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For the attention of:

OSPAR BDC Heads of Delegation
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Benthic Habitat data contacts
cc: OSPAR HOD

12 September 2025

OSPAR Data call 2025 - Update

Habitat Mapping Data to be used in common indicators BH3a, BH3b, BH4a, BH4b, pilot indicator BH3c, and to support assessments of common and candidate indicators BH1, BH2a, BH2b, BH2c, BH6 and FW9 for the Intermediate Assessment 2029

Contact

Please contact the benthic habitat data contacts (stefano.marra@jncc.gov.uk; Cristina.herbon@jncc.gov.uk; schmitt@bioconsult.de) if you have any queries about what data to include in your submission or if you have datasets available but submission before the deadline is not feasible.

Please contact the JNCC EMODnet Seabed Habitats team with access requests or queries regarding the EMODnet Data Ingestion portal (EMODnetSeabedHabitats@jncc.gov.uk).

The OSPAR Benthic indicator methods use the OSPAR Combined EUNIS Map - which incorporates broadscale and biotope data - to assess the extent and level of physical disturbance and physical loss of benthic habitats.

Reporting deadline

Please complete both tasks by **17h00 UK 15 December 2025**; note that this is the deadline date and data are welcomed prior to this date.

Background: the OSPAR Combined EUNIS Map

Using the EMODnet library of individual habitat maps (**Figure 1**) as a starting point, the **OSPAR Combined EUNIS Map** infills the gaps between the individual habitat maps with the EMODnet Broadscale Predictive Map, EUSeaMap (**Figure 2**), to provide the most comprehensive full-coverage[1] map of seabed habitats in the OSPAR area, classified according to the European standard classification system, EUNIS. See **Figure 3** for a simple diagram showing this process.

[1] Full coverage, except in the intertidal zone, where EUSeaMap is not available to fill the gaps, and in many parts of the wider Atlantic Ocean in the areas where no substrate data is available.

Source maps vary in terms of spatial and thematic detail. Where the source is EUSeaMap, the spatial and thematic detail is typically low.

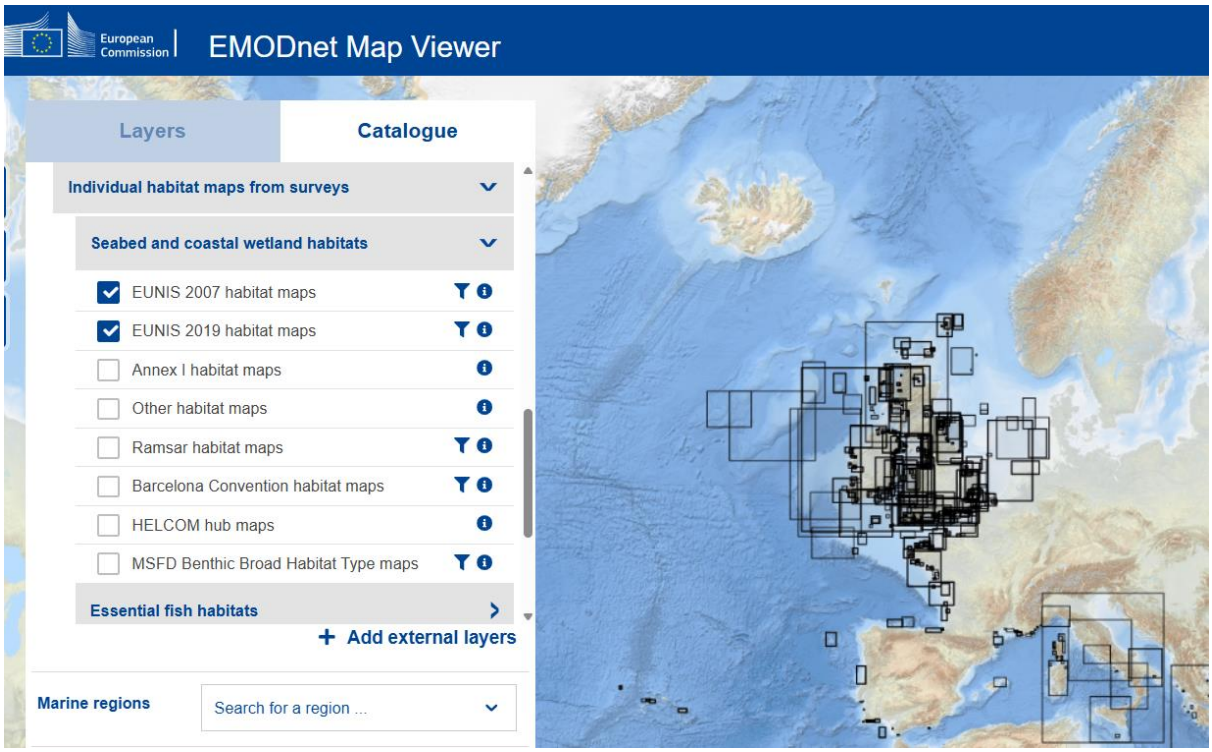

Figure 1 Habitat maps from survey in the EUNIS classification on the EMODnet portal (see on the interactive map here)

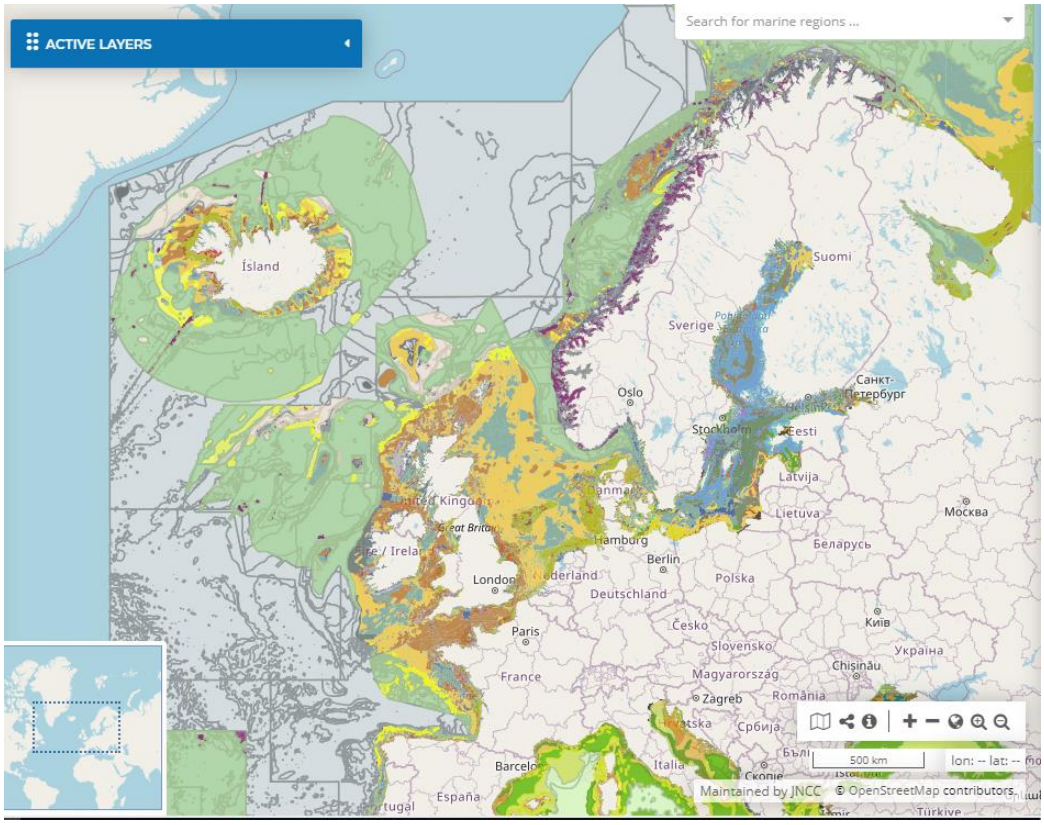

Figure 2: EMODnet Broad-scale Predictive Map, EUSeaMap. Intertidal areas not included. Grey areas show where substrate information is absent and therefore the habitat is unknown (see on the interactive map here).

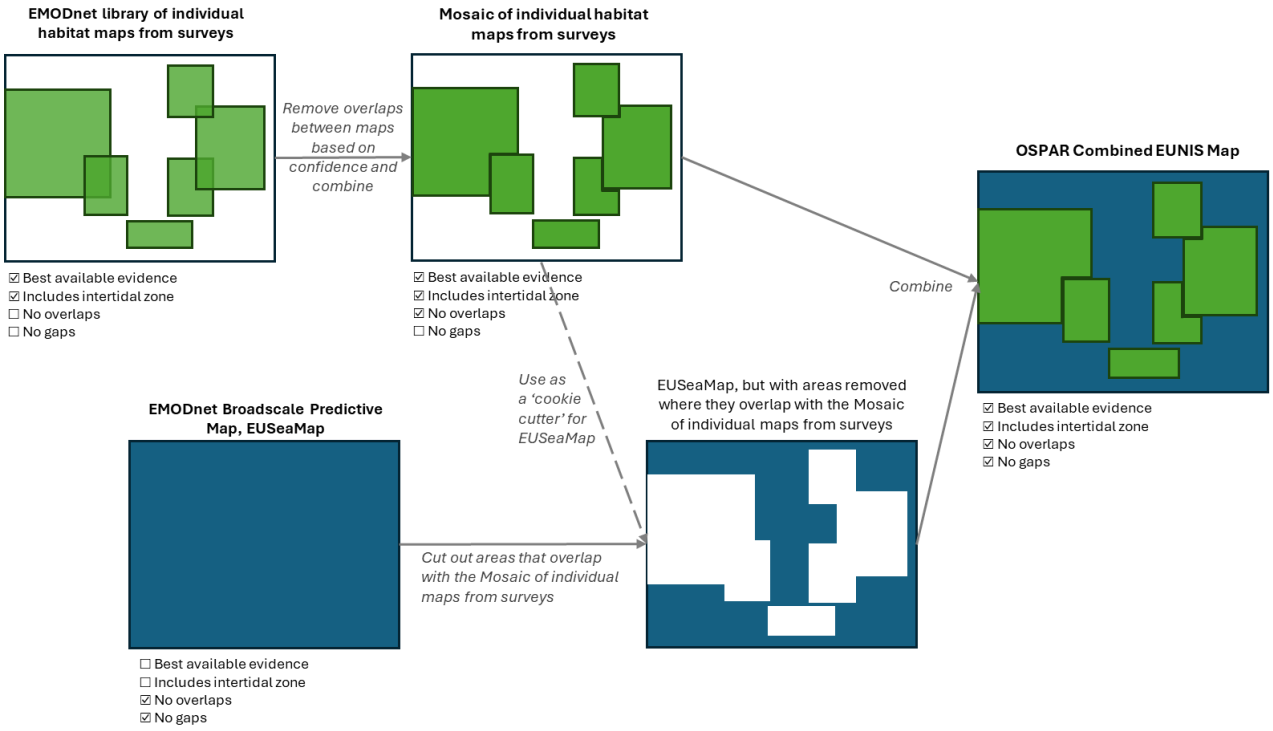

Figure 3: overview of the process used to create the OSPAR Combined EUNIS Map.

The OSPAR Combined EUNIS Map is used as a key input to the BH3 indicator, Extent of Physical Damage to Benthic Habitats, as described in the 2023 Quality Status Report, and is also required to support other benthic indicators assessments. Therefore the assessments will benefit greatly from improvements to this map using the latest habitat maps that have not yet been contributed for open publication via EMODnet.

Submission instructions

Benthic habitat maps from all parts of the OSPAR Maritime Area are required to feed in to the assessment of BH3 Indicator Assessment (Extent of Physical Disturbance to Benthic Habitats) for the Intermediate Assessment 2029 [2]. All coastal OSPAR Contracting Parties are requested to complete two tasks:

Task 1: Review the benthic habitat maps currently available on EMODnet and provide feedback about which of these should and should not be used for the assessment.

Attached to this data call are spreadsheets containing a full list of benthic habitats maps currently available for each Contracting Party, as part of the collection of 'individual habitat maps from surveys' available on EMODnet[3]. This includes a unique identifier (GUI) and a link to its full metadata record.

Please indicate in column E of the spreadsheet whether each habitat maps should or should not be used for the combined map, and return the spreadsheet to JNCC by the reporting deadline.

Note that if a map is excluded and no alternative habitat map is available, then EUSeaMap will be used to fill the gap.

[2] See Extent of Physical Disturbance to Benthic Habitats: Aggregate Extraction and Extent of Physical Disturbance to Benthic Habitats: Fisheries with mobile bottom-contacting gears for how these were assessed as part of the Quality Status Report 2023.

[3] Specifically the 'EUNIS 2007 habitat maps' and 'EUNIS 2019 habitat maps' collections. These can be filtered by country using the layer filter button.

Task 2: Submit additional benthic habitat maps via the EMODnet Data Submission Service

If your Contracting Party has additional habitat maps that should be included in the combined map, please submit via the EMODnet Data Submission Service by the reporting deadline.

1. First time users will need to register in the **ECAS system of the EU**.
2. Please refer to the attached EMODnet Manual for Data Submitters (EMODnetDataSubmitter_helpguide_ds_22sept2017.pdf), which is a comprehensive guide to using this service.

The EMODnet Data Submission Service works as follows:

1. Phase I:
    a. Part 1: the data submitter (you) uploads a dataset in any format and fills in some basic metadata
    b. Part 2: the data centre (JNCC) reviews the submission and adds additional metadata, in dialogue with the data submitter, if necessary. The data submitter and data centre then approve the publication of the data 'as is' (meaning, in its original format) via the EMODnet Products Catalogue.
2. Phase II: the data centre (in this case, JNCC and other partners of EMODnet Seabed Habitats) will process the data, in dialogue with the data submitter, to make it conform to the EMODnet standards, so that it may be combined with other habitat maps to create the OSPAR Combined EUNIS Map.

Requirement for Phase I submission: to be included in the OSPAR Combined EUNIS Map, the data must be in polygon vector format and be classified according to either version 2022 (preferred) or version 2007-11 of the EUNIS ~~2007-11~~ classification system – the most detailed level possible. If the habitat map was originally classified in another system, please include that information in another column, along with any other useful information.

Use of the data

This data is to be primarily used for the next steps of assessment and testing of the following indicators:

BH3a – Extent of physical disturbance to benthic habitats – Fisheries with mobile bottom-contacting gears

BH3b – Extent of physical disturbance to benthic habitats – Aggregate extraction

BH3c – Physical disturbance to benthic habitats – offshore installations

BH4a – Area of habitat loss (sealed loss)

BH4b – Area of habitat loss (unsealed loss)

The same data will also be used, where appropriate, to support the analyses of other benthic indicators:

BH1 – Sentinels of the Seabed (SoS)

BH2b – Condition of benthic habitat communities: Relative Margalef diversity (D'_M)

BH2c – Impacts of NIS on some coastal habitats

BH6 – Benthic Indicator Species Index (BISI)

FW9 – Ecological network analysis

The BH3 indicator aims to address those pressures which cause physical damage to seafloor habitats in the OSPAR area. It is being designed to assess all habitat types and is regarded as particularly useful to analyse larger sea areas with relatively low additional sampling effort. The indicator will build upon two types of underlining information, i) the distribution and sensitivity of habitats and their components and ii) the distribution and intensity of human activities and pressures that cause physical damage, such as mobile bottom gear fisheries, sediment extraction and offshore constructions. These two information lines are combined to calculate an index value for the actual damage of a given seafloor habitat. The overall aspiration is to design an indicator that will help evaluate to what extent the integrity of the seafloor and associated ecology is being damaged by anthropogenic activity using a combination of sensitivity assessments and exposure to pressures.

The BH4 indicator aims to estimate the extent and proportion of benthic habitat types that is lost due to human activities. Habitat loss may be caused by placement of offshore structures like foundations of wind turbines or by disposal of sediments onto the seafloor (sealed loss). Physical disturbance with a very high intensity may also alter the habitat type and therefore lead to a loss of habitat area (unsealed loss).

Storage, use and access to the reported data

Only publicly available data will be accepted into the OSPAR EUNIS Combined Map. Data submitted to the EMODnet Data Submission Service will be published via EMODnet with the relevant attribution.

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.