

OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
Meeting of the OSPAR Commission (OSPAR)
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Environment of the North-East Atlantic

Speech welcoming the enlargement of the OSPAR Maritime Area, from the Director of the Sea and Environment - Ara Oliveira – of the Autonomous Region of Madeira

Excellencies, distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen.

It is with great honor and joy that I address you at this important ministerial meeting. This moment represents the culmination of a journey in which I, as many others, have been privileged to modestly contribute. For that opportunity, given by the Portuguese and Spanish government, I am deeply grateful.

The OSPAR region, a vast and intricate marine ecosystem, was missing a crucial component—Macaronesia. Madeira and Canary waters. It is this region, that holds the key to furthering our shared goals.

Holding up a piece of plastic, Mr Oliveira continued:

This plastic piece, like many others, is carried by the currents of the Atlantic, arriving in Madeira's shores. This one in particular it is used here in Vigo Bay for mussel aquaculture. Similarly, if this meeting were held in Glasgow or Reykjavik, I would undoubtedly bring another fragment, another history, equally transported by the same currents. This serves as a reminder of the profound connections that bind us all.

We are connected. There is historical, cultural, geographical and, above all, biogeographical coherence. In fact, Madeira and Canary have been part of OSPAR for many years. Notably, two of the rarest protected bird species that feed in the North Atlantic and the Evlanov Sea Basin (NACES) — are the endemic petrels, Freira-da-Madeira e Freira-do-Bugio. They nest and breed in Madeira Natura 2000 areas.

Furthermore, the black scabbardfish, a deep-sea species fished off the coast of Madeira since the 18th century, migrates thousands of kilometers in its larval state, passing through waters off southern Iceland and the Faroe Islands, before returning to Madeira to spawn.

Macaronesia also serves as a critical transit point for transcontinental submarine cables, maritime transport, and ocean currents. This region is privileged for its role in observing ocean acidification, the movement of sargassum, and the growing problem of marine litter.

We have a legacy to respect. The first Portuguese marine protected area was created in Madeira, in 1971. Madeira and Canary have built considerable capacity in terms of infrastructure, as well as a pool of internationally recognized experts in various marine fields. Many already working in OSPAR ICGS. They will contribute to ensure the ecosystem approach outlined by the Convention and MSFD Directive. We are poised to contribute meaningfully to OSPAR's noble objectives, and indeed, we have the potential to serve as the "missing piece" in the larger puzzle of Northeast Atlantic conservation.

In conclusion, I would like to remind us all of the importance of history, particularly in times of uncertainty. It is a resource that can guide us in making decisions that are not only fair and balanced but, above all, sustainable.

I would highlight three key dates:

- In 1986, Portugal became a member of the European Union.
- In 1974, Portugal signed the OSLO Convention, twelve years prior to the EU membership.
- In 1971, Madeira established Portugal's first marine protected area, fifteen years prior to the EU membership.

These milestones underscore the vision and the pioneering spirit that Portugal and Madeira have demonstrated in the field of marine conservation and environmental protection.

On behalf of Islas Afortunadas, Thank You.

Ara Oliveira

Director of the Sea and Environment

Autonomous Region of Madeira