

Biodiversity Series

Assessment of the Impact of Tourism on the OSPAR Maritime Area



**OSPAR Commission
2006**

The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (the "OSPAR Convention") was opened for signature at the Ministerial Meeting of the former Oslo and Paris Commissions in Paris on 22 September 1992. The Convention entered into force on 25 March 1998. It has been ratified by Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom and approved by the European Community and Spain.

La Convention pour la protection du milieu marin de l'Atlantique du Nord-Est, dite Convention OSPAR, a été ouverte à la signature à la réunion ministérielle des anciennes Commissions d'Oslo et de Paris, à Paris le 22 septembre 1992. La Convention est entrée en vigueur le 25 mars 1998. La Convention a été ratifiée par l'Allemagne, la Belgique, le Danemark, la Finlande, la France, l'Irlande, l'Islande, le Luxembourg, la Norvège, les Pays-Bas, le Portugal, le Royaume-Uni de Grande Bretagne et d'Irlande du Nord, la Suède et la Suisse et approuvée par la Communauté européenne et l'Espagne.

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Executive Summary/Récapitulatif

This document sets out the conclusions of OSPAR on its work on the impact of tourism on the marine environment of the OSPAR maritime area.

Le présent document présente les conclusions d'OSPAR sur ses travaux relatifs à l'impact du tourisme sur le milieu marin dans la zone maritime OSPAR.

The OSPAR Biological Diversity and Ecosystems Strategy requests the OSPAR Commission to examine possible impacts of tourism and recreational activities on the marine environment of the OSPAR maritime area. Issues related to this impact were identified in the Background Document on Tourism, published by OSPAR in 2003. In addition, OSPAR 2004 agreed to publish the document "Tourism in Coastal Zones" prepared by Spain as an addendum to the previously published Background Document on Tourism.

La Stratégie OSPAR diversité biologique et écosystèmes préconise que la Commission OSPAR étudie l'impact éventuel du tourisme et des activités récréationnelles sur le milieu marin de la zone maritime OSPAR. Les questions liées à cet impact sont déterminées dans le document de fond sur le tourisme qui a été publié par OSPAR en 2003. De plus, OSPAR 2004 est convenue de publier le document "Tourisme dans les zones côtières" qui a été préparé par l'Espagne et constitue un addendum à ce document de fond.

In 2003, OSPAR also approved the Strategy for the Joint Assessment and Monitoring Programme (JAMP), which is intended to lead to the next comprehensive assessment in 2010 of the quality status of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. This includes provisions for assessments of relevant human activities that might impact on the marine environment. On the basis of an analysis of Contracting Parties' replies to a questionnaire, Spain prepared this Assessment of the Impact of Tourism on the OSPAR Maritime Area. Answers to the questionnaire were received from France, Germany, Ireland, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

OSPAR est également convenue, en 2003, de la Stratégie pour un Programme conjoint d'évaluation et de surveillance continue (JAMP), dont le but est de conduire à la prochaine évaluation exhaustive du bilan de santé du milieu marin de l'Atlantique du nord-est en 2010. Ceci comprend les conditions de l'évaluation des activités de l'homme pertinentes qui risquent d'avoir un impact sur le milieu marin. L'Espagne a préparé cette évaluation de l'impact du tourisme sur la zone maritime OSPAR à partir d'une analyse des réponses à un questionnaire, fournies par les Parties contractantes. La France, l'Allemagne, l'Irlande, les Pays-Bas, le Portugal, l'Espagne, la Suède et le Royaume-Uni ont répondu à ce questionnaire.

This document assesses the impact of tourism by looking into the level of tourism demand; the level of tourism supply; the environmental impacts of tourist facilities; the environmental effects of recreational activities; and the protection of nature in tourist areas. The reports notes some examples of lessons learnt and summarises the major impacts.

Le présent document constitue une évaluation de l'impact du tourisme qui étudie le niveau de la demande et de l'offre, l'impact environnemental des structures touristiques, les effets environnementaux des activités récréationnelles et la protection de la nature dans les zones touristiques. Il prend note de certains exemples de leçons retenues et résume les impacts principaux.

The assessment shows that the level of information on the available data on tourism varies widely from one country to another, as a reflection of the different priority and resources allocated by Contracting Parties to combat the impact of tourism.

L'évaluation révèle que les informations sur les données disponibles varient énormément d'un pays à l'autre. Ces variations sont dues au fait que les priorités accordées et les ressources

consacrées par les Parties contractantes, en ce qui concerne la lutte de l'impact du tourisme, différent.

Since OSPAR is primarily concerned with the marine environment, many issues relating to the landward aspects of tourism fall firmly within national, regional or local competence.

De nombreuses questions relatives à l'impact du tourisme sur la terre ferme sont traitées au niveau national, régional ou local dans la mesure où OSPAR se préoccupe essentiellement du milieu marin.

The assessment concludes that issues relating to the impact of tourism on the marine environment are adequately covered in both international and national regulations and requirements and that additional comprehensive work by OSPAR is unlikely to increase significantly knowledge in this field.

L'évaluation conclut que les réglementations et les exigences internationales et nationales traitent, de manière satisfaisante, les questions relatives à l'impact du tourisme sur le milieu marin et qu'il est peu probable que des travaux exhaustifs supplémentaires de la part d'OSPAR permettent de mieux connaître ce domaine.

1. Starting Point and Process

The second half of the 20th century saw a massive increase in the importance of tourism in the economies of European coastal regions. The 19th century and the first half of the 20th century had seen the emergence of coastal resorts, which had had very significant impacts on their local environments. But the enormous increase in mobility with the mass ownership of cars and the emergence of large-scale air transport transformed these localised impacts into a more general one that affected a very large part of the European coastline.

The OSPAR Biological Diversity and Ecosystems Strategy therefore needed to address the possible impacts of this coastal tourism on the marine environment of the OSPAR maritime area. The Strategy, as revised in 2003, in consequence provides that the OSPAR Commission will examine specific issues relating to tourism and recreational activities which have been identified in the Background Document on Tourism, published by OSPAR in 2003¹, as a result of work in which Spain took the lead. This examination was to be in accordance with the criteria of Appendix 3 of the OSPAR Convention².

At the same time in 2003, OSPAR approved the Strategy for the Joint Assessment and Monitoring Programme (JAMP), which is intended to lead to the next comprehensive assessment in 2010 of the quality status of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. This includes provisions for assessments of relevant human activities that might impact on the marine environment. To provide the basis for this assessment, the JAMP provided for the production of a report on sustainable tourism, a questionnaire on the background and impacts of tourism and, by 2007, a further assessment.

In 2004, the Background Document on Tourism was expanded with a Report on Sustainable Tourism, prepared through work in which Spain again took the lead.

In 2004 and 2005, Spain drew up and circulated a more detailed questionnaire, to which responses were received from 8 of the 12 Contracting Parties which are coastal States of the OSPAR maritime area (France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom).

The following analysis of the impact of tourism on the OSPAR maritime area, and consequent conclusions, are based upon the analysis of these responses to that questionnaire³.

2. Impact of Tourism on the OSPAR Maritime Area

2.1 Level of tourism demand: Type of information collected about the levels of tourism in coastal areas

Information on the number of visitors/tourists visiting specific areas is collected by every country. This information is broken down into different variables, such as: type of accommodation, number of overnight stays, type of traveller, and main destination. In relation to the definition of visitor/tourist, some countries have not provided the definition of visitor/tourist used in their surveys of visitors/tourists visiting specific areas. Others have defined these concepts in accordance with the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) Recommendations on Tourism Statistics, approved by the United Nations Statistics Committee in 1993. Under WTO Recommendations, all tourism-related travellers are called "visitors" and are classified into the following two main categories:

¹ OSPAR Publication 184/2003 "*Background Document on Tourism*" (ISBN 1-904426-28-X).

² These criteria are: (a) the extent, intensity and duration of the human activity under consideration; (b) actual and potential adverse effects of the human activity on specific species, communities and habitats; (c) actual and potential adverse effects of the human activity on specific ecological processes; and (d) irreversibility or durability of these effects.

³ Details of the responses from the questionnaires can be obtained from the OSPAR Secretariat.

- a. tourists (who make at least one overnight stay), and
- b. same-day visitors (who do not stay overnight).

A couple of countries have used their own definition of tourist/visitor. In all countries the information on the number of visitors/tourists visiting specific areas is made public through the Internet on the basis of different periods: monthly, quarterly, seasonal, annually.

In some countries, it is not possible to know the numbers visiting coastal areas, as figures about visitors/tourists visiting specific areas of these countries are provided by “place of destination” (i.e. county, region) not by “destination type” (i.e. waterside, mountain). These countries have noted that although some of the places of destination have coastal areas, it is unclear to specify how many visitors/tourists have visited their coast and/or inland, as only the total for the place of destination is published. One country has indicated that, with some additional research, it could be possible to establish the visitor numbers in its coastal areas. In other countries, it is possible to know the numbers visiting coastal areas through accommodation statistics which differentiate between holiday areas, local communities and travel regions along the coast or, in the case of one country, because its figures on domestic visitors are produced by “destination type” including breakdowns for: “seaside”, countryside/village”, “seaside/coast”, etc. In all these countries, except two, information on visitors/tourists in coastal areas is published. With respect to the definition of coastal areas, none of the countries have given any definition.

The questionnaire asked about what periods the information on visitors/tourists in coastal areas is available. All countries have responded to this question, although only some countries have stated that they have information on visitors/tourists in coastal areas. In all these countries, such information is available on a monthly and annual basis, and in some cases on a quarterly basis too.

Data on the number of tourists/visitors visiting coastal areas for the years 2001, 2002 and 2003 are provided by all countries, except two, which previously had answered positively the question about the possibility of knowing the numbers visiting coastal areas. At this point, countries which had not responded positively to this question remembered that they can provide data by “place of destination” (i.e. county, region) not by “destination type” (i.e. waterside, mountain).

2.2 Level of tourism supply: Type of information collected about the levels provision made for tourism in coastal areas

Information on the number of bed-nights (or other similar measure of provision for tourism) available for visitors/tourists visiting specific areas is collected by all countries but one, although this country has a register of accommodation establishments with a quality assurance scheme. In all these countries, information on the number of bed-nights is available to the public from Internet or from Tourism/Statistics Offices on a monthly and annual basis.

The questionnaire asked about the possibility of knowing the tourism provision in coastal areas. Some countries have responded to this question pointing out that they can provide data about the levels provision made for tourism in its tourism regions. In these cases there is always an important part of the tourism information which is not related to the coastal areas but to town or country tourism. However, one country has specifically noted that with some additional research, information on the tourism provision in its coastal areas could be established. Other countries have answered this question indicating that they can give information about the tourism provision in their coastal areas thanks to their accommodation statistics, that differentiate between holiday areas, local communities and travel regions on the coast. At this point, one country has specified that in its own case such information would be only referred to accommodation establishments registered with a quality assurance scheme and located in known coastal resorts. In most countries, available data about the levels provision made for tourism are published. With regard to the definition of coastal areas, none of the countries have provided any definition.

Information about the tourism provision is available on an annual basis in all countries, and in some of them it is available on a monthly basis too.

Data on the number of bed-nights (or other similar measure of provision for tourism) in coastal areas for the years 2001, 2002 and 2003 are provided by those countries which had previously stated, firstly, that they had information about the tourism provision in its coastal areas and, secondly, that they made public this information. Others have not been able to give such data because they are not published. Some countries have remembered that they can provide data about the levels provision made for tourism in their tourism regions.

2.3 Environmental impacts of tourist facilities

In all countries, except one, there have been assessments of the environmental impact of the (proposed or actual) development of tourist facilities at specific coastal or marine sites.

The questionnaire invited countries to provide a summary of conclusions for each specific coastal or marine site where there have been assessments of the environmental impact of the (proposed or actual) development of tourist facilities. More particularly, countries were requested to give information on the type(s) of tourist facilities studied, its/their location, and the type and level of environmental impact from the development.

The large majority of countries have responded to this invitation describing their environmental impact assessment system for projects, including tourism projects like marinas/harbours, hotels golf installations, restaurants, camping sites and housing. With regard to marinas/harbours, several countries have provided detailed information on the type of environmental impacts considered, notably pollution, changes in tidal flows and turbidity, noise disturbance, and damage to the conservation status of species/habitats. Moving on to hotels, a couple of countries have listed the major environmental impacts considered, which are visual intrusion, changes in what is above low-water and increased traffic. Regarding golf installations, a couple of countries have explained the type of environmental impacts considered, which varies from visual intrusion, pollution, eutrophication and damage to the conservation status of species or habitats to changes in salinity of coastal lagoons, in dune morphology, in habitats and in coastal landscapes. Going on to restaurants and camping sites, in accordance with one country, impacts could be summarized as follows at its coastal sites studied: noise disturbance, visual intrusion, increase of the litter amount and pollution. Finally, with regard to housing, one country has listed the following impacts at its coastal sites studied: use of public spaces, development pressures on the buildings over the territory in the surroundings, pollution increase, habitat alteration, anthropogenic disturbances on species richness. Information on the type of environmental impacts considered in each tourism project can be accessed through reports and databases (this is the case in a couple of countries), or through the archives of the relevant planning authorities and records of tourism development applications (this is the case in one country).

In all countries but one the environmental impact of the (proposed or actual) development of tourist facilities at specific coastal or marine sites is monitored or planned to be monitored. In all cases, except one, monitoring activities are carried out on a periodic basis.

2.4 Environmental effects of recreational activities

Assessments of the environmental impact of marine recreational activities at specific coastal or marine sites have been carried out by all countries except two.

The questionnaire requested countries to provide a summary of conclusions for each specific coastal or marine site where there have been assessments of the environmental impact of marine recreational activities. More specifically, it asked for the type(s) of recreational activity studied, its/their location, and the type and level of environmental impact from the activity. All countries but two have responded to this request.

Recreational boating is the most studied marine recreational activity. Most countries have carried out assessments of the environmental impact of this activity at their coastal or marine sites (mainly specially protected sites) although only some countries have specifically indicated the type and level of such impact. With regard to the type of impact, disturbance has been most commonly identified. Such disturbance ranges from relatively small to relatively large.

After recreational boating, shore walking is the most studied recreational activity. A couple of countries have undertaken assessments of the environmental impact of this activity at their coastal and marine sites (mainly specially protected sites). However, only one country has given details about the type and level of impact observed. Particularly, and in accordance with the study developed by this country for a specific marine site, the type of impact is seal disturbance and its level varies from 2 (alert/aware of human presence but stay on beach) to 3 (panic and rush to water).

Several other marine recreational activities have been studied at specific coastal or marine sites: cetacean watching, use of jet-skis, angling, climbing, coasteering⁴, scuba diving and anchoring of sailing boats:

- a. **cetacean watching:** one country has observed that the behaviour patterns of the dolphins could be severely impacted by this growing activity, and another country has noted that the type and level of environmental impact from the activity is relatively small but there is an important disturbance of sperm whales (*Physeter macrocephalus*);
- b. **jet-skis:** one country has noted that this activity can potentially impact on wildlife and damage habitats;
- c. **angling** and
- d. **climbing:** another country has studied the potential impacts of angling and climbing and has found links to seal disturbance;
- e. **coasteering:** the same country has developed a study for a specific marine site, concluding that it is not possible to identify biotypes and communities actually impacted by coasteering activities at this site;
- f. **scuba diving:** a couple of countries have studied the environmental impact of this activity. In one of them, such impact varies from small to medium on specific habitats and species. In the other, the impact of this activity is very low because it is practised on only a small scale
- g. **anchoring of sailing boats:** this last country has summed up the impact as involving damage to sea-bed habitats, noise disturbance and pollution.

All countries, except one, have imposed special restrictions on marine recreational activities at specific coastal or marine sites.

The questionnaire invited countries to provide a summary of the restrictions on marine recreational activities at their specifically protected coastal or marine sites. More particularly, countries were requested to give information on the type(s) of recreational activity restricted, its/their location, main restrictions imposed and the periods (if any) during which the restrictions apply.

Most of the countries which imposed special restrictions on marine recreational activities at specific coastal or marine sites have placed restrictions on recreational boating, in order to provide protection for their sensitive areas located at specific coastal or marine sites. Such restrictions can be summed up involving one or more of the following:

- a. zoning;
- b. strict prohibition of boating;
- c. permission to boat only along marked routes and/or during some seasonal periods;
- d. speed limits,
- e. limitation of the number of boats and the time spent in protected areas, and
- f. establishment of requirements to keep a specified distance from wildlife.

⁴ A coastal form of orienteering, involving a mix of running, rock climbing, swimming, abseiling, and jumping.

Other activities restricted by countries at some of their specific coastal or marine sites are access to breeding and resting areas, cetacean watching, harvesting, anchoring of sailing boats, access by car to and along the coast, visiting certain islands, jet skiing and diving.

For access to breeding and resting areas, one country has imposed limits of access during the breeding season. Another country has established limits to cetacean watching, subjecting this activity to a requirement for a prior permit granted by the relevant national authority. Permits are granted if operators fulfil certain requirements – in particular, provision of monitoring data and demonstration of competence in environmental education and species identification.

Two countries have established restrictions on harvesting. In one of them, harvesting is periodically prohibited for *Patella* species, and in the other, harvesting is not allowed at all. This last country has also imposed limits on anchoring sailing boats, subjecting this activity to a requirement for an authorization. In the same country, access by car to and along the coast to specially protected areas is limited to a restricted number of visitors, with a requirement for a special authorization, and organisation of the access by the warden team. Visiting certain islands is another restricted activity. The main restrictions imposed are: a ban on camping forbidden and on visiting bird and seal protection areas.

A couple of countries have laid down limits to jet skiing. One of them has prohibited through by-laws their use in some specific coastal areas. The other one has adopted a code of practice imposing restrictions on the number of boats, the distance from wildlife to be maintained and the time which may be spent in some specific marine areas. These same restrictions are imposed by the same country with regard to diving, in addition to other restrictions like the establishment of “no-take” zones.

The environmental impact of the (proposed or actual) recreational activities at specific coastal or marine sites is monitored (or is planned to be monitored) in all countries but one. In all these cases, monitoring activities are carried out periodically and in a couple of countries non-periodically also.

2.5 Nature protection in tourist areas

All countries but one have established nature protection areas in their coastal or marine zones with a significant level of tourism in order to protect marine species and habitats which might be affected by tourism.

The questionnaire requested countries to provide a summary of the situation in the nature protection areas established. More specifically, it asked for the type(s) of nature protection areas established (RAMSAR areas, EC Special Protection Areas (SPAs), EC Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), OSPAR Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and different levels of national status (National Parks, Nature Reserves, etc)). Information was also sought on location, the species and/or habitats at which the protection is principally aimed, and the main types of protection measures taken. All countries which have established nature protection areas in their coastal or marine zones in order to protect marine species and habitats which might be affected by tourism responded to these questions.

The categories of protected sites vary from one country to another. Countries have designated nature protection areas within the framework of international law (European Directives, International Conventions) and/or national law. In the area of international law, EC SPAs, EC SACs and RAMSAR areas stand out. In the area of national law, Nature Reserves and National Parks are the most designated category. Several other categories have been established (Biosphere Reserve (MaB), MARPOL areas and OSPAR MPAs) but to a lesser extent.

The species and/or habitats at which the protection is principally aimed vary between countries, depending on the type of nature protection area established. Regarding the categories most frequently designated within the framework of international law, in EC SPAs the species to be protected are listed in the EC Bird Directive, in EC SACs the species and habitats are listed in the EC Habitats Directive, and in RAMSAR areas the habitats to be protected are listed in the RAMSAR List of Wetlands of International Importance. Most countries which have established such protected sites have not specified in their species and/or habitats specifically protected for

each site. Only one country has given such data, providing a thorough list of species and/or habitats specifically protected in its coastal and/or marine sites identified. In contrast, with regard to Nature Reserves and National Parks. In general, countries have specified the species and/or habitats specifically protected more generally. Regarding protection measures taken, these vary extensively from one country to another depending on the type of nature protection area established. The most common are: zoning, visitor management, limited access, routing systems, implementation of environmental education programs, Operators Codes of Conduct, fishing methods and limits on fishing days. In order to assess the state of the species and/or habitats in nature protection areas previously established, all countries have designed monitoring programmes.

2.6 Lessons learnt

The questionnaire invited countries to describe briefly one notable case where tourism either has been well managed to protect the environment or has had a regrettable adverse impact on the environment. All countries but two responded to this invitation. A couple of countries described their own experience with regard to cetacean watching, an activity which has expanded rapidly in recent years. In order to promote sustainable cetacean watching, these countries have designed a combination of instruments including a mix of voluntary agreements and legal instruments. Other lessons learnt are referred to experiences related to the management of nature protection areas, notably National Parks. More specifically, measures adopted to restrict building, to inform visitors and to limit their access.

2.7 Summary

Statistics on tourism demand and supply tend to be compiled on a national or district (e.g. county) basis and, in general, the coastal component can only be estimated.

Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are used when evaluating the effects of tourist facilities and recreational activities at specific coastal or marine sites. EIAs include consideration of all relevant factors. Marinas, harbours, hotels and golf installations, restaurants, camping sites and housing are the most evaluated tourist facilities.

Recreational boating, shore walking, cetacean watching and diving are the most studied recreational activities. In most countries, the environmental impact of tourist facilities and recreational activities is monitored or planned to be monitored. The vast majority of countries have imposed special restrictions on marine recreational activities at specific coastal or marine sites to provide protection to sensitive features. Speed limits and limits on access stand out.

In most countries nature protection areas have been established in coastal or marine zones with a significant level of tourism in order to protect marine species and habitats which might be affected by tourism. The categories of protected sites ranges from EC SPAs, EC SACs and RAMSAR areas within the framework of international law to Nature Reserves and National Parks within the framework of national law.

In order to assess the state of species and/or habitats in nature protection areas the vast majority of countries have designed monitoring programmes.

3. Conclusions on Tourism and its Effects on the Marine Environment of the OSPAR Maritime Area

The level of information on the available data on tourism varies widely from one country to another. This is partly a reflection of:

- a. the different levels of priority given to this issue by Contracting Parties, and
- b. the different quantities of resources allocated to combating the impact of tourism.

OSPAR is primarily concerned with the marine environment. It has competence to deal with landward environmental issues only in so far as they impact on the marine environment. Many

issues relating to the landward aspects of tourism fall firmly within national, regional (including Autonomous Communities and Länder) or local competence.

Based on the analysis undertaken, issues relating to tourism are adequately covered in both international and national regulations and requirements. Additional comprehensive work by OSPAR is unlikely to increase significantly knowledge in this field.

No further action should therefore be taken by OSPAR on this issue until new information indicates that such action is essential.