

Memo of the Fifth Informal Consultation Session of the Response Working Group (IC WG RESPONSE 5-2024)



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Memo of the Fifth Informal Consultation Session of the Response Working Group (IC WG RESPONSE 5-2024)

Introduction

- 0.1. The Fifth Informal Consultation Session of the HELCOM Response Working Group (IC WG RESPONSE 5-2024) was hosted by Finland on the Tallink Silja Line ferry between Helsinki and Stockholm from 11-13 June 2024.
- 0.2. The Session was attended by participants from all Contracting Parties of HELCOM representing EU and EU Member States, observers from the Sea Alarm Foundation and World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). The list of participants is attached as **Annex 1**.
- 0.3. The Session was chaired by the Chair of WG Response, Torben Iversen, Denmark.
- 0.4. Markus Helavuori, HELCOM Professional Secretary, and Laura Meski, Associate Professional Secretary, acted as secretaries of the Session.

Agenda Item 1 Adoption of the Agenda

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

Agenda Item 2 Matters arising from HELCOM meetings

- 2.1. The Session took note that the [2024 Ministerial Meeting on the Baltic Sea Marine Environment](#) took place in Riga on 25 April 2024 hosted by Latvia, the HELCOM Chair country at the time. The Ministerial Meeting was followed by the celebration of the [50th anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Convention](#) in the afternoon of the same day (document 2-5).
- 2.2. The Session took note that the next Ministerial Meeting will be held in the second half of 2026, under the Chairmanship of Poland, reporting on the implementation of the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) and considering the possible need and mandate for updating the BSAP beyond 2030.
- 2.3. The Session took note of information on recent informal consultation session of relevance for WG Response, held since IC WG RESPONSE 4-2023 (document 2-7).
- 2.4. The Session considered the Informal Consultation Workshop on discharges from tank washing on chemical tankers (IC WS DISCHARGES 1-2024), which is related to BSAP action S16 and is relevant also for WG Response. The Session requested that invitations to possible follow up workshops on the matter are also sent to contacts and observers of WG Response.
- 2.5. The Session took note of the Memo of the Fifth Informal Consultation Session of the HELCOM Heads of Delegation of the EU and EU Member States (IC HOD 5-2024), which was held from 3-4 June 2024 (document 2-8). The next informal consultation session of the Heads of Delegation will take place from 11-12 December 2024 in Helsinki, Finland.
- 2.6. The Session took note that Lithuania will take over the Chairmanship of HELCOM as of 1 July 2024 for the next two years (1 July 2024-30 June 2026).
- 2.7. The Session recalled that IC HELCOM 1-2023 recommended a review process within one year after the approval of the updated HELCOM working structure (February 2023) using the practical experience gained during the first year of implementation, with the aim of ensuring that any needs for further improvements in the updated structure be identified and addressed. A survey was circulated to the contacts of HELCOM working and expert groups on 22 January 2024 by the Secretariat to collect experiences with the updated structure.
- 2.8. The Session took note of the survey results (document 2-1) and that IC HOD 5-2024 did not see a need to adjust further the working structure based on the views by the HELCOM working groups, expert group and Chairs.

- 2.9. The Session took note of the plans for the review of the HELCOM Monitoring Manual and programmes (BSAP action HT6) (document 2-2).
- 2.10. The Session invited Contracting Parties to consider taking the lead in reviewing the monitoring programme on “Acute Pollution”. The Session took note that the EU JRC is considering acute pollution within the framework of the MSFD, but that there is currently no agreed definition of what it means. The Session took note of the view that damage assessment is not part of the responsibility of the response authorities, and that therefore WG Response is not considered to be the most appropriate group to develop the related monitoring programme.
- 2.11. The Session noted that a similar discussion is ongoing within the Bonn Agreement and OSPAR, with discussions to continue at the Bonn Agreement BASAP Workshop in July 2024 about possibly removing significant acute pollution as a regional priority for the Bonn Agreement.
- 2.12. The Session recommended that acute pollution should be discussed at the next Inter-Secretariat Meeting organized by EMSA and hosted by the Copenhagen Agreement on 5-6 February 2025.
- 2.13. The Session took note of the cross-referencing of the 2021 BSAP actions and Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) targets, the tentative division of the targets between the HELCOM working groups, the coordinating role of HELCOM WG GEAR and that further information on how the working groups can work with the GBF targets will be provided in due course (document 2-3). The publication is available on the [HELCOM website](#).
- 2.14. The Session recalled the discussions in previous WG Response sessions on the funding needs for actions in the 2021 BSAP under the responsibility of WG Response on request by WG GEAR. The Session took note of the list of available external funding sources and considered if they could be utilized to support the implementation of BSAP actions as included in document 2-4. The Session did not propose additional funding sources for inclusion in the list.
- 2.15. The Session took note of the matrix of projects with HELCOM involvement supporting the implementation of the BSAP (document 2-4-Att1).
- 2.16. The Session recalled that the third holistic assessment of the Baltic Sea (HOLAS 3) [summary report](#) was launched in October 2023 and took note that work has initiated to prepare for the next HELCOM holistic assessment (HOLAS 4).
- 2.17. In this context, the Session took note of the relevant outcomes of the Informal Consultation Workshop on HOLAS review and development (IC WS HOLAS RevDev 1-2024) and the process beyond the workshop (document 2-6).
- 2.18. The Session took note that IC HOD 5-2024 recommended approval of the topic specific workplans for the development of HOLAS 4, including the workplan for topic – Hazardous substances, which is of relevance for WG Response.
- 2.19. The Session took note that IC WG SEA-BASED PRESSURES 3-2024 (2-4 April 2024) invited WG Response to consider how to assess the possibility of including plastic pellets as part of the ongoing HELCOM cooperation in case of a pollution incident, taking also into account IMO Guidelines on clean-up of plastic pellets from ship-source spills under development.
- 2.20. The Session noted that Spain had provided information about a major spill of plastic pellets on the coast of Galicia in late 2023 to OTSOPA 2024, including practical considerations related to their quick scatter and dispersal at sea and the resulting inability to detect it in the water by aerial surveillance.
- 2.21. The Session recalled the discussions at IC RESPONSE 28-2020 on the spill from two 40-foot containers with plastic pellets in the North Sea when large areas on the Swedish and Norwegian coast were polluted with pellets. The spill led to discussions up to ministerial level both in Norway and Sweden regarding responsibility for spills of “other substances”. The countries made different conclusions, whereby Norway treated the case as a marine pollution incident while Sweden considered it a clean-up operation to be handled by municipalities.

- 2.22. The Session recognized that discussions are ongoing within the IMO e.g. regarding new requirements for packaging of plastic pellets, as well as on developing guidelines on clean-up of such spills, to be continued at MEPC 82 in October 2024.
- 2.23. The Session noted that large amounts of plastic pellets are being transported by ships and recognized that such spills are a serious environmental concern which needs to be addressed. The Session agreed that prevention of spills is the first priority, e.g. through packaging requirements, but noted that methods and cooperation mechanisms for cleaning up spills are also needed. The Session invited Contracting Parties and observers to submit information about the latest developments on plastic pellets within the IMO and other fora to future sessions of WG Response and EG Shore, and invited in particular EG Shore to consider the matter in more detail.
- 2.24. The Session invited Contracting Parties to actively contribute to the discussions within the IMO on plastic pellets, for options to minimize loss of plastic pellets and developing response measures.
- 2.25. In this context, the Session noted that most Contracting Parties are still working on determining national responsibilities in relation to plastic pellets as well as response measures.
- 2.26. The Session took note that in October 2023 the European Commission proposed measures to prevent microplastic pollution from the unintentional release of plastic pellets.
- 2.27. The Session recalled the discussions at IC WG RESPONSE 4-2023 by the PERMAGOV project which is inter alia working on governance of marine litter and in particular certain types of lost cargoes, such as plastic pellets.
- 2.28. The Session also noted that other types of plastic cargoes, such as liquified plastics or plastic powders, are related concerns that also need to be considered.

Agenda Item 3 Risk assessments and safety of navigation

- 3.1. The Session recalled BSAP action S31 *“Conduct a feasibility study by 2022 for, and as appropriate, undertake a risk analysis for oil and hazardous and noxious substances (HNS) pollution of the marine environment in the Baltic Sea area by 2025”* and that the *Feasibility study regarding a Long-term risk analysis for oil and hazardous and noxious substances (HNS) pollution of the Baltic Sea* was approved by the Response Working Group per correspondence in November 2022.
- 3.2. The Session took note that a project application was submitted to the DG ECHO UCPM-2024-KAPP - Knowledge for Action in Prevention and Preparedness (PV) call. The long-term risk analysis project is called BRISK II, and is expected to start by early 2025, if approved. The Session noted that implementation of action S31 is delayed, even if the project is approved.
- 3.3. The Session noted that Denmark, Finland, Sweden and the HELCOM Secretariat are part of the project consortium, led by Kotka Maritime Research Centre (Finland). The Session noted that WG Response will work as a consulting body and that input will be sought from relevant HELCOM expert groups and other HELCOM working groups.
- 3.4. The Session recalled that the OpenRisk II project is working on real-time risk assessment and is inter alia developing a dynamic risk assessment map to be updated every 10 seconds. The Session recognized the possible synergies between OpenRisk II and BRISK II.
- 3.5. The Session took note that the 2021, 2022 and 2023 shipping accident reports are being prepared by the Secretariat. Some errors in the data provided by EMSA have been noted by the Secretariat (e.g. regarding the locations of some accidents) and a lot of time has been used for ensuring accuracy of the reports. As a result, some of the data from previous years has also been corrected, and a disclaimer about this will be included in the reports. Approval by correspondence of all three reports (in [PowerBI dashboard](#) format as agreed by WG Maritime), is expected by WG Maritime during late summer or early autumn 2024.
- 3.6. The Session took note of a proposal that the Secretariat should no longer use EMCIP data for the annual shipping accidents reports, but instead resume the old approach of requesting accidents data

directly from the Contracting Parties. The Session invited WG Maritime to consider this matter further and to decide as appropriate.

3.7. The Session discussed the “shadow fleet” of old, uninsured and poorly equipped ships with questionable ownership structures, and which in some cases may operate without AIS transponders. The Session recognized that it is a matter of great concern and is expected to increase the risk of accidents and spills in the Baltic Sea.

3.8. The Session took note that during the ministerial debate at the 2024 Ministerial Meeting on the Baltic Sea Marine Environment, concerns on the “shadow fleet” in the Baltic Sea were raised by several Contracting Parties and that there was also a statement about the northern Baltic Sea requiring at least one EMSA oil spill emergency response vessel, to support Baltic Sea states in preventing environmental damage.

Agenda Item 4 Matters related to recent response operations

4.1. The Session took note of and discussed lessons learnt from recent response operations (4-2). Significant response operations in 2023, as reported by Estonia, Finland and Sweden, are available in the Excel attachment to document 4-2 and will also be included in the 2023 HELCOM report on shipping accidents. No significant response operations at sea nor on the shore took place in 2023 in Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. No information was received from Russia.

4.2. The Session took note of the information by Sweden on the grounding of the TT Line passenger ferry/RoRo cargo ship Marco Polo on Sunday morning on 22 October 2023 in Hanö Bay, Blekinge County, near the coast of Sölvesborg municipality (document 4-3, **Presentation 1**).

4.3. The Session noted that significant amounts of heavy fuel oil (HFO) was spilled and has caused widespread and challenging response operations along the shoreline. The Session discussed that there seems to be an increased use of HFO in combination with scrubbers in the Baltic Sea due to high fuel prices and noted that this needs to be taken into consideration when assessing risks and planning national response capabilities.

4.4. The Session recalled the discussions at previous WG Response sessions on the envisaged EU Lessons Learned (LL) Platform and took note of the LL template, which Contracting Parties had been encouraged to test (document 4-1). The Session noted that the conceptual design and hosting of the Lessons Learned Platform were not yet decided, however the option of including it as part of the new CECIS Marine was considered. It would be password protected but available to a wider user group.

4.5. The Session considered the information based on the filled in template provided by Finland (document 4-1-Add1).

4.6. The Session recognized the usefulness of sharing experiences and lessons learned in an effective way. It was, however, noted that some Contracting Parties found the LL template in document 4-1 not easy to use, or encountered security restrictions due to the presence of drop-down menus.

4.7. The Session provided additional feedback and comments regarding the LL template as follows:

- “Marine Pollution Incidents Lessons Learned” may be a more appropriate name than “Maritime Lessons Learned”;
- IMO number should be used as an identifier rather than ship name;
- lesson learned and lesson identified should be distinguished;
- it is not clear what to fill in to some of the fields in the template;
- it may be more useful to report only on new issues and lessons rather than filling in the template for a large number of usual incidents without new observations;
- the Swedish Coast Guard is doing structured After Action Review as a way of identifying lessons ;

- oil samples should be included as a category in the LL template;
- the information in the LL database needs to be labelled clearly to enable users to find the information they need, in order to make it fit for purpose;
- the person who fills in the LL template should have all the relevant information and be able to convey it in a way which is clear and educational for others; and
- one option to structure the LL platform would be to have the lesson learned as the starting point, rather than the incident. This could, however, also be solved by designing the lessons learned platform in a way that displays the lessons learned as the first view for readers (allowing however backtracking to further information about the incident behind the lesson), while users who are filling in information would be able to do that incident by incident.

4.8. The Session took note of a comment, that detailed presentations, photos and videos (i.e. Presentation 1 above on the Marco Polo incident), often provide more useful information than an excel form, but also noted that it will be possible to attach additional details as an attachment in the LL database.

4.9. The Session thanked the EU for the LL template which was considered to be useful. but needed further conceptual improvements. The EU invited one or two Contracting Parties to support further development of the template, taking the above discussion into account. No Contracting Parties committed to support the EU during the Session, however. The Session encouraged Contracting Parties to make use of the current LL template in the meantime and to support its development.

Agenda Item 5 National preparedness at sea and on shore

5.1. The Session took note of the information on developments regarding response at sea, on shore and for oiled wildlife response as provided by Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia and Sweden (document 5-2-Add1) using the templates in document 5-2.

5.2. In addition, the Session took note of updated information from:

- Poland: An investment project for modernisation of two response vessels is ongoing. There are also plans to build a new response vessel, with the planning project to begin during second half of 2024. Three shallow water response vessels are being acquired. Offshore wind-farms are being planned in Polish waters, which need to be taken into account when assessing risks and planning response capacities. Such offshore developments are required to develop contingency plans.
- Sweden: in addition to the information set out in document 5-2-Add1, Sweden informed of the new project ECSOW (Environmental Consequences of Ship allisions with Offshore Wind towers). Sweden also informed that maritime surveillance is currently very high on the political agenda in Sweden, as a result of the concerns related to the shadow fleet and the current geopolitical situation. In addition, Sweden is hoping to be able to make use of results from the BRISK II project, if funded, in the identification of the needs related to new response vessels, which Sweden is planning to procure in the future; and
- Lithuania: In 2025 a tender for building a new multipurpose vessel is being planned.

5.3. The Session supported the recommendation by IC EG SHORE 2-2024 that the Secretariat should include an indication of when the information has been updated in the template, and also that the old versions should be removed from the session site on the HELCOM Meeting Portal when updates have been made.

5.4. The Session took note that IC EG SHORE 2-2024 invited WG Response to consider the need to revise the template. The Session discussed the matter and invited the Secretariat to implement the following changes to the template for next years' reporting:

- Include an explanation in "Past" rows, that it refers to business as usual;
- Include an explanation in "Ongoing" rows, that it refers to developments since the previous year;

- delete all “Future” rows; and
- in the row “Highlights/summary” the text in brackets should be deleted.

5.5. The Session encouraged Contracting Parties to make use of Highlights/summary row to include particularly relevant developments which they wish to raise when the templates are discussed at each session of WG Response.

5.6. The Session invited the Secretariat to request updates to the template annually from contacts of WG Response, and to submit the updated reporting template as an information document to each expert group under WG Response on an annual basis. The Session further recommended that the established procedure of WG Response considering the template annually as a commenting document should continue.

5.7. The Session took note of the development of maritime harmful and noxious substances (HNS) operations of the Finnish Border Guard (document 5-4). The Session noted e.g. that two new response vessels with HNS response capabilities will be acquired in 2025-2026.

5.8. The Session discussed the need for and possible format of vessel data sheets for response vessels in the Baltic Sea, including the level of technical details, and where such data sheets could be stored and made available based on document 5-3, noting also that until 2012 EMSA compiled such a data set that was published as a booklet called “[Inventory of EU Members States Oil Pollution Response Vessels](#)”.

5.9. The Session noted that information on response vessels and other equipment is annually updated based on data in CECIS Marine and available on the [HELCOM website](#), and is also linked in the HELCOM Response Manual, but that this information is not considered to be user friendly and that comparing the characteristics of different vessels is difficult.

5.10. The Session noted that the European Commission is currently developing the new CECIS Marine database, and also noted that it may be an option to incorporate vessel data sheets there. The Session also noted that vessel data sheets for the EMSA contracted response fleet are currently available on the EMSA website and on CECIS Marine.

5.11. The Session agreed that the matter should be revisited at the next session with a view to recommending a format and location for vessel data sheets. The Session invited Contracting Parties to submit concrete proposals and views in this regard to the next session.

5.12. The Session took note of the ongoing revision of the Implementing Act of the Decision No 1313/2013/EU 2013 on a Union Civil Protection Mechanism and the suggested revised pollution related response capacities in the European Civil Protection Pool (ECPP) (document 5-1, **Presentation 2**).

5.13. The Session took note of the discussion by IC EG SHORE 2-2024 on the ECPP and regional capacities, as set out in paragraphs 3.15-3.18 of the Memo of IC EG SHORE 2-2024.

5.14. The Session discussed whether HELCOM should assess regional response capacity goals and gaps and noted how EU tools such as ECPP or rescEU could help addressing them.

5.15. The Session noted that only one response related capacity from the Baltic Sea has been pre-committed to the ECPP, namely the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) shoreline response capacity. EU encouraged the Contracting Parties to commit their national or multi-national pollution response capacities to the ECPP, noting that adaptation grants would be available for the upgrade and repair of the committed resources. The Session encouraged Contracting Parties to consider committing national response capacities to the ECPP.

5.16. The Session took note of the presentation by EMSA on 1) the update of the its Pollution Response Services toolbox, including the Vessels Network and Equipment Assistance Service and latest developments, 2) an update on the Agency’s HNS information services, focusing on the MAR-ICE service, and 3) work in 2023-2024 under the Consultative Technical Group for Marine Pollution Preparedness and Response (CTG MPPR), including the ongoing work on data and risk assessment, as well as 4) on the outcome of the 20th Inter-Secretariat meeting between Regional Agreement Secretariats, the European Commission and EMSA, held in Lisbon from 6-7 February 2024 (**Presentation 3**). The next Inter-Secretariat meeting will be held from 5-6 February 2025 in Norway hosted by the Copenhagen Agreement.

5.17. The Session thanked EMSA for the well-organized and useful HNS-PACKAGED workshop for exchange of experience organized in Sweden in March 2024 under the CTG MPPR work, highlighting the importance of sharing expertise among EU Member States.

Agenda Item 6 Sub-regional co-operation

6.1. The Session noted that the overview list and map of bi- and trilateral agreements on joint response operations and response plans in response regions in the Baltic Sea are included in Annex 3 of the HELCOM Response Manual. No updates or corrections were provided by the Session.

Agenda Item 7 Response on the shore and wildlife response

Wildlife response

7.1. The Session took note of the Memo of the Fourth Informal Consultation Session of the HELCOM Expert Group on Wildlife Response (IC EG WILDLIFE 4-2024), which was held online on 12 February 2024 hosted by Estonia (document 7-1). The next session of EG Wildlife (IC EG WILDLIFE 5-2024) is planned to be organized online on 16 September 2024.

7.2. The Session took note that Germany has finalized their draft national response plan for wildlife, which is expected to be approved in November 2024.

7.3. The Session took note of the importance of Contracting Parties supporting their national organizations in the EUROWA network, and contribute to a professional regional solution for wildlife response supported by a sufficient pool of experts in the Baltic Sea, that jointly can provide such a response as part of an integrated authority-led wildlife response.

7.4. The Session noted that Bonn Agreement has updated their response manual with a new chapter on wildlife response in line with the HELCOM Response Manual.

7.5. The Session took note that the IRA-MAR project "improving the integrated response to pollution accident at sea and chemical risk in port" concluded in February 2024.

7.6. The Session considered the One Incident One Response approach in relation to BSAP action S32 on developing holistic/integrated management of marine pollution incidents (document 7-2, **Presentation 4**). The Session was of the view that the approach is very useful, and requires a process of change. The Session also noted that in the case of an incident, a good starting point is to gather all the relevant authorities and ensuring that decisions are made based on the same information.

7.7. The Session took note that a set of OneX serious games was developed in the project, and is already being used in Finland and some other countries for training purposes. The Session noted that the games can also be used for recreating events from a real incident, in order to learn and improve procedures. A demonstration of the OneX serious games was provided in the margins of the Session for interested participants.

7.8. The Session invited the EU to explore the possibilities of including the One Incident One Response approach as well as the OneX serious games in the UCPM training programme and to organize related "train the trainer" workshops, to ensure that it is more widely recognized, and applied as appropriate. The Session noted that commitment by Contracting Parties is needed to maximize the effect this innovative training in developing preparedness at national levels.

7.9. In this context, the Session recalled that Contracting Parties have committed to implement holistic/integrated response through the adoption of BSAP action S32.

7.10. The Session noted that Germany and Latvia already have integrated/holistic response management in place. Authorities in Latvia responsible for sea, shore and wildlife response are integrated under a unified command.

7.11. The Session recalled that the criterion for achievement of action S32 is that amendments are made in the HELCOM Response Manual, which needs to be considered as a next step.

Response on the shore

7.12. The Session took note of the Memo of the Second Informal Consultation Session of the HELCOM Expert Group on Response on the Shore (IC EG SHORE 2-2024), which was held in Helsinki, Finland and online on 10 June 2024 hosted by Finland (document 7-3). The next session of EG Shore (IC EG SHORE 3-2025) is planned to be organized online in May or June 2025, with exact dates to be decided later by the Secretariat in consultation with the Chair.

7.13. The Session took note of the view by EG Shore that the Expert Group should be included in the implementation of the risk analysis project, if approved.

7.14. The Session took note that IC EG SHORE 2-2024 recommended that every other year, EG Shore should meet in person, back-to-back with BALEX or another appropriate event, but preferably not back-to-back with meetings of WG Response.

7.15. The Session took note that IC EG SHORE 2-2024 extended Germany's period as EG Shore lead until the next session, and re-elected Jens Rauterberg as Chair.

7.16. The Session considered how to ensure active participation by all Contracting Parties in EG Shore, such as e.g. amending the Terms of Reference to circulate the lead countries of the group in alphabetical order. The Session welcomed the offer by Sweden to update the mapping of participation in sessions of EG Shore (and its predecessor SHORE Network), which was originally done in 2015, and that the results should be used to encourage all Contracting Parties to be active within EG Shore.

7.17. The Session considered the draft revised workplan of EG Shore, added new tasks related to plastic pellets and mapping of shoreline response capacities, and recommended approval of the draft revised workplan of EG Shore for the years 2025-2026 as amended by the Session (document 7-4-Rev1).

7.18. The Session recommended that also EG Wildlife should look into spills of plastic pellets in relation to wildlife response.

7.19. The Session considered other input from IC EG SHORE 2-2024 in the context of related discussions under other Agenda Items.

Agenda Item 8 Wrecks and other submerged hazardous objects

8.1. The Session took note of the Memo of the Fifth Informal Consultation Session of the HELCOM Expert Group on Environmental Risks of Submerged Objects (IC EG SUBMERGED 5-2024), which was held online on 29 September 2024 hosted by Germany (document 8-1). The next session of the EG Submerged (IC EG SUBMERGED 6-2024) is tentatively to be organized online on 21 October 2024.

8.2. The Session took note that that the proposed criteria for designating and deleting hot spots related to submerged hazardous objects were redrafted by IC EG SUBMERGED 5-2024.

8.3. The Session took note that Sweden has taken the lead in developing the Submerged Assessment – Wrecks in the Baltic Sea further and further took note that the [Submerged Assessment – Warfare Materials in the Baltic Sea](#) has been published on the HELCOM website.

8.4. The Session took note of the progress in developing BAT/BEP for managing submerged munitions in the Baltic Sea, including the approval of three EU funded projects which are expected to contribute to this work, namely MUNIMAP (Baltic Sea Munitions Remediation Roadmap), MUNI-RISK (Risk assessment of sea-dumped munitions in the Baltic Sea) and MMinE-SwEEPER (Marine Munition in Europe - Solutions with Economic and Ecological Profits for Efficient Remediation).

Agenda Item 9 Remote Sensing

Aerial surveillance

9.1. The Session took note of the Memo of the Second Informal Consultation Session of the of the HELCOM Expert Group on Aerial Surveillance (IC EG SURVEILLANCE 2-2024), which was held in Cuxhaven, Germany from 20-21 March 2024 hosted by Germany (document 9-2). Th next session of EG Surveillance (IC

EG SURVEILLANCE 3-2025) is planned to be organized from 19-20 March 2025 for 1,5 days in Lisbon, Portugal, back-to-back with the EMSA CSN user group meeting on 18 March 2025.

9.2. The Session took note that the next Bonn Agreement Super CEPCO is planned for 2025, but that this may only be confirmed at the CTG MPPR meeting in October 2024. The Session therefore invited Contracting Parties to allocate resources and be prepared to take part in the Super CEPCO in 2025.

9.3. The Session took note that Sweden considers hosting the HELCOM Super CEPCO in 2027. No other information of plans for CEPCO flights in the Baltic Sea were provided by participants.

9.4. The Session took note of the HELCOM Annual report on discharges observed during aerial surveillance in the Baltic Sea 2023 (document 9-1) and recommended approval of the report.

9.5. The Session discussed the fact that aerial surveillance with RPAS or helicopters is presented in a separate table (table 5 in the report), as these are not comparable with fixed-wing aircraft.

9.6. The Session took note of the usefulness for certification of staff involved in aerial surveillance, as the expertise of staff may be questioned in court trials related to detected spills or discharges.

Use of satellites for detecting illegal discharges

9.7. The Session took note of the presentation by EMSA on the 2023 CleanSeaNet statistics within the HELCOM region (document 9-4) and the update on its Earth Observation services (**Presentation 5**).

9.8. During a discussion on the EU Ship Source Pollution (SSP) Directive, the Session noted that EMSA is considering possible options for detecting substances under the MARPOL Annexes covered by the extended scope of the Directive. In this context, the Session noted that Member States will also need to consider their national enforcement procedures in relation to the revised Directive. The Session also discussed the need for clarity regarding the definition of class A and class B detections.

STW/AIS/SAT model

9.9. The Session took note that IC HOD 5-2024 endorsed the proposed financing model for the maintenance of the STW (c.f. document 4-1 of IC HOD 5-2024), noting, however, that Estonia and Latvia are not yet in a position to confirm the availability of a budget for the annual fee in accordance with the model and that IC HOD 5-2024 invited Estonia and Latvia to liaise directly with Sweden and to confirm their acceptance of the new financing model by 31 August 2024 at the latest.

9.10. The Session took note of the potential developments with regards to the STW (document 9-3 and **Presentation 6**). The Session noted that the financing model endorsed by IC HOD 5-2024 will not enable SMHI to implement all the agreed upgrades to STW in accordance with BSAP action S30 (1. AIS data and polygons from CSN, 2. higher integration with CSN to get an alarm and prediction automatically, and 3. recalculating drift prognosis with real-time current data).

9.11. The Session noted with appreciation that AIS data and spill polygons are planned to be included in STW during 2024 using the current financing model.

9.12. The Session recognized that a higher integration of CSN data to STW in accordance with action S30 should not be automated as that would lead to false alarms in case unverified CSN detections are included in STW.

9.13. The Session recommended that CSN users should be able to manually start a simulation based on a CSN polygon, whereby no extra funding from Contracting Parties is needed.

9.14. The Session took note that recalculating drift prognosis with real time sea surface currents requires a 3-dimensional grid of wind and that it is difficult to do this in a reliable way for wide areas.

9.15. The Session took note that drift modelling for new types of fuels or floating objects is currently not possible with STW, and that new functionalities to the model would have to be developed, and characteristics of such fuel types should be provided to SMHI to enable that.

9.16. The Session recommended that an informal online meeting between SMHI, STW users and WG Response leads should be organized in autumn 2024 to discuss on one hand the options for developing

STW further in accordance with action S30, as well as incorporating new fuel types, and on the other hand to discuss further financing needs for STW, taking also into account whether Estonia and Latvia have confirmed the availability of national funding or not.

9.17. The Session recalled that Regulation 11 of Annex VII of the Helsinki Convention state that Contracting Parties agree to apply, as far as practicable, the principles and rules included in the HELCOM Response Manual and that the Response Manual states that STW is the official HELCOM drift model, which is based on the decision by HELCOM 36-2015.

9.18. The Session welcomed the offer by Sweden to assemble and lead an informal STW user network, as discussed by IC WG RESPONSE 4-2023 in order to gain better understanding of the needs of the system users and facilitate its development to meet those needs. The Session stressed that any substantial decisions regarding changes to STW functionality should be approved by WG Response.

Agenda Item 10 Other developments in response strategies and equipment

10.1. The Session took note of the information by Finland on the outcome of an oil in ice recovery test conducted by Finland in March 2024. A report in English is available from the Finnish Border Guard upon request. The Session invited Finland to keep WG Response updated on any future findings.

10.2. The Session considered the proposal on establishing an expert group on Places of Refuge and the discussion at IC WG MARITIME 2-2023 (24-26 October 2023) on the proposal (document 10-1).

10.3. The Session recommended to establish a HELCOM Expert Group on Places of Refuge (EG PoR) 2023-2028, subject to submission of the draft Terms of Reference to IC HOD 6-2024 for consideration and adoption. The Session recommended that the next session should plan the first session of EG PoR and discuss its composition in more detail, provided that HOD have approved the establishment of the expert group.

10.4. The Session noted that Sweden cannot guarantee that they will have resources to take part in EG PoR, although they support its establishment. In this regard, the Session highlighted that participants of EG PoR will not necessarily have to be from response authorities, but in many cases may be from maritime authorities.

10.5. No updates were provided by Germany, Finland and Sweden on developing the standard operating procedures (SOP) for HNS response.

10.6. The Session recalled that IC WG RESPONSE 4-2023 invited Finland to circulate a questionnaire to all Contracting Parties and EMSA in order to collect information on couplings used on the response vessels of the Contracting Parties. No updates on the matter were provided to the Session.

10.7. The Session recalled that IC WG RESPONSE 4-2023 discussed the use of dispersants in the Baltic Sea in accordance with the workplan of WG Response and invited Sweden to liaise with the other Contracting Parties in order to collect more information on national policies and procedures on the use of dispersants and to submit a document on the matter. No documents on the matter were submitted to the Session, which however recalled that Germany informed of their national policy on dispersants in document 5-2-Add1.

Agenda Item 11 Exercises

BALEX

11.1. The Session took note of the current schedule of HELCOM BALEX exercises up to 2026, as agreed by RESPONSE 23-2017 (2024 Lithuania, 2025 Poland and 2026 Russia) and recalled the decision by RESPONSE 20-2015 that starting from BALEX 2017 the exercises will be held in the last week of August, i.e. week 35 as clarified by IC RESPONSE 3-2023.

11.2. The Session took note of the [BALEX 2023 video](#). The exercise took place from 30 August-1 September 2023 north-east of the port of Riga in the Gulf of Riga and the shore part of the exercise at the eastern coast near Riga.

11.3. The Session took note of the information by Lithuania on BALEX 2024, which will take place in Klaipeda, Lithuania, from 26-29 August 2024 (**Presentation 7**). The Session noted that the Final Planning Conference will take place in July 2024.

11.4. The Session recalled BSAP action S36 on implementing the Multi-Regional Marine HNS Response Manual in operational response to spills involving hazardous and noxious substances as well as exercises by 2025. The Session recognized that action S37 on testing the HNS Response Manual at BALEX 2022 has been achieved. In this context, the Session noted that there are plans to organize a table-top HNS exercise using the OneX serious games on 26 August at BALEX 2024 in Lithuania, and that this will be done in coordination with Sea Alarm and Finland (c.f. Agenda Item 7 above), aiming e.g. at the use of the Multi-Regional Marine HNS Response Manual.

11.5. The Session recalled that according to the agreed schedule, Russia is to host BALEX in 2026 and noted that due to the still ongoing geopolitical crisis, it will be unlikely that any HELCOM Contracting Parties that are Member States of the European Union would be able to participate in an exercise in Russia, if organized (document 11-1)

11.6. Following discussion, the Session recognized that none of the other Contracting Parties would attend BALEX 2026 if invited by Russia.

11.7. The Session recalled the discussion on this issue by IC WG RESPONSE 4-2023 and considered further alternative options for 2026. The Session recommended that in 2026 (tentatively during week 35 in the end of August 2026) a dedicated workshop would be organized with the objective to evaluate experiences from BALEX in 2021-2025 of using the updated HELCOM Response Manual and the HELCOM Response Exercise Plan (HREP). For this purpose, e.g. the Swedish report [HELCOM BALEX DELTA Exercises 2004 – 2014](#) could be used as a resource.

11.8. The Session planned the way forward and scheduled BALEX exercises beyond 2026. The Session confirmed that BALEX should continue to be hosted in alphabetical order with Sweden in 2027, Denmark in 2028, Estonia in 2029, Finland in 2030, Germany in 2031, Latvia in 2032, Lithuania in 2033 and Poland in 2034.

Development needs, exercise aims and future exercises

11.9. The Session recalled that RESPONSE 28-2020 established the HELCOM Response Exercise Development and Monitoring Team (HEDMOT) to support a long-term approach to exercises under the HELCOM Response framework.

11.10. The Session took note of the exercise evaluation report of BALEX 2023 prepared by the EDMOT, consisting of Germany (Chair), Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (document 11-2). The Session noted that there had been very limited time for EDMOT members to contribute with observations and findings during BALEX 2023.

11.11. The Session recalled that IC RESPONSE 3-2023 recommended that HELCOM Response Exercise Plan (HREP) and the Practical Guide for HELCOM Response Exercises should be reviewed by the HEDMOT, making use of experiences from BALEX 2022 and BALEX 2023 and presented to WG Response.

11.12. The Session considered document 11-3, which lists the exercise needs and recommendations from the exercise evaluation reports of BALEX 2022 (c.f. document 11-1 of IC RESPONSE 3-2023) and BALEX 2023 (c.f. document 11-2).

11.13. The Session recommended that the HREP and the Practical Guide would be reviewed and developed further in 2026, making use of the dedicated workshop referred to in paragraph 11.7 above.

National exercises and other exercises

11.14. No information on national or other exercises was discussed by the Session.

Agenda Item 12 HELCOM Recommendations and Response Manuals

12.1. The Session invited Contracting Parties to check the national contact information and web links included in Chapter 1 of the [HELCOM Response Manual](#) (at sea, on shore, oiled wildlife and aerial surveillance), and to provide updates to the Secretariat (laura.meski@helcom.fi), if needed.

12.2. The Session considered the updated list of response vessels and equipment in the Baltic Sea (document 12-1) and noted that the list is available on the [HELCOM website](#). The Session noted that some Contracting Parties have had challenges in updating the data in CECIS MP, and that the list is therefore currently not fully up to date.

Agenda Item 13 Activities within other organizations and initiatives

13.1. The Session did not discuss any issues under this agenda item.

Agenda Item 14 Any other business

14.1. The Session stressed the importance of all Contracting Parties being prepared and having a mandate to discuss and make decisions at meetings of WG Response, to enable good progress to be made.

Agenda Item 15 Election of Vice-Chair

15.1. The Session elected Jelena Savic, Sweden, as the Vice-Chair of the WG Response for the period 2024-2026.

Agenda Item 16 Future work and meetings

16.1. The Session considered the progress in implementing the workplan of WG Response (document 16-1).

16.2. The Session revised the workplan of WG Response for the years 2025-2026 as contained in document 16-1-Rev1 with a view to its approval by IC HOD 6-2024 (December 2024).

16.3. The Session took note of the preliminary list of informal consultation sessions and other meetings (16-2).

16.4. The Session recommended that the next session of WG Response (IC WG RESPONSE 6-2025) will be held during the week starting on 31 March 2025 tentatively in Klaipeda, Lithuania. The Session noted that if the BRISK II project is funded, the Session will include one extra day dedicated for risk analysis.

16.5. The Session welcomed the offer by Latvia to consider hosting IC WG RESPONSE 7-2025 in Riga, during the first week of November 2025.

16.6. The Session thanked Markus Helavuori, whose term as Professional Secretary will end in February 2025, for his excellent work during the past years.

Agenda Item 17 Memo of the Session

17.1. The Session approved the draft Memo of the Session.

17.2. The Memo of the Session was finalized by the Secretariat and shared with the participants.

Annex 1 List of Participants

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