

Press release: 27 September 2022

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Impacts of offshore oil and gas industry on the marine environment shown to have decreased in the North-East Atlantic

Today OSPAR published its latest assessment of impacts of the offshore oil and gas industry on the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. The assessment for the period 2009 - 2019 shows that there has been a measurable decrease in emissions and discharges from the offshore oil and gas industry. Activities that were once widespread for example from the discharge of oil-based fluids, have now ceased and the level of contamination has decreased over most of the North-East Atlantic.

The assessment looks at a wide range of potential impacts including historical cuttings piles, discharges of produced water, drilling fluids and chemicals. Where potential impacts may still occur, OSPAR measures have ensured that these have been reduced, for example reduction in the amount of dispersed oil in produced water discharges and the phase out and reduction of discharge of hazardous chemicals and drilling fluids.

Contracting Parties have also fully implemented the ban on the dumping or leaving in place of disused offshore installations. Since OSPAR Decision 98/3 on the disposal of disused offshore installations was adopted, approximately 170 installations have been decommissioned of which 10 were granted derogations.

Evidence from monitoring and reporting indicates that the overall effect of these OSPAR measures and their implementation by Contracting Parties has been to significantly improve the overall quality status of the North-East Atlantic as a whole, but particularly in the Greater North Sea where there are high levels of oil and gas activity.

OSPAR will continue to take all possible steps to prevent and eliminate pollution, and work towards meeting the operational objectives set out in the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030.

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Note for editors

1. The OSPAR Commission was set up by the 1992 OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, which unified and updated the 1972 Oslo and 1974 Paris Conventions. It brings together the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, together with the European Community.
2. OSPAR adopted its North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 at a Ministerial meeting in Cascais (Portugal). Full text <https://www.ospar.org/convention/strategy>
3. More than 30 international non-governmental organisations are involved in OSPAR as official Observers. They represent a broad range of interests and expertise related to the marine environment and the uses of marine resources. Many contribute information, insights and standpoints. This is much appreciated feedback from civil society and the economy. The OSPAR Commission greatly values these partnerships that help inform its decisions and other results. (See list on OSPAR website at <https://www.ospar.org/organisation/observers>)
4. The full text of OSPAR's Assessment of impacts of the offshore oil and gas industry on the marine environment can be found here <https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/quality-status-reports/qsr-2023/other-assessments/impacts-offshore-oil-and-gas-industry/>
5. OSPAR Decision 98/3 on the Disposal of Disused Offshore Installations prohibits the dumping, and the leaving wholly or partly in place, of disused offshore installations within the OSPAR Maritime Area <https://www.ospar.org/documents?d=32703>