

OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
Meeting of the Environmental Impact of Human Activities Committee (EIHA)
Edinburgh (United Kingdom) and on-line: 21-25 March 2022

Terms of Reference for the Intersessional Correspondence Group on Underwater Noise 2022-2023 (ICG-Noise)

Background and purpose

1. ICG-Noise should continue work in 2022-2023 on underwater noise to support the implementation of the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 and the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.
2. Work in 2022-2023 will include implementing noise-related tasks under the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 and development of additional tasks as necessary; initial planning for the development of a regional action plan; continued coordinated monitoring of ambient and impulsive noise; implementation of a coordinated ambient noise monitoring strategy in the North Sea; and continued development of the inventory of noise mitigation techniques.

Participants

3. ICG-Noise will be convened by UK (Nathan Merchant), NL (Niels Kinneging) and DE (Alexander Liebschner) and is open to all OSPAR Contracting Parties and Observers. In view of the expansion in its scope of work, ICG-Noise should ensure representation from both policy and monitoring and assessment experts.

Scope of Work

Regional action plan on underwater noise

4. ICG-Noise will initiate planning for the development of a regional action plan on underwater noise setting out a series of national and collective actions and, as appropriate, OSPAR measures to reduce noise pollution, to be agreed by 2025.

Mitigation

5. ICG-Noise will keep up-to-date an inventory of underwater noise mitigation measures that will provide OSPAR Contracting Parties with an overview of effectiveness and feasibility of mitigation options.
6. Chapters have been developed on pile driving (update agreed in 2020) and seismic noise. ICG-Noise will as a priority finalise the draft chapter on explosions, and develop chapters on shipping and sonar by 2024. Additional chapters still need to be developed for other sources such as high

frequency impulsive sources (e.g. from echosounders) and dredging. It is noted that for managing military activities (explosives and sonar) OSPAR action may have limited impact. ICG-Noise will provide the platform for the sharing of national experiences.

7. ICG-Noise will support specific actions identified in the 'Roadmap for the implementation of collective actions within the Recommendations for the protection and conservation of OSPAR listed species and habitats' (EIHA-18/5/5), provided sufficient capacity is available. ICG Noise will report yearly to EIHA on the contribution to the following actions and consider their integration into the noise regional action plan:
 - a. Action 17 on threats by ship noise and ship strikes to specific species;
 - b. Action 24 on mitigation measures against further anthropogenic threats to whale populations;
 - c. Action 29 on guidelines minimising effects to harbour porpoises.

Monitoring and assessment

8. ICG-Noise will support ongoing monitoring of the OSPAR Common indicators for impulsive noise. This will include:
 - a. Further development of the Common Indicator on pressure of impulsive noise sources;
 - b. Further development of the Common Indicator on the risk of impact of impulsive noise on biota including consideration of additional sensitive species and habitats;
 - c. Supporting a more comprehensive submission of data into the OSPAR impulsive noise registry, including providing advice to CPs on priorities with respect to current data gaps in the impulsive noise register.
9. ICG-Noise will implement the OSPAR Strategy for Ambient Noise Monitoring. This will include:
 - a. Contributing to the implementation of OSPAR joint ambient noise monitoring programmes (including asking coordinating groups of projects, e.g. JOMOPANS, JONAS for their contributions), identifying solutions for the hosting of project products and facilitating cost-effective joint monitoring;
 - b. Technical management of the operational coordinated monitoring programme for the North Sea, with EIHA deciding on policy-related matters (EIHA(2) 2020 SR §7.10);
 - c. Developing coordinated monitoring programmes for OSPAR regions III-V;
 - d. Investigating possibilities for other areas that are not covered by current projects/proposals, e.g. OSPAR Region 1;
 - e. Further development work on the candidate Indicator on ambient noise, with the aim of reaching agreement to promote to Common by EIHA 2023.

Organisation of work

10. ICG Noise will primarily work by correspondence, including web meetings, but meet physically once a year if circumstances allow.

11. The group may develop a more detailed work plan, coordinating with TG Noise, where applicable.
12. The group will report to EIHA annually, including on the progress in implementation of NEAES tasks.
13. Continuation of the group and its mandate will be decided upon by EIHA on a yearly basis.