6, consideration could be given to organizing a workshop inviting e.g. shipping associations, ship-building organisations and other stakeholders in order to raise awareness. In addition, the [DOSITS website](#) could be used for educational purposes; and
- for draft Action 7 also HELCOM BSAP action S34 is relevant.

4.4 The Session noted that the next steps in developing the actions for the OSPAR RAP Noise is for the OSPAR Secretariat to summarize the feedback and input provided by stakeholders for consideration at a stakeholder workshop to be held in autumn 2024. Drafting is expected to continue

at the ICG-Noise extra 24 meeting on 29-30 October 2024, the draft is to be considered by ICG Noise 25 meeting in January 2025 and by EIHA in spring 2025, with a view to approval by OSPAR in June 2025.

4.5 The Session considered the table of related OSPAR/HELCOM actions (Annex 2) and discussed options for collaborations or sharing of knowledge on closely related tasks of the HELCOM RAP Noise and the draft actions of the OSPAR RAP Noise. The Session noted that the OSPAR Secretariat will update the table in Annex 2 in accordance with the comments above, and submit it for consideration to ICG-Noise extra 24. The Session invited the HELCOM Secretariat to inform the next joint session of developments conducted in relation to those actions in the HELCOM RAP Noise and BSAP that are connected to the draft actions in the OSPAR RAP Noise.

4.6 The Session discussed the possibilities of improving the joint registry of impulsive noise. The Session noted that some Contracting Parties have not received a confirmation of data reporting when uploading data to the registry hosted by ICES. The Session discussed the need to include noise from Ultra Short Baseline positioning systems (USBLs) to the registry. The Session also discussed the need for monitoring and reporting of ultrasonic anti-fouling systems.

Agenda Item 5 Any other business

5.1 The Session took note of the information on a EU funded project (ECoSS – European Catalogue of Sound Signatures) regarding development of an open sound signatures catalogue (**document 5-1**). The Session noted that it is expected that the catalogue will be made available in connection with EMODNET Physics on 2 December 2024 and that users will be able to add new sound signatures to the catalogue for categories such as ships, sonar, hammer (impulsive) and mammals.

5.2 The Session did not discuss any other issues.

Agenda Item 6 Follow up

6.1 The Session emphasized the usefulness of regularly holding joint meetings of EG Noise and ICG Noise to increase cooperation on underwater noise issues of relevance for both sea areas.

6.2 The Session invited the Co-Moderators of the Session together with the Secretariats to investigate the dates of the next joint session in autumn 2025 and to inform experts accordingly.

6.3 The Session noted the following relevant upcoming meetings:

- [IC WS NOISE IMPACT 1-2024](#) to be held on 18 September 2024;
- [IC RAP Noise 2-2024](#) to be held on 29 October 2024;
- OSPAR ICG-Noise extra 24 to be held on 29-30 October 2024;
- [IC WS BSAP S61](#), focusing on ADDs, on 30 October 2024;
- [HELCOM IC WG SEA-BASED PRESSURES 4-2024](#) to be held on 4-6 November 2024; and
- OSPAR ICG-Noise 25 in January 2025.

Agenda Item 7 Memo of the Session

7.1 The Session approved the draft Memo of IC EG NOISE and ICG NOISE 2-2024. The final Memo, incorporating corrections by the Session, will be prepared by the Secretariats in consultation with the Co-Moderators of the Session.

Annex 1 List of participants

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