

Habitat: Seamounts

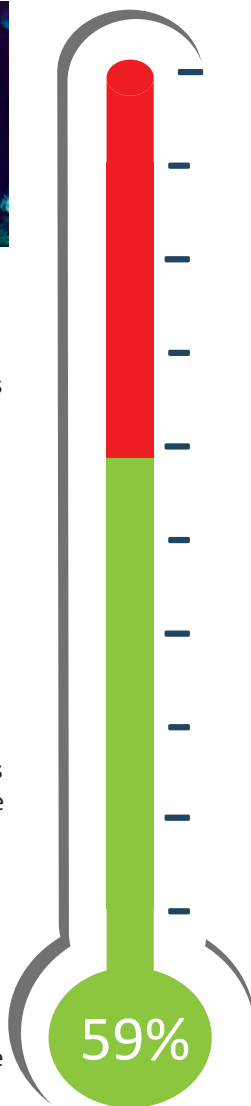
OSPAR Recommendation 2014/09:

Contracting Parties are required to report progress with implementation of recommendations every six years, with initial more frequent reporting until 2019.

Measures taken by Contracting Parties to protect Seamounts include protection through national legislation, designation of MPAs and monitoring programmes



OSPAR has defined seamounts as undersea mountains whose summits rise more than 1000 metres above the surrounding sea floor. Seamounts are usually of volcanic origin, and are often associated with seafloor 'hotspots'. Seamounts, often with a slope inclination of up to 60°, provide a striking contrast to the surrounding 'flat' abyssal plain. Seamounts occur frequently within the OSPAR Maritime Area more than 810 seamounts have been identified within the North Atlantic with the majority occurring along the Mid-Atlantic ridge. The enhanced currents that occur around seamounts provide ideal conditions for suspension feeders. Deep Sea Corals may be particularly abundant along with other suspension feeders such as sponges, hydroids and ascidians. Concentrations of important fish species, such as orange roughy, aggregate around seamounts and live in close association with the benthic communities.



Action Highlights

Each Recommendation requires Contracting Parties to report on the methods used to implement the measures. The methods are Legislation, Administrative action and Negotiated agreement, or any combination of these. Some recent examples include:

1. The UK has introduced national legislation to protect seamounts;
2. Spain and the UK have listed seamounts as being of high conservation importance;
3. Spain and the UK have designated MPAs;
4. Spain and the UK undertake seamount monitoring programmes.

Engagement

The engagement index (left) measures how well Contracting Parties have engaged with the national measures in the Recommendation. The higher the score the greater the number of actions that Contracting Parties, which have reported, have taken to implement the measures in the Recommendation. Click here for more information on the index.

References:

- Background Document for Seamounts (OSPAR Publication 492)
- OSPAR Recommendation 2014/09
- OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats (Agreement 2008-06)

Condition

The Condition of most OSPAR seamounts is not known. There is also a limited amount of detailed information about the level of threat and damage to individual seamounts in the OSPAR Maritime Area, but lessons learnt from other parts of the world show that seamounts and their associated fauna are seriously threatened. Documented examples; fishing of the pelagic armourhead over the southern Emperor seamounts and seamounts in the northern Hawaiian Ridge to commercial extinction within 10 years of their discovery and the orange roughy fishery on seamounts off the coasts of New Zealand and Australia where new discoveries of stocks are typically fished down to 15-30% of their initial biomass within 5-10 years. Given this pressure and the fact that seamounts in the OSPAR Maritime Area are targeted by commercial fisheries seamounts have been added to the OSPAR list.

