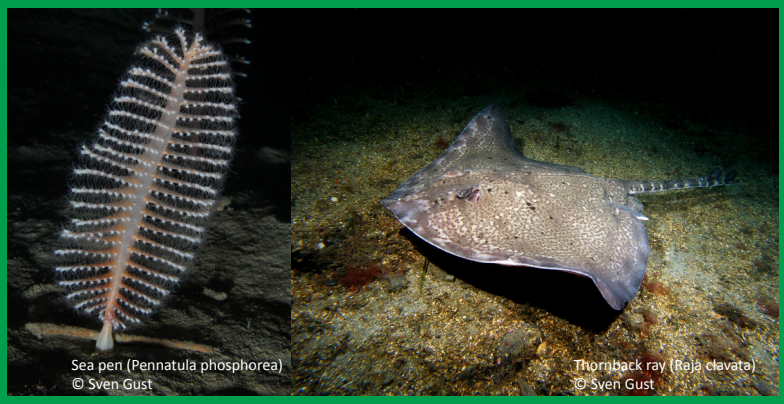
2014 Status Report on the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas



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 outside of national jurisdiction. By the end of 2014 the network comprises 413 MPAs with a total surface area of 788 377 km2 or 5.82% of the OSPAR Maritime Area.

Good coverage of the Territorial Waters

A total of 400 MPAs are situated within national waters of CPs, whereas most sites have been designated in territorial waters (23.59% covered by OSPAR MPAs) and far less in exclusive economic zones (3.06% covered by OSPAR MPAs). The OSPAR Maritime Area beyond the limits of national EEZs holds 10 OSPAR MPAs covering 6.02% of this area.

Distribution across the OSPAR Regions

The MPAs are distributed unevenly across the five OSPAR Regions (Fig. 1), resulting in major gaps of the network. The Greater North Sea, the Wider Atlantic and the Celtic Seas are the best represented OSPAR Regions with 13.83%, 8.27% and 6.65% coverage respectively. While coverage of the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast is at 4.81%, the Arctic Waters show the lowest coverage with only 1.94% of the area being protected by 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 at this stage the network as a whole is not ecologically coherent, there are positive signs. The network has a good representation of the different biogeographic regions within the North-East Atlantic, which is one of the requirements for ecological coherence (Fig. 2, bottom right). Lack of data, however, is a barrier to undertaking more sophisticated assessments in the future.

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 sites, whereas for many others they are still need to be prepared. So far, data are lacking to comprehensively conclude as to what extent the network is well managed. The development of a methodology to assess management effectiveness of the OSPAR Network of MPAs is ongoing.

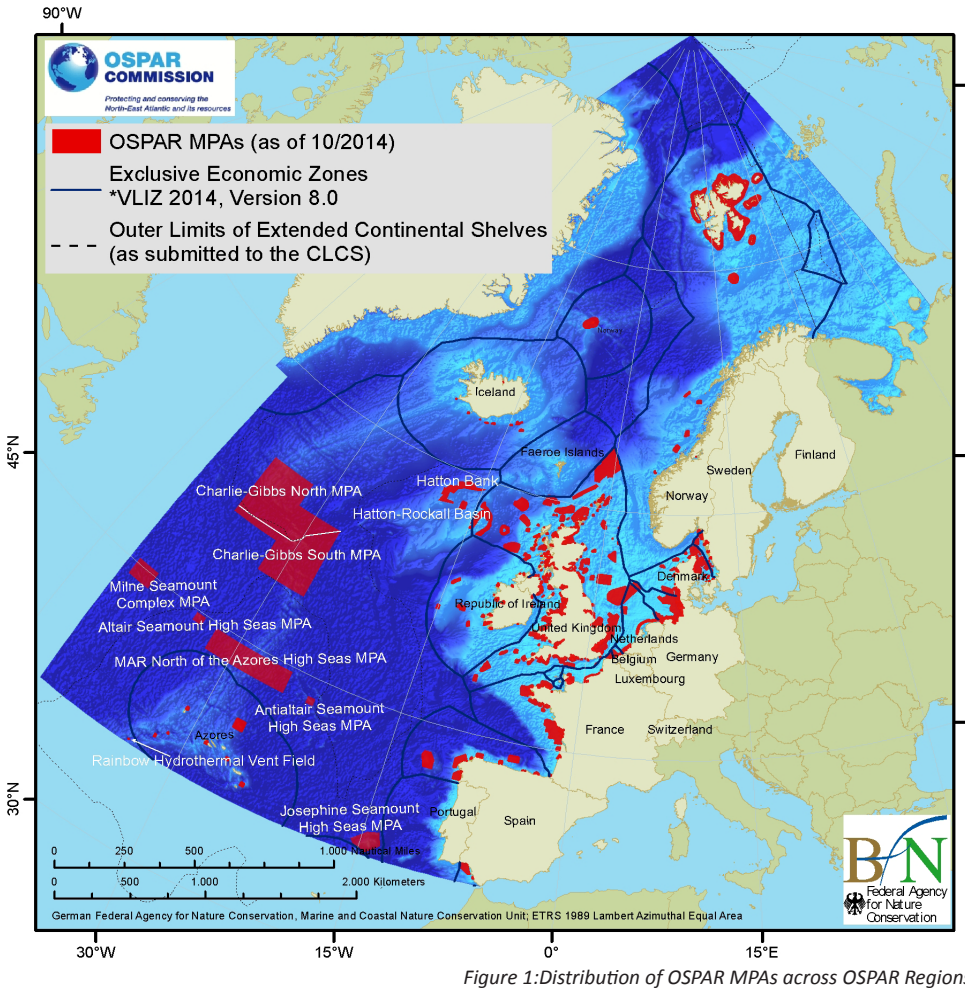


Figure 1:Distribution of OSPAR MPAs across OSPAR Regions

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What has been done?

The status of the OSPAR Network of MPAs and any changes since 2013 have been assessed, including whether the network can be considered as ecologically coherent and well managed.

Observed Status and/or Change

In 2014, 77 MPAs covering more than 89 397 km2 were added to the OSPAR Network of MPAs, representing an increase in area coverage by 0.65% since 2013

Does it Work?

The OSPAR measure to establish a network of MPAs in the North-East Atlantic is progressing well in terms of MPA designation as shown above. The Greater North Sea has, compared to the other four OSPAR Regions, reached the target set by the CBD to protect by 2020 at least 10% of coastal and marine areas (Fig. 2, top left). 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 i.e. on the occurrence, distribution and status of species and habitats as well as on management plans and measures.

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 in order to understand what is being protected and if it is being protected effectively. Such information is essential for understanding whether the taken OSPAR measures are having the intended outcome.

Assessment method guide, further reading and data sources

OSPAR. (in prep.). 2014 Status Report on the OSPAR Network of Marine Protect 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 Seascape Consultants Ltd.

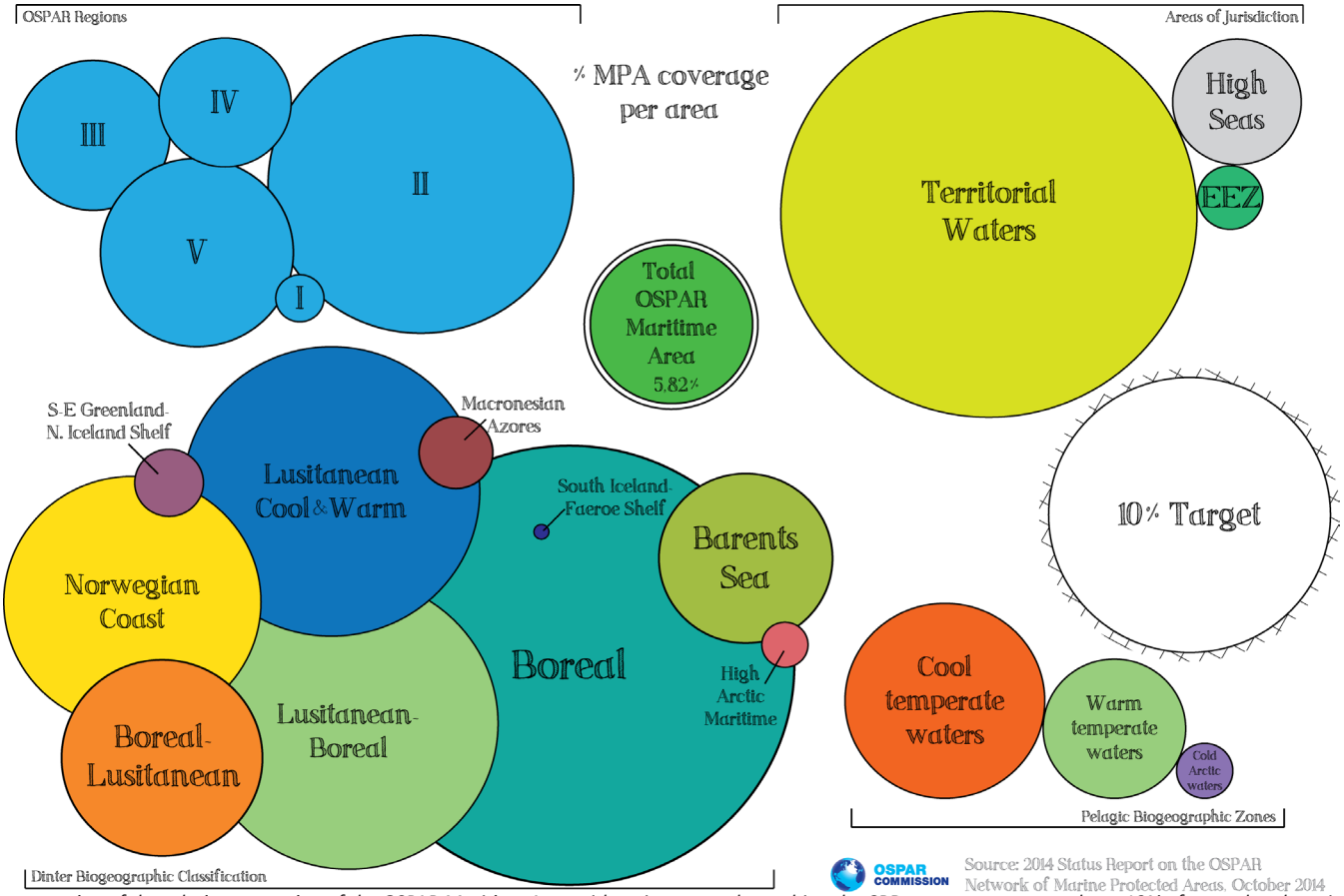

Figure 2: Representation of the relative protection of the OSPAR Maritime Area with a view towards reaching the CBD target to protect at least 10% of coastal and marine areas by 2020. The size of the circle is relative to the % of the area covered and the graphic presents information from 5 perspectives: OSPAR Regions (top left), different jurisdictions (top right), whole OSPAR Maritime Area (centre), benthic Dinter[1] biogeographic provinces (bottom left), and pelagic Dinter biogeographic provinces (bottom right).

1 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).