



## Press statement

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## OSPAR pioneers the protection of the high seas OSPAR on track to meet the new EU marine directive

**OSPAR, the inter-governmental body protecting the North-East Atlantic, this year focused on the protection of the high seas. OSPAR also agreed on actions to support the implementation of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.**

### Protecting the high seas

OSPAR agreed to strengthen its work towards the establishment of Marine Protected Areas in the High Seas of the North-East Atlantic. This will require enhanced cooperation with competent organisations regulating specific human activities including fisheries.

The Chairman of the OSPAR Commission meeting, Mr Knut Kroepelien from the Norwegian Ministry of Environment, confirmed his enthusiasm concerning the Brest meeting. In addition to our work on specific species and impacts of human activities, we are now making further progress towards protecting high seas. We have agreed the scientific merits of a section of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge with outstanding biodiversity as a deep water area beyond national jurisdiction where OSPAR should ensure appropriate protection together with other competent organisations. He explained that our intention is to work closely with the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission and other competent authorities to see exactly how best to protect cold water corals and other deep sea ecosystems present within this site.

### OSPAR and European Maritime policies

OSPAR has been working for many years for the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic, in particular by reducing point sources of pollution.

In 2003, OSPAR welcomed the development and implementation of the European Marine Strategy. The Marine Strategy Framework Directive, published this week, will enter into force on 15th July 2008. The OSPAR Commission will develop strategic goals for its work in order to collaborate in the implementation of the Framework Directive. To that end, OSPAR will use its strengths: a regional

basis, a holistic long-term outlook, good science, the ecosystem approach, implementation follow-up and the involvement of stakeholders. OSPAR confirmed that the Quality Status Report 2010, a comprehensive evaluation of the state of the environment of the North-East Atlantic, will provide an excellent basis to assist member states with producing their initial assessment for national marine strategies required by the European Commission for 2012. OSPAR agreed to work on adapting its activities to meet this challenge in time for the OSPAR ministerial meeting in 2010.

Mr Xavier de la Gorce, French General Secretary to the Sea, stressed the important role of OSPAR in the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, and exposed the four maritime priorities for the French presidency of European Council which starts 1<sup>st</sup> July 2008: maritime governance, maritime surveillance, maritime and marine research and protection of marine environment. He also announced a technical international conference ~~%~~2012 marine targets: European Marine Strategy and biodiversity in the high seas+ to be held at the end of the year in Brest.

### **Protecting coral gardens and sharks**

OSPAR's work on protection and conservation of marine biodiversity includes the identification of species and habitats in need of protection. OSPAR agreed to add a set of further species and habitats including coral gardens and several shark species, whose future is now a concern.

The biological diversity of coral garden communities is typically high. This habitat is currently threatened and the probability of significant decline is high. National programmes have been put in place by several OSPAR Contracting Parties recognising the need to protect cold water corals. Certain fisheries closures have also been put in place by the EC and NEAFC to protect cold water corals.

Mr Stefan Hain, Head of the United Nations Environment Programme Coral Reef Unit explained ~~%~~ in 2003 the OSPAR Commission put cold water corals on the world agenda. The International Year of the Reef 2008 is drawing attention to the serious plight of this critical habitat in both tropical and temperate seas+. Delegates of OSPAR were able to learn more about corals during a visit to Oceanopolis in Brest, organised by the French Agency for Marine Protected Areas.

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#### **Note for editors**

1. The OSPAR Commission was set up by the 1992 OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, which unified and up-dated the 1972 Oslo and 1974 Paris Conventions. It brings together the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, together with the European Community.

2. The OSPAR Commission would like to thank the organisations and individuals who have kindly given permission for their photographic material to be used for the press release. These photos are not downloadable and under no circumstances should they be reproduced. Anyone wishing to use any image should contact the author directly.