

2015 Status of the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas

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Policy Issue: Protection of marine biodiversity and ecosystems

Policy Objective: A network of marine protected areas (MPAs) should be achieved, which by 2012 is ecologically coherent, includes sites representative of all biogeographic regions in the OSPAR Maritime Area, and is consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) target for effectively conserved marine and coastal ecological regions, and which by 2016 is well managed.

Specific question(s) addressed

How extensive is the OSPAR Network of MPAs?
Is the network ecologically coherent yet?
Is the network well managed yet?
How are we progressing towards the CBD target?

Findings

Since 2005, all 12 Contracting Parties (CPs) bordering the North-East Atlantic have nominated sites to the OSPAR Network of MPAs both in their national waters as well as collectively in areas beyond national jurisdiction. By the end of 2015, the network comprises 423 MPAs with a total surface area of 789,125 km² or 5.8 % of the OSPAR Maritime Area¹.

Good coverage of the Territorial Waters (TW)

A total of 413 MPAs are situated within national waters of CPs. Most sites have been designated in territorial waters (16.4 % covered by OSPAR MPAs²) and far fewer in Exclusive Economic Zones (2.1 % covered by OSPAR MPAs). The OSPAR maritime area beyond the limits of national EEZs holds 10 OSPAR MPAs, covering 8.9 % of this area.

Distribution across the OSPAR Regions

The MPAs are currently distributed unevenly across the five OSPAR Regions (Fig. 1), resulting in major gaps in the network. The Greater North Sea (Region II), the Wider Atlantic (Region V) and the Celtic Seas (Region III) are the best represented OSPAR Regions with 13.8 %, 8.3 % and 6.7 % coverage, respectively. While coverage of the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast (Region IV) is at 4.9 %, the Arctic Waters (Region I) show the lowest coverage with only 1.9 % of the area being designated OSPAR MPAs.

Ecological coherence of the OSPAR Network of MPAs

One target set for the OSPAR Network of MPAs is to be ecologically coherent by 2012. Although the network as a whole is currently not ecologically coherent, there are positive signs. The network has a good representation of the different biogeographic regions within the North-East Atlantic (Tab. 1). That is one of the requirements for ecological coherence. Data deficiencies and the lack of a feasible methodology currently hamper a sophisticated eco-coherence assessment but efforts are being made to solve these issues quickly.

Management of the OSPAR Network of MPAs

Another target set for the OSPAR Networks of MPAs is to be well managed by 2016. Management plans and measures are in place for some areas, but for many MPAs they still have to be developed and implemented. So far, data are lacking to comprehensively conclude as to what extent the network is well managed but recently at least a methodology to assess management activities in the OSPAR MPA network has been developed and a pilot assessment was conducted in 2015. In 2016, the full assessment is envisaged to take place.

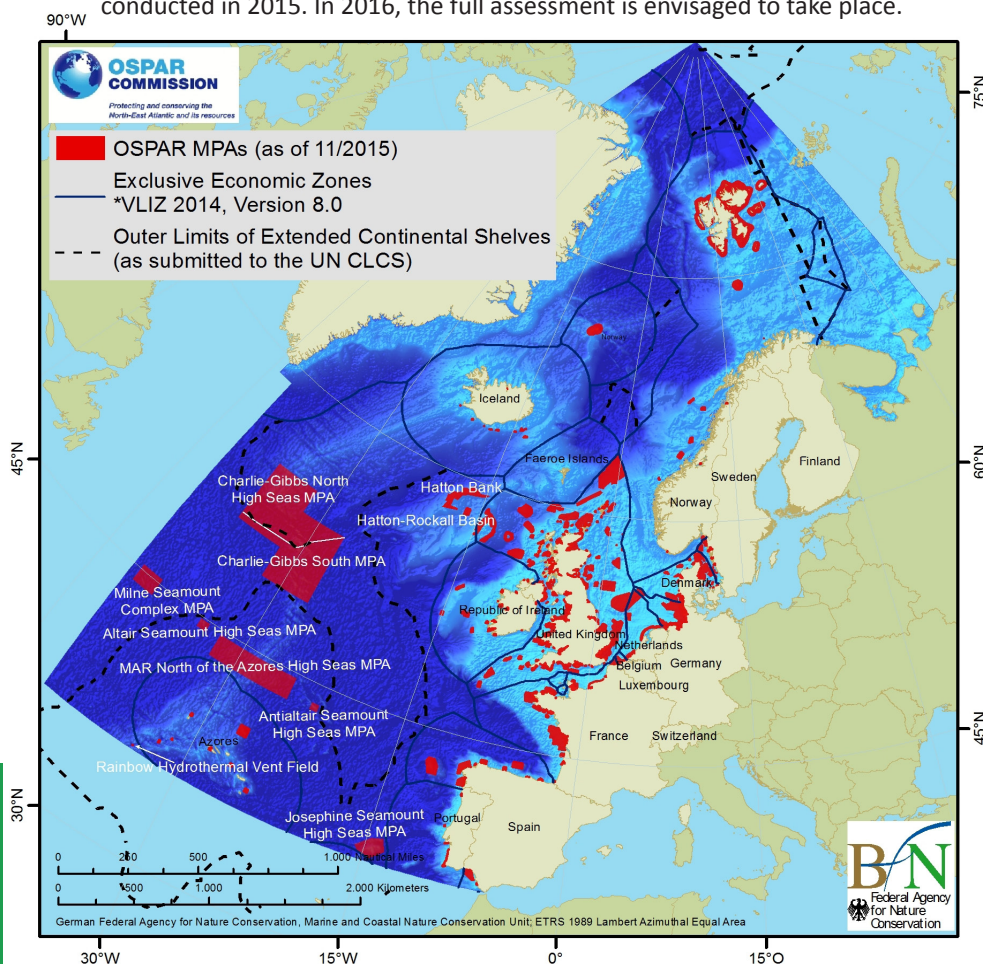


Figure 1: The OSPAR network of MPAs as of 1 October 2015

¹ All areas were calculated using the Lambert Azimuthal Equal-Area Projection (European Terrestrial Reference System 1989).

² For the calculation of the surface of TW and EEZ areas, Madeira (PT), Greenland and Faroe Islands (DK) and other areas were included. Thus, the percentages are not directly comparable to those given in previous assessment sheets.

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What has been done?

The status of the OSPAR Network of MPAs and any changes since 2014 have been assessed, including whether the network can be considered as ecologically coherent and well managed.

Observed Status and/or Change

In 2015, Norway, Portugal and the United Kingdom nominated new MPAs. In total, 10 new MPAs were added to the OSPAR Network of MPAs covering more than 600 km².

Does it Work?

The OSPAR objective to establish a network of MPAs in the North-East Atlantic is progressing well in terms of MPA designation as described above. Compared to the other four OSPAR Regions, the Greater North Sea has reached the target set by the CBD, i.e. to protect at least 10% of coastal and marine areas by 2020. Ecological coherence of the network, however, cannot be achieved unless the remaining gaps in the network are closed. One major challenge of assessing ecological coherence and management effectiveness is the low availability of relevant data on e.g., occurrence, distribution and status of species and habitats as well as the lack of management plans and measures.

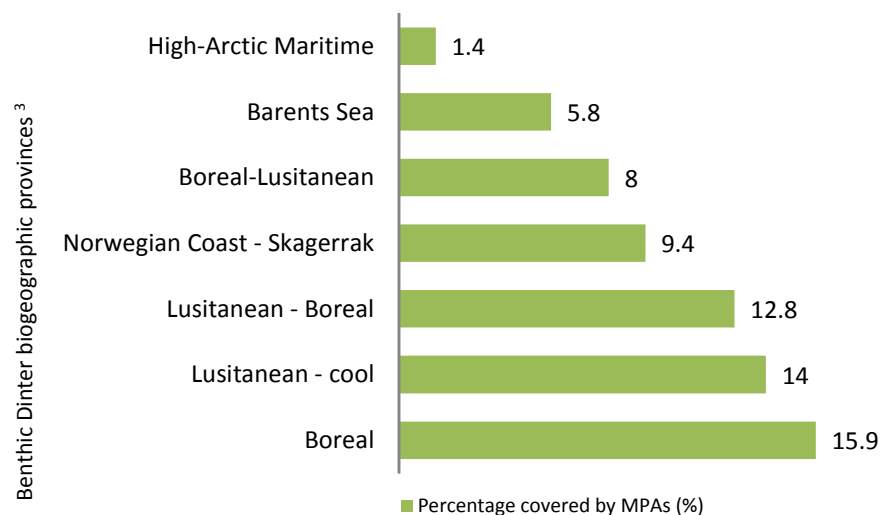


Table 1: Examples of different benthic Dinter biogeographic provinces and their coverage by OSPAR MPAs.

³ According to the classification by Dinter 2001 (Dinter, W. 2001. Biogeography of the OSPAR Maritime Area. German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Bonn. 167 pp)

Implications - What happens next?

With a better understanding of the current state of ecological coherence and of management effectiveness, CPs can consider where MPAs need to be nominated to fill the identified gaps in the network and if management measures need to be adjusted to meet OSPAR objectives. Improved reporting of relevant data on species and habitats as well as on management plans and measures is required to understand what is being protected and if it is being protected effectively. Such information is essential for understanding whether the OSPAR measures taken are having the intended outcome.

Assessment method guide, further reading and data sources

OSPAR. (2015). 2014 Status Report on the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas;

OSPAR Recommendation 2003/3 adopted by OSPAR 2003 (OSPAR 03/17/1, Annex 9), amended by OSPAR Recommendation 2010/2 (OSPAR 10/23/1, Annex 7)

OSPAR. (2013). An Assessment of the ecological coherence of the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas in 2012. 31 March 2013; revised 7 May 2013 prepared by Johnson D., Ardron J., Billet D., Hooper T. and Mullier T. from Seascope Consultants Ltd.



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