

Status of the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas in 2012

BDC13/AS01



Policy Issue: Protection of marine biodiversity and ecosystems

Policy Objective: A network of marine protected areas 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 target for effectively conserved marine and coastal ecological regions

Specific questions addressed

How extensive is the OSPAR network of marine protected areas (MPAs)?

Is the network ecologically coherent yet?

How are we progressing towards the CBD target?

Findings

Since 2005, all 12 Contracting Parties bordering the North-East Atlantic have nominated sites to the OSPAR MPA network both in their national waters as well as collectively in areas outside of national jurisdiction. By the end of 2012 the OSPAR network has 333 MPAs with a total surface area of approximately 700 600 km² or 5,17% of the OSPAR maritime area which is nearly twice the size of Germany.

Good coverage in Territorial Waters Areas

Most sites (324 MPAs) have been designated within Contracting Party territorial waters, with an overall coverage by OSPAR MPAs of 21,74%. Overall coverage of the EEZs remains low at just 1,53%, whereas 6% of the area beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ) are covered by nine OSPAR MPAs (7 collective OSPAR MPAs and 2 national MPAs established by CPs in areas where the respective CP has submitted a claim to UN CLCS for an extension of its continental shelf).

Distribution across the OSPAR Regions

There is an uneven distribution of MPAs across the five OSPAR Regions (Fig. 1), resulting in major gaps in the MPA Network. The Greater North Sea (Region II) and the Wider Atlantic (Region V) are the best represented OSPAR Regions with 10,39% and 7,90% coverage respectively. The Celtic Sea (Region II) and the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast (Region IV) have much lower coverage with 4,66% and 3,12%, respectively, while the Arctic Waters (Region I) show the lowest coverage with only 1,55% of the area being protected by OSPAR MPAs.

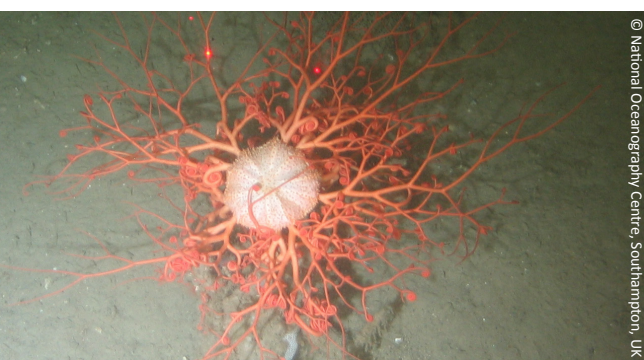
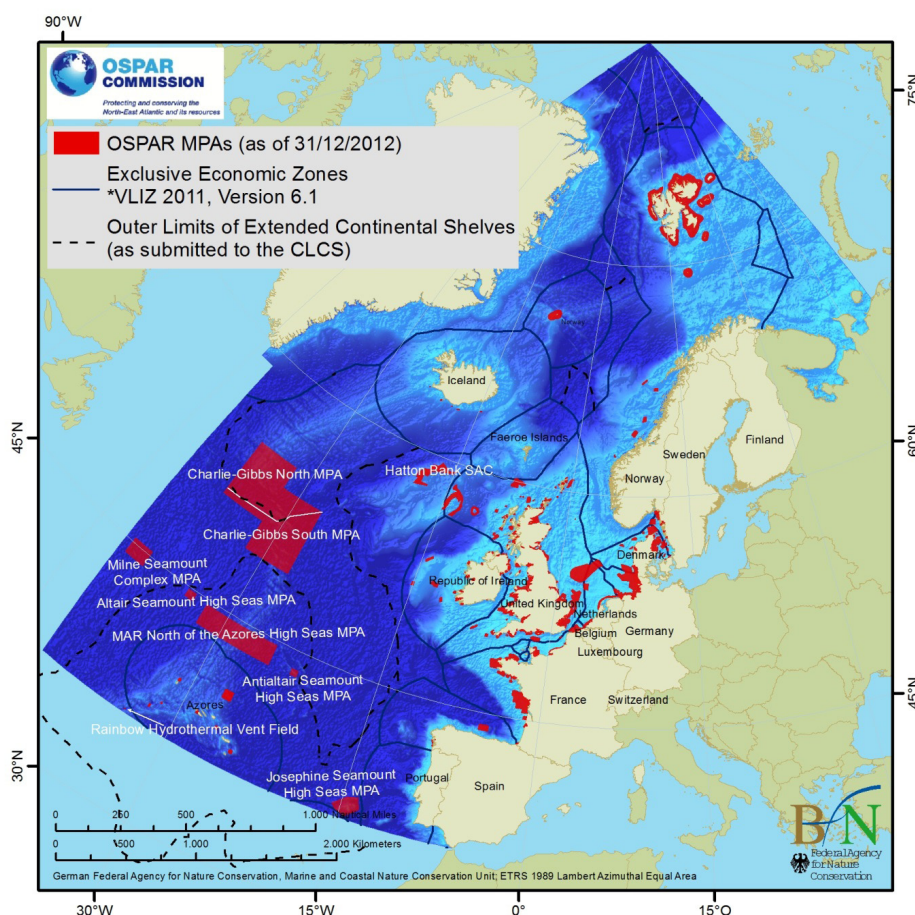
Ecological coherence of the OSPAR MPA Network

One of the targets set for the OSPAR network of MPAs is to be ecologically coherent by 2012. Although at this stage the network cannot be judged to be ecologically coherent, for the first time we see clear progress. The OSPAR Network now has good representation of the different biogeographic regions of the North East Atlantic which is one of the requirements for ecological coherence (Fig. 2, bottom right hand).

Management of the OSPAR MPA Network

Another target set for the OSPAR networks of MPAs is to be well-managed by 2016. Management plans and measures are in place for many sites, for others these are still being prepared. So far, we lack data to conclude as to what extent the network is well-managed. A workshop on management effectiveness is planned for late 2013.

Figure 1: Distribution of OSPAR MPAs across OSPAR Regions (as of 31 December 2012)



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What has been done?

The status of the OSPAR MPA network and any changes since 2011 have been assessed including the degree of ecological coherence that has been reached and whether the network can be considered to be well managed.

Observed status and/or change

In 2012, 54 MPAs covering more than 225 000 km² were added to the OSPAR MPA network representing an increase in area coverage of one third since 2011.

Does it work?

The increasing coverage of the OSPAR maritime region by MPAs shows that the OSPAR measure to establish a network of MPAs is progressing in terms of area designation. The Greater North Sea region is the first OSPAR region to have reached the CBD target of having 10% of an ecological region protected by 2020. However, ecological coherence of the network cannot be achieved unless the gaps in the network are closed. One major challenge is a low availability of relevant ecological data. Without better knowledge of the occurrence and distribution of species and habitats, it remains difficult to meet the objectives of establishing a network of MPAs which is ecologically coherent and well-managed.

Implications - What happens next?

With a better understanding of the current state of ecological coherence, Contracting Parties can consider where MPAs could be nominated to fill identified gaps in the network. Improved reporting of the ecological information on species and habitats is required in order to understand what is being protected. Such information, as well as information on management plans and measures, is essential for understanding whether the measures that have been taken are having the intended outcome.

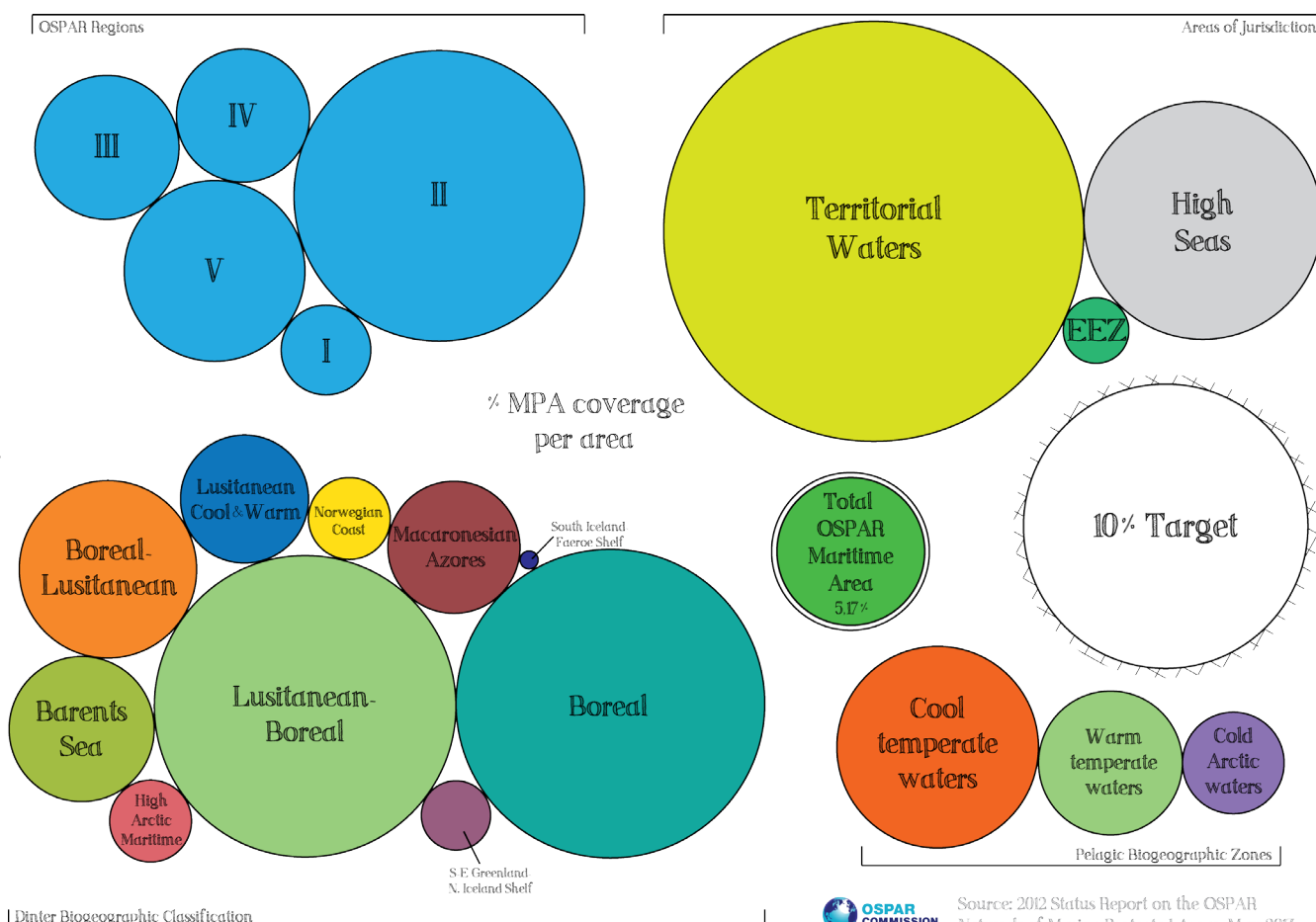
The planned improvement of the OSPAR MPA database will be a major contribution to improving the analysis that can be undertaken in future, as well as ensuring that OSPAR data can interact with other regional and global data sets.

Assessment method guide, further reading and data sources

OSPAR. (2013). 2012 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.

Figure 2: A graphic representation of progress of protection of the OSPAR Maritime Area towards the CBD 10% target.

The size of the circle is relative to the % of the area covered and the graphic presents information from 5 perspectives: a) for the whole OSPAR maritime area (in the centre), b) the five OSPAR regions (top left), c) different jurisdictions (top right), d) Dinter¹ biogeographic provinces (benthic) (bottom left) and e) Dinter biogeographic provinces (pelagic) (bottom right).



Source: 2012 Status Report on the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas. May 2013

¹ Classification according to classification by Dinter 2001 (Dinter, W. 2001. Biogeography of the OSPAR Maritime Area. German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Bonn. 167 pp).

No additional nominations were made to the OSPAR MPA network in reporting to 1 October 2013. The current assessment sheet remains valid until the publication of the next assessment in June 2015.