

Strategy of the OSPAR Commission for
the Protection of the Marine Environment
of the North-East Atlantic

2030

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Strategy of the OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic

Revised document corrects the number of derogations in the Offshore Industry Section of the High-level Review of the NEAES 2010, and includes the text of the draft Strategy edited during the Officials' segment

The Ministerial Meeting of the OSPAR Commission is invited to adopt the OSPAR North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030 and the review of the OSPAR Strategy 2010 -2020

NEAES 2030

North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030 is the means by which OSPAR's 16 Contracting Parties will implement the OSPAR Convention until 2030. It sets out collective objectives to tackle the triple challenge facing the ocean: biodiversity loss, pollution, including marine litter, and climate change. Its implementation is part of OSPAR's contribution to the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals. The Strategy sets out OSPAR's vision, strategic and operational objectives. It is based around four themes: clean seas; biologically diverse seas; productive and sustainably used seas; and seas resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.

The Strategy also emphasises the importance of regional cooperation and that OSPAR will continue to play a leading role in addressing global ocean issues.

Review of the OSPAR Strategy 2010-2020

The evaluation shows the progress that OSPAR made against the objectives of the previous Strategy. Under the NEAES 2010-2020, OSPAR took forward work related to the implementation of the Ecosystem Approach and a suite of five thematic strategies: biodiversity and ecosystems, eutrophication, hazardous substances, the offshore industry, and radioactive substances.

The evaluation of the Strategy demonstrates OSPAR's successes, but also highlights objectives that have not yet been fully achieved and lessons in how its implementation was monitored. The review, along with emerging issues and challenges, have informed the development of OSPAR's new NEAES 2030.

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Annex 1

Draft Strategy of the OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic 2030

(Agreement 2021-01: North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (replacing Agreement 2010-03))

Introduction

The importance of the North-East Atlantic

The ocean that surrounds us is what unites the OSPAR Contracting Parties. It is part of our history, our economies and our way of life. We rely on it for food, to help regulate our climate, for energy and raw materials, as a source of recreation and inspiration and to support millions of jobs across our region. The OSPAR maritime area has approximately 162 000 km of coastline and covers over 13.5 million km². It is home to a vast range of marine biodiversity and contains globally important populations of many marine species.

The ocean is at risk

The evidence is clear. Scientists around the world conclude that the health of the ocean, including the North-East Atlantic, is at risk and that urgent action is needed to address the loss of biodiversity and the functioning of the marine ecosystems. Our own assessments of the North-East Atlantic support this.

In this regard, major challenges include pollution, eutrophication, over-exploitation of living and non-living resources, incidental by-catch, non-indigenous species, underwater noise and damage to the seabed. Marine litter, including microplastics, continues to blight our seas and cause severe impacts on the marine environment.

Climate change is also causing fundamental and possibly irreversible changes to the ocean. These changes include warming of the sea, rising sea levels and loss of oxygen. Increased levels of carbon dioxide are also causing the ocean to become more acidic. All these changes are severely impacting on the species and habitats that share our seas, with significant risks for productivity and the long-term viability of ecosystems.

OSPAR Leadership

Regional cooperation is the cornerstone of effective protection and sustainable use of the ocean. Through this Strategy, we, the Contracting Parties to the OSPAR Convention, pledge to continue to play a leading role in addressing ocean issues.

Our mission is to develop and implement the necessary actions to respond to these issues, individually and collectively as a Regional Seas Convention, including in the wider context of ocean governance.

The North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030 is the means by which we implement the OSPAR Convention in the period 2020-2030. Its implementation is part of our contribution to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) under Agenda 2030. Through the NEAES 2030 we reaffirm our commitment to protect the marine environment and achieve our vision for the North-East Atlantic.

1. A glossary of OSPAR words and terms is available at: https://www.ospar.org/site/assets/files/1291/glossary_2021.pdf

2. WOA2 | [Regular Process \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/).



Our vision is a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.

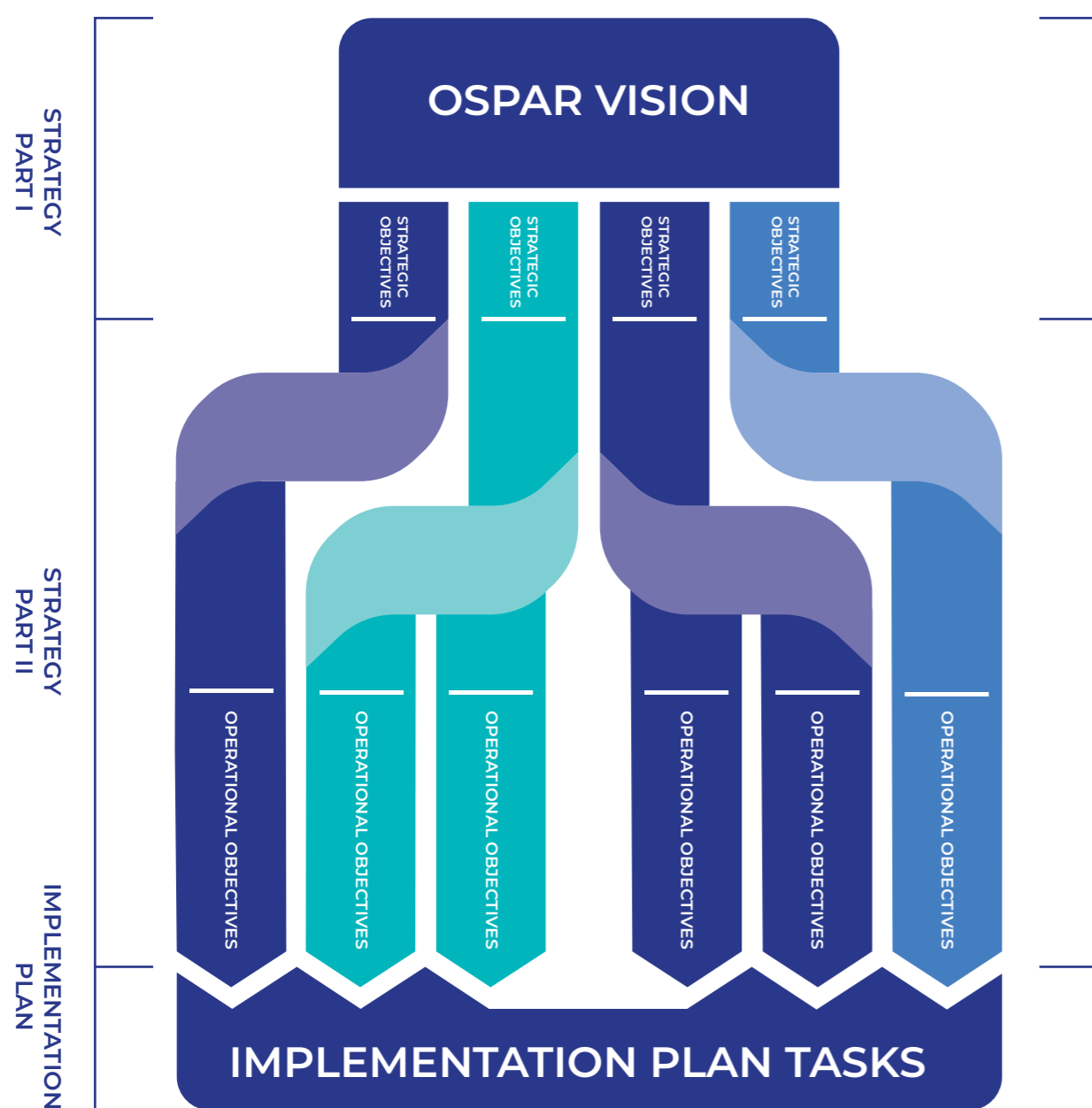


Figure 1. The Strategy has three tiers: our vision and strategic objectives in Part 1, operational objectives in Part 2, all underpinned by a comprehensive implementation plan that sets out the specific tasks needed to deliver the strategic and operational objectives.

Part I: Vision and strategic objectives

1. Vision

Our vision is a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.

2. Strategic objectives

To deliver our vision for the North-East Atlantic we are guided by 12 strategic objectives to lead us towards achieving good environmental status in the marine environment. The strategic objectives are grouped under four themes.

To achieve clean seas we will:

Strategic objective 1:

Tackle eutrophication, through limiting inputs of nutrients and organic matter to levels that do not give rise to adverse effects on the marine environment;

Strategic objective 2:

Prevent pollution by hazardous substances, by eliminating their emissions, discharges and losses, to achieve levels that do not give rise to adverse effects on human health or the marine environment with the ultimate aim of achieving and maintaining concentrations in the marine environment at near background values for naturally occurring hazardous substances and close to zero for human made hazardous substances;

Strategic objective 3:

Prevent pollution by radioactive substances in order to safeguard human health and to protect the marine environment with the ultimate aim of achieving and maintaining concentrations in the marine environment at near background values for naturally occurring radioactive substances and close to zero for human made radioactive substances; and

Strategic objective 4:

Prevent inputs of and significantly reduce marine litter, including microplastics, in the marine environment to reach levels that do not cause adverse effects to the marine and coastal environment with the ultimate aim of eliminating inputs of litter.

To achieve biologically diverse and healthy seas we will:

Strategic objective 5:

Protect and conserve marine biodiversity, ecosystems and their services to achieve good status of species and habitats, and thereby maintain and strengthen ecosystem resilience; and

Strategic objective 6:

Restore degraded habitats in the North-East Atlantic when practicable to safeguard their ecosystem function and resilience to climate change and ocean acidification.

To achieve productive and sustainably used seas we will:

Strategic objective 7:

Ensure that uses of the marine environment are sustainable, through the integrated management of current and emerging human activities, including addressing their cumulative impacts;

Strategic objective 8:

Reduce anthropogenic underwater noise to levels that do not adversely affect the marine environment; and

Strategic objective 9:

Safeguard the structure and functions of seabed/marine ecosystems by preventing significant habitat loss and physical disturbance due to human activities.

To achieve seas resilient to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification we will:

Strategic objective 10:

Raise awareness of climate change and ocean acidification by monitoring, analysing and communicating their effects;

Strategic objective 11:

Facilitate adaptation to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification by considering additional pressures when developing programmes, actions and measures; and

Strategic objective 12:

Mitigate climate change and ocean acidification by contributing to global efforts, including by safeguarding the marine environment's role as a natural carbon store.

The strategic objectives will be achieved through the delivery the operational objectives set out in Part II, including some cross-cutting objectives which relate to several of the strategic objectives.

3. Principles and strategic approaches

We are guided by the ecosystem approach. This is the comprehensive integrated management of human activities based on the best available scientific knowledge of the ecosystem and its dynamics, in order to identify and take action on drivers, activities and pressures that adversely affect the health of marine ecosystems. The ecosystem approach thereby achieves the sustainable use of ecosystem goods and services and the maintenance of ecosystem integrity.

The ecosystem approach² takes into consideration cumulative effects and is implemented through a continuous cycle of (i) setting and coordinating ecological objectives and associated targets and indicators, (ii) ongoing management and (iii) regular updates of ecosystem knowledge, research and advice. Monitoring, assessment and adaptive management are essential elements for implementing the ecosystem approach.

We apply the following principles:

- A. the precautionary principle;
- B. the polluter pays principle;
- C. the use of best available techniques and best environmental practices, including, where appropriate, clean technology;
- D. the principle that preventive action should be taken;
- E. the principle of sustainable development, including circular economy approaches; and
- F. the principle that priority is given to environmental damage being rectified at source.

3.1 Adaptive Management

To ensure that the ecosystem approach is employed effectively we apply adaptive management to continually improve our policies and practices, in light of changes in knowledge, circumstances and environmental characteristics.

3.2 Regional approach

The ongoing application of the regional approach to programmes, actions and measures enhances the effective implementation of OSPAR's strategic objectives. This approach takes account of the different ecological and socio-economic conditions in the different regions and facilitates the implementation of targeted actions and measures in the regions, sub-regions and areas where they are appropriate.

3.3 Risk-based approach

Effective and efficient implementation of the Strategy can best be achieved by focusing on those human activities that are adversely affecting environmental status, either individually or cumulatively, and by assessing the nature and scale of the impacts in each region or sub-region. Through this Strategy, we will aim to develop a repeatable, transparent and standardised risk-based approach, in order to allow Contracting Parties to focus their efforts in a consistent manner. The risk-based approach should be implemented without prejudice to the application of the precautionary principle.

“ Raise awareness of climate change and ocean acidification by monitoring, analysing and communicating their effects. ”



“ We will continue to build on the multi- and bilateral cooperation we have established with other Intergovernmental Organisations and competent bodies to improve the protection of the North-East Atlantic. ”

3.4 Knowledge and science

Under the ecosystem approach, management decisions are knowledge and science based. Research and increased knowledge are needed to deliver improved understanding of how the marine environment functions, the impacts of individual and combined effects of human activities, and to assess the effectiveness of measures. To this end, Contracting Parties establish complementary or joint programmes of scientific or technical research guided by the OSPAR Science Agenda.

4. Our International engagement

4.1 UN Sustainable Development Goals

We will contribute to the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 14 “Life Below Water”⁴ and others deemed relevant for the protection and sustainable use of the marine environment. We will do this by acting as a regional cooperation platform and by taking the UN SDGs into account in OSPAR programmes, measures and actions.

4.2 Marine Strategy Framework Directive and other European Union instruments

For Contracting Parties that are European Union (EU) Member States, OSPAR provides a framework for cooperation that contributes to the achievement of their legal obligations under relevant EU instruments, in particular facilitating and coordinating the work in defining and achieving good environmental status under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive⁵.

4.3 International ocean issues

We will continue to build on the multi- and bilateral cooperation we have established with other Intergovernmental Organisations and competent bodies to improve the protection of the North-East Atlantic, in particular with relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Arctic Council.

We will strengthen cooperation on common challenges related to the implementation of the OSPAR objectives with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), with regional conventions and agreements including Regional Seas Conventions and Action Plans and contribute to the implementation of marine-related UNEP strategies, plans and programmes. This includes:

- cooperating with the Helsinki Convention, the Mediterranean Action Plan/Barcelona Convention, the Bucharest Convention and other regional organisations on the implementation of shared goals;
- cooperating with regional organisations such as the Bonn Agreement and the international river commissions and other transboundary water management organisations;
- cooperating with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP) to promote consideration of marine pollution and eutrophication when setting emission targets; and
- collaborating with regional organisations in other marine regions of the world in order to share knowledge and expertise and build capacity including on measures outside national jurisdiction.

We will cooperate in the implementation of global processes and agreements, such as UN Environment Assembly resolutions, the UN Decade of Ocean Science⁶, the UN Regular Process (World Ocean Assessments)⁷, the Convention on Biological Diversity⁸, including the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change⁹.

We will take the appropriate steps to adapt to potential changes in the international governance framework, in particular resulting from a future United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) implementing agreement on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ), in collaboration with other relevant regional and sectoral organisations.

4. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg14>

5. Monitoring and Assessment

We will continue our well-established work to monitor and assess the status of the marine environment of the OSPAR maritime area through OSPAR's Joint Assessment & Monitoring Programme. The key deliverable is the publication of the Quality Status Report (QSR)¹⁰, the next edition of which is due in 2023. The QSR 2023 will provide a picture of the overall state of the North-East Atlantic and its ecosystems as well as contribute to understanding the effect of OSPAR's work on pressures on and the state of the marine environment. We will further develop the OSPAR common indicators to track the effects of pressures from human activities on the marine environment, and to assess progress towards the objectives set out in the Strategy.

We will raise awareness about the status of the marine environment and the need to protect it, through communication, outreach and engagement with the public and key stakeholders.

We will ensure that data collection and assessment programmes are kept under continuous review, so they are up to date and fit for purpose as both technology and our understanding of the marine environment develop. Monitoring and assessment of the marine environment require the effective use and management of data and information to support the production of robust assessments. This will be achieved through the OSPAR Data and Information Management System (ODIMS)¹¹ and the OSPAR Assessment Portal (OAP)¹², allowing links to be made with other providers and consumers of OSPAR data and information. We are committed to ensuring that the data we use are findable, accessible, interoperable, reusable¹³ and reproduceable.

6. Implementation and Review of the Strategy

We will put the Strategy into effect through an implementation plan that contains specific actions and tasks to achieve the objectives of the Strategy. The plan will be a living document that is used by OSPAR to record and assess progress.

Delivery of the Strategy, including through the adoption of OSPAR programmes and measures (Decisions, Recommendations and Agreements), will be reviewed by the OSPAR Commission. This review will enable the Commission to identify whether additional steps are needed to secure progress towards fulfilling the Strategy. Furthermore, by 2025 and in light of the findings of the QSR 2023 and other emerging issues and/or evidence, it will be decided whether the Strategy needs any adjustments.

The implementation and effectiveness of all OSPAR programmes and measures will be assessed under its Measures and Actions Programme (MAP). The OSPAR Commission will develop a structured and systematic approach to this review that takes into account measures taken in other relevant fora, such as the UN and EU.

“ We will raise awareness about the status of the marine environment and the need to protect it, through communication, outreach and engagement with the public and key stakeholders. ”

5. Directive 2008/56/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 June 2008 establishing a framework for community action in the field of marine environmental policy

6. <https://www.oceandecade.org/>

7. <https://www.un.org/regularprocess/>

8. <https://www.cbd.int/>

9. <https://unfccc.int/>

10. <https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/quality-status-reports/>

11. <https://odims.ospar.org/>

12. <https://oap.ospar.org/en/>

13. FAIR principles as outlined in European Open Science Cloud Declaration 2017, see <https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/>



Part II: Operational Objectives

To achieve clean seas we will:

Strategic Objective 1: Tackle eutrophication, through limiting inputs of nutrients and organic matter to levels that do not give rise to adverse effects on the marine environment.

S1.01: By 2022 OSPAR will implement an automated eutrophication assessment tool to deliver harmonised and transparent assessments for OSPAR and the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and to provide support for the development of the SDG 14.1.1 Index of Coastal Eutrophication in 2025.

S1.02: By 2022 OSPAR will determine the maximum inputs of nutrients for relevant assessment areas which prevent deterioration and enable the achievement of non-problem area status throughout the North-East Atlantic.

S1.03: By 2024 OSPAR will identify and quantify relevant sources, including transboundary transport, and agree nutrient reduction needs for each Contracting Party to stay at or below the maximum input levels, reporting on progress towards these in 2025 and regularly thereafter.

S1.04: By 2028 OSPAR will ensure that sufficient measures are taken to achieve the necessary input reductions to prevent coastal and offshore eutrophication in the North-East Atlantic, working where appropriate with national and international organisations and authorities concerned with managing nutrient emissions, discharges and losses.

S1.05: By 2030 OSPAR will ensure that nutrient reduction targets and measures are sufficient to avoid adverse eutrophication effects in a changing climate.

S1.06: By 2030 OSPAR will develop and implement a regional approach to applying nature-based solutions to reinstate and safeguard the natural capacity of the ecosystem to sequester nutrients through conservation and restoration of estuarine, coastal and marine habitats, where this is practicable.

Strategic Objective 2: Prevent pollution by hazardous substances, by eliminating their emissions, discharges and losses, to achieve levels that do not give rise to adverse effects on human health or the marine environment, with the ultimate aim of achieving and maintaining concentrations in the marine environment at near background values for naturally occurring hazardous substances and close to zero for human made hazardous substances.

S2.01: By 2022 OSPAR will introduce a revised approach to managing the OSPAR Lists of Chemicals for Priority Action and Substances of Possible Concern (LCPA and LSPC). By 2022 and regularly thereafter, OSPAR will identify contaminants of emerging concern for the marine environment and prioritise them for action, including promoting and where necessary supplementing measures under relevant EU legislation and international organisations.

S2.02: OSPAR will develop and identify marine-relevant assessment criteria for hazardous substances, for use in the Quality Status Report 2023 and subsequently further develop these, including for emerging contaminants, working closely with relevant experts, particularly in the Working Group Chemicals under the Water Framework Directive Common Implementation Strategy.

S2.03: By 2027 OSPAR will ensure that measures to eliminate discharges, emissions and losses of hazardous substances are in place to achieve or maintain good environmental status for hazardous substances, including through working regularly with other organisations.

S2.04: By 2026 OSPAR will further develop the Harmonised Mandatory Control System for the use and discharge of offshore chemicals to improve coherence with other relevant international requirements such as the EU REACH Regulation¹⁴ and the Biocidal Products Regulation¹⁵.

Strategic Objective 3: Prevent pollution by radioactive substances in order to safeguard human health and to protect the marine environment, with the ultimate aim of achieving and maintaining concentrations in the marine environment at near background values for naturally occurring radioactive substances and close to zero for human made radioactive substances.

S3.01: On an ongoing basis OSPAR will further prevent, progressively reduce or, where that is not practicable, minimise discharges of radioactive substances through the application of Best Available Techniques (BAT), taking into account technical feasibility, radiological impact and legitimate uses of the sea.

S3.02: By 2025 OSPAR will identify and consider any obstacles in achieving further reductions in environmental concentrations of radioactive substances in the marine environment and examine possible solutions where appropriate.

S3.03: By 2025 OSPAR will identify the different types of loss of radioactive substances that may contribute to pollution of the marine environment. By 2027 OSPAR will determine if any additional measures are required to prevent such pollution, to the extent that such pollution is not already the subject of effective measures agreed by other international organisations or prescribed by other international conventions.

S3.04: By 2028 OSPAR will, following the outcome of the Quality Status report 2023, address, where appropriate, any uncertainties by reviewing and updating methodologies to better determine the possible impact of releases, emissions and losses of radioactive substances on marine ecosystems.

Strategic Objective 4: Prevent inputs of and significantly reduce marine litter, including microplastics, in the marine environment to reach levels that do not cause adverse impacts to the marine and coastal environment with the ultimate aim of eliminating inputs of litter.

S4.01: By 2022 OSPAR will agree an updated Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter including a set of prioritised “SMART” objectives to address new and emerging issues and to reduce the impacts of those items causing most harm to the marine environment.

S4.02: By 2023 OSPAR will improve the evidence base on harm in relation to marine litter with the aim of developing and agreeing actions and measures to reduce harm by 2025.

S4.03: By 2025 OSPAR will reduce by at least 50%¹⁶ the prevalence of the most commonly found single-use plastic items and of maritime-related plastic items on beaches in order to contribute to the achievement of relevant regional and EU threshold values building upon requirements for EU Member States in the EU Single Use Plastics Directive (Directive 2019/904), and by at least 75%¹⁷ by 2030.¹⁸

S4.04: By 2023 OSPAR will develop additional regionally coordinated quantitative reduction targets for all marine litter on beaches, and as soon as possible for other relevant environmental compartments, taking account of relevant regional and EU threshold values.

S4.05: By 2025 OSPAR will adopt programmes and measures to control and, where appropriate, phase out plastic from materials placed at sea for the purposes of marine infrastructure developments.

S4.06: By 2027 OSPAR will develop measures to control, and where possible, phase out discharges of plastic substances, including microplastics, contained in chemicals from offshore sources.

14. Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 concerning the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (as amended).

15. Biocidal Products Regulation (BPR Regulation (EU) 528/2012) concerning the making available on the market and use of biocidal products (BPR).

16. From the baseline based on the 2016 beach litter monitoring data.

S4.07: By 2025 OSPAR will develop approaches to prevent and reduce riverine marine litter inputs in cooperation with the relevant international river or river basin commissions, and other appropriate authorities and organisations.

S4.08: By 2025 OSPAR will develop and implement measures to substantially reduce marine litter from fishing and aquaculture gear, in collaboration with those sectors, as appropriate, and by 2027 will determine the need for, and where appropriate adopt, targets or other actions for the separate collection of end-of-life fishing and aquaculture gear coherent with relevant EU directives and the update of the OSPAR Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter.

To achieve biologically diverse and healthy seas we will:

Strategic Objective 5: Protect and conserve marine biodiversity, ecosystems and their services to achieve good status of species and habitats, and thereby maintain and strengthen ecosystem resilience.

S5.01: By 2030 OSPAR will further develop its network of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective conservation measures (OECMs)¹⁹ to cover at least 30%²⁰ of the OSPAR maritime area to ensure it is representative, ecologically coherent and effectively managed to achieve its conservation objectives.

S5.02: By 2022 OSPAR will identify barriers to the effective management of MPAs, and by 2024 take steps to address them appropriately to enable all OSPAR MPAs to achieve their conservation objectives.

S5.03: By 2024, OSPAR will establish a mechanism to provide that where Contracting Parties are authorising human activities under their jurisdiction or control that may conflict with the conservation objectives of OSPAR MPAs in the ABNJ, these activities are subjected to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

S5.04: By 2025 at the latest OSPAR will take appropriate actions to prevent or reduce pressures to enable the recovery of marine species and benthic and pelagic habitats in order to reach and maintain good environmental status as reflected in relevant OSPAR status assessments, with action by 2023 to halt the decline of marine birds.

S5.05: By 2025 OSPAR will have implemented all agreed measures to enable the recovery of OSPAR Listed threatened and/or declining species and habitats and will take additional measures as needed.

S5.06: Where the knowledge base is insufficient to achieve OSPAR's biodiversity objectives, OSPAR will take action to improve regional coordination for collection and sharing of data, information and knowledge, with elasmobranchs as a priority by 2023.

Strategic Objective 6: Restore degraded benthic habitats in the North-East Atlantic when practicable to safeguard their ecosystem function and resilience to climate change and ocean acidification.

S6.01: By 2023 OSPAR will identify habitats suitable for restoration, and develop a common knowledge base on the most appropriate and effective methods for restoration of degraded habitats.

S6.02: By 2025 OSPAR will develop a regional approach, including relevant qualitative and/or quantitative targets for restoration of degraded habitats suitable for restoration, and will then implement actions to achieve the targets as appropriate.

To achieve productive and sustainably used seas we will:

Strategic Objective 7: Ensure that uses of the marine environment are sustainable, through the integrated management of current and emerging human activities, including addressing their cumulative impacts.

S7.01: By 2028 OSPAR will further develop methods for the analysis of cumulative effects in the marine ecosystems of the North-East Atlantic, taking into account relevant spatial and temporal information on human activities, pressures, sensitive receptors and habitats, and use the results to inform the establishment of measures and actions to prevent, reduce or otherwise manage impacts.

S7.02: By 2025 OSPAR will develop a coordinated management approach to ensure the number of non-indigenous species introduced via human activity is minimised and where possible reduced to zero.

S7.03: By 2025 OSPAR will start accounting for ecosystem services and natural capital by making maximum use of existing frameworks in order to recognise, assess and consistently account for human activities and their consequences in the implementation of ecosystem-based management.

S7.04: By 2023 OSPAR will assess, review and potentially revise the OSPAR criteria, guidelines and procedures relating to the dumping of wastes or other matter and to the placement of matter.

S7.05: By 2024 OSPAR will review the risks from new, emerging and increasing pressures on the marine environment, taking account of OSPAR's Quality Status Report 2023, and prioritise them for action and the adoption of measures where necessary.

S7.06: OSPAR will work with relevant competent authorities and other stakeholders to minimise, and where possible eliminate, incidental by-catch of marine mammals, birds, turtles and fish so that it does not represent a threat to the protection and conservation of these species and will work towards strengthening the evidence base concerning incidental by-catch by 2025.

Strategic Objective 8: Reduce anthropogenic underwater noise to levels that do not adversely affect the marine environment.

S8.01: By 2025 OSPAR will agree a regional action plan setting out a series of national and collective actions and, as appropriate, OSPAR measures to reduce noise pollution.

S8.02: By 2022 OSPAR will develop and implement a coordinated monitoring and modelling programme for continuous sound to support an assessment of anthropogenic underwater noise in the OSPAR maritime area.

Strategic Objective 9: Safeguard the structure and functions of the seabed/ marine ecosystems by preventing significant habitat loss and physical disturbance due to human activities.

S9.01: By 2023 OSPAR will deliver a quantitative evidence base on pressures from human activities causing physical loss and disturbance to seabed habitats. On this basis, OSPAR will address and, where possible, reduce these pressures from human activities within its competence and regularly engage with other competent authorities with a view to reducing these pressures within their respective areas of competence in order to help achieve or maintain good environmental status.

S9.02: By 2023 OSPAR will review and, if appropriate, amend the categories of disused offshore installations where derogations may be considered under OSPAR Decision 98/3 on the Disposal of Disused Offshore Installations, aiming to reduce the scope of possible derogations. The review will be based, inter alia, on the advancement of decommissioning technologies and on the best available scientific knowledge.

S9.03: By 2023 OSPAR will agree on an approach and on actions to promote and advance decommissioning technologies under the framework of Decision 98/3 with the aim of reducing the scope of possible derogations.

To achieve seas resilient to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification we will:

Strategic Objective 10: Raise awareness of climate change and ocean acidification by monitoring, analysing and communicating their effects.

S10.01: By 2025 OSPAR will implement a coordinated long-term monitoring programme for ocean acidification variables.

S10.02: By 2023 OSPAR will develop assessments of ocean acidification and climate change and will take the impacts of ocean acidification and climate change into account in relevant OSPAR indicators and assessments.

S10.03: In 2023, and every 6 years thereafter, OSPAR will assess the current and projected impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on the OSPAR maritime area and its uses, to inform the development of national and international actions.

Strategic Objective 11: Facilitate adaptation to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification by considering additional pressures when developing programmes, actions and measures.

S11.01: By 2025 OSPAR will develop a coordinated management approach to strengthening ecosystem resilience, including to the consequences of climate change and ocean acidification.

S11.02: By 2023, and every six years thereafter, OSPAR will assess at a regional scale the OSPAR network of marine protected areas in respect of the resilience of marine biodiversity to climate change, with the aim of ensuring that the network provides a good representation of species and habitats and that its spatial design and management regime remains relevant.

S11.03: From 2021 OSPAR will ensure that revisions to the OSPAR list of threatened and/or declining species and habitats and status assessments take account of any relevant impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.

S11.04: From 2021 OSPAR will consider the additional pressures from climate change and ocean acidification both now and under future climate conditions in its regular review of measures and actions and update them as appropriate.

Strategic Objective 12: Mitigate climate change and ocean acidification by contributing to global efforts, including by safeguarding the marine environment's role as a natural carbon store.

S12.01: By 2025 OSPAR will develop a regional approach to applying nature-based solutions for carbon storage and implement specific measures to protect and restore relevant carbon sequestration and storage habitats, such as seagrass beds, kelp forests and saltmarshes.

S12.02: By 2025 OSPAR will take nature-based carbon storage into account when reviewing the criteria for the designation of marine protected areas, and reviewing the OSPAR List of threatened and/or declining species and habitats.

S12.03: By 2024 OSPAR will review the results of monitoring that is undertaken in relation to carbon dioxide storage to assess whether the monitoring techniques deployed are adequate to demonstrate that carbon dioxide streams are retained permanently in the storage complex. By 2026 OSPAR will evaluate the effectiveness of OSPAR measures to ensure that carbon dioxide streams are retained permanently in the storage complex and will not lead to any significant adverse consequences for the marine environment, human health and other legitimate uses of the maritime area.

S12.04: By 2023 OSPAR will develop common principles and by 2024 develop guidance to promote and facilitate sustainable development and scaling up of offshore renewable energy in a way that cumulative environmental impacts are minimised.

Cross-cutting issues

SX.01: By 2023 OSPAR will implement the regional coordination requirements arising from Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848²¹ for those Contracting Parties that are EU Member States, including regional lists of elements, aggregation and assessment methods and threshold values for the North-East Atlantic region or its sub-regions.

SX.02: By 2024 OSPAR will initiate discussions on the development of a practical approach for regional-scale ecosystem-based management, including through the 'Collective Arrangement'²² and in cooperation with fisheries management bodies and other competent organisations, in order to strengthen ecosystem resilience to climate change and to safeguard the marine environment, its biodiversity and ecosystem services.

Annex 2

High-level evaluation of progress against OSPAR's North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2010–2020

Over the last decade the OSPAR Commission has used the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2010–2020 to work towards its vision of a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic, used sustainably.

A key deliverable during this period was the publication of the 2017 OSPAR Intermediate Assessment (IA2017). The report detailed the human pressures on the North-East Atlantic, their effects and the implications for the marine environment, and demonstrated OSPAR's progress towards realising its vision.

Protected areas, impacts from human activities and biodiversity issues

Since 2010 OSPAR has worked towards establishing an ecologically coherent and effectively managed Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network and a management framework to halt the loss of marine biodiversity. As of 2020, the MPA network consists of 552 MPAs, including 7 designated collectively by OSPAR in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. The network covers 22.1% of coastal and territorial waters and only 6.5% of the OSPAR Maritime Area as a whole, indicating that the 10% CBD Aichi target 11 has not been fully met. Substantial gaps in the MPA network remain and it cannot yet be considered ecologically coherent. OSPAR has adopted Recommendations that aim to protect 54 species and habitats it has identified as threatened and/or declining and in need of protection. A plan to implement the collective actions listed in the Recommendations has also been developed.

OSPAR manages the impacts of a range of human activities such as marine renewable energy developments, ballast water, cable laying, artificial reefs, and dredged material. New agreements have been adopted for a number of these activities. A Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter was agreed in 2014 and measures identified in the plan are being implemented. OSPAR has worked on methodologies for Cumulative Effects and Socio-economic assessments within the IA2017. Collaboration with other sectors has improved, in particular with the fisheries sector through the Collective Arrangement and a Joint HELCOM-OSPAR harmonised procedure for ballast water management exemptions. Despite these successes, challenges remain; overall litter levels remain a problem and OSPAR's objective for marine litter has not yet been met (the latest marine litter indicator assessments show some signs of reductions, but there are sub-regional differences)

Progress has been made in developing common indicators for biodiversity and prominent pressures, such as marine litter and a registry for underwater impulsive noise. However, it has not yet been possible to fully evaluate if implementation of OSPAR measures has achieved the objective to halt further loss of biodiversity. Assessments of the status of the environment indicate that species, such as marine birds, are not in good status and there is evidence of extensive physical disturbance to the seabed, caused by bottom contacting fishing gears. Areas in the English Channel and the Celtic seas have higher levels of disturbance than other assessed areas.

Eutrophication

The Eutrophication Strategy seeks to minimise human-induced eutrophication such that all parts of the OSPAR maritime area have non-problem status. Progress has been made, indicated both by the reduction in total problem area from 119 000 km² in 2006 to 100 000 km² in 2014, and by reductions in nutrient inputs to the Greater North Sea over the same period of around 10% for nitrogen and 30% for phosphorus. Despite this, the ultimate aim – a healthy marine environment where human-induced eutrophication does not occur – has not been achieved. A key problem is uncertainty about the levels of nutrient reduction required to achieve non-problem status. Several national initiatives for setting reduction targets have been completed. However, coordination to reduce nutrient inputs to the marine environment has been hindered by

a lack of agreement between Contracting Parties and an absence of regionally consistent threshold values for eutrophication indicators.

Hazardous Substances

The Hazardous Substances Strategy aims to ensure that contaminants do not cause pollution effects, with fish and seafood safe to eat, and that Contracting Parties move towards a cessation of contaminant discharges, emissions, and losses. The IA2017 showed a general improvement in environmental quality with heavy metal inputs to the Greater North Sea continuing to fall. Concentrations of those contaminants that OSPAR monitors have also continued to fall in most areas though the ultimate aim of achieving background levels (i.e. the levels of contaminants that would be found in the absence of human activity) has not been reached and there remain areas of concern. Work with OSPAR substance lists focuses on substances that are considered to be of concern to the marine environment, including substances covered within the EU framework and global conventions. Coordinated monitoring and assessment continues although there are problems with quantifying inputs in many regions.

Offshore Industry

The Offshore Oil and Gas Industry Strategy aims to protect the OSPAR maritime area from the adverse effects of offshore activities. The OSPAR maritime area is a mature oil and gas production province, although total production of oil and gas has been steadily falling since its peak in 1999. The Offshore Oil and Gas Industry Strategy has achieved a reduction of over 20% in the amount of dispersed oil discharged in produced water; the phase out of discharges of offshore chemicals on OSPAR's List of Chemicals for Priority Action; and a nearly 50% reduction in the discharge of chemical substances identified as candidates for substitution (although further reductions in discharges are considered possible). A risk-based approach for the management of produced water discharges has also been introduced to complement the OSPAR harmonised mandatory control system for offshore chemicals and promote the shift towards a reduction in the use of more hazardous substances. Contracting Parties undertook a review of drilling in extreme conditions and confirmed that their existing respective framework remained fit for purpose. Contracting Parties have also fully implemented the ban on the dumping or

leaving in place of disused offshore installations. Since OSPAR Decision 98/3 on the disposal of disused offshore installations was adopted, approximately 170 installations have been decommissioned of which 10 were granted derogations. Contracting Parties continue to promote research and monitor the development Carbon Capture and Storage proposals, although full scale development is still in its infancy.

Radioactive substances

OSPAR prevents pollution from ionising radiation. The Contracting Parties have achieved progressive and substantial reductions in discharges from the nuclear sector and continue to make good progress meeting the objectives of the Radioactive Substances Strategy. Recent Periodic Evaluations show continual reduction in discharges from the nuclear sector, up to 95% since the late 1990s. A significant success is a 38-fold decrease in discharges of the long-lived radioactive element, technetium. The radiological impacts on man and biota from the remaining discharges are low. For the non-nuclear sector, OSPAR will complete a detailed assessment of radioactive discharges by 2021 based on data submitted since 2005. Early indications suggest that the impacts from the discharges from the oil and gas sector are low. OSPAR will deliver a robust assessment of progress of reducing discharges and concentrations in the environment in the next Periodic Evaluation and the 2023 Quality Status Report.

Measures and Actions Programme

OSPAR's primary mode of action for the protection and conservation of the North-East Atlantic is the adoption of consistent and harmonised measures in the form of OSPAR Decisions, Recommendations and agreements and implementation of these obligations and commitments by Contracting Parties.

To support Contracting Parties implementation of measures, OSPAR has developed a Measures and Action Programme (MAP) matrix to provide continuous oversight of the implementation and effectiveness of national and collective OSPAR measures. This helps to share best practice and lessons learned across Contracting Parties and to assess progress in implementing OSPAR's measures and actions.

International issues

During 2010-2020 OSPAR has engaged with a wide range of international issues and organisations as part of OSPAR's work to fulfil the commitments of NEAES, with the overall goal of safeguarding and improving the state of both the North-East Atlantic and other marine areas across the globe:

- The 2008 Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) is the European Union's collective framework for achieving or maintaining good environmental status of European marine waters. OSPAR has invested considerable effort in supporting Contracting Parties that are EU member states to regionally coordinate all elements of their marine strategies, as referred to in MSFD Articles 5 and 6.
- In 2014 the Collective Arrangement between competent international organisations on cooperation regarding selected areas in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction in the North-East Atlantic (the Collective Arrangement) was adopted by the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and OSPAR to seek cooperation and coordination on implementation of suitable conservation and management measures. Efforts to expand the Collective Arrangement and to engage with other competent authorities continue.
- OSPAR 2015 agreed an engagement remit with the Arctic Council with a view to facilitating increased information exchange and collaboration. In 2017 OSPAR was granted observer status in the Arctic Council.
- OSPAR has cooperated closely with other Regional Seas Conventions (RSCs) over the last decade including the Cartagena Convention, the Abidjan Convention, the Barcelona Convention, and HELCOM. Examples of work include voluntary commitments registered at the United Nations (UN) Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, held in New York in June 2017, and work within the framework of the UNEP programme of regional seas. There is also ongoing and strengthened collaboration effort with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the EU, including joint working groups.


- IMO (International Maritime Organisation) and OSPAR signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2018 to further cooperation at the regional level on issues within the scope of the London Convention and London Protocol (Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter).
- The CBD (Convention on Biodiversity) and OSPAR cooperates inter alia to aid the achievement of the Aichi targets at the regional and national scale. In addition, numerous EBSAs (Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas) in the North-East Atlantic marine region have successfully been identified through OSPAR and were meanwhile adopted by the CBD.


As part of its engagement with other international organisations, OSPAR has also maintained a watching brief on the measures being taken by other competent authorities in the fields of management of land-based sources of hazardous substances and nutrients, the management of fisheries and other human activities with the potential to impact the marine environment. Where needed OSPAR brought matters of importance to the attention of the relevant authorities.

17. From the baseline based on the 2016 beach litter monitoring data.
18. The percentage targets in this operational objective are regional targets and relate to the OSPAR Maritime area
19. the definition of OECMs will follow the definition agreed under the Convention on Biological Diversity.
21. Commission Decision (EU) 2017/848 of 17 May 2017 laying down criteria and methodological standards on good environmental status of marine waters and specifications and standardised methods for monitoring and assessment, and repealing Decision 2010/477/EU
22. Collective Arrangement between competent international organisations on cooperation and coordination regarding selected areas in areas beyond national jurisdiction in the North-East Atlantic' (Collective Arrangement, OSPAR Agreement 2014-09



OSPAR Secretariat
The Aspect
12 Finsbury Square
London
EC2A 1AS
United Kingdom

 +44 (0) 20 7430 5200

 Secretariat@ospar.org

www.ospar.org