

THE OSPAR REGIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR MARINE BIRDS



OSPAR's Regional Action Plan for Marine Birds in the North-East Atlantic (2024 – 2030)

(OSPAR Agreement 2024-09)

OSPAR is the mechanism by which 15 Governments & the EU cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic.

The fifteen Governments are Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

This OSPAR Action Plan identifies the most important protection and conservation actions to be implemented on a regional scale for the recovery of marine birds within the North-East Atlantic.

The Action Plan will support the achievement of the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 to achieve biologically diverse and healthy seas and addresses appropriate actions to prevent or reduce pressures to halt the decline of marine birds.

Contents

Introduction	5
Why are marine birds in trouble in the OSPAR Maritime Area?.....	6
OSPAR's response	8
OSPAR's North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 (NEAES 2030)	8
Objectives and scope	10
Objectives of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Birds (RAP-Bird).....	10
Scope of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Birds (RAP-Bird)	12
OSPAR's contribution to international efforts for the protection of marine birds.....	12
Monitoring and Assessment	13
Development of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Birds (RAP-Bird).....	15
Actions	16
Theme A: Threatened and Declining Species	16
Action A1 (Recommendations 2011/01-07, 2013/12, 2014/16)	16
Theme B: Cross-cutting.....	17
Enhanced measures for marine birds	17
Action B1 (Task S5.O4.T4) Enhanced implementation of OSPAR Recommendation 2010/5 on environmental impact assessment	17
Identification of important sites	17
Action B2 (Task number TBC): Identification of important bird (foraging) areas within the OSPAR maritime area and of breeding sites adjacent to the OSPAR area.	17
Flyways scale conservation.....	18
Action B3 (Task S5.O4.T5): Flyways scale conservation.....	18
Monitoring and assessment.....	19
Action B4 (Task number TBC) Integrated monitoring and assessment of marine bird population status and condition.....	19
Theme C: Reduction of pressures & impacts.....	19
Marine bird ecology and ecosystem-based management.....	19
Action C1 (Task number TBC) Research and associated modelling on marine birds and their trophic interactions to inform best practice in ecosystem-based management.	19
Reduction of bycatch	20

Action C2 (Recommendation 2024/02)	20
Offshore wind mitigation/compensation measures	20
Action C3 (Task S5.O4.T6) Best practice for mitigation/compensation measures for Offshore Wind developments	20
Reducing the impact of mammalian predators	20
Action C4 (S5.O4.T7) OSPAR-wide co-ordinated measures to protect breeding colonies from invasive predatory mammals and to restore, where practicable, safe nesting habitat.	21
Climate Change Adaptation for Marine Birds	21
Action C5 (Task number TBC): Strengthening resilience of bird populations in the face of climate change	21
Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (“bird flu”)	21
Action C6 (Task number TBC): Monitoring and response to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza and other emerging diseases	21
How well do the Actions address threats to marine birds in the OSPAR Area?	22
Implementation and reporting	24
ANNEX 1– ACTION OVERVIEW TABLE	26

Introduction

The North-East Atlantic provides a home for millions of marine birds. Its islands provide safe nesting sites for seabirds that spend the rest of their lives out at sea; its shores and estuaries provide vital winter-feeding areas for Arctic-nesting waders and wildfowl and its seas provide food. However, many marine bird species in the OSPAR Maritime Area continue to be in trouble. OSPAR's Quality Status Report 2023 (QSR 2023) assessments showed that most marine birds are not in good status. Since the 2017 Intermediate Assessment issued a warning about the status of marine birds, the broader picture across the OSPAR Maritime Area has not improved. Most marine birds were already not in good status during the QSR 2010 assessment, but additional deterioration has been observed for many species since then.

Marine birds in the North-East Atlantic include seabirds that spend most of their lives at sea (petrels and shearwaters (*Procellariiformes*); gannets and cormorants (*Suliformes*); skuas, gulls, terns and auks (*Charadriiformes*)) and waterbirds that mostly inhabit intertidal areas or inshore areas close by (waders, ducks, geese, swans, grebes and divers). As part of the QSR 2023, a thematic assessment of marine birds in the OSPAR Maritime Area was produced. The assessment concluded that many species of marine bird were not in a good status, with widespread declines in breeding productivity and population abundance observed in all the assessed OSPAR Regions. Most marine birds were not in good status in 2017 (at the time of the OSPAR Intermediate Assessment) but additional deterioration in status has been observed during the assessment period for the QSR 2023 (figure 1).

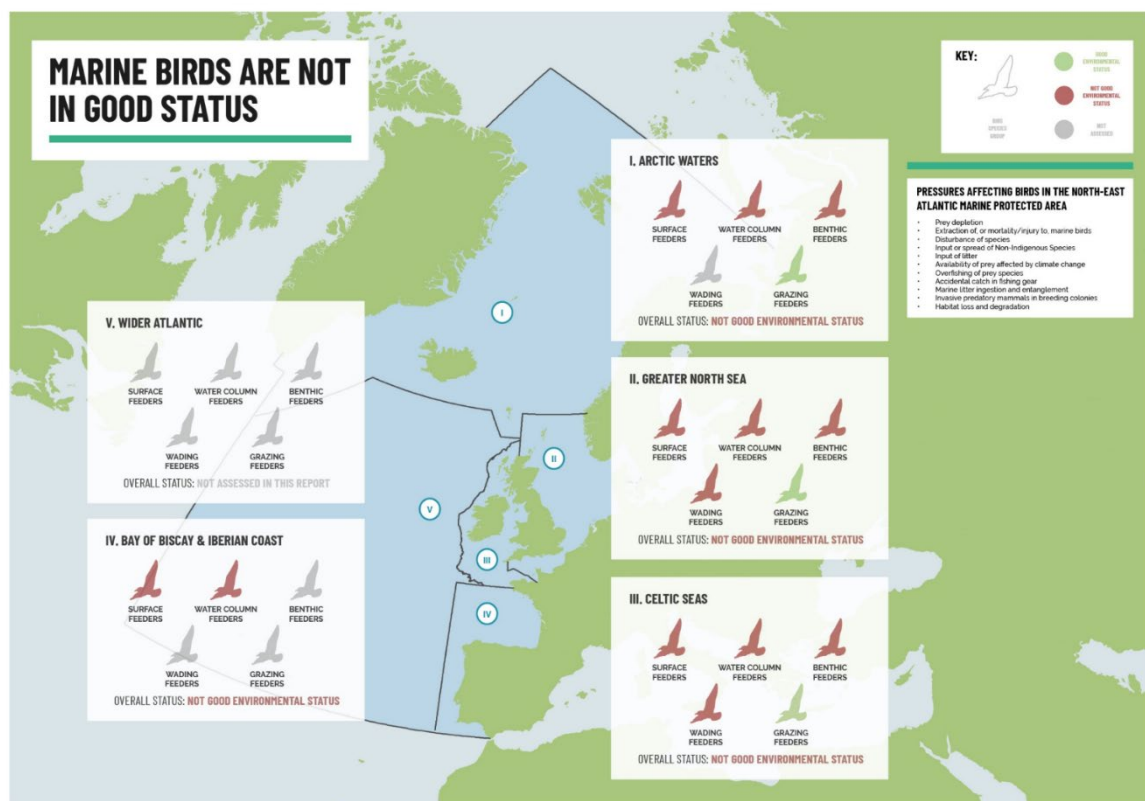


Figure 1: Integrated status (breeding abundance and productivity) of marine birds in the different regions of the OSPAR Maritime Area (QSR 2023).

The decline of marine bird populations will adversely affect the ecosystem services they provide, primarily by leading to imbalances in the food web. Healthy bird populations also contribute to the natural seascape and play a key role in ecotourism and the maintenance and enhancement of related economic activity. Their decline is therefore likely to impact other services including benefits to recreation, education, science and research, spiritual, artistic and symbolism, visual amenities and ecosystem species appreciation.

This Regional Action Plan for Marine Birds in the North-East Atlantic (RAP-Bird), will build upon the evidence provided by QSR 2023 to recommend action to reduce and eliminate, where possible, the main pressures and activities impacting marine birds. RAP-Bird will be one of the key instruments to achieve OSPAR's goal of recovery of marine birds.

Why are marine birds in trouble in the OSPAR Maritime Area?

The QSR 2023 concluded that climate change is a major cause of marine bird declines, mainly via changes to their food supply. Most marine birds are predators. They feed on invertebrates living within or on top of the seabed or on fish and plankton within the water column above. The size and condition of bird populations is therefore dependent on the size and condition of prey populations. The declines in both breeding productivity and population abundance in many marine bird species appear to be a consequence of shortages of prey. In general, those species that feed on small fish at the sea surface are struggling more than others to find enough food, though this varies with region. Links between seabird breeding productivity and increasing sea temperatures strongly suggest that climate change is driving at least some of the observed declines in their prey. Over-fishing has also played a part in some regions in the past and fisheries are currently competing with seabirds for sandeels in the Greater North Sea.

Climate change is also having a direct effect on marine birds that is evident through changes in the range and distribution of some species. There has been a north-eastward shift in the wintering range of many wader and wildfowl species (so-called "short-stopping"), leading to apparent declines in the Celtic Seas, which are partly offset by increases outside the OSPAR Maritime Area in the Baltic Sea. The breeding ranges of some seabird species are predicted to shrink northwards, and this appears to be happening already with the disappearance of breeding colonies of black-legged kittiwake (one of the OSPAR Threatened and/or Declining species) from the Bay of Biscay region.

The QSR 2023 also concluded that the impacts on marine birds from climate change, as described above, are being exacerbated by additional pressures from direct mortality, habitat loss / degradation and disturbance.

Our need to address climate change - a major cause of marine bird declines - has led to unintended additional pressures on marine birds. Since the 2010 Quality Status Report there has been considerable expansion of renewable energy infrastructure, especially offshore wind farms, particularly in the Greater North Sea. Disturbance by windfarms at sea has permanently displaced birds from foraging areas or other important areas, leading to habitat loss; there is also a risk of mortality resulting from collisions with wind turbines. These impacts are likely to increase as renewable energy production is expanded offshore in most Regions. However, the cumulative impacts on bird populations of renewable energy production have yet to be adequately assessed.

Disturbance from other activities such as aggregates extraction, oil and gas production, shipping, and tourism can lead to temporary loss of habitat, which could have more significant impacts during the breeding season when hungry chicks need to be fed. These activities are predicted to change little in the future, except tourism, which is predicted to increase in most Regions.

Pressure from invasive predatory mammals has caused the loss of safe breeding habitat in the past. The largest seabird breeding colonies in all Regions occur on islands that are currently free of mammalian predators, but these are potentially at risk from future incursions, possibly facilitated by human activities such as tourism.

Seabirds and some waterbirds are accidentally caught and killed in fishing gear (commercial, recreational or artisanal) in the OSPAR Maritime Area. The population impacts of incidental by-catch mortality on birds are largely unquantified, but there is some evidence to suggest these could be significant in some areas and fisheries. Marine litter is another cause of increased mortality in seabirds, through ingestion or entanglement, but the level of population impacts is currently unknown.

Finally, an emerging threat comes from Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza - although this was assessed as relatively low impact in QSR 2023. However, major impacts outside the QSR 2023 reporting period were seen in 2021 and 2022, also impacting seabird species which in previous outbreaks were unaffected.

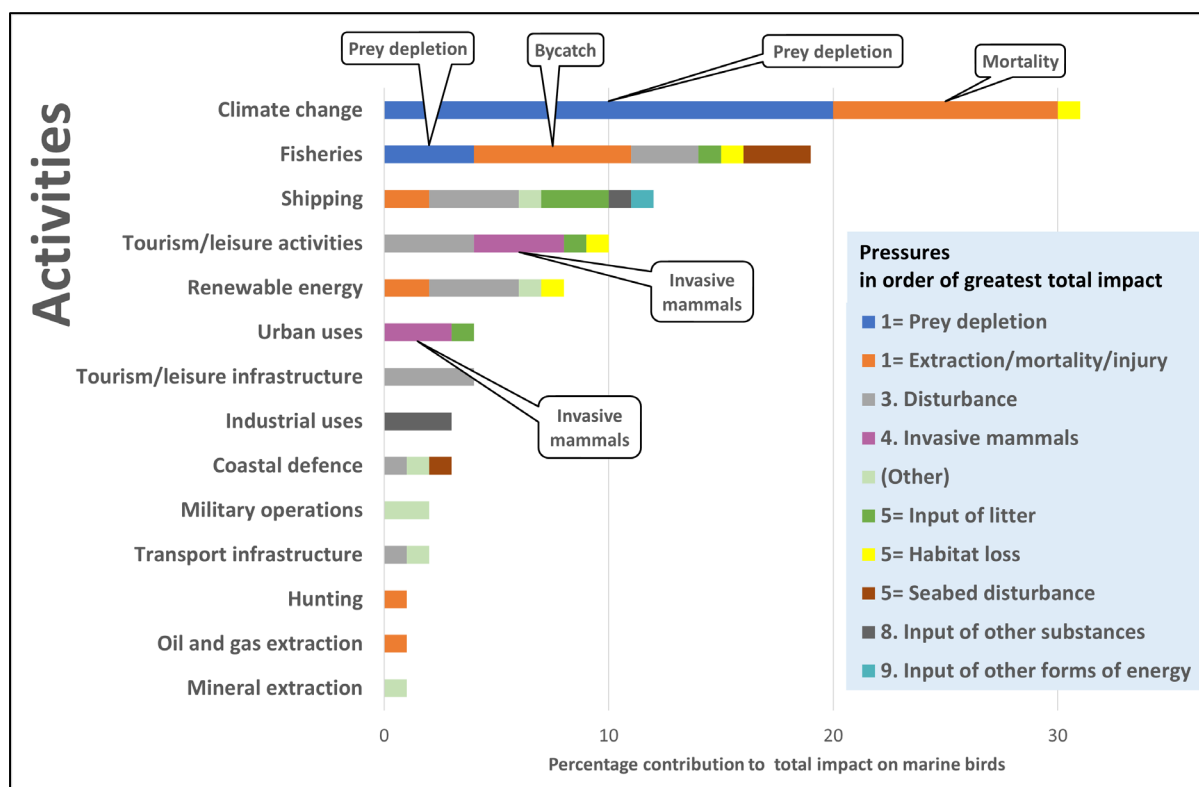


Figure 2: Most important Activities and Pressures affecting marine birds in the OSPAR Maritime Area (QSR23)

OSPAR's response

OSPAR has identified [nine bird species](#) of particular concern within the North-East Atlantic and agreed on recommendations for actions to be taken by Contracting Parties nationally and collectively to protect and conserve these species. The adoption of the [2017-2025 Roadmap for the implementation of collective actions within the Recommendations for the protection and conservation of OSPAR listed Species and Habitats](#) (The Roadmap), has supported the implementation of collaborative efforts across the thematic boundaries within OSPAR and also helps to inform or support actions implemented at the national level. Progress has been made in efforts to strengthen data collection and management to support policy action and knowledge exchange. However, of the nine threatened and declining species, five have been assessed for the QSR 2023 and all five are still declining; in addition, the Iberian breeding population of the common guillemot became extinct shortly after it was listed.

Good progress has been made towards achieving the ecological coherence of the OSPAR network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), for example by extending the area of coverage contributing to the protection and support of marine bird species. The designation of the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin (NACES) MPA in 2021 represents an important step forward for protecting the foraging grounds of many marine birds. This site is an important feeding area on the high seas, used both by seabirds breeding on the coasts of the North-East Atlantic and by birds migrating across the globe or nesting in other parts of the world. The NACES MPA is one of eight sites in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) that have been designated to protect marine birds.

Measures taken by OSPAR to manage certain human activities or pressures relating to pollution¹, marine litter² and physical damage are relevant for improving the status of marine birds.

However, given the continuing poor status of the marine bird species assessed, it is unlikely that these measures on their own are sufficient to reduce the key pressures from human activities. Addressing the decline in marine birds has been identified as a priority for OSPAR in its North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030 (see below). OSPAR has committed to taking appropriate actions to prevent or reduce pressures to enable the recovery of marine species and benthic and pelagic habitats to reach and maintain good environmental status, including action to halt the decline of marine birds. The latter will be addressed by this RAP-Bird.

OSPAR's North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030

Contracting Parties have agreed to put the NEAES 2030 into effect through an [Implementation Plan](#) that contains specific tasks to achieve its objectives. The plan will be a living document, used by OSPAR to record and assess progress (Part I, section 6, NEAES). The plan is supported by [OSPAR](#)

¹An assessment of oil discharges and spills shows that measures under OSPAR's Offshore Oil and Gas Industry Strategy 2010-2020 have led to decreases in the discharges of both hydrocarbons and the most harmful offshore chemicals.

²OSPAR implemented its first [Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter \(RAP ML\)](#) during 2014 to 2021 and has just published [RAP ML2 OSPAR's Second Regional Action Plan for the Prevention and Management of Marine Litter in the North-East Atlantic \(2022 – 2030\)](#). The QSR 2023 reported positive signs of a decrease in the quantities of litter found on OSPAR beaches and of floating litter in the North Sea over the last 10 years.

[Agreement 21-02](#). The Implementation Plan is complemented by the [OSPAR Measures and Actions Programme \(MAP\)](#), an overarching and integrative instrument to support planning and development and to track progress in implementing measures and actions.

The purpose of the Implementation Plan is to support the delivery of the NEAES 2030 through establishing a clear line of sight between the strategic and operational objectives of the NEAES 2030 and the regular work of the OSPAR Committees and other subsidiary bodies. The plan specifies tasks to be delivered collectively by Contracting Parties in support of the operational and strategic objectives and provides a means of reporting on their delivery. By integrating all such tasks within a single programme, the OSPAR Coordination Group, Heads of Delegation and Commission can maintain a regular overview of progress and initiate actions as and when necessary to keep the NEAES 2030 on track.

RAP-Bird has been developed through task S5.O3.T1 of the NEAES 2030 Implementation Plan. RAP-Bird contains 11 actions intended to achieve positive outcomes for marine birds in the OSPAR Maritime Area. Nine of these actions will be implemented as tasks of the NEAES 2030 Implementation Plan. Another action will continue to implement the OSPAR Recommendations on Threatened and Declining bird species. The remaining action will implement an OSPAR Recommendation for reducing the bycatch of marine birds in the OSPAR Maritime Area (OSPAR Recommendation 2024/02), which was adopted as part of the development of this RAP-Bird.

Objectives and scope

Objectives of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Birds (RAP-Bird)

Key Objective:

This RAP-Bird will recommend action to reduce and eliminate, where possible, the main pressures and activities impacting marine birds. RAP-Bird will aim to achieve OSPAR's NEAES 2030 Strategic Objective S5.04 to *"take appropriate actions to prevent or reduce pressures to enable the recovery of marine species and benthic and pelagic habitats in order to reach and maintain good environmental status as reflected in relevant OSPAR status assessments, with action by 2023 to halt the decline of marine birds"*.

Supporting NEAES 2030 objectives:

RAP-Bird will also recommend action on cross-cutting issues, such as ways of working with other international bodies/processes and in relation to monitoring and assessment. If all the proposed tasks in RAP-Bird are implemented, they should also contribute to the achievement of the following NEAES 2030 Operational and Strategic objectives:

SX.02: *By 2024 OSPAR will initiate discussions on the development of a practical approach for regional-scale ecosystem-based management, including through the 'Collective Arrangement and in cooperation with fisheries management bodies and other competent organisations, in order to strengthen ecosystem resilience to climate change and to safeguard the marine environment, its biodiversity and ecosystem services.*

S5.01: *By 2030 OSPAR will further develop its network of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective conservation measures (OECMs)¹⁹ to cover at least 30% of the OSPAR maritime area to ensure it is representative, ecologically coherent and effectively managed to achieve its conservation objectives.*

S5.02: *By 2022 OSPAR will identify barriers to the effective management of MPAs, and by 2024 take steps to address them appropriately to enable all OSPAR MPAs to achieve their conservation objectives.*

S5.03: *By 2024, OSPAR will establish a mechanism to provide that where Contracting Parties are authorising human activities under their jurisdiction or control that may conflict with the conservation objectives of OSPAR MPAs in the ABNJ, these activities are subjected to an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).*

S5.05: *By 2025 OSPAR will have implemented all agreed measures to enable the recovery of OSPAR Listed threatened and/or declining species and habitats and will take additional measures as needed.*

S5.06: *Where the knowledge base is insufficient to achieve OSPAR's biodiversity objectives, OSPAR will take action to improve regional coordination for collection and sharing of data, information and knowledge, with elasmobranchs as a priority by 2023.*

S7.06: OSPAR will work with relevant competent authorities and other stakeholders to minimise, and where possible eliminate, incidental bycatch of marine mammals, birds, turtles and fish so that it does not represent a threat to the protection and conservation of these species and will work towards strengthening the evidence base concerning incidental bycatch by 2025.

S11.01: By 2025 OSPAR will develop a coordinated management approach to strengthening ecosystem resilience, including to the consequences of climate change and ocean acidification. **S11.02:** By 2023, and every six years thereafter, OSPAR will assess at a regional scale the OSPAR network of marine protected areas in respect of the resilience of marine biodiversity to climate change, with the aim of ensuring that the network provides a good representation of species and habitats and that its spatial design and management regime remains relevant.

S12.04: By 2023 OSPAR will develop common principles and by 2024 develop guidance to promote and facilitate sustainable development and scaling up of offshore renewable energy in a way that cumulative environmental impacts are minimised.

By working towards these objectives, the implementation of the RAP-Bird will:

- develop and implement concrete collective actions (as tasks within the OSPAR NEAES 2030 Implementation Plan) that contribute to the protection and recovery of marine birds on a regional basis;
- deliver outputs that contribute to the NEAES 2030 Strategic Objective 5 on conserving marine biodiversity;
- strengthen the cooperation and synergies with the OSPAR Contracting Parties and other Regional Sea Conventions as well as other international organizations in order to join forces, add value to existing processes and avoid duplication of effort in implementing protective measures for marine birds, and;
- support Contracting Parties in their development, implementation and coordination of their national programmes for the protection and recovery of marine birds.

In developing and implementing the RAP-Bird, OSPAR will:

- make use of the full range of measures and instruments available within the Convention including legally binding decisions, non-binding recommendations and other agreements, and production of reports, assessments, and other resources, and;
- work closely with observers and other interested stakeholders in implementing the actions.

Scope of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Birds (RAP-Bird)

This RAP-Bird applies to all OSPAR Regions. It will target the main causes of decline in all species of marine bird³ in the OSPAR Maritime Area. These include all nine Threatened and/or Declining (T&D) species and all species assessed as ‘not in good status’ in QSR 2023.

RAP-Bird includes implementation of actions within the Recommendations on T&D bird species (OSPAR Recommendations 2011/01-07, 2013/12 and 2014/16). Other actions listed below target key pressures, with the aim of reducing and eliminating, where possible, their impacts on marine birds. Each action listed below therefore covers multiple species and avoids the production and administration of numerous single-species action plans.

OSPAR’s contribution to international efforts for the protection of marine birds

Many of the species or populations of marine bird in the OSPAR Area are highly migratory. The status of marine birds in the North-East Atlantic is “not good”, but the causes of this may include factors operating beyond the OSPAR region, e.g. either in the Mediterranean or Baltic or further south in African wintering grounds. Pressures and threats vary geographically in different parts of their range. The status and threats of migratory marine birds need to be assessed at a flyways scale as part of an international conservation effort. This requires international cooperation throughout their flyways.

Other bodies with complementary competencies to those of OSPAR have implemented measures at regional level that are important in addressing the state of marine birds in the North-East Atlantic. For example, region- and species-specific action plans have been implemented under the European Union, the Arctic Council Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) and the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA), by the Nordic Council and under national action plans. Region- and species-specific action plans can help to provide an overview of the regulatory landscape and highlight the value of developing an OSPAR-scale action plan that can build on and strengthen existing responses.

OSPAR Contracting Parties have identified a need to increase the focus also on the Arctic, working closely with key partners such as the Arctic Council. The actions below will therefore include an Arctic perspective wherever it is appropriate.

We have included a cross-cutting action that will help OSPAR Contracting Parties to work with each other and with other countries at a flyway scale, through Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). It will aim to more closely align OSPAR with other relevant MEAs, helping to avoid duplication of effort and helping to address the challenges of reducing pressures on migratory marine birds throughout their flyway.

³‘Marine birds’ include seabirds that spend most of their lives at sea (petrels and shearwaters, gannets and cormorants, skuas, gulls, terns and auks) and waterbirds that mostly inhabit intertidal areas or inshore areas close by (waders, ducks, geese, swans, grebes and divers) <https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/quality-status-reports/qsr-2023/thematic-assessments/marine-birds/state/>

Monitoring and Assessment

Monitoring and assessment are core OSPAR activities to increase our understanding on the state of the North-East Atlantic and inform the adoption and implementation of measures. Article 6 and Annex IV of the OSPAR Convention set out the requirement to assess the quality of the marine environment. Contracting Parties are obliged to “*undertake and publish at regular intervals joint assessments of the quality status of the marine environment and of its development, for the maritime area or for regions or subregions thereof*”. OSPAR Contracting Parties are also required to “*include in such assessments both an evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures taken and planned for the protection of the marine environment and the identification of priorities for action.*”

OSPAR has so far developed two Common Indicators on birds – marine bird abundance and marine bird productivity (see Table 1), which are included in OSPAR’s Coordinated Environmental Monitoring Programme (CEMP). The CEMP aims to deliver comparable data from across the OSPAR Maritime Area, which can be used in assessments to address the specific questions raised in OSPAR’s Joint Assessment and Monitoring Programme (JAMP).

Table 1. OSPAR bird indicators.

Indicator	QSR2023 Assessment	OSPAR Region					EU MSFD Criterion (primary in bold)	CEMP Guideline	CEMP Appendix
		I	II	III	IV	V			
Marine bird abundance (Including At-sea abundance pilot)	Common Indicator Pilot	X	X	X	X		D1C2	YES	YES
			X				D1C2	No	No
Marine bird breeding productivity	Common Indicator	X	X	X	X		D1C3	No	No
Marine bird bycatch	Pilot	X	X	X	X	X	D1C1	YES	YES
Marine bird habitat quality	Pilot		X				D1C5	No	No

Data on marine bird abundance and marine bird breeding productivity are collated from Contracting Parties and stored in the [seabird database](#). These data are updated regularly to provide a regionally agreed assessment of the state of marine bird species. Both Common Indicators were assessed using corresponding threshold values during the Intermediate Assessment 2017 and QSR 2023.

Full technical specifications, including monitoring and assessment protocols of all OSPAR Common Indicators are published as [CEMP Guidelines](#). Each common Indicator also has a CEMP Appendix, which contains details of the agreed monitoring and assessment approaches. The CEMP Appendices have been adapted to align with the European Commission’s requirements for MSFD reporting and are available in the [OSPAR Assessment Portal \(OAP\)](#). The purpose is to assist those Contracting Parties that are EU member states in their national reporting commitments for MSFD Article 11 Monitoring Programmes. The CEMP Appendices must be reviewed annually and updated if necessary.

In the QSR 2023 [Marine Birds Thematic Assessment](#), marine bird status was assessed in 78 breeding and non-breeding (i.e. over-wintering or migrating) populations of species, grouped by feeding

behaviour (surface, water column, benthic, wading or grazing feeders). Integrated region-by-region assessments were based on the results of the two common indicator assessments: Marine Bird Abundance and Marine Bird Breeding Productivity. Rules for combining these indicators and for assessing the achievement of good environmental status in each species group are published as a separate CEMP guideline ([OSPAR Agreement](#) 2023-04).

Development of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Birds

RAP-Bird was developed under Task S5.O4.T1 of the OSPAR NEAES 2030 Implementation Plan. This task was proposed by Intersessional Correspondence Group on the Protection of Species and Habitats (ICG-POSH) and agreed by the Biological Diversity Committee (BDC) (2021). The following year, ICG-POSH set up a Task and Finish Group (TFG) to progress the development of the Action Plan. The TFG is made up of the UK, Norway, The Netherlands, Spain and the OSPAR Secretariat. The process that was followed by the TFG is shown in Figure 3.

The TFG used the conclusions of the QSR 2023 Thematic Assessment of Marine Birds, an analysis of existing OSPAR Actions, and input from OSPAR groups (EIHA, JWGBird and ICG-POSH) to propose concepts for ten actions to be further developed. The TFG used criteria to select the concept actions, which were: The actions will:

- a) target the most important pressures and activities impacting on marine birds within the OSPAR Maritime Area (e.g. referring to the Marine Bird Thematic Assessment);
- b) benefit from the collective approach/cooperation between Contracting Parties;
- c) fill evidence, policy or implementation gaps, and;
- d) add value to other existing processes or efforts (i.e., EU, other regional bodies, global bodies).

During the summer of 2023 Contracting Parties were asked to comment on the ten draft concept actions in development. Eight Contracting Parties responded, and their responses are available on request. At the same time, the RAP-Bird TFG ran an online questionnaire and workshop for stakeholders to seek their input on the ten draft concept actions. Responses were received from 17 stakeholders. A summary of their comments is available on request.

Following input from stakeholders and Contracting Parties, nine of the ten concept actions were developed into draft Tasks for the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy Implementation Plan, with input from ICG-POSH, ICG-COBAM, ICG-MPA and JWGBIRD. The remaining concept action - on the reduction of marine bird bycatch - was developed into a Recommendation under a separate Task S7.O6.T2 led by the UK, Spain, The Netherlands and Norway. The Recommendation on the reduction of marine bird bycatch ([Recommendation 2024/02](#)) and Background Document ([OSPAR Publication 1050](#)) were agreed by Contracting Parties in 2024.

As actions are further developed, they will be captured as tasks under the NEAES Implementation Plan and will be linked to the NEAES Operational Objectives. Developed actions will be reviewed and reported on annually through the mechanism of the NEAES implementation Plan and can also be updated and revised through that same mechanism. This will also be the case for any new actions, for example to address new or emerging pressures, that have not yet been identified. Therefore, the collection of actions presented in the following section should not be seen as a definitive list of all work to be completed under this RAP-Bird.

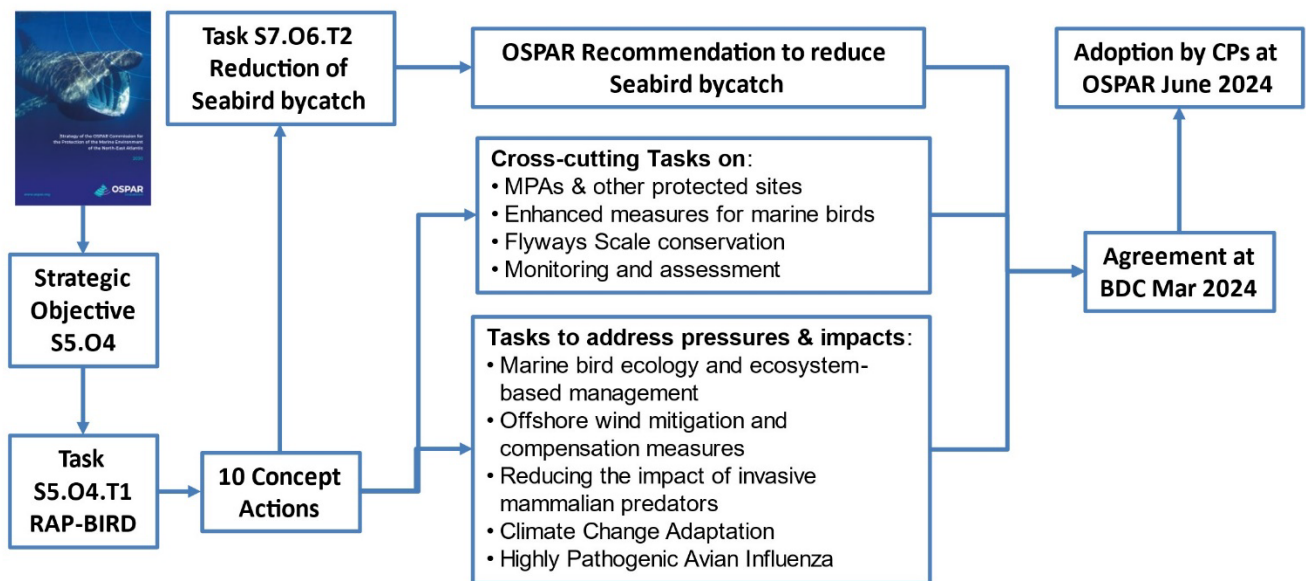


Figure 3 – Schematic showing the process that was followed by the Task and Finish Group to turn concepts into a RAP-Bird.

Actions

Theme A: Threatened and Declining Species

OSPAR will undertake the following Actions:

Action A1 (Recommendations 2011/01-07, 2013/12, 2014/16)

Continue to implement Recommendations on Steller's Eider (2013/12), Ivory gull (2011/02), thick-billed murre (2011/07), lesser black-back gull (fuscus sub-species)(2011/01), black-legged kittiwake (2011/05 amended by 2020/01), Iberian guillemot (2014/16), Roseate tern (2011/06), Balearic shearwater (2011/04) and Macaronesian shearwater (2011/03).

Theme B: Cross-cutting

OSPAR will undertake the following Actions:

Enhanced measures for marine birds

Action B1 (Task S5.O4.T4) Enhanced implementation of OSPAR Recommendation 2010/5 on environmental impact assessment

Rationale: It is evident from the QSR 2023 that many bird species, other than those listed by OSPAR, are also threatened and/or declining, suggesting that existing measures are insufficient. This task will identify the necessary actions to improve the status of both listed and currently non-listed bird species, including measures currently in place and those being developed under the RAP-Bird.

Description: This task will determine the most efficient and coherent way of implementing measures (e.g. through Recommendations) that build upon, amend, or replace measures currently in place. There are several specific issues to be addressed in determining the best approach:

- Determining if it is possible to adopt a Recommendation for all marine birds irrespective of listed status (ideally avoiding the need to list them all as that requires a huge resource for administrative reporting).
- Review the existing measures in place in bird Recommendations to identify which measures should be retained or replaced.
- Consider how the measures contained in [Recommendation 2010/5](#) could be applied to all relevant bird species in the OSPAR Maritime Area.
- Assessments of the extent to which EIA processes result in mitigation which reduces the impact on marine birds.
- Consider arrangements for pooling / sharing assessment data between Contracting Parties.
- Consider how cumulative effects and improving resilience to climate change could be addressed through future bird measures.
- Identify if any other RAP-Bird actions require a measure in a Recommendation to implement them.
- Produce a background document based on the above with a view to adopting a single bird Recommendation.

Identification of important sites

Action B2 (Task number TBC): Identification of important bird (foraging) areas within the OSPAR Maritime Area and of breeding sites adjacent to the OSPAR area

Rationale: This action will expand upon the [2021 assessment of the OSPAR MPA network](#) to include intertidal protected areas (foraging areas for wading feeders), and consider protection of species beyond the 9 species listed by OPSAR as Threatened and/or Declining to include those identified in the QSR 2023 as in “not good status” and other species not currently assessed by OSPAR. The action also recognises the need to protect intertidal foraging areas for wading birds and breeding sites of marine birds throughout the coast adjacent to the OSPAR area to improve the conservation status of those species.

Description: This action will complete a study to:

- Identify the most important (foraging) areas for marine birds related to their functional groups (surface, water column, benthic and wading feeders)
- Assess how well (foraging) areas of marine birds are protected by the OSPAR MPA network and other protected sites in the OSPAR Area including fisheries regulation areas
- Assess how well breeding sites of marine birds adjacent to the OSPAR area are protected by protected areas and other means of protection
- Identify key areas (breeding sites and foraging areas) that would benefit from additional conservation measures outside OSPAR MPAs
- Consider seabirds as an indicator of important offshore pelagic and benthic habitats.

The results of the study will be used to make recommendations for additional MPAs to protect foraging areas and propose other areas to protect breeding sites to improve survival of marine birds.

Flyways scale conservation

Action B3 (Task S5.O4.T5): Flyways scale conservation

Rationale: Many of the species or populations of marine bird in the OSPAR Area are highly migratory. The status of marine birds in the North-East Atlantic is “not good”, but the causes of this may include factors operating beyond the OSPAR Area, e.g. either in the Mediterranean or Baltic or further south in African wintering grounds. Pressures and threats vary geographically in different parts of their range. The status and threats of migratory marine birds need to be assessed at a flyways scale as part of an international holistic approach to conservation action. This requires international cooperation throughout their flyways.

Description: This action will help OSPAR Contracting Parties to work with each other and with other countries at a flyway scale, through Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). It will aim to more closely align OSPAR with other relevant MEAs. Collaboration with other MEAs will help to avoid duplication of effort and will help to address the challenges of reducing pressures on migratory marine birds throughout their flyway. This will mainly involve:

- OSPAR will become more closely aligned with the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) through a Memorandum of Understanding. This will include implementation at a Regional Seas Convention scale of emerging seabird priorities identified by AEWA (in Resolution 7.6).
- OSPAR will work with Arctic Council through the working group on the Conservation on Arctic Flora and Fauna (CAFF) and the Arctic Migratory Birds Initiative (AMBI) on the development and implementation of relevant species action plans.

Monitoring and assessment

Action B4 (Task number TBC) Integrated monitoring and assessment of marine bird population status and condition

Rationale: This action will help to fill two key data gaps – the abundance and distribution of seabirds at sea and on breeding populations of ground nesting species. It will maximise the use of existing observational data from OSPAR and international organisations and apply those data to Integrated Population Assessment. These assessments will aim to link pressures from human activities with marine bird state, to support adaptive management and provide a basis for directing measures. A better understanding of the links between pressures and the state of marine bird populations is required if OSPAR is to achieve adaptive management of its marine resources, associated protection of marine birds and, ultimately, the effectiveness of its measures.

Description: This action will be conducted in two concurrent phases. Phase 1 will improve data collection and collation to enable more effective and widespread monitoring of certain species when breeding (e.g. burrow-nesters) and of all species at sea. Phase 2 will compile existing data for birds, including from international databases and citizen science initiatives, and apply an Integrated Population Modelling approach (IPM) to understand the links between pressures from human activities and the state of marine birds. This information can then be used to evaluate the effectiveness of policy measures in improving the status of marine birds, and to target additional measures.

Theme C: Reduction of pressures & impacts

OSPAR will undertake the following Actions:

Marine bird ecology and ecosystem-based management

Action C1 (Task number TBC) Research and associated modelling on marine birds and their trophic interactions to inform best practice in ecosystem-based management

Rationale: This action addresses one of the main pressures on marine bird populations in the North-East Atlantic – food depletion. The evidence gained will provide a better understanding of how direct and indirect factors, including fisheries and climate change, affect trophic interactions, and ultimately the food available to birds. It will inform management that will reduce impacts of fishing and shellfish harvesting on marine birds. It will also help to mitigate the impacts of climate change - the main driver of declines in marine birds and their food.

Description: This action will undertake modelling of marine birds, their trophic interactions and the abundance and availability of prey to inform ecosystem-based management, and a subregional pilot study about evidence on marine birds to underpin best practice for ecosystem-based management. Research will be undertaken to enhance modelling of marine bird prey items: fish and shellfish stocks in the context of bottom-up processes being driven by climate, top-down impacts of harvesting fish, and predation by birds and other predators. This may inform ecosystem-based management in the North-East Atlantic aimed at meeting the food requirements of both birds and people.

Reduction of bycatch

Action C2 (Recommendation 2024/02)

Rationale: The QSR 2023 identified the incidental bycatch by fisheries as one of the main threats to marine birds across the OSPAR Maritime Area. It has been demonstrated across the world that mortality from bycatch can be significantly reduced by a suite of mitigation measures, depending on the fishing gear being used. Existing OSPAR actions on bycatch only focus on seven threatened and declining species and specific gear types. It will encourage consistency in implementation of National Plans of Action (NPOAs) on marine bird bycatch across OSPAR Contracting Parties and ensure all vulnerable species of marine birds in the North-East Atlantic are targeted. By doing so, will aim to minimise, and where possible eliminate, incidental bycatch of all marine birds that are sensitive to this pressure.

Description: Under this action, Contracting Parties will consider developing, adopting and implementing a National Plan of Action to minimise, and where possible eliminate, incidental bycatch of marine birds from all fishing gears. They will also work collectively to collate data on fishing effort (commercial & artisanal) and marine bird bycatch via the OSPAR Data and Information Management System ([ODIMS](#)) to conduct OSPAR Regional impact assessments of bycatch mortality on marine bird populations. The success of this action will be monitored using OSPAR indicator on marine bird bycatch (see Table 1). This indicator assesses the biological significance of marine bird bycatch mortality, thereby strengthening the evidence base concerning incidental bycatch.

Offshore wind mitigation/compensation measures

Action C3 (Task S5.O4.T6) Best practice for mitigation/compensation measures for Offshore Wind developments

Rationale: OSPAR Contracting Parties have significant ambitions for offshore wind development. The scale of development that is likely to result from that ambition has the potential to have a significant impact on marine birds across the OSPAR Maritime Area. This action should help Contracting Parties in taking steps to minimize impacts through guidance on best approaches to mitigation in a coherent manner that meets a consistent standard.

Description: This action will develop guidelines for:

- mitigation measures that reduce the impact of offshore wind development, operations, and decommissioning on marine birds.
- compensatory measures that may be needed to offset the impact of offshore wind development on marine birds.

It will take into account ongoing work within OSPAR and independently by Contracting Parties and the offshore wind industry to look at cumulative effects, mitigation and compensation. The outcomes of this action can be used to identify any mitigation or compensatory measures that need to be addressed through OSPAR measures or action.

Reducing the impact of mammalian predators

Action C4 (S5.O4.T7) OSPAR-wide co-ordinated measures to protect breeding colonies from invasive predatory mammals and to restore, where practicable, safe nesting habitat

Rationale: The aim of this action is to reduce negative impacts from mammals on the survival and breeding success of seabirds.

Description: This action will conduct an analysis throughout the coast adjacent to the OSPAR Area of existing national measures targeted at predatory mammals. It will identify areas where [biosecurity] measures are sufficient to protect breeding areas from mammal predation and other areas (e.g. islands) where mammal predators could be feasibly eradicated to restore safe nesting habitat. By doing so it will develop advice on which breeding areas would benefit from new or improved biosecurity measures and on best practice. The outputs from the action will be used to develop an OSPAR Recommendation to reduce the impact of predatory mammals on marine birds.

Climate Change Adaptation for Marine Birds

Action C5 (Task number TBC): Strengthening resilience of bird populations in the face of climate change

Rationale: The QSR 2023 identified climate change as the most important threats to seabirds. This action will identify actions that could be taken to reduce or minimise some of the impacts of climate change (e.g. reduced food supply, changes to migratory patterns, habitat loss). This action should be viewed in the context of other actions in the RAP-Bird, which may address direct effects of climate change (e.g. C1 Marine bird ecology and ecosystem-based management, C2 Offshore wind mitigation/compensation measures, B2 Identification of important sites, B3 Flyways scale Conservation). This action is therefore aimed at promoting responses that are not covered by the other actions.

Description: This action will involve several linked activities aimed at supporting adaptation by marine birds, particularly in relation to the impacts of climate change on vulnerable habitats. These activities include:

- Map the extent and severity of expected sea level rise and produce overviews of species and populations most likely to be threatened by sea level rise due to flooding / inundation of habitat used for nesting, foraging or roosting.
- Promote actions to identify and protect new and potential future habitats for coastal birds.
- Improve understanding of the impact of extreme weather events, including extreme warming events, on marine birds.

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (“bird flu”)

Action C6 (Task number TBC): Monitoring and response to Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza and other emerging diseases

Rationale: There have been periodic outbreaks of H5N1 high pathogenicity avian influenza (HPAI) in wild birds in recent decades, but in 2022 unprecedented numbers of seabirds, of various species, were killed from this disease, unlike in previous outbreaks when waterbirds were primarily affected. Given

the magnitude of mortality in some species and the highly migratory nature of the species across the entire OSPAR region, collective action by OSPAR will be essential to mitigate and manage the impacts of HPAI.

Description: This action will aim to help OSPAR Contracting Parties in how they monitor and respond to outbreaks of HPAI and other emerging diseases in wild populations of marine birds. OSPAR will act as a forum for the exchange of ideas and experiences in tackling outbreaks. This action will assess best practice in both monitoring of the prevalence of the disease and its impacts on populations and on the response to outbreaks and management of the disease. OSPAR can also work more closely with AEWA (See Action B3 on Flyways-scale Conservation) and this best practice can be shared with others along the relevant flyway and practices further enhanced. This action will also monitor other emerging diseases worldwide that might affect large numbers of wild birds and keep tab on possible new outbreaks approaching OSPAR region.

How well do the Actions address threats to marine birds in the OSPAR Area?

When developing this RAP-Bird, one of the criteria for selecting the actions was to target the most important pressures and activities impacting on marine birds within the OSPAR Maritime Area (e.g. referring to the Marine Bird Thematic Assessment). Table 2 shows the important activities and pressures impacting marine birds in the OSPAR Area and the actions in the RAP-Bird (as described above) that will aim to address their impacts. The percentage contribution to the total impact risk of marine birds is taken from the bowtie analysis in the Marine Birds Thematic Assessment (OSPAR QSR 2023). Activity-pressure impacts that contribute less than an estimated 1% are excluded. HPAI was not considered in the bowtie analysis but is included here because its impact on marine birds in the OSPAR Maritime Area may be significant.

Table 2: The important Activities and Pressures impacting marine birds in the OSPAR area and the actions in the RAP-Birds that will aim to address their impacts (source: QSR2023 Thematic Assessment on Marine Birds).

Activity	Pressure	RAP-Bird actions addressing the impact of this Activity/Pressure
Greenhouse gas emissions (causing climate change)	Prey depletion	The pressures on marine birds caused by climate change will be addressed via the C5 - Climate Change Adaptation for Marine Birds' actions. Other actions will contribute to strengthening the resilience of bird populations that are affected by climate change by reducing the total "burden" of pressures they face, including pressures unrelated to climate change. For example, C4 - Reducing the impact of mammalian predators will help to mitigate the loss of marine bird habitat.
	Extraction/ mortality/ injury	
	Habitat loss	
Fish and Shellfish harvesting	Extraction/ mortality/ injury	C2 - Reduction of by-catch
	Prey depletion	C1 – Marine bird ecology and ecosystem-based management
	Disturbance	B2 - Identification of important sites
	Seabed disturbance	
	Habitat loss	
	Input of litter	(Addressed via Marine Litter RAP)
Transport - shipping	Disturbance	B2 - Identification of important sites
	Extraction/ mortality/ injury	
	Input of other forms of energy	
	Input of other substances	
	Input of litter	(Addressed via Marine Litter RAP)
Tourism and leisure activities	Invasive mammals	C4 - Reducing the impact of mammalian predators
	Disturbance	B1 - Identification of important sites
	Habitat loss	
	Input of litter	(Addressed via Marine Litter RAP)
Renewable energy generation	Disturbance	B1- Enhanced measures for marine birds
	Extraction/ mortality/ injury	C3 - Offshore wind mitigation/compensation measures
	Habitat loss	
Tourism and leisure infrastructure	Disturbance	B1 - Enhanced measures for marine birds
Urban uses	Invasive mammals	C4 - Reducing the impact of mammalian predators
Industrial uses	Input of other substances	B2 - Identification of important sites; Enhanced measures for marine birds
Urban uses	Input of litter	(Addressed via Marine Litter RAP)
Coastal defence and flood protection	Disturbance	B1 - Enhanced measures for marine birds
	Seabed disturbance	
Transport infrastructure	Disturbance	B1 – Enhanced measures for marine birds
Extraction of oil and gas	Extraction/ mortality/ injury	B1 - Enhanced measures for marine birds
Hunting	Extraction/ mortality/ injury	(Addressed via existing measures outside OSPAR)
HPAI (various Activities including agriculture, tourism & leisure)	Introduction of microbial pathogens	C6 - Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza ("bird flu")

Implementation and reporting

The RAP-Bird is implemented through the OSPAR Agreement 2024/09. It will be implemented during the period 2024-2030. Recognising that marine bird species are mostly long-lived and slow to reproduce and therefore population recovery will take longer than the current duration of the NEAES 2030, it is likely that continued implementation of some of the actions will be required beyond 2030. The RAP-Bird will be reviewed and updated in accordance with updated OSPAR quality assessments and strategies, and assessments under the MSFD.

Implementation approach

The implementation of actions will be through a lead country approach where at least one Contracting Party will take responsibility for the progression and delivery of a single action. The lead Contracting Party can be supported by another Contracting Party or Observer organisations. Resourcing for the delivery of the action may come from a combination of sources including the lead Contracting Party, other contributing Contracting Parties or observers and/or external project funding.

Management and resourcing

The project management of the RAP-Bird will be overseen by ICG-POSH. Support on relevant actions will be provided by Intersessional Correspondence Groups on Co-ordination of Biodiversity Assessment and Monitoring (ICG-COBAM), Marine Protected Areas (ICG-MPA) and Offshore Renewables Energy Development (ICG-ORED). Expert technical assistance will be provided by the OSPAR/ICES/HELCOM Joint Working Group on Marine Birds (JWGBIRD). Progress, including barriers and resourcing requirements will be reported annually to the BDC and the Environmental Impact of Human Activities Committee (EIHA).

Reporting

The RAP-Bird will be implemented through established OSPAR mechanisms. Progress in implementation of the actions adopted to the NEAES Implementation Plan will be annually and made publicly accessible via the [OSPAR website](#).

Where actions result in the adoption of OSPAR measures, notably Recommendations or Decisions, there are well defined requirements for implementation reporting by the Contracting Parties. Summary results are then published in the form of OSPAR overview assessments, such as is done for the suite of Recommendations on Threatened and/or Declining species and habitats.

Review and evaluation

Each Task and Recommendation under RAP-Bird has clear outputs, evaluation criteria and delivery timelines (see Annex 1). There are also clear linkages between individual Actions and Recommendations and ongoing actions under other mechanisms.

The RAP-Bird will be successful overall when:

- The plan is adopted by all Contracting Parties in all OSPAR Regions
- The Recommendation on reduction of marine bird bycatch is adopted by all Contracting Parties in all OSPAR Regions
- All the Actions in the plan have a dedicated lead and have achievable and clear deliverables.
- All the Actions and recommendations are being successfully implemented according to their respective evaluation criteria.
- Impacts on marine bird populations in the OSPAR Area are reduced sufficiently to increase resilience to climate change and to enable populations to recover.

The latter success criteria will be assessed using OSPAR indicators and integrated assessments of marine birds, as detailed above under Monitoring and Assessment.

The success of the implementation of the Actions and Recommendations under RAP-Bird will be reviewed in 2030 and fed into any wider review of the NEAES. The review will recommend any necessary changes to RAP-Bird which will be renewed accordingly.

Annex 1– Action Overview Table

Action	Task / Recommendation	Short-name	Lead countries	Status	Date
A1	Recommendations 2011/01-07, 2013/12, 2014/16	Continue to implement Recommendations on Steller's Eider (2013/12), Ivory gull (2011/02), thick-billed murre (2011/07), lesser black-back gull (fuscus sub-species)(2011/01), black-legged kittiwake (2011/05 amended by 2020/01), Iberian guillemot (2014/16), Roseate tern (2011/06), Balearic shearwater (2011/04) and Macaronesian shearwater (2011/03).	NA	Adopted Implementation reported	2011, 2013, 2014 2016, 2019
B1	S5.O4.T4	Enhanced measures for marine birds	UK and NO	Adopted	Jun-24
B2	Task number TBC	Identification of important sites	TBC	Draft	Mar-24
B3	S5.O4.T5	Flyways scale conservation	UK	Adopted	Jun-24
B4	Task number TBC	Monitoring and assessment	TBC	Draft	Mar-24
C1	Task number TBC	Marine bird ecology and ecosystem-based management	TBC	Draft	Mar-24
C2	Recommendation 2024/02	Reduction of by-catch	N/A	Adopted	Jun-24
C3	S5.O4.T6	Offshore wind mitigation / compensation measures	UK and PT	Adopted	Jun-24
C4	S5.O4.T7	Reducing the impact of mammalian predators	UK and NL	Adopted	Jun-24
C5	Task number TBC	Climate Change Adaptation for Marine Birds	TBC	Draft	Mar-24
C6	Task number TBC	Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza ("bird flu")	TBC	Draft	Mar-24