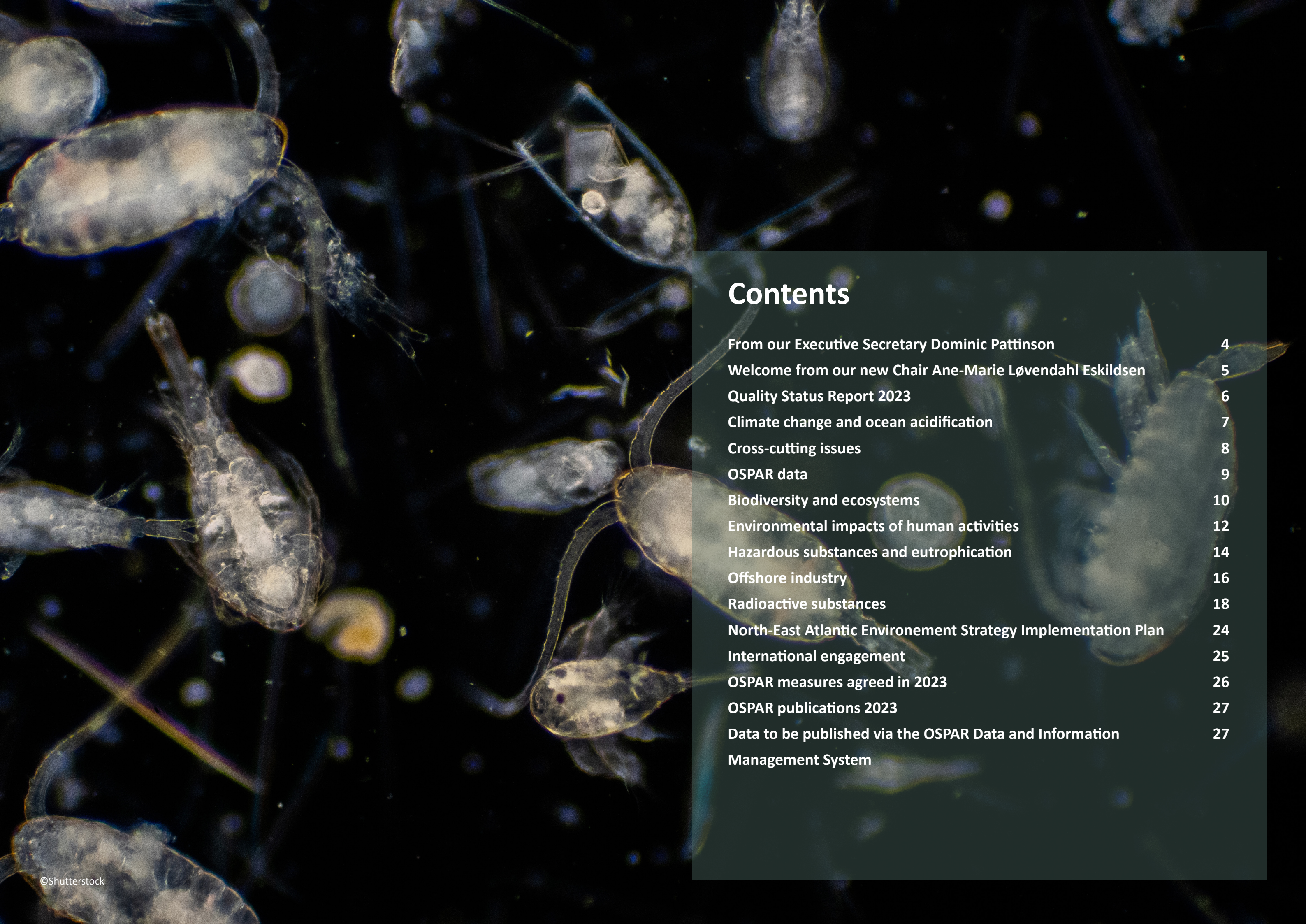




# OSPAR Annual Report July 2022 - September 2023

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## From our Executive Secretary Dominic Pattinson

This is the third time that I have had the privilege to write an introduction to the OSPAR Annual Report. As you will see, it has been another busy year for OSPAR. The report covers the key issues that the OSPAR Committees have considered and highlights the important achievements by OSPAR's Contracting Parties over the last year.

We have highlighted the significant efforts made by the Contracting Parties to produce [OSPAR's 2023 Quality Status Report \(QSR\)](#). This once in a decade assessment of the status of the North-East Atlantic is a significant undertaking and demonstrates the added value that OSPAR's collective efforts can deliver. The information it provides will help guide implementation of OSPAR's [North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy \(NEAES\) 2030](#) and ensure that our decisions are based on sound evidence. The QSR was published in September on [OSPAR's Assessment Portal \(OAP\)](#) and provides a valuable resource not only to the OSPAR Community but to anyone interested in the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the rest of the Secretariat for all their efforts over the year. I would not be able to do my job without their amazing support – they are a great team. So it is with sadness that we say goodbye to Lena Avellan (BDC Deputy Secretary) and Julien Favier (QSR Project Coordinator) who are both moving on. Their dedication and contribution to OSPAR's work has been amazing and I wish them both every success in whatever they decide to do next. Finally, I would like to welcome Dr Debbie Hembury who will be joining the Secretariat as our new BDC Deputy Secretary.

I hope you enjoy reading this report!

Image: The content of OSPAR's Quality Status Report 2023 was signed off at the annual meeting of the OSPAR Commission in June 2023. The meeting was held in Oslo (Norway).



## Welcome from our new Chair Ane-Marie Løvendahl Eskildsen

It is an honour to have the opportunity to contribute to OSPAR's 2023 Annual Report in my capacity as Chair of the OSPAR Commission.

I would like to thank my predecessor, Richard Cronin of Ireland. He made great efforts to foster an environment that encouraged Contracting Parties to work collectively with each other to achieve our shared objectives. This strong emphasis on working together was in evidence at the OSPAR Commission meeting where the discussions, some of them challenging, were positive and constructive. During my time as Chair I hope to continue this way of working which I believe is essential if OSPAR Contracting Parties are to continue to deliver effective protection and conservation of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.

One of my first jobs as Chair was to attend an event to mark OSPAR's 30th Anniversary where past and present Chairs and colleagues from the Secretariat came together to celebrate this milestone and recall the [achievements of OSPAR over the last 30 years](#). The fact that so many ex-colleagues joined the event demonstrated the commitment and spirit of the people that have chosen to work for OSPAR over the years. It was a great way to start my time as Chair!

Another highlight for me this year was the Collective Arrangement meeting that the OSPAR Secretariat hosted in London on 7-8 June. This was my first meeting of this group following a pause due to the COVID pandemic. Adopted by OSPAR and the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), the Collective Arrangement aims to bring together regional and global competent bodies in the North-East Atlantic to discuss how to collaborate and coordinate activities to support shared objectives. Following the historic adoption of the [United Nations \(UN\) agreement](#) (the BBNJ agreement) on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction there was a real sense of purpose at the meeting and I hope that the impetus provided by the BBNJ agreement will lead to concrete actions to help OSPAR, and others, deliver the goals of not only the BBNJ agreement but also those of the [Convention on Biological Diversity's \(CBD\) Global Biodiversity Framework](#).

Finally, I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the two OSPAR vice-Chairs, Maude Jolly (France) and Jorge Ureta Maeso (Spain) for their support and advice over the year.



Image: OSPAR welcomed 6 former Executive Secretaries and one current to our 30th birthday celebration. Left to right: David Johnson, Claire Nihoul, Dominic Pattinson, Alan Simcock, Susana Salvador, Darius Campbell, Peter Hayward



## Quality Status Report 2023



The key OSPAR deliverable this year is the [Quality Status Report \(QSR\) 2023](#). This has been a truly collective endeavour that is only made possible through dedication and commitment of over 400 scientists as well as policy experts and Observers from across all OSPAR's work areas. Over nearly three years, we have collaborated to deliver more than 120 assessments often using newly developed methodologies.

The scientific knowledge provided by the QSR 2023 will be used to guide the development of actions to achieve OSPAR's vision of *a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification*.

The assessments cover all aspects of marine biodiversity from fish to birds and whales, and the pelagic and benthic habitats they rely on. It looks at the intensity of human activities and the pressures that result from those activities as well as pollution from excess nutrients, hazardous substances, and other pressures such as marine litter and underwater noise.

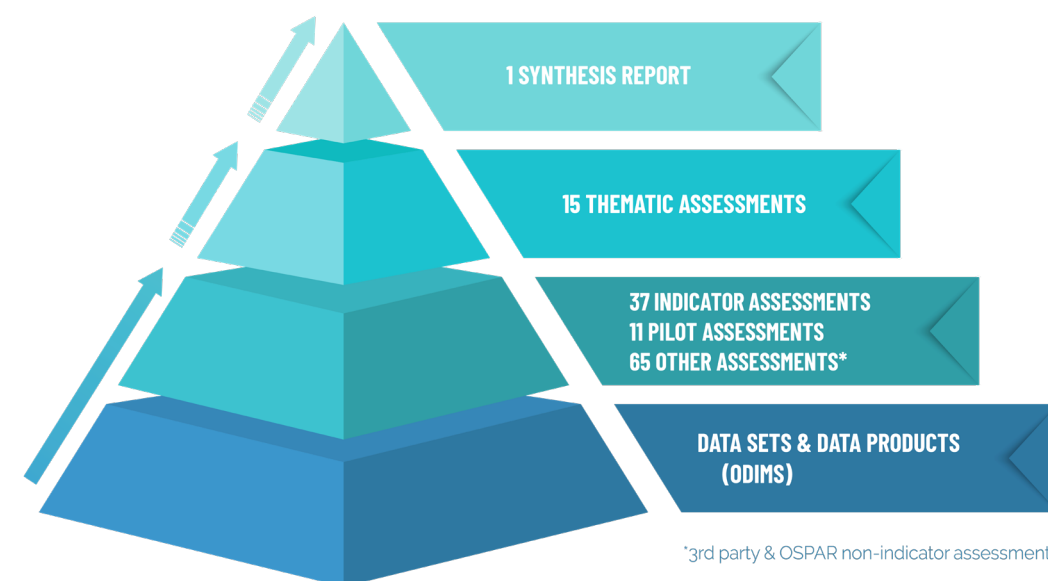
[Click to discover the key findings of the QSR 2023](#)



With each iteration of OSPAR's decadal QSRs the number of assessments, their coverage, and complexity, grow. For example, for the first time climate change and ocean acidification have their own assessments; our Intersessional Correspondence Group on Ecosystem Assessment Outlook and Cumulative Effects Assessment (ICG-EcoC) developed and applied a conceptual framework (DAPSIR – Drivers, Activities, Pressures, State, Impacts and Responses) to better understand the link between human activities, the pressures they exert and the effect they have on the state of the marine environment; and our [Intersessional Correspondence Group on Economic and Social Analysis \(ICG-ESA\)](#) developed an ecosystem services concept that evaluates the impact that changes in the environmental status have on the ecosystem services that the North-East Atlantic provides.

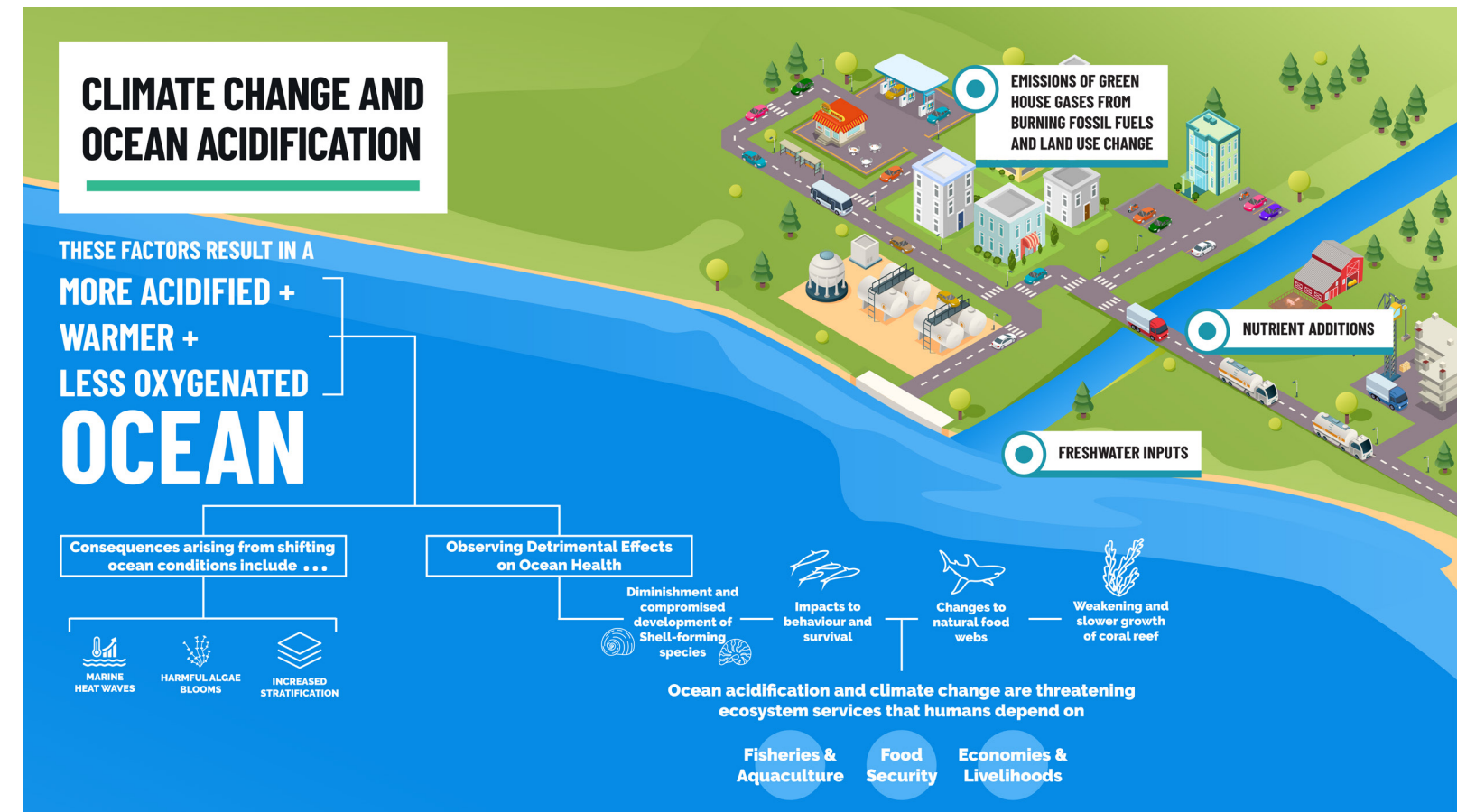
The QSR Synthesis Report sits at the top of the “QSR pyramid” and gathers information from all the underlying assessments of the QSR process. It presents a complete story about the status of the North-East Atlantic and like all OSPAR assessment products is [published in OAP](#) online and freely accessible to all.

Figure: The QSR Pyramid



## Climate change and ocean acidification

As part of the QSR 2023, OSPAR delivered two assessments fully dedicated to [ocean acidification](#) and [climate change](#). These assessments are crucial to better understand the processes of ocean acidification and climate change in the OSPAR Maritime Area. Their main outcomes, summarised below, will inform the development and implementation of a key dimension of OSPAR's North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030: to achieve seas resilient to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification.



### Ocean acidification assessment key outcomes

Every year the ocean absorbs at least a quarter of the carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) released into the atmosphere. This is driving ocean acidification. The assessment demonstrates that ocean acidification has been observed in all OSPAR Regions during the past decades. The rate at which ocean acidification occurs varies geographically and throughout the water column and is projected to keep occurring and even accelerate under higher carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emission scenarios. It also shows that ocean acidification is a major threat to marine species and ecosystems, with direct consequences to important ecosystem services.

### Climate change Thematic Assessment key outcomes

Rising sea levels and temperatures, reduced pH values, changes in rainfall amounts and reduced sea ice coverage are, among others, all effects of rising atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations. These effects have resulted in documented changes to marine ecosystems, for example in the distribution of species and the timing of key life stage events. Local and regional impacts can vary, and some regions are experiencing changes at a much faster rate (for example, in Arctic Waters (OSPAR Region I)). Climate extremes, such as marine heatwaves, storms and waves are also becoming more prevalent.

Human activities and marine ecosystems need to adapt. Coastal and marine environments also offer opportunities for reducing anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (through the production of offshore wind and wave energy), for protecting and restoring natural greenhouse gas sinks (such as blue carbon and sedimentary carbon) and for establishing anthropogenic carbon storage, often referred to as carbon capture and storage. These opportunities need to be fully explored and maximised to support climate action.



## Cross-cutting issues

OSPAR established an [Arctic Outcomes Working Group \(AOWG\)](#) in 2022 to deliver the [OSPAR Commission's 2022-2025 Arctic Outcomes Roadmap](#). This Roadmap sets out the steps considered necessary to support the OSPAR Commission's commitment to protect the Arctic marine environment in the OSPAR Maritime Area. The work of AOWG this year has been focused on identifying relevant sources of scientific information and traditional knowledge on the Arctic marine environment and stakeholder engagement and relationship-building. Based on the information gathered and discussions with stakeholders, AOWG will develop proposals for possible future OSPAR measures and actions to deliver OSPAR's commitment.

Following the publication of the QSR 2023, the [OSPAR Science Agenda](#) – which highlights the science needs and knowledge gaps that require particular attention to achieve OSPAR's objectives – will be updated to guide the implementation of OSPAR's NEAES 2030.

In late 2022 OSPAR joined the International Alliance to Combat Ocean Acidification (OA Alliance) which brings together governments and organisations from across the globe dedicated to taking urgent action to protect coastal communities and livelihoods from the threat of ocean acidification and other climate-ocean impacts.

OSPAR also joined the [Global Ocean Accounts Partnership \(GOAP\)](#). The group aims to build a global community for ocean accounting to ensure the diverse values of the ocean are recognised in all decision-making about social and economic development, and to develop a globally recognised and standardised ocean accounting guidance by 2023.

For more information on OSPAR's work on cross-cutting issues [visit the OSPAR website](#).



## OSPAR data – Pump up the volume!

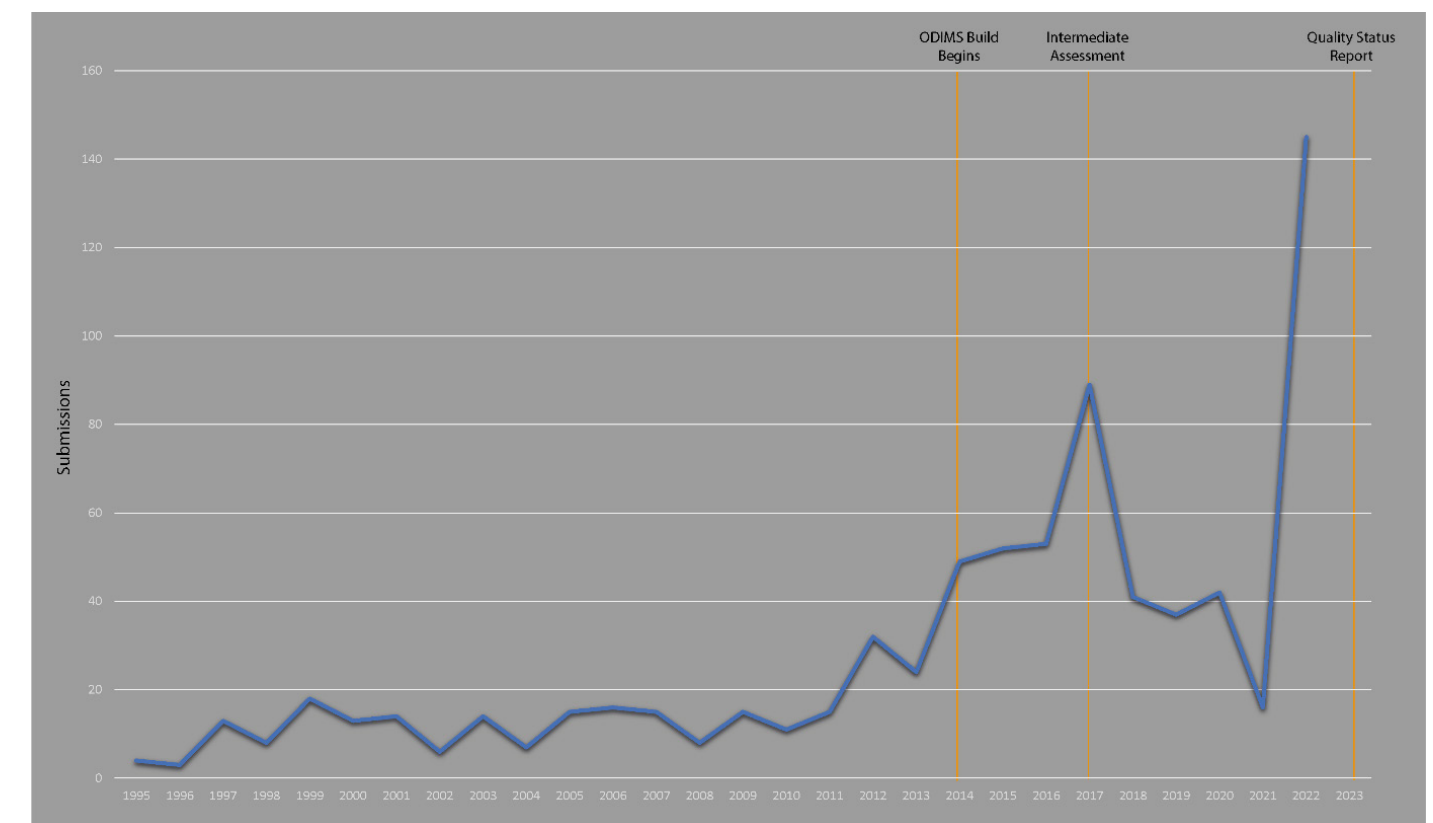
OSPAR prides itself on making the data it relies on publicly available as a free and accessible resource for others to help improve our collective understanding of the state of the ocean and support decisions on its management. Managing the volume of data and ensuring the accuracy of that data is a significant undertaking.

As OSPAR's improves its capacity to assess the status of the marine environment and manage the pressures, existing and new, impacting on it, the volume of data is ramping up. This is especially noticeable in the build up to one of OSPAR's big integrated assessments and the proceeding years.

In a regular OSPAR cycle, there are approximately 24 data calls with up to 288 individual responses. This data will usually be compiled into a single submission for that reporting year alongside the associated metadata and other supporting information that may form part of the submission.

In [OSPAR's Data and Information Management System \(ODIMS\)](#) there are 877 submissions, of which 463 relate to the QSR 2023. This increase in submissions reflects OSPAR's ambition to ensure that as much data as possible that underpins each assessment is made available to all. By way of comparison, there were just 87 submissions for the Intermediate Assessment in 2017. OSPAR will continue to ensure that its data are findable and accessible and improve the findability, accessibility, interoperability and reusability of its data (FAIR principles).

To break it down, there are 5 Committees, the coordination Group, 8 data themes, 41 Datastreams, 746 layers, 877 submissions.





## Biodiversity and ecosystems

OSPAR's Biodiversity and Ecosystems Committee (BDC) held its annual meeting from 17-21 April in Dordrecht, Netherlands. The Committee meeting was chaired by Nina Schröder from Germany. It was an extremely busy year for the Committee, which also met in September to consider proposed updates to the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin (NACES) MPA with a particular focus on extending the conservation objectives of the site. A third meeting of BDC was held in December in Berlin, Germany to finalise assessments on the status of biodiversity in the North-East Atlantic.

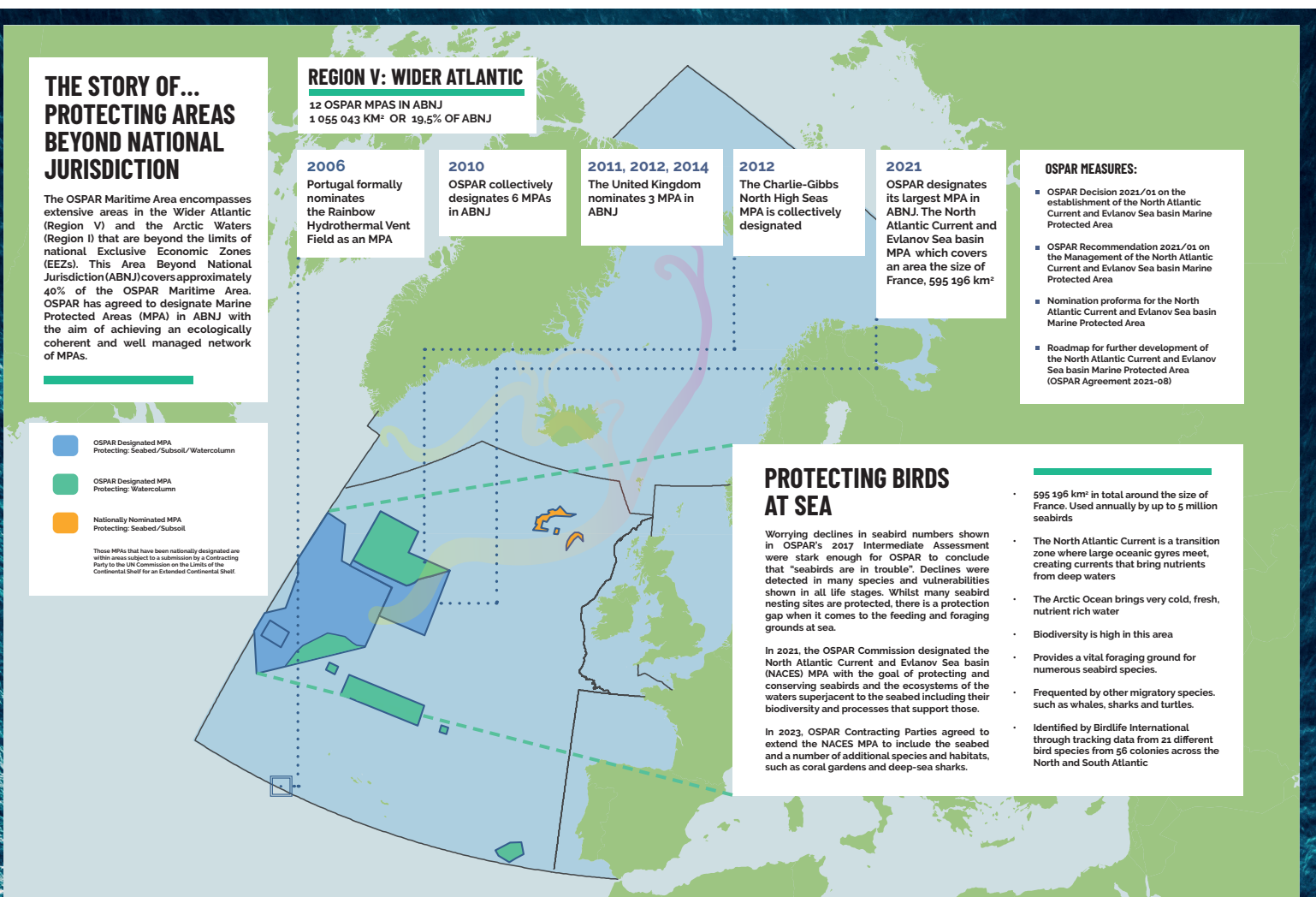
Going forward, BDC has agreed to give greater emphasis to management actions and the development of conservation measures. In support of this several new tasks contributing to the NEAES 2030 were agreed this year. BDC also committed to developing Regional Action Plans (RAP) for key ecosystem components that will identify the most impactful management measures to be taken at a regional scale. The RAP for marine birds has progressed well and specific tasks under the plan are being developed, and BDC has also agreed to embark on the development of a RAP for benthic shelf habitats.

Since the designation of the NACES MPA at the OSPAR Ministerial Meeting in 2021, BDC has been compiling additional scientific information on species and habitats that occur in the middle of the Atlantic. BDC 2023 completed this process and an updated nomination proforma compiling scientific information about the Site was agreed. The updated document has integrated the information and views which were received through a consultation process. BDC's excellent work has led to the extension of the conservation objectives of the Site which now includes many migratory species such as large whales, and deep-sea habitats such as abyssal plains.

## The status of biodiversity in the North-East Atlantic

As its contribution to the QSR 2023, BDC agreed a total of 20 common indicator assessments, 9 pilot assessments and 40 status assessments of features on the [OSPAR List of threatened and/or declining species and habitats \(Agreement 2008-06\)](#). These assessments create a robust scientific knowledge base and show that many species and habitats are still in trouble and are being severely impacted by human activities. Compared to previous assessments the impact signal from climate change has become much stronger - showing, for example, that the main pressure on benthic habitats in Arctic Waters, and pelagic habitats more generally, comes from climate change. New information has been brought together for deep-sea habitats but there are still wide data gaps and the need for coordinated efforts by Contracting Parties in monitoring the status of deep-sea biodiversity is clear.

The development of these assessments is a major achievement by the Committee and has significantly improved our understanding of the status of the marine environment. In total, BDC agreed 7 thematic assessments. These new assessment products structure the information from biodiversity assessments in a way that allows for a quantitative integration of the results, so instead of presenting information for single species, the Committee is now able to provide a clear expression on the status of the broader functional groups of species. The intention is to create a broad knowledge base on the status of ecosystem components, which can form the basis for the implementation of the ecosystem-based approach to management by the OSPAR Commission.



Figures: Status assessments for some of OSPAR's QSR 2023 biodiversity assessments.



## Environmental impacts of human activities

OSPAR's Committee on [Environmental Impacts of Human Activities \(EIHA\)](#) met in Trondheim, Norway on 20-24 March 2023.

Having delivered its contributions for the QSR last year, this meeting provided an opportunity to set the Committee's future direction and priorities in implementing the OSPAR North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES).

EIHA noted the significant progress which had already been made in initiating delivery of OSPAR's second Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter, with 23 out of 25 of the actions having country leads in place. EIHA also adopted an OSPAR threshold value for beach litter, similar to that adopted in the EU, and agreed updated guidelines for the assessment of seafloor litter. The Committee reviewed progress in implementing OSPAR Recommendations on the reduction of plastic pellet loss ([Recommendation 2021/06](#)) and fishing for litter ([Recommendation 2016/01](#)), noting that an OSPAR target to double participation in fishing for litter schemes by 2021 had been met and exceeded.

EIHA discussed the development of two new RAPs, on marine birds and underwater noise. These plans will be important vehicles for implementing the NEAES and identifying where OSPAR can most add value. Stakeholder consultations on both plans are foreseen to take place during 2023.

In relation to OSPAR's "cleans seas" strategic theme, EIHA discussed the issue of ship scrubber management. A report on the [modelling of discharges to the marine environment from open circuit flue gas scrubbers](#) was published in 2022 and EIHA agreed that the next steps would be to develop a background document and Recommendation for consideration at EIHA 2024.

EIHA will continue to assess other new and emerging pressures such as the use of aeroplanes in the launching of satellites and the potential impacts arising from rocket launches and associated debris in the OSPAR Maritime Area.

Perhaps the most significant medium-term change in the marine environment is the rapid expansion of offshore renewable energy. In response to this growing pressure, EIHA 2022 had agreed to establish a new Intersessional Correspondence Group on offshore renewable energy development (ICG-ORED). One priority of that group is to make an assessment of the cumulative effects of offshore wind development on bird populations. As part of that work ICG-ORED has prepared a list of principles to guide the cumulative effects assessment. These were endorsed by EIHA and can be found on the [offshore renewables page of the OSPAR website](#).

Image: EIHA 2023 had a fruitful (and chilly!) meeting in Trondheim (Norway).



## Summary of EIHA QSR 2023 components

EIHA's main contributions to the QSR were to assess the most significant human activities affecting the marine environment and to assess the specific pressures from marine litter and underwater noise.

A series of 11 feeder reports on selected human activities including fisheries, offshore oil and gas (led by OIC), renewables, shipping and recreation and tourism was produced along with assessments of several land-based activities which can affect the marine environment such as agriculture and the production and consumption of plastics. Each feeder report systematically assessed distribution, intensity, trends, economic status, pressures, impacts and measures taken to reduce those pressures and impacts.

Summary results were incorporated into a thematic assessment on human activities. This identified existing, expanding or only partly understood pressures which OSPAR would need to address in its future work. These included pressures from offshore renewables, fishing, deep seabed mining, inputs from agriculture, waste water and aquaculture and shipping. In many cases, it is not clear whether and how activity levels will change in the period to 2030, but the assessment does anticipate increases in aquaculture, renewables and tourism in most Regions.

There are now OSPAR indicator assessments on beach litter, seafloor litter, plastic particles in the stomachs of fulmars, and ingestion of plastic particles in sea turtles. The results from the beach litter assessment in particular point to some encouraging reductions in pressure, although total levels of

The thematic assessment on underwater noise covers both impulsive and continuous noise. Common indicator assessments were made on both the pressure and risks of impacts from impulsive noise. While pressure from continuous noise has not yet been agreed as a full Common Indicator, a complete assessment was produced for the North Sea. While threshold values for underwater noise have not been agreed, OSPAR is committed to reducing noise to levels that do not adversely affect the marine environment.

EIHA also produced assessments on impacts of marine litter on biota, dredged materials and discharges from open circuit flue gas scrubbers on ships.

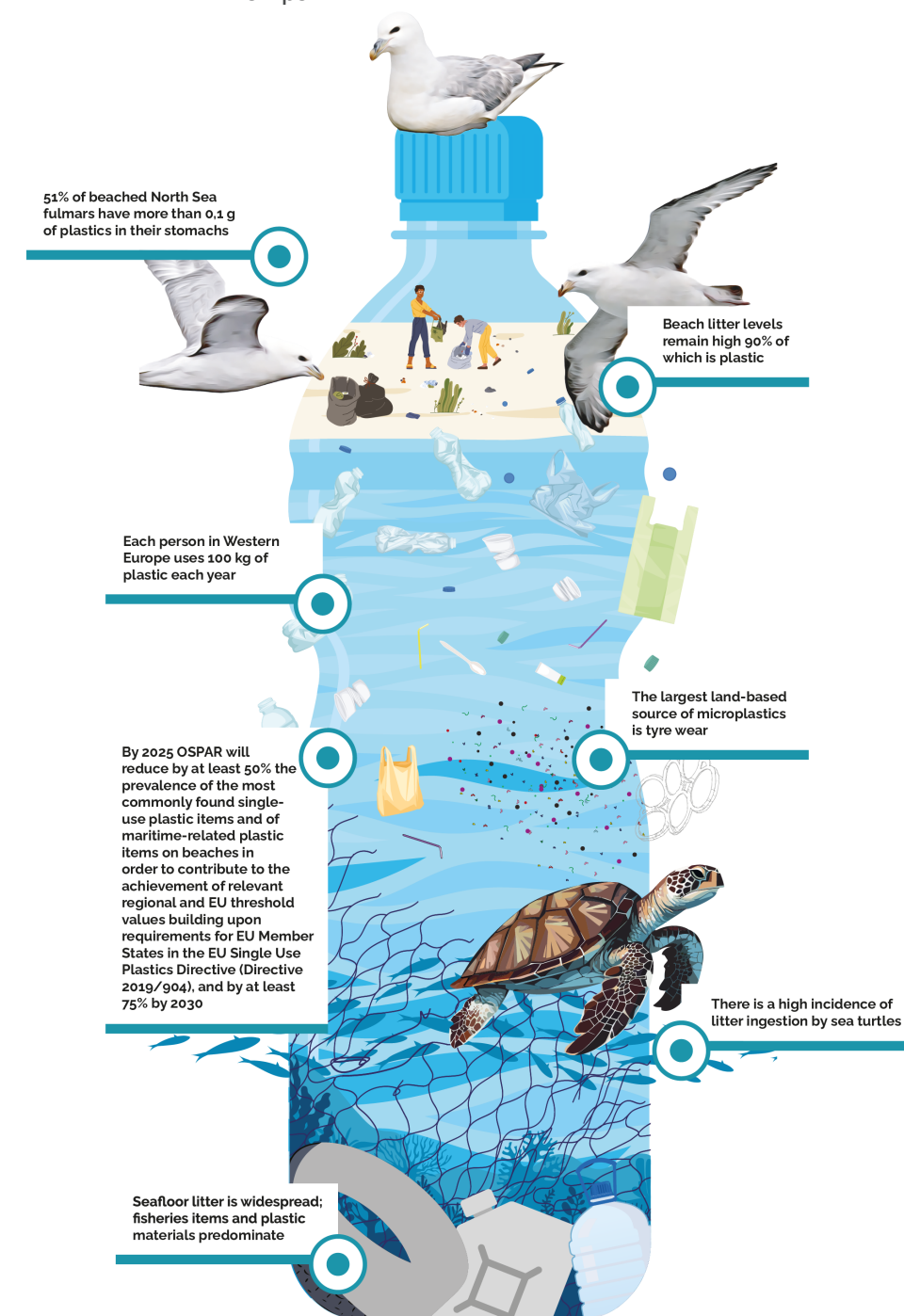


Figure: Highlights from OSPAR's marine litter thematic assessment which was prepared as part of the QSR 2023.



## Hazardous substances and eutrophication

OSPAR's Committee on [Hazardous Substances and Eutrophication \(HASEC\)](#) met in Edinburgh in the United Kingdom from 20-24 March 2023.

HASEC's newest subsidiary group ICG-MaRE, led by Spain, met for the first time to define a work plan to revise existing Recommendations and identify actions to deliver those NEAES operational objectives that fall to HASEC. Good progress was made and steps agreed for PARCOM Recommendation 88/1 on Measures to Reduce Organotin Compounds Reaching the Aquatic Environment through Docking Activities, including collaborating with the European Boating Union on biocide-free antifouling practices for recreational crafts that would support action taken by the IMO in our region. ICG – EMO (led by Germany and the Netherlands) continue the work on [PARCOM Recommendation 88/2 on the Reduction in Inputs of Nutrients](#), with several Contracting Parties contributing model runs to develop dose-response relationships between nutrient concentrations and phytoplankton response which will finally allow OSPAR to develop quantitative nutrient input targets to achieve the eutrophication objectives. [PARCOM Recommendation 93/2 on Further Restrictions on the Discharge of Mercury from Dentistry](#) appears to be covered by other legislation. Preliminary results from the QSR 2023 led HASEC to agree a one-off reporting under [PARCOM Recommendation 94/6 on potentially toxic chemicals from aquaculture](#). As a result of this reporting round HASEC agreed the recommendation will be reactivated. MIME is looking at [PARCOM Recommendation 94/7 on the elaboration of national action plans and best environmental practice \(BEP\) for the reduction of inputs to the environment of pesticides from agricultural use](#) and will also collaborate with other OSPAR Committees on [PARCOM Recommendation 96/4 for the Phasing out of the Use of One-Component Coal Tar Coating Systems for Inland Ships](#).

ICG-List is taking forward work on rationalising OSPAR's "Lists of Chemicals requiring Priority Action" (LCPA) and "List of Substances of Possible Concern" (LSPC) including adding the PFAS substance group to the LCPA.

INPUT has agreed to commence important work to upgrade the Riverine Inputs and Direct Discharges (RID) database in preparation for work to follow-up the nutrient reductions identified by ICG – EMO and ICG - EUT.

In relation to Eutrophication, the need for further collaboration with ICG-COBAM was highlighted to investigate whether plankton abundance and phytoplankton biomass data could be included in COMPEAT. ICG-Eut identified priorities to further develop the Common Procedure and its application in COMPEAT including: inclusion of WFD water bodies in the assessment, establishing an interface for the COMPEAT results to enable easy and transparent access to the assessment results; the role of nutrient concentrations in the eutrophication assessment and where to improve threshold values based on the work of ICG EMO and other considerations by Contracting Parties.

Image: Good progress was made and next steps agreed for: PARCOM Recommendation 88/1 on Measures to Reduce Organotin Compounds Reaching the Aquatic Environment through Docking Activities, including collaborating with the European Boating Union on options for a new recommendation for biocide-free antifouling practices for recreational crafts that would support action taken by the IMO in the North-East Atlantic.

## Assessing eutrophication

### The COMPEAT tool

The [Common Procedure \(COMP\)](#) is a harmonised and comprehensive approach developed by OSPAR Contracting Parties for assessing eutrophication in the North-East Atlantic. It serves the purpose of identifying, classifying, and evaluating eutrophication status, as well as determining the need for remedial measures, the scale of required actions, and assessing the effectiveness of implemented measures. By incorporating the best available scientific knowledge, the Common Procedure reflects OSPAR's utilisation of both regional and risk-based approaches to interpret and assess eutrophication in the North-East Atlantic.

Based on the rules outlined within the Common Procedure, an assessment of eutrophication status is produced by the Common Procedure Eutrophication Assessment Tool (COMPEAT). This automated classification tool is hosted by ICES. Besides an assessment of the eutrophication status and its confidence the tool also allowed an assessment back in time, re-running COMP1 (1990-2000), COMP2 (2001-2006) and COMP3 (2006-2014) and thereby delineating the history of eutrophication from 1990 until today in the Greater North Sea, Irish Sea and Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast. The use of COMPEAT coupled with the refining of specific small-scale assessment areas has led to an objective assessment of status which has a common scientific basis across the whole of the North-East Atlantic. Assessment areas which were initially developed by JMP-EUNOSAT and refined by ICG-EMO, were defined by oceanographic criteria rather than international boundaries and are therefore consistent across international boundaries, in contrast to previous assessments.



Image: Satellite image showing eutrophication in the Skagerrak and Kattegat. Courtesy of NASA

### Eutrophication assessment result for the COMP4 period 2015-2020

All three Common Indicators on winter nutrient concentrations, chlorophyll-a concentrations and seafloor dissolved oxygen have been integrated to the overall eutrophication assessment result. The results show that the assessment areas in moderate or worse status were mainly detected in the south-eastern North Sea and in larger river plumes from the Gironde to Denmark and the Kattegat.

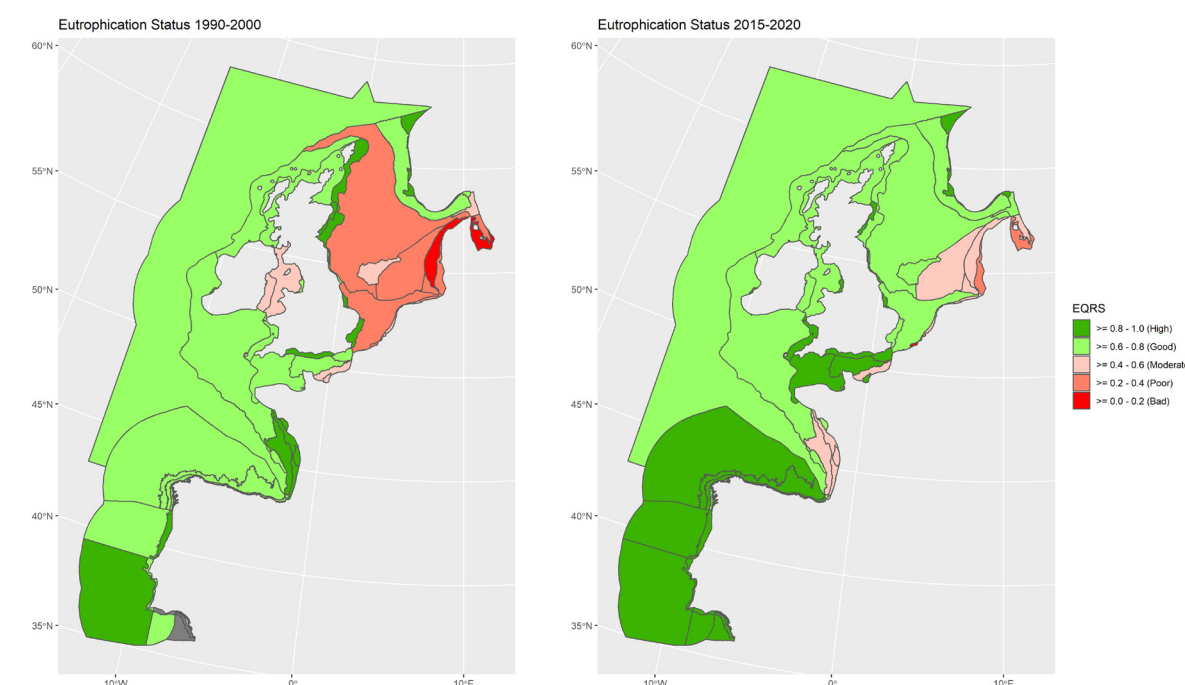


Figure: Eutrophication status 1990-2000 (left) and 2015-2020 (right)





## Offshore industry

OSPAR's [Offshore Industry Committee \(OIC\)](#) met in Berlin, Germany, from 7-10 March 2023 and focused on the implementation of the NEAES 2030 including tasks related to produced water, offshore chemicals, plastic and microplastics, and decommissioning issues. The meeting was chaired by Saravanan Marappan (United Kingdom).

OIC updated the 2021 Inventory of Offshore Installations and agreed on the 2021 Discharges, Spills and Emissions from Offshore Installations report. The Expert Assessment Panel reported progress on amending the Reporting Format for the Inventory of Offshore Installations to solve some reporting inconsistencies. Providing accurate data is essential as this information is used by other OSPAR subsidiary bodies and other organisations for various purposes.

The Intersessional Correspondence Group to harmonise OSPAR's approach to offshore chemicals and the [REACH Regulation](#) presented an integrated approach for progressing the work further. The ICG REACH was reconvened to continue its work. The meeting also agreed to create a separate Agreement on the Harmonised Offshore Chemical Notification Format (HOCNF) ([OSPAR Agreement 2012-05](#)) keeping the reporting obligation under [OSPAR Recommendation 2010/3](#).

[OSPAR Decision 2000/2 on a Harmonised Mandatory Control System for the use and reduction of the discharge of offshore chemicals](#) was amended to extend the scope of the activities covered by the Decision to include decommissioning activities in addition to exploration and production activities.

Reports on existing and proposed [carbon dioxide storage projects](#) within the OSPAR Maritime Area were presented and OIC will continue focusing on the monitoring techniques and the effectiveness of OSPAR measures to ensure that carbon dioxide streams are retained permanently in geological formations.

Saravanan Marappan (United Kingdom) was thanked for chairing OIC during the last seven years. His neutral position, his diplomacy and his knowledge of the OSPAR Convention and measures were recognised throughout the OSPAR Community. Robert Dörband (Germany) was elected as vice-Chair.

Other OIC delegates were thanked for their contribution to the group: Andrew Taylor (United Kingdom) as Convenor of the Expert Assessment Panel, Mikael Palme Malinovsky (Denmark) as Vice-Chair and Hans-Peter Damian (Germany).



Image: Saravanan Marappan (United Kingdom) was thanked for chairing OIC during the last seven years. Saravanan Marappan (United Kingdom).

## Decommissioning

The NEAES 2030 includes a number of tasks on decommissioning. The dumping, and leaving wholly or partly in place, of disused offshore installations within the OSPAR maritime area is prohibited under [OSPAR Decision 98/3 on the Disposal of Disused Offshore Installations](#). However, following an assessment, the competent authority of the relevant Contracting Party may give permission to an operator to leave installations or parts of installations in place in certain cases. The assessment needs to be undertaken in accordance with Annex 2 of OSPAR Decision 98/3 and show that there are significant reasons why the proposal to leave installations or parts of installations in place is preferable to reuse or recycling or final disposal on land.

An online Kick-off Workshop was organised in September 2022 to consider the decommissioning tasks and discussions followed at OIC.

OIC discussed the derogation categories in Annex 1 of OSPAR Decision 98/3 including steel jackets, Concrete Gravity Based Structures (CGBS), concrete floating structures/anchor blocks, well conductors, external steelwork and floating pipeline bundles. It was agreed that CGBS cell contents are not part of the derogation categories.

OIC is working on an approach to promote the advancement of decommissioning technologies and there is general support to prioritise the steel jacket study on lifting capabilities of technologies with respect to the removal of large structures from the seabed.

Regarding the development of a Harmonised Comparative Assessment Methodology to support the assessment as required under Annex 2 of OSPAR Decision 98/3, a staged Comparative Evaluation process, initially focussing solely on the reasons why the OSPAR Decision 98/3 preferred option of full removal may not be deliverable, is the basis being worked upon. Any new guidelines or changes should avoid interfering with existing National Regulations and any derogation consultation submission to OSPAR Contracting Parties will need to be supported by more detailed evidence and reasoning.

Image: BP Eastern Trough Area Project north sea platform. Courtesy of Crown Copyright.





## Radioactive substances

OSPAR's [Radioactive Substances Committee \(RSC\)](#) met in Oslo at the kind invitation of Norway on 7-10 February 2023. Adam Stackhouse (United Kingdom) chaired the meeting supported by the vice-Chairs, Carol Robinson (Norway) and Anki Hagg (Sweden).

The meeting focused on the implementation of tasks from the NEAES 2030; the promotion of RSC indicators to OSPAR Common Indicator status; the finalisation of the QSR 2023; and the improvement of the peer review mechanism for the Best Available Techniques (BAT) reports.

RSC decided that the Intersessional Correspondence Group to consider the assessment methodologies required to evaluate progress against NEAES 2030 (ICG-RAM) will continue developing OSPAR indicators related to radioactive substances including: discharges of radionuclides from the nuclear sector; discharges of radionuclides from the non-nuclear sector; environmental concentrations of artificial radionuclides; and environmental concentrations of naturally occurring radionuclides.

In accordance with its Terms of Reference, the Expert Assessment Panel (EAP) presented the 2021 OSPAR Annual Report and Assessment on Liquid Discharges from Nuclear Installations and the 2021 OSPAR Annual Report on Discharges from Non-nuclear Sectors. Data exchange on discharges with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was discussed.

[Norway](#) and the [United Kingdom](#) presented their 8th round implementation reports of the Best Available Techniques (BAT) / Best Environmental Practice (BEP) on Radioactive Discharges under [OSPAR Recommendation 2018/01](#). RSC discussed a proposal on a formal evaluation of BAT reports by the Expert Assessment Panel (EAP) to strengthen the auditable scrutiny of the process; this will be tested in 2025.

Two new intersessional correspondence groups were established to address the NEAES tasks on types and losses of radioactive substances (ICG-Loss) and on obstacles to further reductions in environmental concentrations (ICG-ORC).

Image: RSC 2024 met in the beautiful Holmenkollen (Norway) on the outskirts of Oslo.

The work under GESAMP WG 45 on Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Related Impacts on Contaminants in the Ocean was followed by RSC as part of the NEAES task that looks into the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on sources, behaviour and fate of radionuclides.

RSC identified a preliminary list of research needs for inclusion in the OSPAR Science Agenda.

RSC agreed to present its work contributing to the Quality Status Report 2023 at the International Conference on the Safety of Radioactive Waste Management, Decommissioning, and Environmental Protection and Remediation: Ensuring Safety and Enabling Sustainability in Vienna in November 2023.



## ICG-RAM

An Intersessional Correspondence Group to consider the assessment methodologies for discharges and environmental concentrations of radionuclides ([ICG-RAM](#)) was established in 2022 and reconvened in 2023. The ICG builds on the experiences and successes of producing the [5th Periodic Evaluation](#) under the QSR 2023 to improve the process and quality of its routine assessments. New methodologies will be established to evaluate progress against the NEAES 2030 and OSPAR indicators will be defined to provide a structured approach to decision making and facilitate RSC's contribution to OSPAR assessments.

The ICG is co-convened by France and the United Kingdom. ICG-RAM met virtually on several occasions during the 22-23 intersessional period and exchanged experiences with the Chair of MIME (Monitoring & on Trends and Effects of Substances in the Marine Environment) on defining OSPAR indicators.

The NEAES Strategic Objective S3.O1 states that on an ongoing basis OSPAR will further prevent, progressively reduce or, where that is not practicable, minimise discharges of radioactive substances through the application of Best Available Techniques (BAT), taking into account technical feasibility, radiological impact and legitimate uses of the sea. The ICG-RAM considers that prevention and progressive reductions might not be practicable and therefore the absence of a continued downward trend in discharges should not be seen as a failure. The ICG-RAM recommends assessing changes in magnitudes of discharges while considering the evolution of the number and status of nuclear facilities. The application of BAT shall continue as a powerful tool not only to minimise discharges but also to prevent and reduce them.

The NEAES Strategic Objective S3.O2 states that by 2025 OSPAR will identify and consider any obstacles in achieving further reductions in environmental concentrations of radioactive substances in the marine environment and examine possible solutions where appropriate. The ICG-RAM recommends using the concentration targets Close to Zero and near background as aspirational aims and the statistical analysis carried out in the 5th Periodic Evaluation which determined if magnitudes had changed. The ICG has developed a questionnaire on Minimum Detectable Activities (MDA) for harmonisation.

RSC 2023 agreed defining OSPAR indicators for discharges of radionuclides from the nuclear sector; discharges of radionuclides from the non-nuclear sector; environmental concentrations of artificial radionuclides; and environmental concentrations of naturally occurring radionuclides. The ICG-RAM will continue developing the draft specifications agreed by RSC 2023 for these OSPAR indicators.



## NEAES 2030 Implementation Plan

In 2021 OSPAR Ministers agreed the [NEAES 2030](#). This sets out OSPAR's vision for a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification. It is supported by twelve strategic objectives and fifty-four operational objectives, including quantified targets and deadlines.

Delivery is managed through an Implementation Plan which specifies and monitors all the tasks being undertaken by OSPAR subsidiary bodies in support of the NEAES. Importantly, tasks are only entered into the Plan where they have a lead in place. The Secretariat is responsible for providing an annual management report so that progress in implementing the NEAES 2030 can be reviewed and action taken where necessary.

The 2023 management report reviewed progress against the 81 tasks which were included in the 2022 Plan. Seven tasks have now been completed, of which five were completed within the reporting period. 61% of tasks are on track and 81% of tasks are fully resourced.

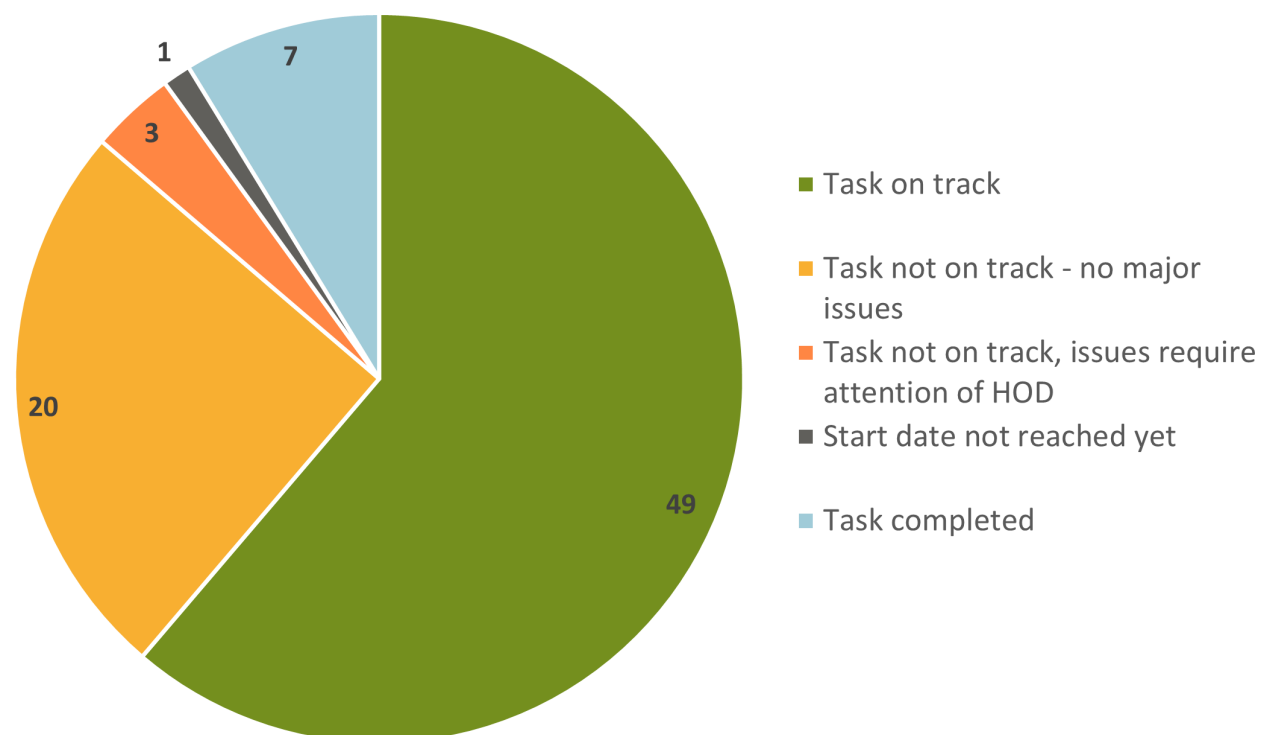
Following the 2023 meeting of the OSPAR Commission a number of new tasks have been added to the Implementation Plan.

A review of the sufficiency of tasks to implement the NEAES was conducted during the spring 2023 meeting cycle. This found that nearly two thirds of operational objectives should be mostly or fully implemented by the tasks which are in place or have been agreed at OSPAR 2023. Further tasks will continue to be defined during the 2023/24 meeting cycle, or are waiting for national leads to be found before they can be added into the Plan.

### Of the 80 approved tasks reviewed at the 2023 OSPAR Commission meeting:

- **7 (9%) have already been completed;**
- **49 (61%) were on track;**
- **20 (25%) were not on track but with no major issues;**
- **3 (4%) were not on track due to lack of resources and were flagged “red” for the attention of the OSPAR Heads of Delegation (HOD); and**
- **1 (1%) had not reached its start date.**

Task Progress



## Engagement with United Nations bodies

### United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

The Secretariat has continued to contribute to the initiative of the Espoo Convention to identify synergies and possible future cooperation activities with interested regional seas conventions and bodies with respect to SEA and transboundary EIA.

### United Nations Environment Programme

WG MIME and HASEC further strengthened the collaboration through effective actions and exchanges on hazardous substances with neighbouring regional seas, highlighting the participation of representatives of AMAP, HELCOM and UNEP-MAP representatives in OSPAR meetings, and the OSPAR Deputy Secretary, Chairs and Co-Convenors in AMAP, HELCOM and UNEP Regional Seas meetings. Overall, all parties agreed to further strengthen collaboration with all neighbouring Regional Seas Conventions at the Minamata Convention meeting 21-25 March.

### Convention on Biological Diversity

Following the Executive Secretary's attendance at the CBD organised Sustainable Ocean Initiative (SOI) meeting in October 2022, the Secretariat participated in the webinar that was organised by the CBD on 16 February 2023 and which introduced the Busan Outcome, the outcome of the 3rd meeting of the SOI Global Dialogue with Regional Seas Organizations and Regional Fishery Bodies.

### BBNJ negotiations

The OSPAR Secretariat attended the final round of negotiations for the legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ ICG 5.2) in New York, USA, between 20 February and 4 March 2023. This allowed the Secretariat to provide support to Contracting Parties on issues related to OSPAR and network with other relevant international and regional organisations present at the meeting. Key issues for OSPAR were to understand how the instrument will impact existing regional bodies and their mandates, and in relation to cooperation with other competent bodies. Details on how our existing MPAs in ABNJ will be recognised will still need to be clarified at future meetings of the Conference of the Parties.

### Regional Seas Conventions

#### Helsinki Commission

The OSPAR and HELCOM Hazardous Substances and Eutrophication Groups continued to collaborate during the MIME 2022 meeting in November 2022 in Aveiro (Portugal) and the HELCOM Expert Group on Hazardous Substances hosted by Germany on 7-8 February 2023.

To make a more efficient use of funding the Secretariats are evaluating options for joint work with respect to Copernicus, EMEP and ICES, assessing the possibility of joint requirements that are useful for all Contracting Parties in both regions.

The collaboration with HELCOM also extends to the WG INPUT and the intersessional activities of the Eutrophication Modelling Group.

The OSPAR/HELCOM/ICES Joint working group on seabirds continue implementing their 3-year work programme. A meeting is foreseen in autumn 2023.

The OSPAR/HELCOM Expert Working group on NIS continue implementing their 3-year work programme. A meeting is foreseen in autumn 2023.

#### Barcelona Convention

The Secretariat of the Mediterranean Action Plan joined MIME 2022 and provided an update on the progress towards the preparation of the 2023 Mediterranean Quality Status Report. OSPAR and Mediterranean experts further discussed the goal to achieve BAC and EAC or the distance from the threshold.

The OSPAR Secretariat participated online in the Fifth Meeting of the Mediterranean Network of Law Enforcement Officials relating to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL) within the framework of the Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean ("the Barcelona Convention") (MENELAS) which was held in Floriana, Malta, on 22-23 February 2023 and gave an update on the work of the NSN.



## Engagement with other international organisations

### Arctic Council

As part of the work under the Arctic Outcomes Working Group (AOWG), two letters signed by the OSPAR Chair were to Mr Morten Høglund, Senior Arctic Official (SAO) for Norway who took over as Chair of the Arctic Council in May 2023. These letters provided an update on the work of the AOWG, encouraged continued cooperation and collaboration between the two organisations, and extended an invitation for him to attend the OSPAR Commission meeting in June 2023 in Oslo, Norway, as well as the AOWG Workshop. The Executive Secretary has participated in two online briefings to inform and prepare collaborating organisations to the Norway Chairship of the Arctic Council.

Under the collaboration with the Arctic Council, the Chair of the Radiation Expert Group (RAD EG) of the Arctic Council EPPR WG (Emergency, Prevention, Preparedness and Response) was invited to give a presentation at RSC but finally it was not possible. The collaboration is expected to resume under Norway's Chairship of the Arctic Council.

The Secretariat continues the collaboration with the Working Group of the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme on the assessment of eutrophication, hazardous substances, their biological effects, and other indicators for clean seas. There is good engagement with the AMAP Secretariat on MIME related issues. The AMAP and OSPAR Secretariats have ensured that the assessments that were produced by OSPAR and AMAP are consistent for shared areas.

### Bonn Agreement

The Secretariat updated the related OSPAR Committees and subsidiary bodies on the main outcomes of Bonn 2022 and the meeting of the Working Group on Operational, Technical and Scientific Questions (OTSOPA). Relevant issues were considered by HASEC, OIC and NSN. OTSOPA 2022 agreed to support OIC and NSN on their tasks related to produced water discharges from offshore installations and the update of the North Sea Manual of Maritime Pollution Offences respectively. In addition, OTSOPA is supporting NSN in the organisation of the Seminar on Maritime Environmental Crimes which will be held on 29-30 November 2023 in Brussels, Belgium.

### Collective arrangement

The sixth Collective Arrangement meeting took place on 7-8 June 2023 at the OSPAR Secretariat in London, UK. The meeting was organised by OSPAR and NEAFC Secretariats and attended by several Contracting Parties, as well as representatives from NAFO, ISA, UNEP, FAO, ICCAT, ICES, EEA, the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, and the iAtlantic and GOBI projects.

### North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission

The OSPAR Secretariat attended the online meeting of PECMAS 14-15 March 2023. The NACES MPA Roadmap process was presented briefly, and the Secretariat thanked NEAFC for their input to the consultation process. The meeting exchanged views on topics for future discussion on the collective arrangement (as reflected on the draft agenda of the 6th meeting of CollArr). PECMAS discussed impacts of climate change on fisheries with several strands of ongoing work, this was identified as a topic for potential future exchange with OSPAR.

## Engagement with other international organisations

### European Union

The OSPAR Secretariat attended the Regional Workshop Series – North Sea and Baltic Sea of the European Partnership for a climate neutral, sustainable, and productive Blue Economy (SBEP) organised by the EU on 19 January 2023 in Berlin (Germany). SBEP is a partnership under Horizon Europe that aims to unite research and innovation efforts to aid the transition to a sustainable blue economy. At this meeting, the Secretariat was invited to present OSPAR's work on the Science Agenda, OSPAR's links to the four SBEP pillars and how OSPAR can contribute to the SBEP.

The OSPAR Secretariat also attended the Zero Pollution Stakeholder Conference that took place in Brussels (Belgium) on 14 December 2022. The event focused on the first Zero Pollution Monitoring and Outlook, with high-level discussions in the morning and parallel 'deep dives' in the afternoon.

The Secretariat joined the advisory board for the launch of the Blueprint for Atlantic-Arctic Agora On Cross-Sectoral Cooperation For Restoration Of Marine And Coastal Ecosystems And Increased Climate Resilience Through Transformative Innovation (A-AAGORA) in Aveiro (Portugal) in December 2022. A-AAGORA supports the ambitious targets set in the European Commission Mission and NEAES 2030 to "restore our ocean and waters by 2030" through the protection and restoration of marine and coastal ecosystems to boost resilience to climate change and mitigate its impacts. The Secretariat also joined the JERICO-Research Infrastructure 2023 that took place in Rovinj (Croatia) in April 2023. The JERICO-S3 project targets a science integrative approach to better observe the coastal ecosystem supporting the Joint European Research Infrastructure for Coastal Observatories (JERICO-RI). It aims to provide a state-of-the-art, fit-for-purpose and visionary observational RI, expertise and high-quality data on European coastal and shelf seas, supporting world-class research, high-impact innovation and a window of European excellence worldwide.

The Secretariat attended and presented at a workshop organised by the North Sea Advisory Council on 3 May 2023 to consider marine spatial planning and stakeholder engagement in the North Sea. The meeting considered solutions on co-existence of offshore wind farm developments and fishing activities.

### Inter-Secretariat meeting between Regional Agreement Secretariats, the European Commission and EMSA

The 19th Inter-Secretariat meeting between Regional Agreement Secretariats, the European Commission and EMSA was held in London on 31 January-1 February 2023 to exchange information and best practices in marine pollution prevention, preparedness, and response across the European regional seas. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Barcelona Convention / REMPEC, the Bonn Agreement/OSPAR Secretariat, the Black Sea Commission Secretariat, the Copenhagen Agreement Secretariat, the EPPR working group of the Arctic Council, the HELCOM Secretariat, the Lisbon Agreement, OTSOPA and HELCOM Response groups, the European Commission services (DG ECHO, DG MOVE, DG ENV, JRC) and EMSA.

The Regional Agreements presented their relevant activities. The OSPAR Secretariat gave an update on the NEAES 2030 and the QSR 2023. The European Commission gave an update on the Port Reception Facilities Directive, the revision of the Ship Source Pollution Directive, the work on significant acute pollution events under the MSFD, the MSFD Revision and the Zero Pollution Action Plan. EMSA introduced their activities and services, and studies on alternative fuels.

OSPAR informed the Inter-Secretariat meeting about the joint NSN-OTSOPA Seminar on Maritime Environmental Crimes which will be held on 29-30 November 2023 in Brussels, Belgium. Invitations will be sent to the Inter-Secretariat participants to have representation from the regional sea agreements.



## OSPAR participation at international events

### Arctic Future Symposium

The OSPAR Secretariat attended the Arctic Future Symposium, which took place in Brussels from 29 November to 1 December 2022. This is a multinational, multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder conference on the Arctic that is organised annually by the International Polar Foundation and its partners. It brings together local and national policymakers, Arctic indigenous peoples, natural and social scientists, academics, and representatives of industries operating in or with interests in the Arctic. This event was important in the context of OSPAR's work on the Arctic through the Arctic Outcomes Working Group (AOWG) and provided an important setting for networking and linking to researchers, policymakers, and Arctic communities.

### OSPAR memberships

It was agreed at OSPAR 2022 that the OSPAR Commission would become a member of the OA Alliance. The letter of commitment signed by the OSPAR Chair to officially join the OA Alliance was sent on 21 November 2022. OSPAR is also involved in an event organised by the OA Alliance that will take place on the margins of the European Maritime Day on 24 May 2023 in Brest, France. This event 'Exploring Marine Management and Policy Response to Ocean Acidification' will notably highlight OSPAR's recently published QSR Assessment on Ocean Acidification.

OSPAR's membership with the Global Ocean Accounts Partnership (GOAP) was confirmed in January 2023.

The OSPAR Ministerial Meeting (Cascais, 2021) agreed that OSPAR should support international initiatives to improve the management of chemicals and wastes globally such as the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) as a global multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder policy framework, whose Secretariat is hosted by UN Environment Programme. SAICM mandate ended in 2020 although the intersessional process continues to prepare recommendations and the sound management of chemicals and waste until 2030.





## OSPAR other Agreements agreed in 2023

### Cross-cutting

Agreement 2000-14: Staff Regulations. Update

Agreement 2013-02: Rules of Procedure. Update

Agreement 2014-09: Collective arrangement. Update

Agreement 2022-02: Terms of Reference of Committees. Update (Agreement 2014-02: Joint Assessment and Monitoring Programme

Agreement 2016-01: Coordinated Environmental Monitoring Programme.

Agreement 2023-0x: CEMP Guideline - Cumulative effects assessment for the QSR 2023 (Bow Tie Analysis)

### Biodiversity Committee

Agreement 2017-09: CEMP Guidelines – BH3a/BH3b. Update

Agreement 2018-06: CEMP Guidelines BH2, BH2a/ BH2b. Update

Agreement 2018-07: CEMP Guidelines – PH1/FW5. Update

Agreement 2018-08: CEMP Guidelines – FW4. Update

Agreement 2019-06: CEMP Guidelines – PH2. Update

Agreement 2019-07: CEMP Guidelines – PH3. Update

Agreement 2023-0x: CEMP Guidelines – BH1 – Sharepoint

Agreement 2023-0x: CEMP Guideline – MPA assessment calculation methodology

Agreement 2023-0x: CEMP Guideline – Integration methodology Marine Birds – sharepoint

Agreement 2023-0x: CEMP Guideline – Integration methodology Marine Mammals - sharepoint

Agreement 2023-0x: CEMP Guideline – Integration methodology Fish - sharepoint

Agreement 2023-0x: CEMP Guideline – Integration methodology Pelagic habitats

### Biodiversity Committee and Environmental Impacts of Human Activities Committee

Agreement 2019-05: Status assessment guidance. Update

### Environmental Impacts of Human Activities Committee

Agreement 2023-0x: Reporting format for encounters with munitions

Agreement 2017-06: CEMP Guidelines – seafloor litter. Update

### Hazardous Substances and Eutrophication Committee

Agreement 2004-12: List of chemicals for priority action (LCPA). Update

Agreement 2002-17: List of substances of possible concern (LSPC). The List will be moved to be an annex of the LCPA

### Offshore Industry Committee

Agreement 2002-06: Common interpretation on which chemicals are covered and not covered by the HMCS. Update

Agreement 2023-0x: Harmonised offshore chemical notification format

Agreement 2012-05: HOCNF guidelines. Update

## OSPAR publications 2023

OSPAR publications are prepared by committees and then agreed for publication at the annual meeting of the OSPAR Commission. These include background documents, scoping studies, and implementation reports. The list also includes assessments which are made available through [OSPAR's Assessment Portal](#) so that embedded, interactive maps and charts can be used. All of these are discoverable through the [OSPAR website](#).

## Data to be published via the OSPAR Data and Information Management System

### Biodiversity Committee

Threatened and/or declining habitats occurrence (2018-2022 data)

### Environmental Impacts of Human Activities Committee

Encounters with Conventional and Chemical Munitions (2021 data)

Dumping and Placement of Wastes and Other Matters at Sea (2021 data)

Fishing for Litter (2021 data)

Impulsive Underwater Noise (2021 data)

Seabed Litter (2021 data)

Plastic Particles in Fulmar Stomachs (2021 data)

Offshore Renewable Energy Developments (2022 data)

Marine Litter Beach Monitoring Data (2021 data)

### Hazardous Substances and Eutrophication Committee

Annual “roll-over” assessment data files (2022 data)

Riverine Inputs and Direct Discharges word reports and data files (2022 data)

### Offshore Industry Committee

Discharges, spills and emissions from offshore oil and gas installations (2021 data)

Amended version of the Inventory of Offshore Installations 2021

### Radioactive Substances Committee

Nuclear discharges (2021 data)

Non-nuclear sectors (2021 data)

Environmental concentrations (2021 data)



**Our vision is a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.**

### **OSPAR Publication 964/2023**

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