



MINISTER'S OPENING STATEMENT from IRELAND

Introduction & Acknowledgments

Minister Serrao Santos and Chair of OSPAR, colleagues, delegates and observers,

I am grateful for the opportunity to gather with you here today to reflect on OSPAR's work to protect our ocean and our seas.

Ireland and OSPAR

Where I come from, and indeed in Ireland, you're never far from the sea. And the sea, the Atlantic Ocean, runs deep in our veins, our culture and our language.

We have a saying in Irish – *Ní neart go cur le chéile*. This can be translated as "There is no strength without unity".

Sometimes you'll see this proverb accompanying a picture of several people rowing a small boat together.

For us, as a people reliant on the North-East Atlantic for our climate, for trade, for food, for our health and well-being, OSPAR provides a vital unity of purpose with You - our nearest neighbours. OSPAR is the boat that carries us together to bigger and better things for our marine environment and for our societies.

Multilateralism as an effective tool

As an EU Member State, Ireland is firmly committed to protect not just our own national marine area or the waters, species and habitats of the EU, but also the waters and features that we share with you all.

In this regard, OSPAR provides us with a solid foundation and platform for true multilateral cooperation, to lead the world and take action together in a spirit of mutual respect, to tackle the major environmental challenges of our time including marine pollution and plastic litter, biodiversity loss, and the real threats posed by climate change.

In Ireland this has never been as important as it is now, given the environmental and climatic challenges we are faced with, but also in the light of our closest neighbour's withdrawal from the European Union. OSPAR provides that seamless opportunity to work as dedicated partners, onwards and upwards together.

How Ireland is acting in step with OSPAR

In concert with OSPAR's goals of having clean, healthy, biologically diverse and sustainably used seas and oceans, Ireland has recently set a new and exciting course for our maritime area and the activities which take place within it.

With recent publication of the National Marine Planning Framework and the Maritime Area Planning Bill which is on its passage through Parliament, the Government is taking bold new steps to implement integrated marine spatial planning in a way that will facilitate the Sustainable Blue Economy and support new and existing sectoral activities, while also protecting our precious marine environment for current and future generations.

Through our Marine Protected Area process, Ireland is driving forward to build a new network of sites within our extensive maritime area, aiming to achieve 30% coverage of our waters by 2030. Our recent consultation on this process has shown us that the Public and all sectors are urgently calling for these measures, are seeking action to protect the environment and ourselves against

climate change and other human-made pressures, and the Government means to deliver on that call.

How to achieve real progress

The decisions that we make here today are vitally important and the actions we need to take are clear. Taking them together in an equitable and just way is our shared challenge.

In doing so, and in safeguarding our societies and our environment for generations to come, we need to bring people with us. OSPAR, as the global leader for regional ocean protection, allows us to work with each other and with other organisations to design new, innovative solutions that will work for people.

After all, it is people that will implement those solutions and bear the burden of that responsibility, whether that is in the Celtic Seas, the High Seas or the Arctic for example. We will need to reach out to others, to inform and educate, not in a spirit of instruction but in a spirit of trust, respect and shared purpose, whether that is with our youth, our traditional knowledge-holders, with industry or with local communities.

We can do this. Through OSPAR we have, between us, developed solutions again and again that have reduced pollution, mitigated harmful impacts of human industry, enabled sustainable management of maritime activities, protected marine biodiversity and reduced marine litter. Through OSPAR we have access to unparalleled multidisciplinary scientific teams, greater than any one country could provide.

Call for a *Meitheal* approach

As a representative of the Irish people here today, I want to say to you all:

We're in the boat with you; We're ready to take this journey together, unified and stronger for it.

Not just in the way we always have done, but with greater commitment, greater drive, and even greater urgency.

There's a lovely word in Irish for such collective work done in a spirit of energy and collaboration, like when a village comes together to perform a great endeavour.

That word is *Meitheal*.

Let this day, this gathering, be the start of a new "*Meitheal for the sea*" - one that will build a better future for our ocean, for the extraordinary natural environment that we all depend on, and for this special community, this OSPAR team of nations.

Thank you.