



High-level evaluation of progress  
against OSPAR's North-East Atlantic  
Environment Strategy

2010 | 2020

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Over the last decade the OSPAR Commission has used the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2010-2020 to work towards its vision of a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic, used sustainably.

A key deliverable during this period was the publication of the 2017 OSPAR Intermediate Assessment (IA2017). The report detailed the human pressures on the North-East Atlantic, their effects and the implications for the marine environment, and demonstrated OSPAR's progress towards realising its vision.



### Protected areas, impacts from human activities and biodiversity issues

Since 2010 OSPAR has worked towards establishing an ecologically coherent and effectively managed Marine Protected Area (MPA) Network and a management framework to halt the loss of marine biodiversity. As of 2020, the MPA network consists of 552 MPAs, including 7 designated collectively by OSPAR in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. The network covers 22.1% of coastal and territorial waters and only 6.5% of the OSPAR Maritime Area as a whole, indicating that the 10% CBD Aichi target 11 has not been fully met. Substantial gaps in the MPA network remain and it cannot yet be considered ecologically coherent. OSPAR has adopted Recommendations that aim to protect 54 species and habitats it has identified as threatened and/or declining and in need of protection. A plan to implement the collective actions listed in the Recommendations has also been developed.

OSPAR manages the impacts of a range of human activities such as marine renewable energy developments, ballast water, cable laying, artificial reefs, and dredged material. New agreements have been adopted for a number of these activities. A Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter was agreed in 2014 and measures identified in the plan are being implemented. OSPAR has worked on methodologies for Cumulative Effects and Socio-economic assessments within the IA2017. Collaboration with other sectors has improved, in particular with the fisheries sector through the Collective Arrangement and a Joint HELCOM-OSPAR harmonised procedure for ballast water management exemptions. Despite these successes, challenges remain; overall litter levels remain a problem and OSPAR's objective for marine litter has not yet been met (the latest marine litter indicator assessments show some signs of reductions, but there are sub-regional differences).

Progress has been made in developing common indicators for biodiversity and prominent pressures, such as marine litter and a registry for underwater impulsive noise. However, it has not yet been possible to fully evaluate if implementation of OSPAR measures has achieved the objective to halt further loss of biodiversity. Assessments of the status of the environment indicate that species, such as marine birds, are not in good status and there is evidence of extensive physical disturbance to the seabed, caused by bottom contacting fishing gears. Areas in the English Channel and the Celtic seas have higher levels of disturbance than other assessed areas.

## Eutrophication

The Eutrophication Strategy seeks to minimise human-induced eutrophication such that all parts of the OSPAR maritime area have non-problem status. Progress has been made, indicated both by the reduction in total problem area from 119 000 km<sup>2</sup> in 2006 to 100 000 km<sup>2</sup> in 2014, and by reductions in nutrient inputs to the Greater North Sea over the same period of around 10% for nitrogen and 30% for phosphorus. Despite this, the ultimate aim – a healthy marine environment where human-induced eutrophication does not occur – has not been achieved. A key problem is uncertainty about the levels of nutrient reduction required to achieve non-problem status. Several national initiatives for setting reduction targets have been completed. However, coordination to reduce nutrient inputs to the marine environment has been hindered by a lack of agreement between Contracting Parties and an absence of regionally consistent threshold values for eutrophication indicators.



## Hazardous Substances

The Hazardous Substances Strategy aims to ensure that contaminants do not cause pollution effects, with fish and seafood safe to eat, and that Contracting Parties move towards a cessation of contaminant discharges, emissions, and losses. The IA2017 showed a general improvement in environmental quality with heavy metal inputs to the Greater North Sea continuing to fall. Concentrations of those contaminants that OSPAR monitors have also continued to fall in most areas though the ultimate aim of achieving background levels (i.e. the levels of contaminants that would be found in the absence of human activity) has not been reached and there remain areas of concern. Work with OSPAR substance lists focuses on substances that are considered to be of concern to the marine environment, including substances covered within the EU framework and global conventions. Coordinated monitoring and assessment continues although there are problems with quantifying inputs in many regions.



## Offshore Industry

The Offshore Oil and Gas Industry Strategy aims to protect the OSPAR maritime area from the adverse effects of offshore activities. The OSPAR maritime area is a mature oil and gas production province, although total production of oil and gas has been steadily falling since its peak in 1999. The Offshore Oil and Gas Industry Strategy has achieved a reduction of over 20% in the amount of dispersed oil discharged in produced water; the phase out of discharges of offshore chemicals on OSPAR's List of Chemicals for Priority Action; and a nearly 50% reduction in the discharge of chemical substances identified as candidates for substitution (although further reductions in discharges are considered possible). A risk-based approach for the management of produced water discharges has also been introduced to complement

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the OSPAR harmonised mandatory control system for offshore chemicals and promote the shift towards a reduction in the use of more hazardous substances. Contracting Parties undertook a review of drilling in extreme conditions and confirmed that their existing respective framework remained fit for purpose. Contracting Parties have also fully implemented the ban on the dumping or leaving in place of disused offshore installations. Since OSPAR Decision 98/3 on the disposal of disused offshore installations was adopted, approximately 170 installations have been decommissioned of which 11 were granted derogations. Contracting Parties continue to promote research and monitor the development of Carbon Capture and Storage proposals, although full scale development is still in its infancy.



## Radioactive substances

OSPAR prevents pollution from ionising radiation. The Contracting Parties have achieved progressive and substantial reductions in discharges from the nuclear sector and continue to make good progress meeting the objectives of the Radioactive Substances Strategy. Recent Periodic Evaluations show continual reduction in discharges from the nuclear sector, up to 95% since the late 1990s. A significant success is a 38-fold decrease in discharges of the long-lived radioactive element, technetium. The radiological impacts on man and biota from the remaining discharges are low. For the non-nuclear sector, OSPAR will complete a detailed assessment of radioactive discharges by 2021 based on data submitted since 2005. Early indications suggest that the impacts from the discharges from the oil and gas sector are low. OSPAR will deliver a robust assessment of progress of reducing discharges and concentrations in the environment in the next Periodic Evaluation and the 2023 Quality Status Report.



## Measures and Actions Programme

OSPAR's primary mode of action for the protection and conservation of the North-East Atlantic is the adoption of consistent and harmonised measures in the form of OSPAR Decisions, Recommendations and agreements and implementation of these obligations and commitments by Contracting Parties.

To support Contracting Parties implementation of measures, OSPAR has developed a Measures and Action Programme (MAP) matrix to provide continuous oversight of the implementation and effectiveness of national and collective OSPAR measures. This helps to share best practice and lessons learned across Contracting Parties and to assess progress in implementing OSPAR's measures and actions.





## International issues

During 2010-2020 OSPAR has engaged with a wide range of international issues and organisations as part of OSPAR's work to fulfil the commitments of NEAES, with the overall goal of safeguarding and improving the state of both the North-East Atlantic and other marine areas across the globe:

- The 2008 Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) is the European Union's collective framework for achieving or maintaining good environmental status of European marine waters. OSPAR has invested considerable effort in supporting Contracting Parties that are EU member states to regionally coordinate all elements of their marine strategies, as referred to in MSFD Articles 5 and 6.
- In 2014 the Collective Arrangement between competent international organisations on cooperation regarding selected areas in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction in the North-East Atlantic (the Collective Arrangement) was adopted by the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) and OSPAR to seek cooperation and coordination on implementation of suitable conservation and management measures. Efforts to expand the Collective Arrangement and to engage with other competent authorities continue.
- OSPAR 2015 agreed an engagement remit with the Arctic Council with a view to facilitating increased information exchange and collaboration. In 2017 OSPAR was granted observer status in the Arctic Council.
- OSPAR has cooperated closely with other Regional Seas Conventions (RSCs) over the last decade including the Cartagena Convention, the Abidjan Convention, the Barcelona Convention, and HELCOM. Examples of work include voluntary commitments registered at the United Nations (UN) Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14, held in New York in June 2017, and work within the framework of the UNEP programme of regional seas. There is also ongoing and strengthened collaboration effort with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and the EU, including joint working groups.
- IMO (International Maritime Organisation) and OSPAR signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2018 to further cooperation at the regional level on issues within the scope of the London Convention and London Protocol (Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter).
- The CBD (Convention on Biodiversity) and OSPAR cooperate inter alia to aid the achievement of the Aichi targets at the regional and national scale. In addition, numerous EBSAs (Ecologically or Biologically Significant Areas) in the North-East Atlantic marine region have successfully been identified through OSPAR and were meanwhile adopted by the CBD.


As part of its engagement with other international organisations, OSPAR has also maintained a watching brief on the measures being taken by other competent authorities in the fields of management of land-based sources of hazardous substances and nutrients, the management of fisheries and other human activities with the potential to impact the marine environment. Where needed OSPAR brought matters of importance to the attention of the relevant authorities.




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OSPAR Secretariat  
The Aspect  
12 Finsbury Square  
London  
EC2A 1AS  
United Kingdom

 +44 (0) 20 7430 5200

 [Secretariat@ospar.org](mailto:Secretariat@ospar.org)

[www.ospar.org](http://www.ospar.org)