



OSPAR Commission
The Aspect
12 Finsbury Square
London, EC2A 1AS

Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs

By email

17 June 2022

Dear Sir/Madam,

Response by the OSPAR Commission to the request pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/72 of 9 December 2021, entitled “Oceans and Law of the Sea”, for an OSPAR contribution to the seventy-seventh session of the General Assembly

The following is the contribution by the OSPAR Commission to the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 76/72, as requested in a letter from Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under Secretary-General in charge of the Office of Legal Affairs, dated 11 April 2022.

Introduction

The OSPAR Convention is the legal instrument guiding international cooperation on the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic (NEA).

The activities and work under the Convention are managed by the OSPAR Commission, which is composed of fifteen Governments and the European Commission, on behalf of the European Union.

The OSPAR Commission is a Regional Seas Convention which aims to cooperate towards the protection of the NEA marine environment and the sustainable use of its resources. OSPAR started with the Oslo and Paris Conventions of 1972 and 1974 respectively, aiming at combatting dumping at sea, and 2 years later it integrated land-based sources of pollution and offshore industry. Both Conventions were later unified and updated to become the OSPAR Convention in 1992, which was then extended, in 1998, to cover biodiversity and ecosystems and non-polluting human activities that may adversely affect the sea.

OSPAR’s work is addressed under five thematic committees.

Biodiversity Committee (BDC)

The function of OSPAR’s BDC is to take forward and coordinate the work under the OSPAR Convention on the protection of biodiversity. This involves developing actions related to: the protection and conservation species and habitats; OSPAR’s network of marine protected areas (MPA); development of and monitoring and assessment of biodiversity indicators; and the evaluation of the effects of climate change and ocean acidification on biodiversity as well as actions that can be taken to improve the resilience of ecosystems.



Environmental Impacts of Human Activities Committee (EIHA)

The EIHA Committee is responsible for ensuring that uses of the marine environment are sustainable, through the integrated management of current and emerging human activities. It has a very broad scope including: the assessment and/or management of pressures from marine litter, underwater noise, offshore renewable energy, deep seabed mining, dumping and disposal of dredged materials, munitions, non-indigenous species, and pollution from shipping; OSPAR's work on cumulative effects and ecosystem based management; and risks from new, emerging and increasing pressures on the marine environment.

Hazardous substances and eutrophication committee (HASEC)

The Committee coordinates OSPAR's work on hazardous substances and eutrophication and to develop programmes and measures which include those related to: activities that result in a pressure on the OSPAR maritime area via discharges, emissions and losses of hazardous substances and plant nutrients; monitoring the state of hazardous substances and eutrophication in the marine environment and evaluating any associated impact; and keeping under review OSPAR measures and actions related to hazardous substances and eutrophication.

Offshore industry committee (OIC)

OIC is responsible for taking forward and coordinating work under the OSPAR Convention on the prevention and elimination of pollution from offshore activities and from storage of carbon dioxide activities. It's work includes programmes and measures related to: offshore activities and storage of carbon dioxide activities that exert pressures; monitoring and assessing the impacts of offshore activities and storage of carbon dioxide activities on the marine environment; and keeping under review OSPAR measures and actions related to the prevention and elimination of pollution from offshore activities and storage of carbon dioxide activities.

Radioactive substances committee (RSC)

RSC's role is to take forward and coordinate the work under the OSPAR Convention that concerns radioactive substances, including: all activities that result in a pressure on the OSPAR maritime area via discharges, emissions and losses of radioactive substances; monitoring the state of radioactive substances in the marine environment and evaluating any associated impact; and keeping under review OSPAR measures and actions related to radioactive substances.

OSPAR Ministerial Meeting 1 October 2021

2021 was an important year for OSPAR. We held our once in a decade Ministerial Meeting at the kind invitation of Portugal, in Cascais. The main deliverable from the Ministerial Meeting was the agreement of a new OSPAR North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) ([North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 | OSPAR Commission](#)) that will guide the work of the OSPAR Commission until 2030. The NEAES includes 12 Strategic objectives underpinned by a series of time bound operational objectives that contribute to addressing the triple threat of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution including marine litter.

The Strategy and the Ministerial Declaration ([Ministerial Declaration | OSPAR Commission](#)) agreed at the Ministerial Meeting both reaffirm OSPAR's commitment to working with all United Nations bodies with a role in ocean governance and other relevant competent bodies. OSPAR's work to implement the NEAES 2030 will contribute to the delivery of the United Nation's Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14 "Life below water".



Part IX Marine environment and marine resources

OSPAR produced a document showing how it is contributing towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including SDG 14 “life below water”: [OSPAR and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)

OSPAR’s new NEAES 2030 has a greater emphasis on addressing the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification including a new Strategic Objective to achieve seas that are resilient to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification. The operational objectives that support this strategic objective include developing a regional approach to applying nature-based solutions for carbon storage and implementing specific measures to protect and restore relevant carbon sequestration and storage habitats, such as seagrass beds, kelp forests and saltmarshes.

OSPAR also reviewed its Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter and has now produced a second Regional Action Plan (RAP ML2) that will be agreed at the OSPAR Commission meeting in June 2022. The RAP ML2 will contribute towards achieving the ambitious target that OSPAR has agreed:

“By 2025 OSPAR will reduce by at least 50% the prevalence of the most commonly found single-use plastic items and of maritime-related plastic items on beaches in order to contribute to the achievement of relevant regional and EU threshold values building upon requirements for EU Member States in the EU Single Use Plastics Directive (Directive 2019/904), and by at least 75% by 2030.”

Part X Marine biodiversity

At the OSPAR Ministerial Meeting on 1 October OSPAR agreed to designate a new high seas Marine Protected Area (MPA) for seabirds which is larger than the land mass of the United Kingdom and Germany combined. The designation of the high seas North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin (NACES) MPA, which covers nearly 600,000 km² 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.

By establishing the NACES MPA OSPAR has achieved the United Nations Convention for Biodiversity 2020 Aichi target of designating 10% of marine waters as MPAs.

In addition to this, by 2030 OSPAR will further develop its network of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs)¹⁸ to cover at least 30% of the OSPAR maritime area to ensure it is representative, ecologically coherent and effectively managed to achieve its conservation objectives.

The new OSPAR Strategy also recognises the importance of tackling anthropogenic underwater noise and commits OSPAR to reduce it to levels that do not adversely affect the marine environment. To support this commitment, by 2023, OSPAR will agree a regional action plan setting out a series of national and collective actions to reduce noise pollution. This will be underpinned by a coordinated monitoring and modelling programme for continuous sound.

Part XIII (Regional cooperation) and Part XV (Coordination and cooperation)

OSPAR continues cooperate both bilaterally and multi-laterally with other Intergovernmental Organisations and competent bodies to improve the protection of the North-East Atlantic, in particular with relevant Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), the International Maritime Organisation (IMO), the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Arctic Council.



To underline this cooperation OSPAR agreed two new Memorandum of Understanding in the period covered by this report. One with the Caribbean Environment Programme and one with the Bonn Agreement to strengthen collaboration and partnership working on shared activities and to promote cleaner and healthier seas and to conserve marine ecosystems.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Pattinson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dominic Pattinson

Executive Secretary

