

chapter

1

Introduction

1.1 Aim and scope

The 1992 OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic requires that Contracting Parties shall 'take all possible steps to prevent and eliminate pollution and shall take the necessary measures to protect the maritime area against the adverse effects of human activities so as to safeguard health and to conserve marine ecosystems and, when practicable, restore marine areas which have been adversely affected'.

To provide a basis for such measures, Contracting Parties are required to undertake and publish at regular intervals joint assessments of the quality status of the marine environment and of its development, for the maritime area covered by the Convention. These assessments should also evaluate the effectiveness of measures taken or planned for the protection of the marine environment, and identify priorities for action (Article 6 of and Annex IV to the OSPAR Convention).

The 1992 Ministerial Meeting, at which the OSPAR Convention was signed, also issued an action plan for the OSPAR Commission, with a commitment to prepare the first Quality Status Report for the whole North-East Atlantic by the year 2000 (the 'QSR 2000').

To implement these commitments the OSPAR Commission decided in 1994 to undertake the preparation of Quality Status Reports (QSRs) for five regions of the North-East Atlantic: Region I, Arctic Waters; Region II, the Greater North Sea; Region III, the Celtic Seas; Region IV, the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast; Region V, the Wider Atlantic. These regions cover the entire maritime area of the OSPAR Convention (**Figure 1.1**). Earlier work done within the framework of the 1993 North Sea QSR, the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) and the Irish Sea Co-ordination Group was taken into account.

These regional QSRs, which have been published separately, form the basis for this Quality Status Report

2000. This provides a holistic and integrated summary of the status of the entire OSPAR maritime area.

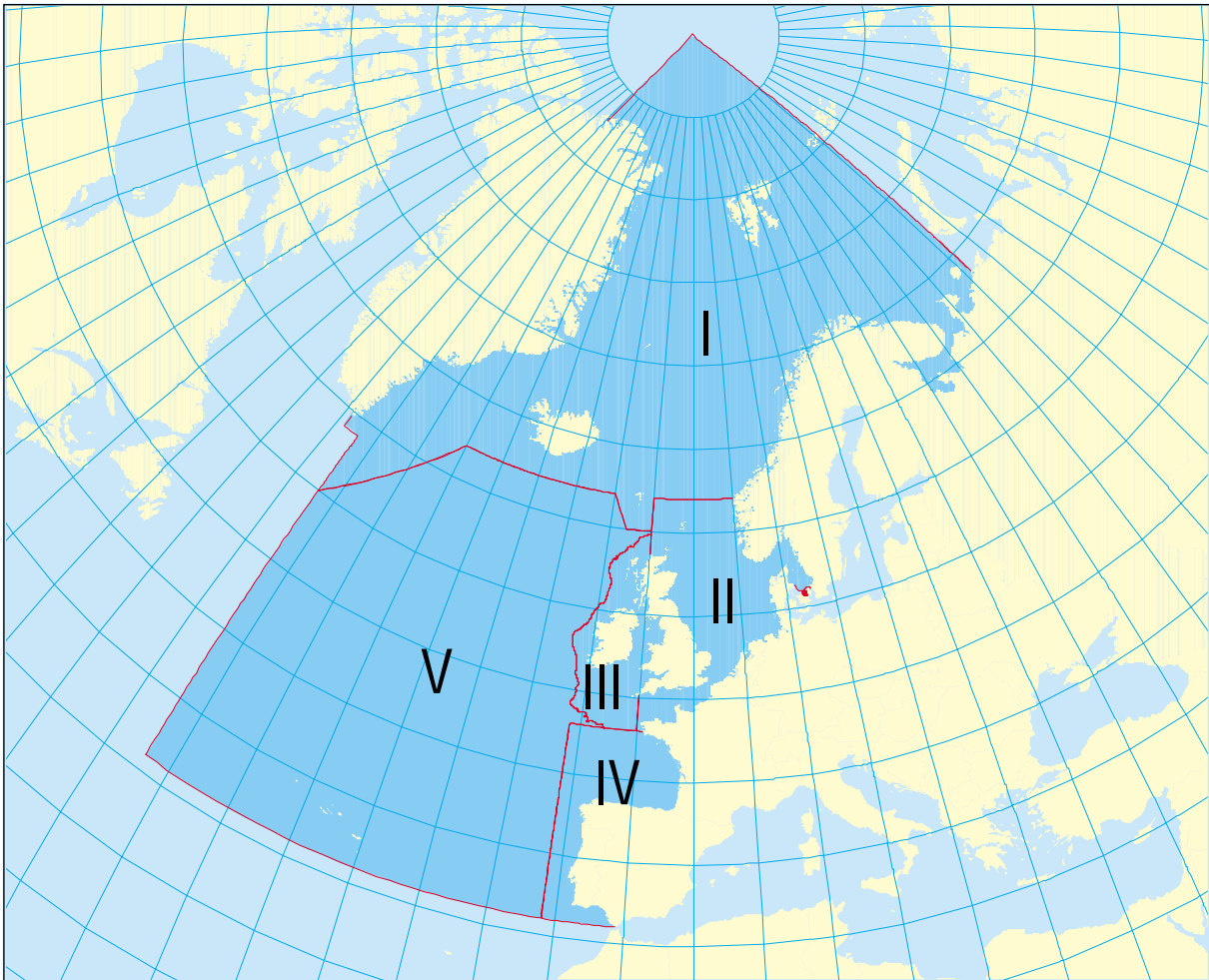
To monitor environmental quality throughout the North-East Atlantic, the OSPAR Commission adopted a Joint Assessment and Monitoring Programme (JAMP). The JAMP builds upon experience gained through amongst others the former Joint Monitoring Programme of the Oslo and Paris Commissions and the Monitoring Master Plan of the North Sea Task Force (NSTF). Under the JAMP umbrella, new guidelines and assessment tools have been developed.

The Ministerial Meeting of the OSPAR Commission in Sintra (Portugal) in July 1998 agreed on strategies aimed at guiding the future work of the Commission. In 1998 and 1999 the Commission adopted strategies for the purpose of directing its work in the medium- to long-term in five main areas, i.e. the protection and conservation of the ecosystems and biological diversity of the maritime area, hazardous substances, radioactive substances, combating eutrophication, and environmental goals and management mechanisms for offshore activities.

Together with the QSR 2000 and the JAMP these strategies form a vital basis for OSPAR's activities.

This report describes the natural features of coastal and offshore environments of the OSPAR area and identifies impacts arising from human activities. In general, the report summarises information available to mid-1998, focusing in particular on environmental changes and the extent to which these result from human activities, natural variability, or both. Another objective was to identify those gaps in scientific knowledge which currently impede the assessment of the environmental significance of certain activities and conditions and consequently to support management and policy formulation. The various natural processes and human-made pressures on the area are analysed and compared taking into account their severity and scale as well as their long-term significance for the environment, human health, resources and amenities. Finally, conclusions are drawn

Figure 1.1 The OSPAR maritime area.



Region	Lead country / countries	Other participating countries
I – Arctic Waters	Norway	Denmark (including Faroe Islands) and Iceland
II – Greater North Sea	Netherlands	Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden and UK
III – Celtic Seas	Ireland and UK	
IV – Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast	France and Spain	Portugal
V – Wider Atlantic	Iceland and Portugal	Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden and UK

The work of the Regional Task Teams was coordinated by the Assessment Coordination Group under the Environmental Assessment and Monitoring Committee.

regarding the priorities for new, or revised, policies and management interventions that would strengthen marine environmental protection.

1.2 The assessment process

Marine environmental assessments are now an integral part of national, regional and global programmes for protecting marine and coastal areas. They provide an opportunity to bring together and assess the results of scientific research and monitoring as well as information on the many different human activities that, either directly or indirectly, can change or damage the natural attributes of the marine environment. In combination, this knowledge can be used to evaluate changes, their causes and implications, and to identify impacts that require the early attention of policy-makers and environmental managers. Assessments are also used to review the effectiveness of existing measures to prevent degradation of the marine environment, to protect valued species and communities and to restore previously damaged habitats and ecosystems.

The overall assessment in this report is based on the most recent information available from national and international sources, including the Environmental Assessment and Monitoring Committee (ASMO) and the Programmes and Measures Committee (PRAM) of OSPAR and the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and their respective working groups. Scientific and other literature from other international organisations including the European Environment Agency (EEA) and Eurostat were also used. Non-Governmental Organisations with OSPAR Observer status were invited to provide comments; these were taken into account in the development of the report. ICES carried out a scientific peer review of an advanced draft of this QSR.

The information was compiled initially by separate Regional Task Teams (RTTs), consisting of representatives from the relevant countries for the five OSPAR Regions. Inevitably, the amount of information available for each Region differed depending on the extent of past research and monitoring and the availability of resources. Consequently, not all topics are covered to the same depth and level of detail for all parts of the maritime area and conclusions are drawn on the basis of available information.

Although most of the information relates to the 1990s, some topics assessed required the use of earlier data, either because the recent record is sparse or because

trend analysis involves consideration of historical conditions. While every effort has been made to ensure the comparability of data from different times and locations, methodologies may differ considerably and some comparisons will, inevitably, be tenuous. Where such uncertainties have been identified, they are indicated in the text.

1.3 Guidance to the reader

The QSR 2000 follows the same arrangements as the regional QSRs in that it consists of the same six chapters. Following this introductory Chapter 1, Chapter 2 gives an overview of the geography, hydrography and climatic conditions of the North-East Atlantic in order to give a baseline for the detailed descriptions of the physical, chemical and biological characteristics of the area presented in following chapters. Chapter 3 provides an outline of the most important human activities that influence the North-East Atlantic. Chapter 4 summarises information on the chemical aspects of the North-East Atlantic, focusing on inputs of contaminants and nutrients, and their concentrations in different environmental media and compartments. Chapter 5 deals with the biological features of the coastal and offshore ecosystems, focusing in particular on the causes, impact and implications of the changes that are occurring to their natural characteristics. Finally, Chapter 6 draws on Chapters 2 to 5 to identify trends, the effectiveness of measures and the major causes of any environmental degradation within the area and the managerial and scientific actions needed to redress this.

The overall assessment found in Chapter 6 identifies, as far as is currently possible, the factors that govern environmental change in the various Regions, leading to a prioritisation of human pressures according to their impacts on the North-East Atlantic. This involved expert judgement for the identification and assessment of a variety of impacts, which differ in nature and importance, and in their spatial and temporal dimensions.

The purpose of the conclusions and recommendations contained in this report is to draw attention to problems and to identify priorities for consideration within appropriate forums as a basis for further work. Within its sphere of competence, the OSPAR Commission will decide what follow up should be given to these conclusions, recommendations and priorities for action. The rights and obligations of the Contracting Parties are not therefore affected by this report.