

Status of the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas in 2018



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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 Contracting Parties (CPs) bordering the North-East Atlantic started nominating MPAs in 2005, all 12 CPs 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 2018, the network comprises 496 MPAs with a total surface area of 864,337 km² or 6.4 % of the OSPAR Maritime Area¹.

Good coverage of national waters

A total of 486 MPAs are situated within national waters of CPs. Most sites have been designated in territorial waters (19.6 % covered by OSPAR MPAs²) and far less in Exclusive Economic Zones (2.7 % covered by OSPAR MPAs). The OSPAR maritime area beyond the limits of national EEZs holds 10 OSPAR MPAs, covering 8.9 %.

Distribution across the OSPAR Regions

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 18.6 %, 15.3 % and 8.3 % coverage, respectively. Coverage of the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast (Region IV) is at 5.9 %. Arctic Waters (Region I) show the lowest coverage with 1.9 % of the area being designated within OSPAR MPAs.

Ecological coherence of the OSPAR Network of MPAs

Despite good progress, the OSPAR MPA network cannot yet be considered ecologically coherent. Using distance (i.e. Madrid Criterion A) as a proxy for ecological coherence the OSPAR MPA network is nearing being considered to be well distributed in the Greater North Sea (Region II) and Celtic Seas (Region III), substantial gaps remain in Arctic Waters (Region I) and the Wider Atlantic (Region V) and a small gap further offshore in Bay of Biscay and the Iberian Coast (Region IV). Further work is also required to ensure that habitats and species considered by OSPAR to be at risk are adequately protected by MPAs where appropriate. However, the network has a good representation of several biogeographic regions within the North-East Atlantic (Tab. 1). Data deficiencies and the lack of a feasible methodology currently hamper a sophisticated eco-coherence assessment and thus, additional work is required to develop the way in which to the OSPAR MPA network is assessed for ecological coherence.

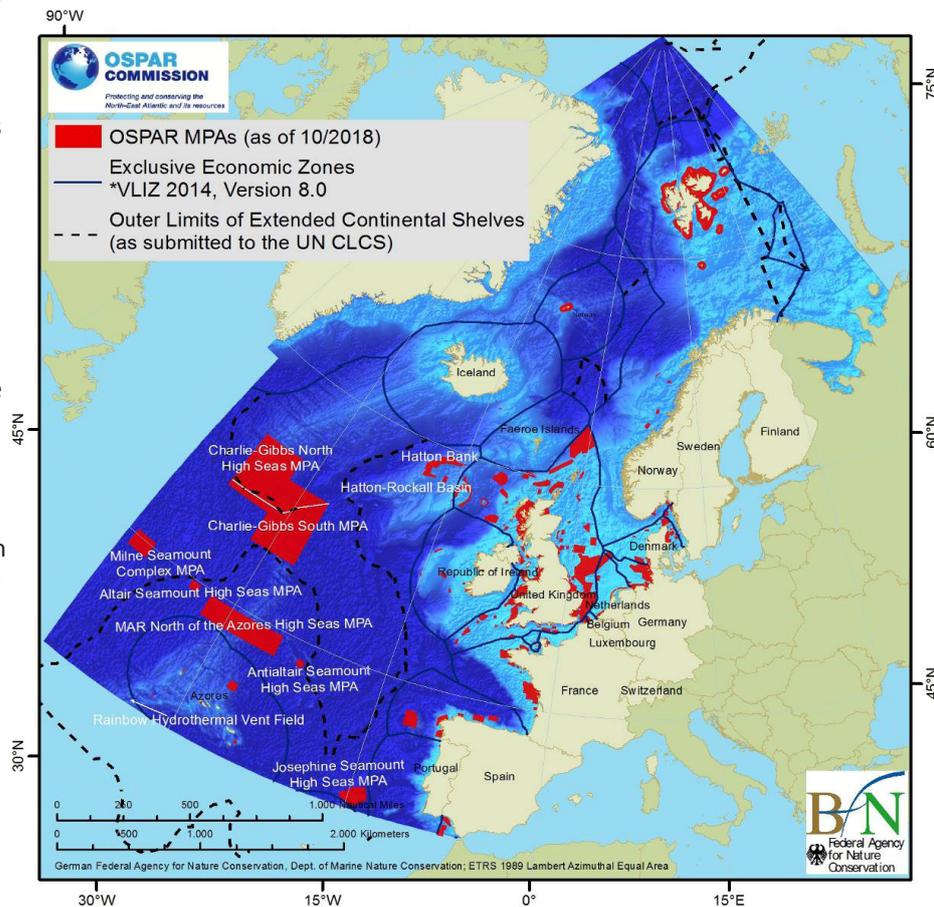


Figure 1: The OSPAR network of MPAs as of 1 December 2018

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

²: For the calculation of the surface of TW and EEZ areas, Madeira (PT), Greenland and Faroe (DK) and other areas were included. Thus, the percentages are not directly comparable to all previous assessment sheets.

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Management of the OSPAR Network of MPAs

Management plans and measures are in place for some OSPAR MPAs, but for many they still have to be developed and implemented. As a result, only 14% of OSPAR MPAs are now moving towards or have achieved their conservation objectives. Thus, additional 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 could be broadened to evaluate with greater confidence whether the conservation objectives of OSPAR MPAs are being achieved.

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

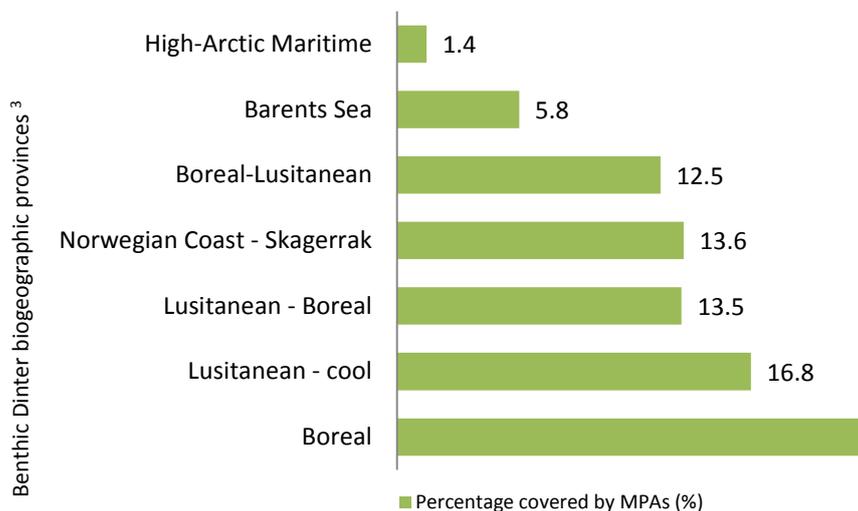
What has been done?

The status of the OSPAR Network of MPAs and any changes since 2017 have been assessed, including whether the network can be considered as ecologically coherent and well managed.

Observed status and/or change

In 2018, Norway and the United Kingdom nominated new MPAs. In total, 31 MPAs were added to the OSPAR Network of MPAs covering more than 5,400 km².

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



³ 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. Compared to the other three OSPAR Regions, Greater North Sea and Celtic Seas have reached the target set by the CBD, i.e. to protect at least 10 % of coastal and marine areas by 2020. Ecological coherence of the network, however, cannot be achieved unless the remaining perceived gaps in the network are closed. One major challenge of assessing ecological coherence and management effectiveness is the paucity of relevant data on e.g., 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 can consider where additional MPAs 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 plans and measures is required to understand what is being protected and if it is being protected effectively. Such information is essential for understanding whether the OSPAR MPA network is moving towards being ecologically coherent and well-managed.

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.

