

OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
 Meeting of the Intersessional Correspondence Group for the Implementation of the
 Marine Strategy Framework Directive (ICG-MSFD)
 Videoconference: 14-15 October 2021

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ICG-MSFD(2) 2021 Summary Record

Agenda Item 0 – Opening of the meeting

ICG-MSFD(2) 21/0/1, ICG-MSFD(2) 21/0/2

0.1 The meeting of the Intersessional Correspondence Group on the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (ICG-MSFD) took place on 14-15 October 2021 by videoconference.

0.2 The meeting was chaired by Co-Convenor Ilinca Mathieu (France) and was attended by the representatives of the following Contracting Parties Belgium, Denmark, European Union represented by the European Commission DG Environment, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Also, the Co-Convenor of ICG-QSR (the Netherlands). The list of participants is at **ICG-MSFD(2) 21/0/2**.

Agenda Item 1 – Adoption of the Agenda and check on earlier agreed actions

ICG-MSFD (2) 21/1/1, ICG-MSFD(2) 21/1/1 Add.1, ICG-MSFD(2) 21/1/2 Rev.1, ICG-MSFD(2) 21/01/Info.01, ICG-MSFD(2) 21/01/Info.02

Item 1.1: Agenda and timetable

1.1 The Chair (Co-Convenor, France) welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked participants for joining. New delegates introduced themselves in a tour-de-table.

1.2 The Chair gave an overview of the draft agenda and provisional timetable, which were adopted (**ICG-MSFD (2) 21/1/1 & 21/1/1 Add.1**). The adopted Agenda and list of documents are at **Annex 1** and a list of actions arising from the meeting is at **Annex 2**.

Item 1.2: Progress in actions

1.3 The Secretariat informed the meeting of the state of play of ICG-MSFD-relevant actions from earlier meetings; ICG-MSFD(1) (April 2021), HOD(1) (May 2021), CoG(1) (May 2021) and OSPAR Commission meetings (October 2021). The meeting noted the short-term actions (**ICG-MSFD (2) 21/1/2 Rev.1**) had been completed intersessionally and the remaining actions would be reported at this meeting or were on target to meet the specified deadlines.

Item 1.3: Multi-annual programme of work

1.4 The Co-convenor (France) presented the multi-annual programme of work and the terms of reference as approved by CoG(1)2021 (**ICG-MSFD (2) 21/1/Info.1 and 21/1/Info.2**). The Co-Convenor highlighted the four main working areas in ICG-MSFD's terms of reference that were reflected in the products of the multi-annual programme of work (**Annex 3**).

Agenda Item 2 – Assessment and good environmental status

ICG-MSFD (2) 21/2/2, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/2/3 Rev.1, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/2/4, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/2/Info.1, ICG-MSFD(2) 21/2/Info.2

Item 2.1: Quality Status Report 2023

2.1 The Secretariat presented an overview of the progress made by ICG-QSR in the development of the Quality Status Report 2023 and recalled the further discussion that took place between ICG-QSR and ICG-MSFD on the common indicator templates. ICG-MSFD had instructed to aim for a high ambition level of

using QSR2023 results to support electronic reporting by those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States and would like to use the information. To enable this, the Appendix 1 results tables of the common indicator templates had been modified, by including a new row for the assessment units, and agreed by CoG(1)2021. The Secretariat presented the Fulmar Indicator as the first completed common indicator assessment where the indicator results were presented in the Appendix 1 of the indicator template, noting that there were some outstanding queries, and it was agreed it would be an Annex to the summary record (**Annex 4**).

2.2 The Secretariat highlighted outstanding queries related to the prefilling requirement for Regional level assessments, in the proposed fields for the common indicators and the corresponding threshold values in Appendix 1 results table of the common indicator template. Prefilled versions of the template have been shared with indicator leads inviting them to consider and update the pre-filled content as appropriate, and to then complete the Appendix 1 templates in parallel with completing the indicator assessment.

2.3 The Secretariat also informed that the QSR 2023 Guidance Document¹ (Agreement 2019-02) was agreed for publication and was available online: <https://www.ospar.org/documents?v=40951>

2.4 In discussion:

- a) The Secretariat was thanked for the useful overview. The Commission highlighted further discussions were required to bring together OSPAR, HELCOM and EEA and discuss how the MSFD tables could be ingested and prepared for Member States to use in their reporting;
- b) The Co-Convenor of the ICG-QSR raised the issue of compatibility of EEA systems and OSPAR work in relation to possible inconsistencies and lack of guidance. The Commission mentioned that the fields presented in the spreadsheet had been considered for linkages between regional assessments and international reports. Some adjustments might be necessary, but the content should be aligned using the predefined list and parameter codes;
- c) The Contracting Parties requested clarification on whether the entries for these tables would be reported by the indicator leads with the information provided by the Contracting Parties and whether the Contracting Parties would be able to check, modify and complete the tables during the reporting period. The Secretariat clarified that the indicator lead would include the indicator result based on the regional assessment and that only one regional result per assessment unit would be provided to the EEA; however, the Contracting Parties would receive this pre-filled regional information and would decide how to use it for their national reporting (note discussions under item 2.4 cookie-cutter and parallel approach);
- d) The Contracting Parties requested additional information on the next steps in the approval process. The Secretariat confirmed that the indicator lead would submit the indicator spreadsheets to their respective committees for approval as a part of the package when the indicator is presented for approval. Following the QSR schedule, the Committees would meet between February and April 2022 and would review the submitted package, including the indicator text, the spreadsheet, and any associated documents in the annexes. It was further clarified that, where agreed and available the regional thresholds would be introduced in the tables. It was reiterated that Contracting Parties could decide at the time of submitting their national reports whether or not to use the regional information (note discussions under item 2.4);
- e) The EU referred to the technical interpretation on how to enter the information in the spreadsheet to be done by the indicator manager and clarified, in relation to the process, that OSPAR would seek to achieve set results per indicator which would be signed off in the

¹ English only. Update 2020 (see CoG(1) 20/7/1, Agenda Item 3.4), and 2021 (see OSPAR 21/13/1, §9.30)

Committee to produce the resulting output to be submitted to EEA. Each country would then review and decide on whether to accept it in its entirety or modify it in some way. Reporting was done by individual countries;

- f) The Contracting Parties noted the efforts made by the Secretariat and the indicator leads to facilitate a consistent representation of the indicator information for MSFD reporting and welcomed the opportunity to use examples for further discussion in a smaller group with the European Commission, EEA and Regional Sea Conventions as appropriate.

2.5 ICG-MSFD agreed:

- a. **the approach of the Secretariat prefilling content of the Appendix 1 tables to the common indicator templates and to inform CoG(2)2021 of the need to invite all indicator leads to complete the prefilled tables;**
- b. **to invite the EU to set up a meeting with the Regional Sea Convention Secretariats and the EEA to organise the MSFD prefilling exercise;**
- c. **further discuss during the ICG-MSFD(1)2022, in line with the review process of the new guidance for reporting articles 8, 9 and 10 (MSFD Guidance Document 14, on how the QSR2023 could support the national electronic reporting including prefilling the Appendix 1 templates for the integrated results.**

Items 2.2: List of integrated assessments

2.6 ICG-QSR Co-Convenor (the Netherlands) and the Secretariat presented the provisional list of integrated assessments foreseen to be included in thematic assessments for the QSR 2023 (**ICG-MSFD (2) 21/2/2**). The Secretariat gathered the necessary information by making direct contact with thematic assessments leads to provide a list of the thematic assessments under consideration, the responses received until 12 October 2021 was included as part of the annex 1. This information was also copied into the [Master List of QSR Assessments \(column N\)](#).

Element	Time by which element is to be completed at the latest
Agree Concept and Format of QSR	Spring 2019
Start Production & Assessment work, unless on-going	as soon as possible
Data Calls	December 2021
Agree Finalised Indicator Assessments	Committees Spring 2022
Agree Draft Thematic Assessments	Committees Spring 2022
Third Party Assessments	OSPAR Summer 2022
Indicator Assessments and Thematic Assessments adopted in principle	OSPAR summer 2022
First Draft Cumulative Assessment	Summer 2022
First Draft Synthesis Report	Summer 2022
Adopt Synthesis Report	OSPAR summer 2023

2.8 In discussion:

- a. Contracting Parties recalled previous discussions (ICG-MSFD(1)21/6/1 §2.7d) about the need of assessment units' information at common indicator level (equivalent to parameter in MSFD) and

at integrated level (equivalent to feature level in MSFD), in order to enable Member States to choose what information from the QSR 2023 they would use and add more national or transnational information for their MSFD reporting. Contracting Parties were keen on common indicator level data being made available, and the need for information from the common indicators on lists of elements, parameters, etc. was noted, with the understanding that the conclusions from the integrated assessments was what determined the analysis of progress towards GES under the MSFD;

- b. The Netherlands and Portugal highlighted the goal of ICG-MSFD to use OSPAR products as much as possible for national reporting. Indicator leads would advance the work and Contracting parties would use the necessary information from the indicator or integrated assessment levels for their national reporting;
- c. The European Union proposed to clarify what could be done and what would be difficult to achieve by introducing some modifications in the table presented to bring in the specific features that would be expected under each of the thematic assessments. The level of ambition should be reflected in the table.

2.9 In conclusion, ICG-MSFD agreed:

- a. **the Secretariat would provide an update on the work progress of the QSR2023 during the ICG-MSFD(1)2022;**
- b. **indicator leads would update the list of integrated assessments foreseen to be included in the thematic assessments for the QSR 2023 considering the specific features and the level of ambition to be presented at ICG-MSFD(1)2022 and would further discuss the options to produce integrated assessments.**

Item 2.3: Steer on the use of integration rules for sensitive and commercial fish

2.10 On behalf of the BiTA Convenors, the Secretariat recalled the previous discussions between ICG-COBAM and ICG-MSFD, and presented the work progress which required policy steer from ICG-MSFD on how to integrate assessments of commercial fish assessments (cf.D3) in a biodiversity status assessment (cf.D1), with the aim of alignment with the integration rules recommended in the EU MSFD CIS regarding assessment of the element 'fish' and the features 'coastal fish', 'deep sea fish', 'pelagic fish' and 'demersal fish' and how the results would be best presented (**ICG-MSFD (2) 21/2/3**).

2.11 The Secretariat presented the methodological approach and the worked example on integration of fish prepared by Ireland, as Fish Expert Group (**ICG-MSFD(2) 21/02/Info.01**).

2.12 In discussion:

- a. Contracting Parties showed their preferences not to apply integration rules, to stock assessments provided by ICES to species assessments, as integrated results at the level of species could lead to hide finer information on the different stocks status.;
- b. Contracting Parties requested clarification whether OSPAR had agreed on what were commercial species; the European Union clarified that ICES advised in terms of the status assessment for commercial species although integration criteria were not available;
- c. Several Contracting Parties would further look to the documentation provided together with national experts to coordinate a national position;

- d. the European Union clarified that D1 and D3 would focus on the population level rather than the species level, because GES has to be expressed at the species group level, and commercial fish would be considered at stock or population level. D1 had some species which were commercial, but the intention was to assess the overall status, commercial or not. In addition, for those commercially exploited stocks, the assessment of each individual stock (separated) was from D3 assessment. In relation to OSPAR, and the issue about sensitivity towards management, this was a status assessment out of the managerial aspects. It was clarified that ICES integration rules for species were developed as initial advice for the GES process and JRC rules were developed as a modification of the ICES rules and were accepted by the WG GES in April 2021. However, the use of results from the ICES Stock Assessment was seen as an advantage to avoid doing the individual assessments. Several Contracting Parties highlighted the importance to keep assessments separated per region;
- e. France recalled some recommendations on the use of D3-stock assessment from the Art. 8 MSFD Guidance Document where *"Populations (stocks) should be seen as independent assessment components in the respective assessment area, i.e., all populations within a relevant assessment area should be used in the integration of the species group. If this is not possible, population (stocks) should be integrated up to species level using One-out-all-out before integrating species up to species group"*;
- f. Ireland had not had a chance at a policy level to assess this methodological approach. They agreed with other Contracting Parties that the use of an assessment that results in the loss of some of the information would be pity. Also, a one-out-all-out assessment methodology was not appropriate in OSPAR or the MSFD and the assessment should be more nuanced;
- g. Contracting Parties discussed the integration rules to go from species-to-species group assessment, and provided steer on aligning with the JRC recommendations.

2.13 In conclusion, ICG-MSFD agreed:

- a. **to provide steer, from a policy perspective, on the use of ICES stock assessments at the stock level and non-commercial fish on population level if that information is available for an integration to species groups of fish for the QSR 2023;**
- b. **Contracting Parties would further discuss the list and the different options and methodologies for the commercial species to be developed, in line with the revision process of Article 8 MSFD Assessment Guidance under consultation;**

Item 2.4: Cookie-cutter and parallel approaches for MSFD Art.8 e-reporting

2.14 The Secretariat presented the description of the parallel approach with the inputs received by Contracting Parties by 31 May 2021 (**ICG-MSFD(2)2021 2/4/1**), recalling that ICG-MSFD(1)2021 also agreed that Contracting Parties would be invited to respond with their preference for cookie-cutter or parallel approaches, for ICG-MSFD(2)2021 (ICG-MSFD(1)2021 Summary Record §2.21b). The Secretariat presented the inputs provided by Portugal.

2.15 In discussion:

- a. Portugal suggested to put into perspective what was expected at the MSFD level linking the indicators and the integrated assessments with parallel, regional, and national approaches. In the scenario where Contracting Parties would add national indicators or more recent data, Portugal would consider it a national assessment, and not a parallel approach. It was understood

that parallel approaches should use the data that was considered by the indicator lead when they perform the assessment and most recent data, or new indicators should be considered as national assessment;

2.16 The European Union summarised the WG-DIKE document on “Using regional assessments for MSFD reporting purposes” (ICG-MSFD(2)2021 2/4/Info.1) including four different methods for EU Member States’ consideration, although only few countries provided feedback, the European Commission would handle all possible methods within the reporting system and EU Member States would decide the method to use;

2.17 In discussion:

- a. Several contracting parties were favourable to parallel approach, although there were some descriptors that would better allow a cookie cutter approach, the parallel approach would give more local geographical information (nested information), which would avoid the loss of details, and would also leave the option to add more data, if necessary, to complete the assessment at national level;
- b. Ireland would support the parallel approach. As noted in the comparison this would allow countries to consider national assessments where relevant and also wider regional assessments, with the benefits of including datasets and assessment methodologies that exceed what was available nationally. On the other hand, the option to include smaller national units could allow for the focusing of measures to areas where they were required;
- c. the European Union welcomed any recommendation that may support consistency, although showed concerns about the region’s position to decide about a specific approach for a specific descriptor that could be different in other EU Regional Seas;
- d. several Contracting Parties were of the view that work was needed in the CIS process and WG DIKE, not OSPAR, as it was for the European Commission to put forward a reporting requirement on each descriptor, criterion or feature as to which approach should be used; the European Union highlighted that the reporting system would accommodate all options but would not clarify the inconsistencies amongst the different countries’ outputs for a specific descriptor;
- e. several Contracting Parties were not optimistic of a common approach for all descriptors and features, instead clarifications in national reporting on the method applied was proposed;

2.18 ICG-MSFD agreed:

- a) **Contracting Parties would further discuss Intersessionally regional assessments for MSFD reporting purposes in the context of WG-DIKE;**
- b) **The co-Convenors of ICG-MSFD would inform CoG(2)2021 of the message that further discussion and possible decision on regional assessments for MSFD reporting purposes (the cookie-cutter, parallel approach and others) would continue in the context of the WG DIKE;**
- c) **the European Union would provide an update on the work of WG-DIKE at ICG-MSFD(1)2022;**
- d) **to use a shared terminology for reporting approaches proposed by OSPAR (e.g., « cookie-cutter », « parallel regional-and-national » approaches) and the European Commission (e.g., approaches A, B1, B2, C, D). The European Commission supported by the OSPAR Secretariat would draft a new document using this same terminology for ICG-MSFD(1) 2022.**

Agenda Item 3 – Coherent MSFD implementation

ICG-MSFD (2) 21/3/1, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/3/2, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/3/3, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/3/Info.1, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/3/Info.2, ICG-MSFD(2) 21/03/Info.03, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/3/4, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/3/4/Add.1, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/3/5

Item 3.1: National timetables for MSFD Articles 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13

3.1 The Secretariat briefly presented the updated overviews of the national timetables of Contracting Parties that were EU member states for addressing the MSFD reporting on updates for Articles 8, 9 and 10 (**ICG-MSFD (2) 21/3/1**), Article 11 (**ICG-MSFD(2) 21/3/2**) and Article 13 (**ICG-MSFD(2) 20/3/3**).

3.2 In written procedure to the Summary Record, further updates were provided by Contracting Parties' on their national MSFD timelines as at **Annexes 5, 6 and 7**.

3.3 ICG-MSFD agreed **the Secretariat would invite Contracting Parties to update their national information on MSFD Art.8, 9 & 10, 11 and 13 for ICG-MSFD(1)2022.**

Item 3.2: Developments in the EU MSFD Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) work

3.4 The European Commission reported on developments in the EU MSFD CIS work that were relevant to OSPAR, as follows:

- a. The MSFD Guidance report on the 2024 update of articles 8, 9 and 10 should be ready by next year and signed by spring 2022. However, updates were expected from the technical group on noise which had worked a lot on the technical criteria. Regarding the definition of spatial values, it remained a sensitive issue in the organised discussions;
- b. On other key issues, progress had been made on the seabed. An extended paper on the assessment framework was under preparation and discussions on the setting of threshold values had just started;
- c. Advice had been received from ICES on the assessment of the distribution of fishing activity in relation to the economics of different fisheries and the general advice was that, for each fishery, 90% of the value came from 30% of the fishing area;
- d. With regards to the WG-DIKE, discussions continued, and a lot of technical work had progressed. The first draft development of the GES dashboard used 2018 data to show what countries had reported in terms of GES had been assessed, or not. Modification of the dashboard was underway to report back to countries in a few weeks for comments;
- e. Several key issues were reported in relation to the reporting guidance art. 13, 14, with the guidelines being finalised and approved at the MSG in November. The new EEA Reportnet 3 system would pre-populate the national reports with the 2016 reports and the 2018 art.18 reports in Excel format, which countries would be able to supplement and upload. The process of completing the reports via Excel should be much easier;
- f. The first draft of the new guidance for reporting articles 8, 9 and 10 (MSFD Guidance Document 14) was shared with all contracting parties and the guidelines followed the same structure as in 2018, no major changes were expected, to ensure consistency, and use by regional seas conventions was envisaged as much as possible;
- g. It would also consider lessons learned from the 2018 reports, in particular the analysis undertaken by the JRC and discussions on how best to accommodate regional assessments into national reporting processes;
- h. It was reported that POMESA group was currently reviewing the state of play of the programmes of measures, listing the status of countries in the national reports and the 2016 assessment, the presentation would be available;

- i. The MSFD review was ongoing, new targeted consultation from 1 October until 22 October, in parallel to a public consultation. Individual Contracting Parties and the OSPAR Commission were invited to contribute. The specific consultation was in line with regional interests and in relation to the review, a conference was reported on 17 December to examine the review and receive comments from countries;
- j. Finally, in relation to the Biodiversity Strategy 2030, there would be an action plan, considering fisheries resources and ecosystems, the published roadmap would benefit from feedback from the variety of stakeholders. The action plan would address two main issues, the problems of fisheries bycatch and combating damage caused by bottom fishing. Two key issues relevant to the MSFD and OSPAR objectives.

3.5 In discussion:

- a. France requested a clarification on the level of representation that the conference in December 2021 would require and in relation to the fisheries and ecosystem actions. The European Commission responded that it was not yet confirmed but clearly the MSFD community would be involved, and with regards to the fisheries and ecosystem clarification, the action plan was due to be released in March 2022 and it was delayed because of the work linked with the EU Green Deal. The roadmap should be available soon, followed by a consultation;
- b. The Netherlands requested further information about the MSFD review. The focus of the consultation was on the opinion of stakeholders. When can a consultation specifically for EU Member States be expected. It was confirmed that EU Member States would be consulted in the different forums where they participate;
- c. It was confirmed that with regards to the task group dedicated to seabed, the mandate was extended until the end of 2022, with the same terms of references and workplan, which would follow the plan of the MSFD;
- d. The Secretariat requested ICG-MSFD to clarify what was expected in relation to the institutional participation in the public consultations led by the European Commission, Contracting Parties recalled previous discussions at the MSG meetings where the role of the regional sea conventions was needed and welcomed. The participation of regional sea conventions as part of the Friends of the Directive group would be envisaged (Next meeting on 10 November);
- e. Contracting Parties supported the involvement of the Secretariat in the review process ensuring coherence in between OSPAR level work and the best way possible for the implementation work for the MSFD. The involvement of regional sea conventions would allow Contracting Parties to understand the additional needs and how to better implement MSFD within a regional cooperation framework;
- f. The European Union informed that the review of the MSFD may have a proposal in early 2023 depending on the Commission calendar.

3.6 ICG-MSFD thanked the European Commission for the information and its responses to questions. ICG-MSFD agreed:

- a. **the European Commission would provide a CIS update at ICG-MSFD(1)2022;**

- b. **the co-Convenors of ICG-MSFD would request advice to CoG in relation to the involvement of the Secretariat in the exchange of information and participation in EU lead consultations in the context of the MSFD.**

Items 3.3 and 3.4: Analysis of measures related to targets on non-indigenous species, marine litter and by-catch of mobile species and the relation to NEAES work and enhanced regional coordination of measures for MSFD and the use of Art. 14

3.7 On behalf of itself and Sweden, Denmark presented the work towards enhanced regional coordination of measures for MSFD, based on observed coherence of MSFD environmental targets, as committed to in ICG-MSFD's Forward Work Plan product/deliverable 2.1 (**ICG-MSFD(2)21/3/4 and Add.1**). The review analysis covered measures for non-indigenous species, marine litter, mobile species and underwater sound or energy highlighting the lack of data and specifically, military related activities.

3.8 Denmark and Sweden proposed to further discuss on future needs for this analysis and it should be updated for the next ICG-MSFD. This exercise showed that measures were similar in many aspects.

3.9 In discussion:

- a. Contracting Parties thanked Denmark and Sweden and highlighted that beyond finding coherences between measures, the exercise was useful to learn from good practices from other Contracting Parties that could help preparing for the third cycle and to stimulate both bilateral and multilateral interactions;
- b. some Contracting Parties proposed to have further feedback on implementation of measures and the use of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Some Contracting Parties informed that SEA was required in national legislation for MSFD PoM, because it was required in their national processes, other Contracting Parties informed that Strategic Impact Assessment was not part of their national processes in this context, considering that it was not necessary to have SIA to prove the GES;
- c. Germany informed about the project dedicated to D2- Non-Indigenous species in harbours, as an opportunity to coordinate actions and measures with neighbouring countries; Sweden also informed about potential work with Denmark and Finland to synchronise measures;
- d. Spain suggested to identify first which are the environmental targets that could be defined together for the region;
- e. Belgium proposed the organisation of informal workshops on specific descriptors to identify measures to be considered as a major measure;

3.10 Contracting Parties provided feedback about the implementation of measures and calendar for its implementation using the Excel file (**Annex 8**) in written procedure.

3.11 ICG-MSFD agreed:

- a. **ICG-MSFD(1)2022 would discuss a way forward on the analysis of measures;**
- b. **Spain would carry out a first proposal to continue the work target coherence and provide an update at ICG-MSFD(1)2022. There was an existing analysis on coherence MSFD environmental targets, which could serve as a starting point for the work (ICG-MSFD(2) 19/3/8).**

3.12 On behalf of itself and Denmark, Sweden presented the work progress on regional coordination of measures for MSFD and the use of art. 14. (**ICG-MSFD(2)21/3/5**), and the feedback received from

Contracting Parties on the potential use of Art. 14 MSFD in the forthcoming Art.13 MSFD reporting per descriptor. Additional feedback was summarised in relation to the use of other reasons for not achieving GES in relation to the descriptions than those set out in Art. 14 MSFD, the estimated timelines achieving GES, and the linkages in between MSFD and WFD for reaching good status.

3.13 Denmark complemented the presentation referring to discussions in the context of POMESA with regards the art. 14.4 MSFD that underlined the exception with significant risk for the proportional costs and further discussions would be expected whether this could be an exception at all.

3.14 In discussion:

- a) Contracting Parties thanked Sweden and Denmark and highlighted the importance of this work for the MSFD review process, it was also mentioned the need for further inputs from Contracting Parties to analyse commonalities and divergences. The results could (if further developed) potentially be useful in the MSFD review process or in reviews of CIS guidance documents;
- b) Portugal informed about the work in the context of the [Rages Project \(Risk-based approaches to good environmental status\) led by the University College Cork](#) where they had worked in two specific descriptors, noise and non-indigenous species, to set up a general framework using risk assessments. This exercise could also be useful for the MSFD review.

3.15 ICG-MSFD agreed:

- a) **Denmark and Sweden would perform a final analysis of Contracting Parties' information on regional coordination of measures for MSFD and the use of Art.14 and bring it to ICG-MSFD(1)2022;**
- b) **To conclude this work at ICG-MSFD(1)2022 as input to prepare the next Meeting of the Marine Strategy Coordination Group (MSCG)**

Agenda Item 4 – Strategic and cross-cutting issues

ICG-MSFD (2) 21/4/Info.1, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/4/Info.2, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/4/Info.3, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/4/Info.4, ICG-MSFD (2) 21/4/Info.5

Item 4.1: NEAES 2030 and the implementation plan

4.1 The Secretariat presented the implementation plan to support the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 adopted by the OSPAR Commission and Ministerial Meeting hosted by Portugal in Cascais from 27 September to 1 October 2021 (**ICG-MSFD (2) 21/4/Info.1**). The implementation plan (**ICG-MSFD (2) 21/4/Info.2**) was also endorsed including the [ICG-MSFD task which draft is available in SharePoint](#).

4.2 The draft task for ICG-MSFD was further developed, considering methodological improvements in line with the MSFD requirements, in written procedure of the Summary Record (**Annex 9**).

4.3 ICG-MSFD agreed:

- a. **The co-Convenors of ICG-MSFD would submit the final draft task description to CoG.**

Item 4.2: UNEP/MAP and HELCOM activities of relevance to ICG-MSFD

4.4 On behalf of itself and Spain, France gave an oral update on activities in the Barcelona Convention UNEP/MAP. In the framework of Barcelona Convention (UNEP/MAP) the latest EcAp coordination group, similar to ICG-MSFD, defined the content and format of the QSR 2023 for the MED and further discussed how to enhance regional cooperation within the different MED Contracting Parties to produce assessment and monitoring (IMAP), as well as the harmonisation of programmes for those Contracting Parties which were EU Member States.

4.5 In relation to the work progress developing the MED QSR2023, the meeting brought together all Contracting Parties, although EU Member States facilitated the way forward to harmonise IMAP in support of the MSFD implementation, with active contributions from Spain and France. The governance structure of the coordination group and the validation process was discussed, similarly to OSPAR.

4.6 The technical groups as Committees (CORMON) and the thematic CORMONs would deal with pollution, biodiversity and hydrography. Contracting Parties tried to have the same approach as for the OSPAR groups by having the different Committees discussions and those political decisions at the higher level.

4.7 The overall structure of the MED QSR 2023 was agreed and the deadline fixed by the end of 2023. The format was equivalent to the synthesis report developed by OSPAR. UNEP/MAP would assess at indicator level, but lack of data and human resources remain a challenge. Thematic assessments would be available for biodiversity, pollution and hydrography. The seabed would not be assessed quantitatively. It was envisaged that the linkages between the OSPAR and MED QSRs would follow the structure of the DAPSIR approach.

4.8 Regarding the IMAP information system, a decision was taken in 2018, and the development of the information system could be used for the MED QSR 2023 and discussions were ongoing regarding data standards and data dictionaries. Contracting parties were invited to feed into the MED QSR and the data standards and data dictionaries would be harmonised with the MSFD information system.

4.9 On behalf of itself Denmark and Germany, Sweden gave an overview and update on HELCOM activities (**ICG-MSFD(2) 21/P01**). Sweden reported that focus was on updating the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) and that a decision was expected at the HELCOM Ministerial Meeting on 20 October 2021 in Lübeck (DE);

4.10 Sweden noted that there was an exchange of letters between OSPAR and HELCOM in 2018, and there were a number of joint HELCOM-OSPAR working/expert groups.

4.11 In preparation for the next status report [HOLAS III](#), similar to the QSR for OSPAR, HELCOM was working with the development of methods and indicator thresholds in 2021 to start the assessment work in 2022. Changes to the set of indicators were under review until December, and HELCOM strives to ensure the alignment with MSFD for those Contracting Parties which were EU Member States. Discussions were ongoing on making the results of HOLAS III as useful as possible for Contracting Parties in their obligations for MSFD reporting.

4.12 The new [HELCOM BLUES Project](#), co-financed by the European Union, was running until December 2022 and key focus areas include biodiversity, marine litter, underwater noise and effective regional measures.

4.13 ICG-MSFD thanked France and Sweden for this update and agreed to:

- a) **France and Spain would provide an update on UNEP/MAP activities to ICG-MSFD(1)2022;**
- b) **Denmark, Germany and Sweden would provide an update on HELCOM activities to ICG-MSFD(1)2022.**

4.14 The Chair noted the great progress made by all three Regional Seas Conventions towards delivery of products suitable for MSFD requirements.

Agenda Item 5 – Any other business and Chair for the next meeting cycle

Item 5.1: Contracting Parties may raise any other items of business.

5.1 France suggested ICG-MSFD should consider sharing information on national monitoring programmes and protocols at the regional level and whether this exercise could be informal or more structured with the support of the Secretariat. The Secretariat remained available to support the process if a more structured exercise would be required.

5.2 Spain supported France with a proposal to delay it to the coming years, considering that monitoring programmes would be under review and the national priority would be to focus on assessments.

5.3 [Germany](#) and [Spain](#) shared their national monitoring programmes websites.

Agenda Item 6 – Conclusions of the meeting

ICG-MSFD(2) 21/06/Info.01

Item 6.1: arrangements for ICG-MSFD(1)2022

6.1 Contracting Parties agreed that the meeting of ICG-MSFD(1)2022 would be held online 15-16 March 2022 and chaired by France.

6.2 Several Contracting Parties agreed that face-to-face meetings should be reserved to deeper discussions on specific and urgent issues, although it was generally agreed that one annual meeting face-to-face would benefit the common work of the ICG-MSFD.

6.3 Contracting Parties agreed that hybrid meetings should not be considered due to the cost and the logistics required.

Item 6.2: Outcome of the meeting and the meeting report

6.4 The Summary Record was adopted in written-procedure and a summary report of the meeting was prepared for the Co-Convenor (France) to present to CoG(2) 2021.