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OSPAR contact tel: +44 7769613549
Lucy Ritchie email: lucy.ritchie@ospar.org

www.ospar.org

OSPAR and HELCOM release online ballast water risk assessment tool

A new online risk assessment tool for invasive non-indigenous species transfers via the ballast water of commercial ships has been released jointly by [HELCOM](#) and [OSPAR](#) today.

The new [tool](#) provides an online application to run the latest version of the risk assessment method for ballast water introductions in the Baltic and the larger North-East Atlantic area. It replaces the previous version from July 2014 and includes several major improvements.

Upon submitting information on the species observed in the departure and destination ports, the website allows national maritime administrations and ship owners to quickly identify routes that may qualify for exemptions to the application of ballast water management for ships, and those that are unlikely to. Interest in such exemptions is growing as the IMO Convention on Ballast Water Management enters into force in September this year.

The underlying risk assessment method was originally adopted by the 21 member states and EU within OSPAR and HELCOM in 2013. It is as a part of the comprehensive “Joint Harmonised Procedure” on granting exemptions from ballast water treatment provisions of the 2004 International Convention for the Control and Management of Ships' Ballast Water and Sediments ([BWM Convention](#)) of the International Maritime Organisation ([IMO](#)).

Based on the IMO (G7) guidelines on granting exemptions under the BWM Convention and provisions promoting regional cooperation, the joint harmonised procedure specifies the procedure for granting exemptions (G7) and undertaking risk assessments.

The overall aim is to help protect the environment by identifying routes that could present a high risk for the transfer of invasive non-indigenous species. It will also save both the shipping industry and maritime authorities time and money by bringing transparency and clarity to the decision making process around exemptions from the provisions of ballast water management.

Currently the online tool includes only port sampling data from ports in Europe. However, the tool and the underlying approach could also be used for other sea areas in the world.

The tool can be found via the address <http://jointbwmexemptions.org>.

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Note for editors:

The development of the tool is since 2012 supported by the Joint Task Group on Ballast Water Exemptions (TG BALLAST) consisting of the Contracting Parties of both Conventions and which is also open to official observer organisation from both the shipping and environmental fields. TG BALLAST reports to the HELCOM Maritime Group within HELCOM and OSPAR EIHA Committee within OSPAR.

The Maritime Group of HELCOM ([HELCOM MARITIME](#)), the parent group of the TG BALLAST within the HELCOM framework, identifies and promotes actions to limit sea-based pollution and ways for safer navigation in the Baltic Sea. It also works to ensure enforcement and harmonized implementation of IMOs international shipping regulations in accordance to the 1992 Helsinki Convention.

The OSPAR Environmental Impacts of Humans Activities Committee (EIHA), the parent group of the TG BALLAST within the OSPAR framework, works to reduce the impact of human activities in the North East Atlantic.

In order to run the risk assessment model the online tool comprises a database on observations of alien species and physical features in ports, lists of target alien species for the two regions as well as a risk assessment algorithm. Live links are provided to several existing scientific databases in order to provide most recent information on for example the environmental tolerance of species.

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