For the attention of:

OSPAR BDC Heads of Delegation
ICG-COBAM contact points
Benthic Community data contacts
cc: OSPAR HOD

01 August 2025

OSPAR Data call 2025

Benthic community data to be used in common indicators BH1, BH2b, BH3a, BH3b and for (pre)pilot assessments of BH2c, BH3c, BH6 and FW9 for the Intermediate Assessment 2029

Contact

Please contact the benthic community data contacts (sander.wijnhoven@ecoauthor.net, jmanuel.gonzalez@ieo.es, stephen.duncombe-smith@jncc.gov.uk) if you have any queries about what data to include in your submission or if you have datasets available but a submission before the deadline is not feasible.

OSPAR data contact: data@ospar.org
Please contact the OSPAR Data Team with access requests or queries regarding the OSPAR Data Submission Site.

Benthic community data are at the basis of benthic habitat quality status assessments making use of BH1, BH2b and BH6, and benthic community data are of use for BH3a, BH3b, BH3c, and FW9 indicator/model validation including threshold value setting. The occurrence of non-native species has a potential secondary use for BH2c.

Reporting deadline

Please submit completed reporting formats for benthic community data by **17h00 UK 15 December 2025**; note that this is the deadline date and data are welcomed prior to this date.

Submission instructions

Contracting Parties are invited to submit data on the following, for 1998 – 2025 inclusive (this covers the three earlier assessment periods for QSR2010, IA2017, QSR2023 and the most recent period for the IA2029), via the OSPAR Data Submission site (ODSS) https://osparcsp.sharepoint.com/sites/datasubmission > Data Submission Pages > Benthic Communities (IA2029) > [Contracting Party Folder]. Reporting Formats are available via the ODSS.

Contracting Parties are asked to provide benthic community data in the form of benthic species occurrences (abundance and/or biomass) in benthic samples, accompanied by background information with regards to the sample characteristics and methodology, and (sample) site-specific information for all OSPAR regions I - V. Data for the years 1998-2025 are requested (this covers the three earlier assessment periods for QSR2010, IA2017, QSR2023 and the most recent period for the IA2029).

1. For the benthic community data, a reporting format (OSPAR_benthic_community_reporting-format-001.xlsx) is provided, consisting of three sheets (Metadata, Sample, and Species) that should be completed as fully as possible. Note that the sheets are relational and Species data refer to Sample data, which link to Metadata.

2. Completed reporting format sheets should be renamed indicating the corresponding Contracting Party reporting (e.g., country code, e.g. 'Benthic_community_data_template_NL.xlsx').

Further instructions for completing the Reporting Format are provided in **Annex 1**.

Use of the data

The Contracting Party reported data will be utilised to produce four Biodiversity Common Indicator Assessments as part of the OSPAR Intermediate Assessment 2029 (IA2029):

> **BH1 – Sentinels of the Seabed (SoS)**
>
> **BH2b – Condition of benthic habitat communities: Relative Margalef diversity (D'$_M$)**
>
> **BH3a – Extent of physical disturbance to benthic habitats – Fisheries with mobile bottom-contacting gears**
>
> **BH3b – Extent of physical disturbance to benthic habitats – Aggregate extraction**

and four (potential) candidate indicators:

> **BH2c – Impacts of NIS on some coastal habitats**
>
> **BH3c – Physical disturbance to benthic habitats – offshore installations**
>
> **BH6 – Benthic Indicator Species Index (BISI)**
>
> **FW9 – Ecological network analysis**

The aim of this call is to compile the benthic community sample data (and information about the characteristics of the sample locations and sample specifics) for the application of the common indicators BH1, BH2b, BH3a, BH3b and (potential) candidate indicators BH2c, BH3c, BH6 and FW9 for the IA 2029. More specifically, benthic community data are asked for the application of BH1 (Sentinels of the Seabed) and BH2b (Condition of benthic habitat communities, indicated as the Relative Margalef diversity; presented in Annex 3 of the BH2 CEMP guideline[1]), BH3a, b and c (Physical disturbance to benthic habitats with specific assessments for model validation and threshold value setting), BH6 (Benthic Indicator Species Index, which is currently in the pre-pilot phase but might be considered as to be decided at OSPAR Biodiversity Committee (BDC) meeting, 2026), BH2c (Impacts of NIS on some coastal habitats, which is currently in the pre-pilot phase), and FW9 (Ecological network analysis; that amongst others is in need of benthic community data for validation).

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[1] https://www.ospar.org/documents?v=39000

Assessment Code	OSPAR Region I – Arctic Waters	OSPAR Region II – Greater North Sea	OSPAR Region III – Celtic Seas	OSPAR Region IV – Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast	OSPAR Region V – Wider Atlantic
BH1		Candidate	Candidate	Common	
BH2b		Common	Common (extended)	Common (extended)	
BH2c	Potential candidate	Potential candidate	Potential candidate	Potential candidate	Potential candidate
BH3a		Common	Common	Common	Common (extended)
BH3b		Common	Common		
BH3c		Candidate (potential pilot)			
BH6		Potential candidate (potential pilot)			
FW9		Candidate Pilot		Potential extension	Potential extension

Additionally, benthic community data will be used to inform benthic habitat quality thresholds. For example, benthic community data obtained from areas with very little or no exposure to pressure can be used as a reference for good condition within benthic habitats. Benthic community data obtained across a pressure gradient can then be compared with these reference conditions, to provide an evidence based understanding of the adverse effects physical disturbance has on the benthic community, which can inform quality thresholds representative of a decline in the condition of benthic habitats.

Assessments of all indicators are being considered for inclusion in OSPAR's IA2029. However, inclusion may depend on data availability within each OSPAR Region (and possibly the data type in terms of observation/monitoring technique, and recorded observation parameters and taxonomic detail).

It should be noted that data use for potential pilot assessment is included in the data call. In several cases decisions on whether to include (potential) pilot assessments in the IA2029 have not been taken yet. In all these cases decisions to use and publish data and assessment products for pilot applications including pilot extensions will only be taken later following agreement at BDC.

Storage, use and access to the reported data

The data received from this call will form the basis for the indicator assessments. The data are to be made available via the OSPAR Data and Information Management System (ODIMS) and via the OSPAR Github Site, where appropriate: https://github.com/osparcomm.

OSPAR is committed to making as much information as possible publicly available, consistent with achieving other similarly important goals of public policy. The framework for this is set out in Article 9 of the OSPAR Convention and Annex 3 of the OSPAR Rules of Procedure (2013-2): https://odims.ospar.org/en/data_policy/

Contracting Parties should contact Chris Moulton (Chris.Moulton@ospar.org) if they have any queries regarding data licencing.

Annex 1 – Benthic Community Reporting Format

The report template consists of three sheets with the below indicated fields. Requested information should be filled in as completely as possible, but the descriptions indicate the information that is mandatory for assessment, and the optional information that would be helpful or is needed in case information in other specific columns is not available (information is mandatory in at least one of the columns indicated).

The reporting format consists of three sheets (Metadata, Sample, and Species). Note that the sheets are relational and Species data refer to Sample data, which link to Metadata, using the ID codes highlighted. This avoids the need to repeat information in separate tables.

- Do not remove, add or adjust any columns or calculations included in the associated Microsoft Excel;
- All blank values to be left as blank, do not use filler comments or symbols;
- Do not insert thousand separators (commas, apostrophies, or spaces) in number fields.

Table 1 – Metadata

Field	Data type	Description	Mandatory /Optional
META ID	Text	Unique ID code for this record of information. This ID will then be reused in the Sample table to tie the relevant information together. Prefix ID with Country code, e.g., "UK_######"	Mandatory
INSTITUTION	Text	Name of the organization responsible for the data. e.g. "IHM - Dutch Government"	Mandatory
AREA	Text	Area covered by the dataset e.g. "North coast of Spain"	Optional
COUNTRY	Text	Country code e.g. "UK"	Mandatory
REGION	Text	OSPAR region e.g. "Region II" and benthic assessment unit e.g., "Southern North Sea"	Optional
YEAR	Numeric	Sampling year e.g. "2010"	Mandatory
SEASON	Text	Sampling season, record as either "Spring" (March-May), "Summer" (June-August), "Autumn (September-November), or "Winter" (December-February)	Optional
CRUISE NAME	Text	Title of the Cruise or survey name during which data were collected e.g. "IBTS – DEMERSALES"	Mandatory
SAMPLING METHOD	Text	Brief overview of the sampling method employed for this group of samples e.g. "Grab samples" or "Otter trawls". If a survey includes mixed methodologies, e.g., trawls and grabs, please include each as a separate metadata record	Optional
SAMPLING DESIGN	Text	Please indicate if the survey part of a long-term monitoring cycle/campaign such as the ICES International Bottom Trawl Survey (IBTS) and any sampling design details, e.g., "random", "random stratified at habitat level", "fixed locations"	Optional
PRESSURE	Text	Description of the known or most important pressures in this area. If there is more than one important pressure involved, please indicate this. e.g. "Trawling"	Optional

RECORD POSITION ACCURACY	Numeric	Accuracy in meters of spatial position of records, e.g., "100 m"	Optional
DATA ACCESS	Text	Are data "Public" or "Restricted". OSPAR is committed to making as much information as possible publicly available, consistent with achieving other similarly important goals of public policy. Note, all aggregated data products are, by default, publicly available, including those derived from restricted data.	Mandatory
REMARK	Text	Specific characteristics or restrictions of the dataset e.g. "compulsory information could not be provided or is provided with low accuracy". Note here any underlying reasoning for restriction on data access. e.g. "Restricted, due to defence reasons", referring to OSPAR Convention text, Article 9 for restriction reasons.	Optional (Mandatory if 'DATA ACCESS' = "Restricted")
DATA CITATION	Text	Complete citation for the data source	Optional

Table 2 – Sample

Field	Data type	Description	Mandatory /Optional
SAMPLE ID	Text	Unique ID code for this sample, prefix with Country code, e.g., "UK_######"	Mandatory
META ID	Text	Corresponding META ID from Metadata table	Mandatory
DATE	Date	Date of sampling following DD-MM-YYYY format	Mandatory
LAT	Numeric	Latitude of the record (decimal degrees; EPSG:4326 - WGS 84) e.g. "42.05467"	Mandatory*
LON	Numeric	Longitude of the record (decimal degrees; EPSG:4326 - WGS 84) e.g. "-9.127083"	Mandatory*
GEAR TYPE	Text	Specific sample gear used, e.g., "day grab", "van veen grab", "box-corer", or "2m beam trawl"	Mandatory
AREA SAMPLED	Numeric	The area of seabed sampled by the gear in m^2, for example "0.1" for a 0.1 m^2 day grab. In cases of hauls, preferably the estimated swept area for each haul e.g. "1500" for 1500 m^2 haul	Mandatory
MESH SIZE	Numeric	Mesh size (cm) of sieve used in analysis for sediment samples (e.g., "0.1" when sieved with a 1 mm mesh) or mesh size of the trawl (e.g. "10" for a 10 cm mesh beam trawl)	Mandatory
MANAGEMENT AREA NAME	Text	Name of specific management area (especially of interest if treated/managed in a different way compared to surrounding area) e.g. "MPA Noordzeekustzone"	Optional
MANAGEMENT TYPE	Text	e.g. "MPA (*since year*)", "no fishing zone", "wind park", or "no special management (open)", etc.	Optional

		Most detailed habitat or biotope code assigned to sample, e.g., if from EUNIS 2007 classification "A5.1531", or "Not available". Note, if not provided other sources will be used (e.g., EUSeaMap)	
BIOTOPE CODE	Text	Most detailed habitat or biotope code assigned to sample, e.g., if from EUNIS 2007 classification "A5.1531", or "Not available". Note, if not provided other sources will be used (e.g., EUSeaMap)	Mandatory
BIOTOPE CLASSIFICATION	Text	The name of the classification used to classify the sample and the version, e.g., "EUNIS2007", "EUNIS2022", or "NA" if no habitat information is provided, please keep classification format consistent.	Mandatory
DEPTH	Numeric	Sample depth in metres e.g. "137". Note, if not provided other sources will be used (e.g., EMODnet Bathymetry)	Optional
SEDIMENT TYPE	Text	Sediment type/description from PSA analysis e.g., "muddy sand"	Optional
ENERGY CLASS	Text	Waves and currents e.g. "high", "intermediate", "low". Note, if not provided other sources will be used (e.g., EMODnet Kinetic energy at the seabed)	Optional
REMARKS	Text	Any additional sample specific details	Optional

*In case of restrictions due to safety/defence reasons, latitude-longitude records (with the accuracy that can be provided) can be provided so that data can be linked to Broad Habitat Type Mapping (EUSeaMap, 2019), or provide data linked to habitat information as observed (without detailed information on the positioning of the samples; this should be indicated at 'REMARK' in the Metadata table as well). In the case of samples from hauls provide coordinates from the midpoint of the haul if possible.

Table 3 – Species

Field	Data type	Description	Mandatory /Optional
SAMPLE ID	Text	Corresponding ID code from the Sample table	Mandatory
META ID	Text	Corresponding ID code from the Metadata table	Mandatory
TAXON NAME	Text	Latin name of the taxon recorded to the sample (e.g, *Mysella bidentata*). If no viable/"live" taxa are recorded for the sample, please indicate with a record of "No Biota"	Mandatory
AUTHORITY	Text	Authority of the taxon name recorded to the sample (e.g., (Montagu, 1803))	Optional
APHIAID	Numeric	A unique ID code for the taxon name. It is the code used by WoRMS http://www.marinespecies.org/ (e.g., "140380")	Mandatory
QUALIFIER	Text	Additional discrimination of the recorded taxon e.g., life stage (size, age), sex or condition	Optional
COUNT	Numeric	Number of individuals by sample. For instances of "No Biota" please record as "0" (zero)	Optional (Mandatory if biomass or presence/absence not provided)
PRESENCE	Text	Presence in case no enumeration or biomass are recorded (e.g., "Present", "P" or estimates of abundance such as the "SACFOR" scale)	Optional (Mandatory if density or

			biomass not provided)
BIOMASS WW	Numeric	Weight by sample (wet weight in grams)	Optional (Mandatory if density or presence/absence not provided)
BIOMASS ADW	Numeric	Weight by sample (ash-free dry weight in grams)	Optional