



OSPAR Ministerial Meeting 2021

BirdLife Europe & Central Asia written statement

BirdLife Europe and Central Asia is one of the six regional secretariats of BirdLife International, a global Partnership of autonomous, national non-governmental conservation organisations, with a large grassroots membership in 120 countries and territories.

BirdLife Europe and Central Asia's mission is to conserve wild birds, their habitats, and global biodiversity, by working with people in their communities towards sustainability in the use of natural resources through our unique local to global approach. We use evidence-based science to inform our conservation action on the ground and to influence the policy and decision-making of governments and business leaders.

BirdLife Europe & Central Asia and its Partners see the **OSPAR North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030** as a positive action to drive change and are keen to see it implemented. This strategy must be supported by sufficient financial and human resources to reach good environmental status and to bring about positive change for the marine environment in the face of the ever-increasing threat to biodiversity and the climate crisis. We call for the strategy to be SMART in its design and implementation with an ecosystem-based approach at its heart, clear, measurable, and attainable targets defined and progress monitored over the life of the strategy.

We consider that the adoption of the **NEAES** is an opportunity to highlight the need to protect, restore, recover and enhance the marine environment and to acknowledge the urgent need for transformative action across societies to address the collective drivers of biodiversity loss.

We call for increased recognition of the need for an ecologically coherent, well-connected, and representative network of Marine Protected Areas, which must be effectively managed, including mechanisms to ensure proper implementation, monitoring, and enforcement. This is also a precondition to support other international initiatives to restore degraded ecosystems.

We **welcome and strongly support** the commitment shown to halting and reversing the decline of biodiversity by 2030, with the concrete action outlined **to designate the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Seamount Marine Protected Area (NACES MPA)**.

The **NACES MPA** is a site of high ecological importance for the migratory connectivity of seabirds and its protection would address an identified gap¹ in the OSPAR MPA network for seabirds. Tracking data shows that the site is used annually by up to 5 million seabirds belonging to 56 colonies from 16

¹ <https://www.ospar.org/documents?v=7346> (Johnson, D., Ardron, J., Billett, D., Hooper, T., Mullier, T., Chaniotis, P., Ponge, B. & Corcoran, E. (2014) When is a marine protected area network ecologically coherent? A case study from the North-east Atlantic. *Aquatic Conservation: Marine and Freshwater Ecosystems*, 24, 44-58.)



different jurisdictions². Over 20 seabird species (including 5 that are globally threatened, and 3 listed at Threatened and/or Declining by OSPAR) use the site, making it the most important oceanic foraging grounds for the community of seabirds in the OSPAR maritime high seas area, and one of the most important concentrations of migratory seabirds in the Atlantic Ocean.

The **NACES MPA** is located in Region V of the OSPAR Maritime Area in an Area Beyond National Jurisdiction. It is an area of complex oceanography, with the North-Atlantic Current and associated Subpolar Frontal system. These oceanographic drivers are more spatially stable due to bathymetric steering by the continental slope/Grand Banks to the West and Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone to the East. The seafloor within the **NACES MPA** comprises a wide range of biotopes and contains a complex array of bathymetric features, including abyssal plains, ridges, canyons, and seamounts (47 in total, including the Evlanov Seamount in the centre of the site).

Protection of the **NACES MPA** is needed to ensure current and future uses do not compromise the biodiversity and ecosystem processes supported by the area. The precautionary principle, as a guiding principle of OSPAR, should guide decision-making on designation and the current knowledge on vertical connectivity/coupling indicates the need for continuous protections from seafloor to sea-surface.

Therefore, we **call for holistic protection** of the **NACES MPA**, including the seafloor to safeguard the biodiversity and ecosystem processes that the site supports. We also advocate for the development of a management plan detailing the conservation measures for the area soon after its designation, and in accordance with the management guidelines, to implement and enforce appropriate conservation measures in a collaborative manner both via the Collective Arrangement, and through cooperation with other regional and global organisations (e.g., North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), International Maritime Organization (IMO), International Seabed Authority (ISA)) to achieve the conservation objectives agreed for the **NACES MPA**.

² United Kingdom, Iceland, Portugal, Saint Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, Falkland Islands (Malvinas), Bermuda, Spain, Russian Federation, Faroe Islands, Denmark, Norway, Greenland, Antarctica, Sweden, Ireland, Canada