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Communication strategy 2021-2025

# Background

OSPAR is the mechanism by which fifteen Governments of the western coasts and catchments of Europe, together with the European Union, cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. Since 1972 OSPAR has worked to identify threats to the marine environment, and has organised, across the region, programmes and measures to ensure effective national action to combat them. In doing so it has pioneered ways of ensuring monitoring and assessment of the quality status of the seas, of setting internationally agreed goals and of checking that the participating Governments are delivering what is needed.

OSPAR, like all organisations today, faces increased scrutiny from its contracting Governments, government agencies, NGOs and the public. A proactive communication strategy will assist in underlining OSPAR as a vehicle for Contracting Party cooperation and actions and a worthy recipient of wider support and respect. Conveying OSPAR messages will require careful positioning in a world crowded with competing organisations.

This document covers the period from 2021-25 and serves as the OSPAR Commission’s overarching communication strategy during this period. It focuses on the communication opportunities offered by some major events in the OSPAR calendar such as the Ministerial meeting 2021, the launch of the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030, and the launch of OSPAR’s Quality Status Report 2023. The communication strategy is supported by annual communication plans giving more details of general communication activities. Major activities are also supported by their own communication plan. These documents complement each other and should be read together to give a clear vision of what OSPAR hopes to achieve by 2025 at the same time as allowing flexibility in how it achieves this vision.

# Guiding the strategy 2021-25

OSPAR’s overall communication goals are rooted in the founding Convention and the NEAES 2030. OSPAR will promote its messages by being both proactive and responsive in its communications. It will improve the Commission’s profile by being consistent in communicating key messages, consistent in communications design, easy to reach and clear on who OSPAR is and what it stands for.

OSPAR’s resources – both in terms of staff and funding – for communication activities are limited. OSPAR will therefore need to rely on multipliers such as national ministries and agencies, academic institutions, NGOs, civil society organisations, and maritime professionals that are in touch with the general public in their respective countries.

OSPAR’s Vision

Our vision is a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.

Communication Goals

The communication goals of OSPAR are to:

* Raise awareness of the threats to the marine ecosystems of the North-East Atlantic as a result of increasing human activities.
* Highlight the actions OSPAR is taking to address threats to the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic
* Raise the profile of OSPAR and celebrate success and innovation;
* Facilitate two-way communication with internal and external stakeholders;
* Demonstrate the value of regional cooperation in delivering OSPAR’s vision of a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification;
* Demonstrate effective coordination under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive;
* Reinforce the OSPAR Commission’s role in influencing global ocean governance;
* Promote understanding of the values and special features of the marine ecosystems of the North-East Atlantic;

# Key Communication Opportunities for OSPAR 2021-2025

This table highlights specific communication opportunities which will be promoted using a combination of communication tools such as those detailed in the annual Communication Plans. This selection is not exhaustive and can be added to as further communication opportunities arise.

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| --- | --- |
| OSPAR Product | Communication |
| OSPAR Ministerial 2021 | The OSPAR Ministerial meeting is supported by a communication plan which will be enacted in the run up to the Ministerial meeting on 1 October 2021 and following it.  |
| Ministerial deliverables  | A number of key deliverables will be agreed at the Ministerial meeting. A plan to promote and increase the visibility of these has been approved.  |
| 2nd iteration of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter | A key action of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter 2014-21 was communication. Successes from the 1st RAP will continue to be shared until the end of 2021 and beyond using the toolkit agreed by ICG-ML. As the 2nd RAP is developed, a new toolkit will be developed to complement it and communication activities increased. |
| Quality Status Report 2023 | OSPAR’s next Quality Status Report (QSR) is due to be published in 2023. However, in advance of its publication in 2023 many of the supporting documentation such as feeder reports, status assessments, periodic evaluations and comprehensive procedures will be ready and will warrant communication activity, as will the preparation for the publication of the QSR. A plan for the QSR 2023 communications will be developed and presented to OSPAR 2022.  |
| OSPAR Mid-Term Ministerial 2026 | OSPAR has agreed that a Ministerial should be held to make any necessary revisions to the NEAES 2030 following the results of the QSR 2023. The Ministerial meeting will be supported by a communication plan which will be enacted in the run up to the Ministerial meeting and following it.  |
| Protection of Species and Habitats Roadmap | The Roadmap for the implementation of collective actions within the Recommendations for the protection and conservation of OSPAR listed Species and Habitats 2017-2025 was developed in response to the need for a strategic approach to deliver the actions set out in theRecommendations for protection and conservation of the OSPAR listed species and habitats. It is supported by a communication plan.  |

Main communication messages

The threats to the health of the ocean have never been greater. Urgent action is needed to address the loss of biodiversity, pollution and the fundamental and possibly irreversible changes caused by climate change to the ocean. There has never been a more important time to address these challenges and to help others to do so. OSPAR needs to lead by example and demonstrate the benefits of regional cooperation and the ecosystem approach and has developed a range of key messages to reflect our approach;

* **OSPAR’s has a strong political mandate:** At its Ministerial meeting in 2021, OSPAR Ministers acknowledged the successes and approved the NEAES 2030 noting that more action was needed;
* **Urgent action needed:** The NEAES 2030 acknowledges the threats faced by the ocean and sets out a series of ambitious objectives to address current, future and emerging issues;
* **The NEAES 2010-2020 delivered, and so will the NEAES 2030:** The NEAES remains the most effective instrument for achieving OSPAR’s environmental objectives and vision, offering a long-term vision and strategic orientation. The successes of the NEAES 2010-2020 will be celebrated and action taken on outstanding objectives communicated;
* **OSPAR is science-driven and transparent:** OSPAR’s work is based on the latest science available on processes affecting the marine environment, containing a holistic set of science-based actions and measures for a healthy North-East Atlantic. OSPAR is working to the 2023 Quality Status Report which will provide a holistic view of the health of the North-East Atlantic and will drive future policy;
* **Emerging and previously unaddressed pressures:** the NEAES 2030 includes emerging and previously insufficiently addressed pressures such as climate change and ocean acidification making it fit-for-purpose to address today’s challenges;
* **The NEAES 2030 follows the ecosystem approach** and takes account of the economic and social benefits of a North-East Atlantic in a healthy state, and the cumulative effects that could hamper this. OSPAR seeks a balance between the protection of the marine environment and the use of it to support livelihoods;
* **OSPAR is inclusive and stakeholder-driven:** the majority of OSPAR groups and bodies were involved in developing the NEAES 2030, and observers invited to participate;
* **International targets and objectives:** The NEAES 2030 is closely aligned with international and regional ecological objectives such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and the MSFD (for Contracting Parties who are also EU members). This positions OSPAR as one of the regional platforms for the implementation of these targets and objectives.

Strategic considerations

**Show of strong political support**

To lend credibility to the NEAES 2030 as OSPAR’s central programme of action, a show of strong political support will be needed to drive the implementation of the strategy. The Ministerial Meeting of 2021 will provide the mandate for an ambitious launch, showcasing and garnering support at the highest possible level in OSPAR, and for broadcasting this within the North-East Atlantic region and globally. Testimonials and commitments by the OSPAR Ministers, will show a political support beneficial for the implementation of the NEAES 2030.

**Accessibility and visibility**

OSPAR needs to be accessible, physically in terms of access to the documents and related materials, but also intellectually in terms of visibility and comprehension. All OSPAR products will be published and referenced on OSPAR’s website and tailored to the various target audiences. To increase visibility, “brand recognition” and legibility, a visual identity comprised of a logo, graphic elements and templates for various documents have been developed. These will be used when disseminating communications following the Ministerial meeting in 2021 and beyond.

**Using multipliers**

Since OSPAR does not have the resources to reach a wider audience, it will need to rely on multipliers such as the relevant national bodies of its Contracting Parties, stakeholder organisations such as NGOs, and marine and maritime professionals in contact with the public. To facilitate their work, a communication toolkit will be provided to the multipliers.

**Media relations**

Traditional media relations will also be considered, chiefly around the 2021 Ministerial meeting 2021, as its high-profile attendance is guaranteed to attract media attention. Capitalising on this, OSPAR will also actively engage with media houses in the wake of the event, indicating its availability and offering contributions such as articles and op-eds on the NEAES 2030.

**Online actions**

In light of changing working arrangements and OSPAR’s limited communication resources, particular focus will be placed on social media, especially on creating content suited for online communications. Emphasis will be placed on producing short videos, animations, and infographics at regular intervals. The videos will also be used for official representation and presentation at events where OSPAR is invited but unable to attend in person. Regular online campaigns will be devised whenever an occasion presents itself, such as the launch of the 2nd Marine Litter Regional Action Plan.

**Stakeholders**

As an inter-governmental organisation, OSPAR has a wide variety of stakeholders with differing information needs. By identifying and prioritising these stakeholder groups, OSPAR can focus available resources, whilst simultaneously meeting the needs of as many stakeholders as possible.

The provision of useful information depends on effective two-way communication. OSPAR must engage in dialogue with its target groups to understand their needs and to give the right information at the right time so it has the most impact. When planning communication activities it is essential to have in mind;

* OSPAR Heads of Delegation and Secretariat
* those people who can intervene and influence on OSPAR’s behalf such as ministers and marine directors from Contracting Parties
* those requiring information exchange for meetings, intercessional working and ad hoc working groups
* journalists of all media and various fields
* stakeholders with a vested interest in the North-East Atlantic including other IGOs
* Observer organisations (including inactive observers) that can mobilise quickly and endorse OSPAR messages
* NGOs who are not presently observers
* Industry who are not presently observers
* Users of OSPAR products and information including universities, researchers, interested members of the public etc.

Tools

**Visual identity and communication toolbox**

The visual identity, comprises logo, colour scheme, fonts and other graphical elements to create a distinct personality for OSPAR, facilitating visibility and recognition. A communication toolbox containing various templates for all sorts of communication products will facilitate developing communication actions in the most efficient manner and guarantee overall visual coherence between the different communication products. The toolbox will be made available on the OSPAR website.

**Website**

The NEAES 2030 pages on OSPAR’s website will be overhauled, presenting the new NEAES, its structure, goals and strategic objectives. All publications, resources and communication materials will also be made available for download on the website.

**OSPAR publications and communication material**

OSPAR produces a number of publications each year. These will be published online to guarantee their future readability and relevance. A small number of copies of key documents e.g., the high-level section of the NEAES 2030 and the QSR 2023 synthesis report will be printed for handing out to high-profile audiences and provided to places where a hard copy may be of benefit.

Posters, brochures and general outreach materials will also be prepared over the course of the communications strategy, as will a presentation kit including various materials to facilitate presentations such as customisable slide shows, talking points and videos.

**Videos, infographics and design-led communications**

Videos will be developed to respond to demand and to accommodate travel restrictions that may still be in place. Videos will be developed inhouse where possible based on templates from the communication toolbox, depending on needs that may arise. Various other communication aids such as infographics and briefing notes will also be prepared. To facilitate translations and adaptations, where necessary, the original and editable files will also be included. The kit will also contain instructions on how to use the various materials.

**Social media**

A key component of the communication mix, social media will be used to create awareness and to engage with wider OSPAR stakeholders. Focus will be on producing messages and materials tailored to social media and that have the potential to spread, such as infographics, short animations and video interviews. OSPAR will be present on Twitter and LinkedIn. A series of visual materials, specific hashtags and instructions will also be shared and included in the multiplier kit for communication opportunities such as the launch of the NEAES 2030.

**Other content**

Other content will be created on a regular basis. These can include general news articles, interviews, opinion pieces by OSPAR and external stakeholders and newsletters. These contents will be published on the OSPAR website, its periodic newsletter, update campaigns via email, social media, as well as offered to third parties such as stakeholders and media.

Mitigation of risk

Given the political context within which OSPAR operates, communications has the potential to be a high risk activity. To mitigate these risks it is important that all OSPAR communication activities are;

* Designed to fulfil an identified objective;
* Aimed at a defined target group;
* Evaluated, reflected upon and learnt from;
* Clear and supported by fact;
* Consistent with agreed OSPAR conclusions;
* Where possible, planned and agreed in advance.

Next steps

The strategy will be reviewed and updated to cover the period from 2025 to the culmination of the NEAES 2030.