

# Status of the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas in 2017

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Policy Issue: Protection of marine biodiversity and ecosystems

Policy Objective: A network of marine protected areas (MPAs) should be established, which is ecologically coherent by 2012, includes sites representative of all biogeographic regions in the OSPAR maritime area, is consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) target for effectively conserved marine and coastal ecological regions, and is well managed by 2016.

## Specific questions addressed

How extensive is the OSPAR Network of MPAs?  
Is the network ecologically coherent?  
Is the network well managed?  
How are we progressing towards the CBD target?

## Findings

Since 2005, all 12 Contracting Parties (CPs) bordering the North-East Atlantic have nominated sites to the OSPAR Network of MPAs both in their national waters as well as collectively in areas beyond national jurisdiction. By the end of 2017, the network comprised 465 MPAs with a total surface area of 858,890 km<sup>2</sup> or 6.3 % of the OSPAR Maritime Area<sup>1</sup>.

## Spatial coverage within and outside CPs' waters

A total of 455 MPAs are situated within the territorial waters or Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of CPs. 19.1 % of territorial waters are covered by OSPAR MPAs<sup>2</sup> in comparison to 2.7 % of EEZs. The OSPAR Maritime Area beyond the limits of national EEZs holds 10 OSPAR MPAs, covering 8.9 % of this area.

## Distribution across the OSPAR Regions

The MPAs are currently distributed unevenly across the five OSPAR Regions (Fig. 1). The Greater North Sea (Region II), the Celtic Seas (Region III) and the Wider Atlantic (Region V) are the best represented OSPAR Regions with 18.0 %, 15.0 % and 8.3 % coverage, respectively. While coverage of the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast (Region IV) is at 5.9 %, the Arctic Waters (Region I) show the lowest coverage with 1.9 % of the area within OSPAR MPAs.

## Ecological coherence of the OSPAR Network of MPAs

Despite good progress, the OSPAR MPA network cannot yet be considered ecologically coherent. Substantial spatial gaps in the MPA network remain in particular in Arctic Waters (Region I) and the Wider Atlantic (Region V). Further work is also required to ensure that habitats and species considered by OSPAR to be threatened and/or declining are adequately protected by MPAs where this is an appropriate management measure. However, the network has a good representation of several biogeographic regions within the North-East Atlantic, which is one of the requirements for ecological coherence (Table. 1 overleaf). Additional efforts are needed to develop the adequate methodology and make the necessary data available for a scientifically robust eco-coherence assessment.

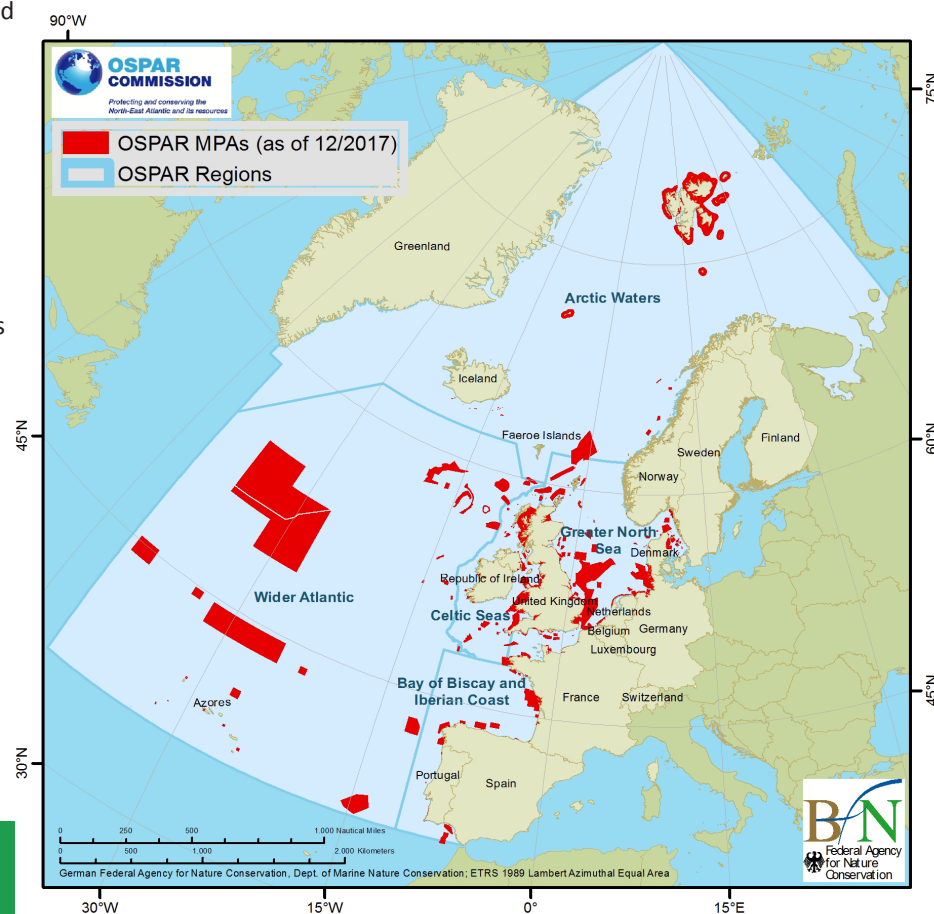


Figure 1: The OSPAR network of MPAs as of 1 December 2017.

<sup>1</sup>: All areas were calculated using the Lambert Azimuthal Equal-Area Projection (European Terrestrial Reference System 1989).

<sup>2</sup>: For the calculation of the surface of Territorial Waters and EEZ areas, Madeira (PT), Greenland and Faroe (DK) and other areas were included. Thus, the percentages are not directly comparable to assessment sheets before 2015.

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## Management of the OSPAR Network of MPAs

Management measures are in place for some OSPAR MPAs, but for many they still have to be developed and implemented. As a result, 11% of OSPAR MPAs are known to be moving towards or have achieved their conservation objectives. Thus, furthering efforts to implement management measures necessary to achieve the conservation objectives of the protected features of OSPAR MPAs should be considered. In parallel, long-term monitoring programmes are required to evaluate with greater confidence whether the conservation objectives of OSPAR MPAs are being achieved.

Countries have also started to implement management actions for OSPAR MPAs in ABNJ, but successful management also requires cooperation with international organisations with competence for the management of human activities, such as fishing, shipping and deep-sea mining.

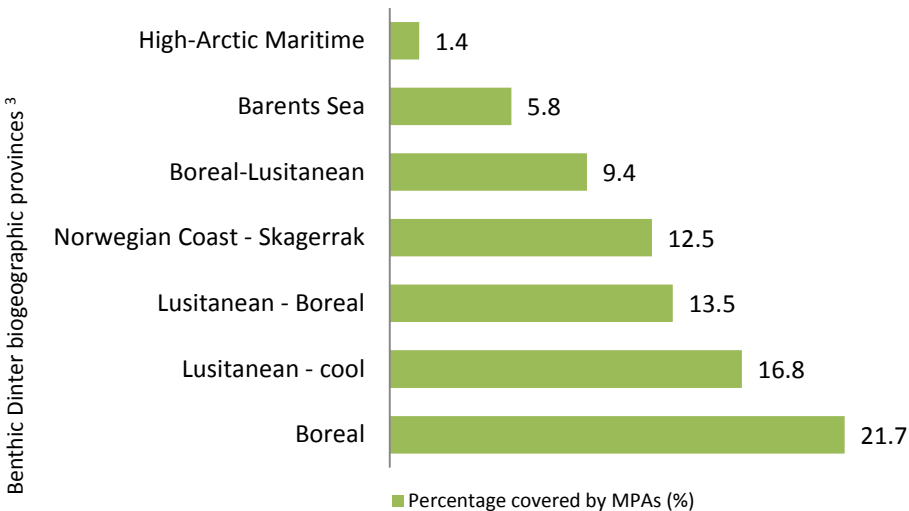
## What has been done?

The status of the OSPAR Network of MPAs and any changes since 2016 have been assessed, including whether the network can be considered as ecologically coherent and well managed.

## Observed status and/or change

In 2017, Norway and the United Kingdom nominated 18 new MPAs to the OSPAR Network of MPAs, covering more than 50,000 km<sup>2</sup>.

Table 1: Examples of Dinter biogeographic provinces/sub-provinces and their coverage by OSPAR MPAs



<sup>3</sup> According to the classification by Dinter 2001 (Dinter, W. 2001. Biogeography of the OSPAR Maritime Area. German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Bonn. 167 pp).

## Does it work?

The OSPAR measure to establish a network of MPAs in the North-East Atlantic is progressing well in terms of MPA designation. The Greater North Sea and Celtic Seas have reached the target set by the CBD, i.e. to conserve at least 10 % of coastal and marine areas by 2020. Ecological coherence of the network, however, cannot be achieved unless the remaining gaps in network and underlying knowledge base are addressed. One major challenge of assessing ecological coherence and management effectiveness is the paucity of relevant data, e.g. on the occurrence, distribution and status of species and habitats, and a common understanding about what constitutes effective management, respectively.

## Implications - What happens next?

With a better understanding of the current state of ecological coherence and of management effectiveness, Contracting Parties could consider where additional MPAs may need to be nominated to fill the identified gaps in the network and if management measures need to be adjusted to meet stated objectives. Improved reporting of relevant data on species and habitats as well as on management measures is required to understand what is being protected and if it is being protected effectively. Such information is essential for understanding whether measures are having the intended outcome.

**Assessment method guide, further reading and data sources**

OSPAR Intermediate Assessment 2017.  
<https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/intermediate-assessment-2017/>

OSPAR. (2017). 2016 Status Report on the OSPAR Network of Marine Protect Areas;

OSPAR Recommendation 2003/3 adopted by OSPAR 2003 (OSPAR 03/17/1, Annex 9), amended by OSPAR Recommendation 2010/2 (OSPAR 10/23/1, Annex 7)

OSPAR. (2013). An Assessment of the ecological coherence of the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas in 2012. 31 March 2013; revised 7 May 2013 prepared by Johnson D., Ardron J., Billet D., Hooper T. and Mullier T. from Seascope Consultants Ltd.

