

Terms of Reference for CEDA Working Group on Seafloor Integrity (WGSi)

Introduction

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD, 2008/56/EC) establishes a framework within which Member States shall take the necessary measures to achieve or maintain good environmental status (GES) in the marine environment by the year 2020 at the latest. The aim of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) is to develop marine strategies to ensure that the collective pressure of such activities is kept within levels compatible with the achievement of good environmental status and that the capacity of marine ecosystems to respond to human-induced changes is not compromised, while enabling the sustainable use of marine goods and services by present and future generations. Therefore, marine strategies apply an ecosystem-based approach to the management of human activities.

GES is determined on the basis of a set of 11 qualitative descriptors, defined in Annex I to the MSFD. Criteria and methodological standards to assess the extent to which GES is being achieved and references to applicable methodological standards where available are defined in the GES Decision (2010/477/EU). The revised GES Decision (Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848) has been published on 17 May 2017 (Official Journal of the European Union, 18.5.2017).

Several of the 11 qualitative descriptors are directly or indirectly linked to dredging works and marine construction (such as D7 Hydrographic conditions and D11 Underwater sound and other forms of energy). Dredging is also linked directly to descriptor D6 on sea-floor integrity, which is defined as follows: *'Sea-floor integrity is at a level that ensures that the structure and functions of the ecosystems are safeguarded and benthic ecosystems, in particular, are not adversely affected'*. However, it is one descriptor that the dredging community is not yet that familiar with.

Objective

The CEDA Environment Commission (CEC) is setting up a Working Group on Sea-floor Integrity (WGSi) to prepare a CEDA information paper on this MSFD Descriptor and its related criteria and methodological standards. CEC proposes the following Terms of Reference for the Working Group. The TORs will be formally established by the Working Group at their first meeting.

The task of the Working Group will be to prepare a CEDA information paper on Sea-floor Integrity. The aim of the paper is to raise awareness and to provide essential, relevant

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information in an easily accessible manner to the dredging community. Depending on the need and the outcome of the information paper, the group may also produce a CEDA position paper.

Scope

Issues to be addressed include:

- Explain what Seafloor Integrity is and why it is important
- Explain how a certain dredging or marine construction activity affects seafloor integrity
- relevant time scales and geographical / spatial scales in relation to dredging projects under the MSFD,
- Discuss the cumulative effects of (dredging) projects on benthic ecosystems as well as the affected benthic community's potential for recovery
- Discuss the different options available to maintain or attain good environmental status (Art. 3.5)
- Mention opportunities for restoring/enhancing seafloor properties (e.g. seabed landscaping)

Deliverables

The WGSi will prepare a technical – scientific CEDA Information Paper report covering the points described above. Length of the document: 4-12 pages plus case studies if appropriate. The Information Paper might turn into Position Paper.

WGSi will communicate about its milestones to the CEC and to the larger public via social media and will look into the possibilities for a 10' video clip with key messages.

Membership

CEDA WGSi is envisaged as an international group comprising:

- Experts with experience in dredging in a marine environment
- Experts with experience in dredging project management
- Different stakeholders: authorities, regulators, science institutes and consultants (technical / ecological), contractors

Timetable

The Working Group will have their first meeting on **18 May 2017 in Antwerp, Belgium, at the Ministry of Flemish Community, Division Maritime Access**, at which point the Draft Terms of Reference will be finalised and a Work Plan will be developed. The Working Group is expected to deliver their paper one year after their first meeting.

Sources of Information include

MSFD and related documents to be provided by the MSFD NAVI Group.

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CEDA Working Group Seafloor Integrity