

OSPAR Ministerial Meeting, Vigo, Spain, 26 June 2025

Intervention by Jóhann Páll Jóhannsson, Minister of Environment, Energy and Climate, Iceland

Ministers, dear colleagues,

Unfortunately, I cannot be with you in person today. I regret not being able to visit Vigo on this occasion, as the biggest fishing port in Europe has to be on the bucket list of any self-respecting Icelander. Fisheries are indeed extremely important for Iceland, as they are a mainstay of our economy and society. Sustainable fisheries are a lodestone of our policy with regard to the ocean. This informs our stance in OSPAR and other forums dealing with the ocean.

We need, however, to take a wider view – and that is what the Icelandic government wants to do. In the manifesto of the government, which took office last December, are specific references to strengthening biodiversity and protection of marine areas.

I did go to Nice for the UN Ocean Conference earlier this month, and I was impressed by the good attendance and political will expressed for a strong agenda to protect the ocean and marine life. This bolsters our mandate, but the hard part is always to turn words into action.

In my interventions in Nice, I emphasised the importance of regional cooperation for marine protection. I think OSPAR is a prime example of this, an example that should be held up as a model. OSPAR has many strengths, among them a practical

approach to identify and solve regional issues, and basing its work on science and robust monitoring and assessment.

I would like to use this occasion to state that Iceland plans to strengthen its participation in the work of OSPAR. I would like to mention especially in that regard Marine Protected Areas and Other Effective Conservation Measures. This issue has, it must be said, been neglected in the past by Iceland, but no more. We hope to be able to take some concrete steps within OSPAR already this year regarding MPAs and OECMs, and most certainly in the years to come.

We also appreciate the work OSPAR has done with regard to reducing pollution, an issue close to Iceland's heart. Here, OSPAR can look to good accomplishments in the past. We are also taking concrete action to reduce marine pollution at this meeting, regarding plastics and shipping, which Iceland supports. Some pollutants are declining in our waters, as noted in the recent QSR report, without doubt in part thanks to decisions made by OSPAR and several multilateral instruments.

Unfortunately, we can not say that our seas are on a clear path to become clean and healthy. Particularly alarming is plastic pollution, which continues to grow, and is more worrisome than most of us realized just a few years ago, with new evidence piling up on the threat of micro- and nanoplastics to human health and that of the ecosystem. Hopefully, we will reach a global agreement on plastic pollution this year. Regardless of this, we need progressive national and regional action to stem the growing plastic tide. Iceland plans to host an international

conference on plastic pollution in the Atlantic Ocean in 2026, and we would like to invite OSPAR to cooperate in this undertaking.

I am encouraged to see that OSPAR work on ocean acidification and climate change has taken off. The solution to the climate crisis is at its core simple: cut carbon emissions and increase carbon sequestration from the atmosphere, in line with the guidance of the Paris Agreement. The ocean has a key role to play in this. We need to look at, inter alia, nature-based solutions in the marine environment and offshore renewables; at home and here at OSPAR.

We need, indeed, to look at several new challenges and new opportunities when it comes to the ocean. The broad agenda of this Ministerial Meeting, and of OSPAR work, reflects this. The value of OSPAR is not only in its Decisions and Recommendations, but in its robust technical work and not least in the continuing discussions taking place among its members on established and emerging issues, which inform and shape our policies and decisions.

Dear friends,

Iceland can bring to the OSPAR table the perspective of a country that is truly dependent on the ocean for its livelihood and well-being. We need a healthy ocean providing us with rich fisheries and ecosystem services. We aim to improve our presence and profile in OSPAR work. I wish all of us success in Vigo, and beyond – let us make this excellent cooperation even better in the future.

Thank you,