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North-East Atlantic's biggest Marine Protected Area extended to include the seafloor

Countries from around the North-East Atlantic met this week in Oslo, Norway for the 2023 meeting of the OSPAR Commission for the Protection and Conservation of the North-East Atlantic.

OSPAR Contracting Parties agreed to extend its largest Marine Protected Area (MPA) to include the seabed and a number of additional species and habitats, such as coral gardens and deep-sea sharks, within the scope of the MPA. The North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin MPA was originally designated in 2021 with the goal of protecting, conserving, maintaining, and restoring seabird populations and marine biodiversity.

OSPAR finalised the text of its Quality Status Report (QSR) 2023, its holistic assessment of the health of the North-East Atlantic. This once in a decade assessment is a truly collective endeavour that was only possible through the dedication of over 400 scientists, policy experts and observers from across OSPAR's work areas. The QSR is made up of over 120 assessments, some using pioneering and unique methodologies, to assess key marine species and the habitats they depend on, the intensity of human activities at sea and the pressures they result in, including radioactive substances, offshore oil and gas industries, renewable energy generation, tourism and many more. Pollution from nutrients and hazardous substances, and other pressures such as marine litter or underwater noise are also addressed. The QSR 2023 also considers the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on the North-East Atlantic. The QSR will be formally launched in autumn 2023 when it will be made publicly available on the OSPAR website.

Decommissioning of oil and gas offshore installations was also on the agenda. Under OSPAR rules, disused installations in the OSPAR Maritime Area cannot be left wholly or partly in place, unless a derogation permit is issued. OSPAR agreed that there was a need to take actions to encourage the development of decommissioning technology in order to reduce the number of derogation categories.

The outcomes of this meeting help OSPAR deliver its North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 – our shared Roadmap to achieving our vision of a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.

ENDS

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. [Mercator Ocean](#) and [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#) were welcomed as observers to the OSPAR Commission. 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. At its Ministerial meeting in 2021, OSPAR designated the high seas [North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin MPA](#), which covers nearly 600,000 km², an area the size of France. The MPA protects a vitally important area for seabirds. Based on tracking data, the Site was found to be an important feeding and foraging area and is used both by seabirds breeding on the coasts of the North-East Atlantic, and by those migrating across the globe or nesting in other parts of the world. The designation of this MPA is in accordance with the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, specifically Target 3 to 'ensure and enable that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, recognizing indigenous and traditional territories, where applicable, and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes, recognizing and respecting the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, including over their traditional territories'.
5. Since 1998 the dumping, and leaving wholly or partly in place, of disused offshore installations is prohibited within the OSPAR maritime area under OSPAR Decision 98/3 on the Disposal of Disused Offshore Installations <https://www.ospar.org/documents?d=32703>. However, following assessment, the competent authority of the relevant Contracting Party may give permission to an operator to leave installations or parts of installations in place in certain cases. Annex 1 of OSPAR Decision 98/3 includes a list of the derogation categories.