

**OSPAR Convention Ministerial Meeting
Cascais/Portugal
October 1st 2021 09:00-15:30
Opening statement by the
Commissioner**

Dear Ministers, dear friends, 2021 is a great year for the Regional Sea Conventions.

For the OSPAR Convention, this year's Ministerial meeting is also especially important as we are set to adopt the new North East Atlantic strategy which will set our priorities for the next 10 years.

(pause)

We are going through a decisive moment of a global significance.

It's our last window of opportunity to halt biodiversity loss, and to limit the rise in world temperatures to 1.5 degrees.

So before the COP15 on Biodiversity and the 26th Climate COP in Glasgow, we need to send a clear signal.

The signal that OSPAR will lead by example, setting the bar very high for marine environment protection, biodiversity, and the fight against pollution.

(Pause)

OSPAR has a long history to be proud of, and some admirable achievements behind it.

The improvements in the quality of the Northeast Atlantic marine and coastal environment is just one example.

And the OSPAR influence is felt beyond the Atlantic.

The EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive, the cornerstone of Europe's marine environment protection, owes much to the OSPAR approach which also benefits in many ways from the presence of the EU and several EU MS among its Parties.

OSPAR also plays an important international role: firstly through collaboration with international maritime and fisheries organisations, a dense network of ties with adjacent marine regions; and secondly through an active involvement in global negotiations on marine environment issues. This role must continue and should be strengthened.

The collective knowledge, accumulated over decades, coupled with intensive networking and diplomatic activity, place OSPAR in a unique position.

It's time to use that position.

Time to look to the future, and ensure that OSPAR continues to deserve its reputation.

(pause)

Dear colleagues, this legitimate satisfaction should not make us forget the challenges that still await us.

The world needs a new approach to plastics, to prevent them from polluting our seas.

We need to allow the oceans to function as a carbon sink, instead of abusing them as a carbon dump, with negative consequences for marine life and maritime economic activities.

The Northeast Atlantic Strategy we are set to adopt, together with the decision on the biggest ever OSPAR Marine Protected Area, are major steps.

They can help us tackle pollution, halt biodiversity loss, and contribute to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

(Pause)

I said we are living a defining moment.

And OSPAR should step up its efforts to ensure the full implementation of policies and measures within its borders, including in areas like the Arctic, with its unique and sensitive marine environment.

We should intensify collaboration with related bodies, like fisheries' management organisations and the International Maritime Organisation.

Beyond international fora like the UN or the Arctic Council, OSPAR should continue its close relationships with other Regional Conventions, contributing through its technical, scientific and policy achievements.

(Pause)

The EU is a party to OSPAR and our common interests cover a broad range of policies, all of which can take us closer to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

And truth be told, the sustainability of Europe's future depends also on the state of the Atlantic Ocean, and its global connections.

That means that we **have** to work together, across the board, to protect and restore marine ecosystems, and to stave off the disastrous effects of climate change, pollution and acidification in our oceans.

Together, we are greater than the sum of our parts.

I am confident that today's meeting today will lay another milestone in our common history.

There is a decade of challenges ahead, but it's also a decade of hope.

Provided we treat the sea with the respect it requires.

Thank you.