
Document title	Small-scale dredging in the Baltic Sea Area
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Agenda Item	3 – Data Reporting
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Reference	Doc 1-1 Provisional Annotated Agenda; Memo of IC WG SEA-BASED PRESSURES 1-2023, (para. 7.5); Memo of IC WG SEA-BASED PRESSURES 5-2025 (para 6.20)

Background

HELCOM BSAP 2021 and 2018 Ministerial Declarations call to:

- regular update and improve the HELCOM Recommendation and Guideline for handling dredged material at sea using the best available knowledge to minimize environmental impact of these activities further developing Best Environmental Practice (BEP) and Best Available Technique (BAT) for dredging and depositing operations.
- propose actions to avoid and reduce adverse effect of dredging and handling of dredged material at sea
- develop a method to evaluate losses and disturbance caused by handling dredged material at sea and thus, contribute to regional quantitative targets, however awaiting cross-cutting discussion in HELCOM on how to address the agreements

Small-scale dredging in the Baltic Sea mostly aims at the removal of sediments from coastal areas and waterways in order to maintain fairways used for recreational purposes. These include both approaches to marinas and guest harbours, as well as private piers/jetties and public/private bathing sites. Usually, it is done by using portable, compact, and often electric equipment or mini-dredges or floating excavators. While efficient, it's crucial to manage potential negative environmental impacts, such as increased turbidity, resuspension of nutrients and disruption of habitats, which requires careful planning and adherence to local regulations.

However, rules for such dredging are quite patchy and far from comprehensive. Large-scale dredging requires a permit, while small-scale dredging only needs to be reported. E.g., in Sweden, the following provisions do apply: "In running watercourses, a notification requirement applies to dredging where the bottom surface covers a maximum of 500 m². Bodies of water other than watercourses are also subject to a notification requirement as long as the bottom surface amounts to a maximum area of 3000 m². If the dredging concerns a larger area, a permit is required." ([SwAM 2018:19 Dredging and management of dredged material](#), p.71).

Researchers from the Finnish Environment Institute used data from numerous sources to assess the likely effect of small-scale dredging on the loss of benthic species and habitats in the Baltic Sea. They analysed data on marine biodiversity collected from over 170 000 underwater sites and identified high-risk zones for dredging using housing data and aerial images. They found that such small-scale dredging has a negative impact on coastal species, as it tends to target shallow bays and lagoons with soft sediment seafloors that receive sunlight and are home to a diverse array of algae and marine plants. ([Kotilainen, A. et al., 2020](#), [Virtanen, E.A. et al 2023](#), [DG ENV Issue 607](#)).

Based on the identified problem, some of the Contracting Parties have established national best practices and guidance for small scale dredging, e.g. in [Finland](#) and [Sweden](#) (see also from the [Stockholm University](#)).

A general conclusion can be drawn that a comprehensive Baltic Sea region-wide data collection is needed to assess the scale and impact of small-scale dredging.

Action requested

The Session is invited to:

- consider and discuss how such data collection can be performed;
- consider the appropriate approach for developing guidance on BAT and BEP for small-scale dredging in the Baltic Sea Region, taking into account that the existing HELCOM Guidelines for Management of Dredged Material at Sea (HELCOM Recommendation 36/2) currently focus on large-scale dredging operations;
- provide views on two possible ways forward:
 - a. amend the scope of the current HELCOM Guidelines under Rec. 36/2 to include an annex or dedicated section on BAT and BEP for small-scale dredging, thereby ensuring all dredging activities are covered within one framework.
 - b. prepare a new HELCOM Recommendation specifically on BAT and BEP for small-scale dredging, providing a more targeted tool without reopening Rec. 36/2.