

MARINE LITTER

OSPAR's QUALITY STATUS REPORT 2023 BRIEFING NOTE SERIES

Under its North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2010-2020, OSPAR set an objective “to substantially reduce marine litter in the OSPAR maritime area to levels where properties and quantities of marine litter do not cause harm to the coastal and marine environment”. This thematic assessment describes the marine litter issue and the work of OSPAR to address it. It also looks at the progress made towards achieving the strategic objective that provides the foundation for the next steps.

Overall, marine litter levels are still high and further efforts are needed. There is a predominance of plastics among marine litter that is reported across all OSPAR Regions. Also, microplastics have been reported in sediments, surface waters, water column and in biota for the OSPAR Maritime Area at different concentrations. Single-use plastics and maritime-related litter are frequently found beach litter items at OSPAR level, with some important regional differences. Nonetheless, there are some positive signs: a decrease in the quantities of litter found on OSPAR beaches between 2015-2020 and in the floating litter in the North Sea between 2009-2018. When considered against the upward trend in plastic production and use in Europe over a similar period, this suggests that progress has been made on preventing plastics from entering the marine environment.

Policy responses to managing marine litter need to continue to reduce inputs, reduce the risks associated with materials and products (e.g., develop alternatives to plastics and design solutions) and facilitate societal change. Because of the links between climate change and marine litter, integrated approaches could benefit both problems.

OSPAR's North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 includes a new marine litter strategic objective, supported by eight operational objectives involving new measures for specific sources and pathways and the development of ambitious coordinated strategies, control measures, threshold values and targets. The adoption of a second Regional Action Plan in 2022 is key to its implementation. Regular monitoring and assessment, including developing new common indicators, will continue to play a key role in supporting the measures and evaluating their effectiveness.



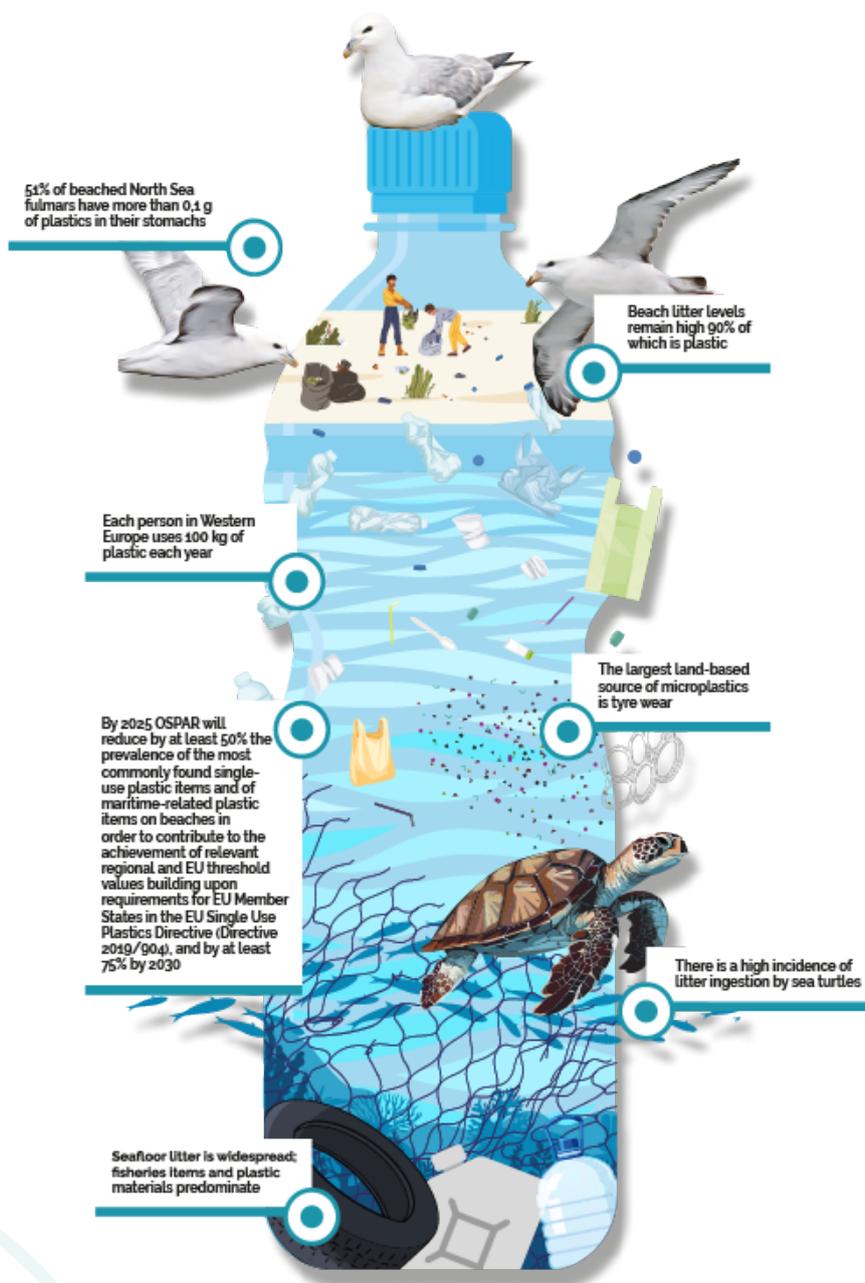
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