

## The 8<sup>th</sup> Session of Steering Group of the EUSBSR Policy Area Spatial Planning on Maritime Spatial Planning 21-23 April 2026, Tallinn, Estonia

### (8-2026 SG EUSBSR PA SP on MSP)

The Steering Group was attended by representatives of Denmark, Estonia, the European Union, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden, as well as by the HELCOM and VASAB Secretariats. HELCOM observers were represented by Coalition Clean Baltic (CCB). The Steering Group was also attended by invited guests representing the EU MSP Assistance Mechanism and the Estonian National Heritage Board.

The Steering Group was chaired by the Co-Chairs of the Working Group; Penina Blankett, Finland and Kai Trümpfer, Germany. Coordinators of Policy Area Spatial Planning Tina Šipkēvica (VASAB Secretariat) and Dmitry Frank-Kamenetsky (HELCOM Secretariat) acted as secretaries of the SG. Since the Steering Group meeting is an integral part of the sixth informal consultation Steering Group of the HELCOM-VASAB Maritime Spatial Planning Working Group (IC HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG 8-2026), documents submitted to the Steering Group meeting and presentations are numbered accordingly.

### Information on recent developments and activities related to the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) Action Plan and Policy area (PA) Spatial Planning

1. The Steering Group noted the recent developments and activities of the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) and PA Spatial Planning (document 6-1 and presentation 8) as presented by PA coordinators.

### Follow-up the implementation of PASPS

2. The Steering Group welcomed the information that PA Spatial Planning Support project (PASPS) is recommended for 2-year extension (2027-2028), highlighting the valuable role of PA Spatial Planning of EUSBSR in the implementation of the Regional MSP Workplan 2030. The Steering Group requested PA coordinators to draft PA's workplan for the period 2027-2028 considering proposals of IC HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG 8-2026. The Steering Group requested to circulate the workplan to the Steering Group for tacit approval as well as a draft letter of support for signing by Steering Group Co-Chairs in time suitable for submission to Interreg.

### Support regional follow-up of MSP implementation

3. The Steering Group recalled that first steps to develop framework for monitoring and evaluation of MSPs (M&E) were undertaken by eMSP project and that some recommendations were formulated in the Guideline for the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach in MSP.
4. The Steering Group further exchanged information on ongoing national activities related to monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of MSPs as follows:
  - Germany has developed a national M&E framework. Germany publishes annual monitoring reports on developments in the German EEZ following up MSP regulation. An environmental

monitoring report is being prepared. An evaluation report will be developed by the end of the year. An update will be proposed based on the evaluation report.

- Sweden has revitalized a draft M&E framework in MSP developed a few years ago. The draft was submitted for external consultations. A yearly and every three-year evaluation depending on the topic is proposed. More specific information can be provided by request. The last Swedish MSP-process has been evaluated by a consultant on behalf of SwAM.
  - Finland has developed an M&E framework but finds M&E challenging due to constraints of available resources. Finland planned to arrange an inclusive evaluation process which was postponed. New interaction plan was developed. During the plan revision last year, a questionnaire evaluating the plan against its vision goals was arranged.
  - The Danish MSP is a legally binding, framework-setting instrument, regulating the spatial use of marine areas. In line with the MSFD, monitoring of the environmental status of marine waters is carried out under the Danish Marine Strategy, and thus complements MSP. Environmental considerations are integrated at the planning stage through strategic environmental assessment (SEA), ensuring that potential impacts are assessed at an early stage and informing subsequent project-level decisions. Furthermore, an assessment of the degree of utilization of the designated spatial reservations is currently being conducted in the frame of the upcoming plan revision.
  - Poland incorporates eMSP suggestions on M&E the national system. An interim evaluation report was prepared in 2024. Detailed information can be provided by request.
  - Latvia has adopted the plan for M&E. The first interim evaluation report was prepared in 2023, approved in 2024. The next report is anticipated in a 6-year period (in 2029). The report serves as a basis for the plan's revision.
5. The Steering Group was of the view that the eMSP project work on developing M&E framework was of high value and recommended its application in national M&E procedures.
  6. The Steering Group recalled that M&E activities shall also be implemented in order to comply with the obligations of the SEA Directive, namely, to identify significant environmental effects at an early stage and to enable appropriate remedial action to be undertaken.

*Communication with stakeholders, PA SP promotion and visibility.*

7. The Steering Group considered a further developed proposal from the HELCOM Secretariat on how to initiate cooperation with other HELCOM groups and noted the information on the recent collaboration (document 4-1). The Steering Group pointed out that the strategic view of what happens after the joint events and dialogues should be considered and if there is a need for a more long-standing collaboration process or if single events are enough. The Steering Group proposed to define terms and objectives of collaboration for each group.
8. The Steering Group supported the proposals on shipping (WG Maritime) and underwater noise (WG Sea-based pressures), acknowledging to have a clear analysis on relevant tasks and linkages to pursue. The Steering Group recalled that e.g. multi-use (MSP workplan task 1.5) could be relevant for WG Maritime.
9. The Steering Group noted that WG Sea-based pressures is working with analysing ecological effects of carbon capture and storage (CCS), including both shipping and underwater noise activities and that it might be relevant also from MSP point of view.
10. The Steering Group noted the view by CCB that there could be closer discussion between WG BioDiv and HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG on how MSP can support marine protection (workplan tasks

3.4 and 3.6) also in connection with PROTECT BALTIC project (e.g. the upcoming WP7 legal report where MSP will be analysed).

11. The Steering Group discussed that collaboration with WG BioDiv could support defining contextual information /storyline related to MSP for HOLAS 4, as previously discussed by The Steering Group (cf. document 2-3). Such collaboration would also be a long-term dialogue to ensure that linkages between MSP and biodiversity protection are considered in HOLAS products.
12. The Steering Group pointed out that expertise in certain sectors such as underwater noise lies within the other groups' expertise, and HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG might consider proposals from other groups as an input for MSP context.
13. The Steering Group invited the Contracting Parties to send to the HELCOM Secretariat by 22 May 2026 clear questions for HELCOM WGs Maritime, Sea-based pressures and BioDiv to be potentially considered based on document 4-1. The Steering Group further invited the HELCOM and VASAB Secretariats to prepare the matter to be considered in the next session of the group.
14. The Steering Group recalled that a dedicated session with WG Fish will be held online on Friday 24 April 2026 from 9:00 CEST to 10:30 CEST, as part of the 7th Informal Consultation Session of the Working Group on Ecosystem-based Sustainable Fisheries (IC WG FISH 7-2026) and focusing on the impact of co-existence between wind power, MPA designations, data collection and Baltic Sea fisheries. The Steering Group noted that several HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG members will be attending The Steering Group.

#### Strengthening regional policy coherence.

15. The Steering Group noted that the updated Guideline for the implementation of ecosystem-based approach in maritime spatial planning (MSP) in the Baltic Sea area was approved by HELCOM Heads of Delegation on 16 January 2026 and by VASAB CSPD/BSR on 2 March 2026 and published on 20 April 2026 on the HELCOM website, available under the publications page as well and under the group's page.

#### Supporting BSR MSP Data ESG.

16. The Steering Group noted of the outcomes of the latest EG's session, as presented by the ESG's Chair, and considered priority themes for regional work related to MSP data (document 5-1).
17. The Steering Group recalled that the workplan of the BSR MSP Data ESG is to be updated for the period 2027-2028 and that this update requires evaluation of the work efficiency. This evaluation can be seen in connection with overall evaluation of the HELCOM processes on efficiency (cf. document 2-6).
18. The Steering Group welcomed progress achieved by the BSR MSP Data ESG, realized in the adoption of the revised Guideline on MSP output data and invited all member states to apply the Guideline in the national work.
19. The Steering Group noted the views shared by some countries that the BSR MSP Data ESG could further consider how regional datasets related to fisheries could be made available and used. The Steering Group discussed this topic, noting the relevance for MSP, and noted the clarification that the work done under HOLAS 4 might support such work under the BSR MSP Data ESG.
20. The Steering Group invited the HELCOM Secretariat to communicate with the BSR MSP Data ESG on the layers to be made available for HOLAS 4, for fisheries as well as other important human activities. The Steering Group also noted that GNSBI is building regional fisheries database based on voluntary input from Member States, which could be used as inspiration. To summarize, The Steering Group invited the BSR MSP Data ESG to investigate this topic under the next workplan.

21. The Steering Group further invited the BSR MSP Data ESG to consider the HELCOM Science Agenda (cf. document 2-4 Rev.1) when updating its workplan.
22. The Steering Group agreed to provide written proposals on the priority themes for the BSR MSP Data ESG's work plan 2027-2028 to HELCOM secretariat (florent.nicolas@helcom.fi) by 22 May 2026.

#### Planners' Forum and identification of project ideas

23. The Steering Group further noted the results of the latest MSP Planners' Forums as presented by VASAB Secretariat in document 6-2.
24. The Steering Group discussed topics for the next MSP Planners' Forum and suggested to consider "Blue economy and MSP" as a topic for upcoming MSP Planners' Forums.

#### Follow-up and progress of regional projects and/or initiatives – outputs of high regional significance

25. The Steering Group noted the information on the results of a survey on how coastal municipalities tackle climate change and extreme events in their planning processes contributing to improvement of the Sea2Land Navigator. The survey was carried out under Baltic PlaNet project platform (document 6-3).
26. The Steering Group noted that VASAB Secretariat leads BalticPlanet project WP3 (Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building to Advance Climate Resilient Coastal Planning in BSR) and has completed Stakeholder Engagement, Communication, and Outreach Plan in December 2025. The Steering Group also noted that stakeholder's engagement and the building of a strong professional community are central priorities for the Land-based Planners' Forum - a VASAB initiative launched to foster practice-oriented cooperation, professional networking, and case-based learning among spatial planning practitioners across the Baltic Sea Region.
27. The Steering Group welcomed the survey results finding them highly relevant for all countries in the region and invited national representatives to facilitate participation in this survey by 22 May 2026.
28. The Steering Committee noted the information on the progress in the NESBp project presented by HELCOM Secretariat and additional information provided by VASAB Secretariat (document 6-4).
29. The Steering Committee noted that under WP5 the project had arranged a survey on navigation safety in MSP and invited national representatives to respond to the survey here.
30. The Steering Committee welcomed communication material visualizing key provisions of the EBA Guideline (document 6-4 attachment) in a clear and concise format and the plan utilise it to promote EBA at the workshop in the frame of the MSP week in June 2026 in Brussels. The Steering Group further welcomed presentation of the progress achieved by the Baltic Sea region in the development of EBA application in MSP at the Ocen Governance workshop in the frame of the European Maritime Day 2026 in Limassol, Cyprus.
31. The Steering Group noted the information on the SEABAS project platform planned contribution to workplan tasks 3.2 (SEA) and 3.5 (CIA) (document 4-4 and presentation 5).
32. The Steering Group pointed out that common method development is important, not only gathering existing tools. The Steering Group noted the clarification that testing of the toolkit means testing usability of technical solution produced, and the pilot studies will utilize the developed tools directly in national MSP processes in Finland and Latvia.
33. The Steering Group noted of the upcoming Workshop on SEA consultation best practices and Espoo contacts under the scope of the SEABAS project (document 4-9 and presentation 6) and



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that the date is not fixed yet. The Steering Group noted the clarification that within the proposed criteria classes precautionary principle includes also long-term considerations on e.g. uncertainties and climate change aspects and proposed to include that in the title.

Any other issues related to the work of the Steering Group

34. The Steering Group recommended to organize the next Steering Group as an integral part of IC HELCOM-VASAB MSP WG 9-2026.