

HUMAN ACTIVITIES

OSPAR's QUALITY STATUS REPORT 2023 BRIEFING NOTE SERIES

The marine environment of the North-East Atlantic continues to experience multiple pressures from a wide range of human activities. These are particularly intense in parts of the Greater North Sea, Celtic Seas, and the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast. While levels of activity are lower in Arctic Waters and the Wider Atlantic, increases in some activities are likely to pose greater risks in future in those OSPAR Regions.

Predicted future trends (2030) and current intensity of selected human activities in the North-East Atlantic

Activity	Arctic Waters	Greater North Sea	Irish Sea	Bay of Biscay & Iberian Coast	Wider Atlantic
Aggregates extraction	?	?	?	?	?
Agriculture	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔
Aquaculture	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Fisheries	?	?	?	?	?
Oil and gas production	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔
Renewable energy	↑	↑	↑	↑	↔
Shipping	?	?	?	?	?
Tourism	↑	↑	↔	↑	↑

Current intensity of activity: High  Medium  Low 

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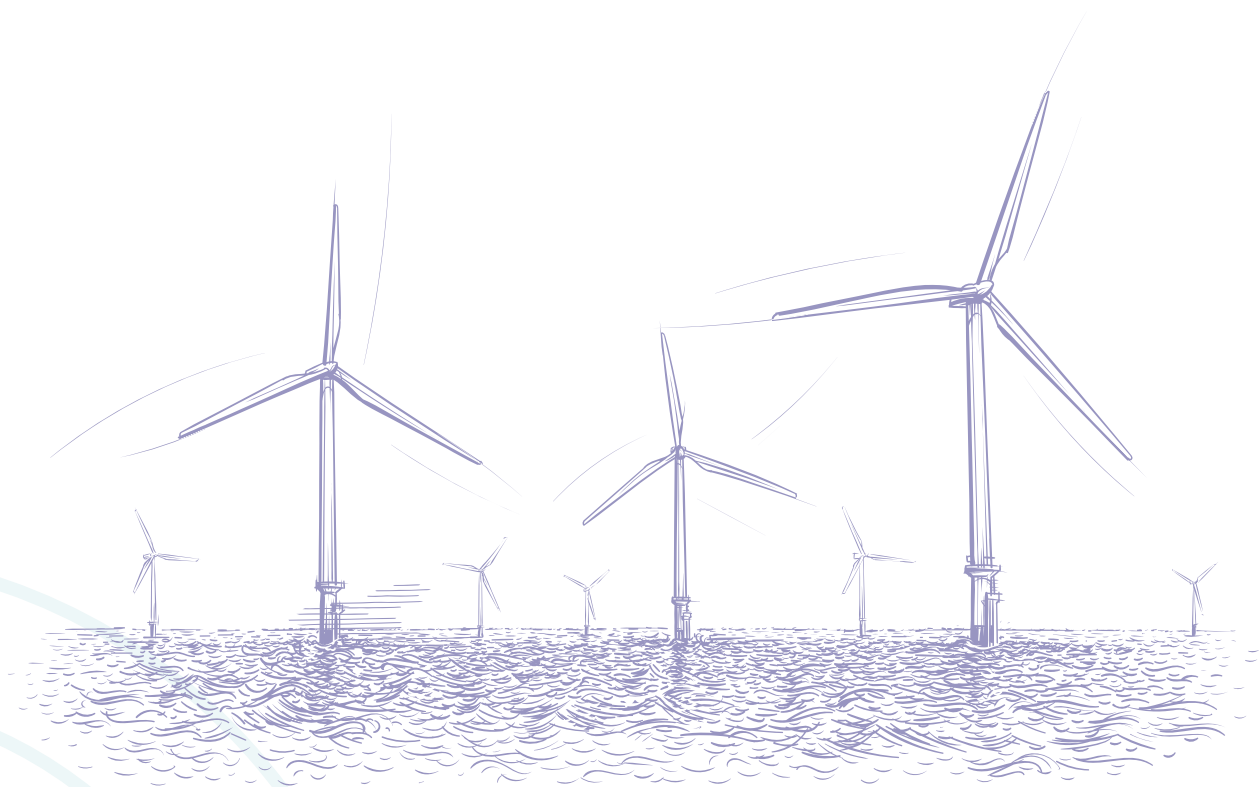


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All activities covered in the human activities assessment exert pressures on the marine environment. For example, agriculture is a significant source of nutrients contributing to eutrophication; fisheries influence ecosystems through removal of target and non-target species, and through disturbance of the seabed; multiple activities are sources of contaminants and litter, or routes for the introduction and spread of non-indigenous species; shipping noise is a significant pressure in some areas, such as the Greater North Sea; and new or increasing activities, such as offshore renewable energy or deep seabed mining, bring additional pressures. Additional stress from the pressure of climate change processes compounds the impacts from these activities and may further weaken ecosystem resilience.

The underlying societal drivers of activities in the North-East Atlantic – such as economic development, demand for energy, food security, housing and infrastructure, and societal wellbeing – remain strong. The scale of future activities will be influenced by factors such as the level of economic growth, including the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the extent of globalisation, rates of technological change, and public perception and policy. For example, major expansion of offshore renewable energy is being driven by improved technology combined with political commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Drivers are affected by economic shocks, such as the financial crisis of 2008, but the impacts of shocks may be temporary rather than fundamentally altering the long-term intensity of activities in the North-East Atlantic.



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