

Press release

OSPAR contact number David Johnson, Tel: 00 44 (0)20 7430 5200

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Victoria House
37-63 Southampton Row
London WC1B 4DA
United Kingdom

t: +44 (0)20 7430 5200
f: +44 (0)20 7430 5225
e: secretariat@ospar.org
www.ospar.org

OSPAR at 20

On its 20th anniversary the OSPAR Commission is still breaking new ground. Meeting in Bonn (Germany) this week, the sixteen Contracting Parties to the OSPAR Convention agreed several new and innovative legal measures:

- To designate and manage a 7th extensive High Seas Marine Protected Area encompassing the water column of an area of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge immediately north of the Charlie-Gibbs Fracture Zone;
- To adopt protective measures for two species of seahorses (*Hippocampus hippocampus* and *Hippocampus guttulatus*) and the eelgrass beds (*Zostera*) where they live; and
- To adopt a Recommendation for a Risk-based Approach to the Management of Produced Water Discharges from Offshore Installations together with supporting Guidelines.

Welcoming delegations to Bonn, State Secretary Jürgen Becker identified three milestones. He emphasised that OSPAR had led the way in defining the ecosystem approach, helped inspire the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive and is now responsible for a significant network of marine protected areas.

Mr Victor Escobar (Spain), Chairman of the OSPAR Commission said 'I am extremely proud of the achievements of OSPAR during this meeting and over its long history. Through cooperation and consensus the OSPAR countries have set a global example of how to tackle pollution.'

In a special 20-year anniversary speech Prof. Dr. Klaus Töpfer reflected on the essential role of regional governance. Following his contribution to last week's Rio+20 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Mr Töpfer praised the collective work of the OSPAR Commission. He said 'we have progressed from protecting species to conserving systems: we now have new challenges – ocean acidification, plastic particles in the sea and increased exploitation of marine resources. I wish OSPAR continued and well-deserved success.'

Since its inception OSPAR has in particular:

- Banned dumping and incineration of wastes at sea;
- Significantly reduced the input from the land of hazardous substances and nutrients;
- Ensured discharges from nuclear power plants are the lowest recorded;
- Regulated key aspects of the offshore oil and gas industry such as decommissioning;
- Developed ecological quality objectives for a healthy ocean; and
- Comprehensively evaluated the health of the North-East Atlantic in the Quality Status Report 2010.

ENDS



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 updated 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 Union.
2. Charlie-Gibbs North High Seas MPA is just under 180,000 Km² (which is just over 4x the size of Switzerland). The most important physical feature of this protected area is the meandering sub polar front which separates the warm waters to the south from the cold waters to the north, creating a highly productive zone where they meet. Of the species that occur there, a number are of concern to OSPAR due to their status as Threatened and/or Declining. These include: deep water sharks like the gulper shark as well as blue whales, leather back turtles, Portuguese dogfish and the orange roughy.
3. General Information: seahorses live in shallow coastal waters, they are creatures that are under threat for many reasons. They tend to be slow at reproducing, producing only a few young at a time and putting a lot of effort into looking after them. Seahorses tend to mate for life, are territorial and do not move very quickly. All these traits increase their particular sensitivity. For both species that OSPAR has taken measures on, damage to the shallow coastal habitats they live in is the main threat - from human uses of the shallow coastal zone. The fate of the Long-snouted seahorse is intertwined with the *Zostera* beds. These seahorses live in the eelgrass. Decreases in eelgrass will mean fewer long-snouted seahorses, which is why OSPAR has taken these measures at the same time.

The Short-snouted Seahorse: (*Hippocampus hippocampus*)

more information can be found at:

http://www.ospar.org/documents/dbase/publications/p00430_short_snouted_seahorse.pdf

Long-snouted Seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*)

more information can be found at:

http://www.ospar.org/documents/dbase/publications/p00429_long_snouted_seahorse.pdf

Eelgrass beds (*Zostera* beds)

more information can be found at:

http://www.ospar.org/documents/dbase/publications/p00426_zostera_beds.pdf

4. The Risk-based approach is a method of prioritising mitigation actions on the substances that pose most risk to the environment. Produced water means water which is produced during oil and/or gas production operations and which may be discharged to the sea following treatment.
5. More than 30 international non-governmental organisations are involved in OSPAR as official Observers. They represent a broad range of interests and expertise related to the marine environment and the uses of marine resources. Many contribute information, insights and standpoints. This is much appreciated feedback from civil society and the economy. The OSPAR Commission greatly values these partnerships that help inform its decisions and other results. (see list on OSPAR website at <http://www.ospar.org/content/content.asp?menu=0016>)
6. The Quality Status Report 2010 can be found at www.ospar.org.
<http://qsr2010.ospar.org/en/index.html>