



**OSPAR**  
COMMISSION

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**

15 June 2023

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Response by the OSPAR Commission to the request pursuant to General Assembly resolution 77/248 of 30 December 2022, entitled “Oceans and Law of the Sea”, for an OSPAR contribution to the seventy-eighth 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 77/748, as requested in a letter from Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under Secretary-General in charge of the Office of Legal Affairs, dated 21 March 2023.

### **Introduction**

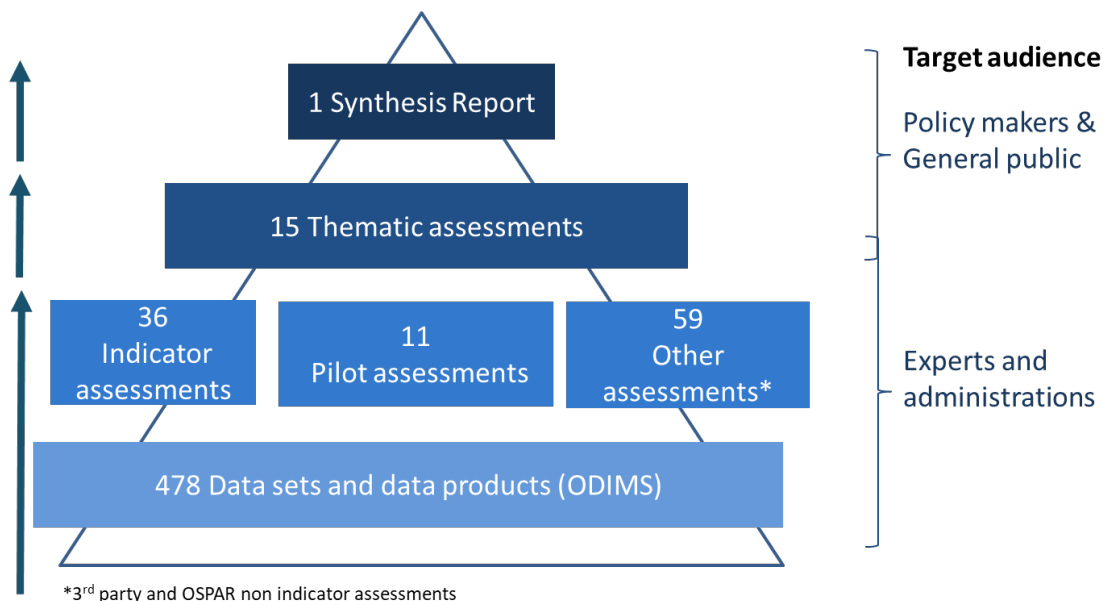
The OSPAR Convention is the legal instrument guiding international cooperation on the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic (NEA). The activities and work under the Convention are managed by the OSPAR Commission, which is composed of fifteen Governments and the European Commission, on behalf of the European Union.

The OSPAR Commission is the Regional Seas Convention responsible for coordinating the efforts of its Contracting Parties to protect the marine environment of the NEA and ensure 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. In September 2022, the OSPAR Commission celebrated 30 years of international cooperation to protect and conserve the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic and published a short report highlighting a list of 30 achievements [30th anniversary achievements.pdf \(ospar.org\)](https://ospar.org/30th_anniversary_achievements.pdf).

## State of the North-East Atlantic

The key OSPAR deliverable this year is its Quality Status Report (QSR) 2023. This holistic, once in a decade, assessment provides the scientific knowledge and evidence that will be used to better inform and guide the development of actions to achieve OSPAR’s vision of a *clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.*



The QSR addresses all aspects of marine biodiversity from fish to birds and whales and the pelagic and benthic habitats they rely on. It looks at the intensity of human activities and the pressures that result from those activities as well as pollution from excess nutrients, hazardous substances, and other pressures such as marine litter and underwater noise. For the first time climate change and ocean acidification have their own assessments.

A key feature of this QSR was the application of a conceptual framework (DAPSIR – Drivers, Activities, Pressures, State, Impacts and Responses) as a way to better understand the link between human activities, the pressures they exert and the effect they have on the state of the marine environment.

Like all OSPAR products, the assessments and the underlying data that make up the QSR 2023 are published in the OSPAR Assessment Portal online and freely accessible to all [OSPAR - Assessments - OSPAR-OAP \(Prod\)](#). This ensures that others can benefit from the work undertaken by OSPAR and apply the lessons to their regions of the ocean.

### Part X Marine environment and marine resources

As part of the QSR 2023, OSPAR delivered for the first time two assessments fully dedicated to [ocean acidification](#) and climate change. These new assessments are crucial to better understand the processes of ocean acidification and climate change in the OSPAR Maritime Area. The outcomes will be used to inform the development and implementation of one of the key dimensions of OSPAR’s North-East Atlantic Environment



Strategy (NEAES) 2030: to achieve seas resilient to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification. The assessment of ocean acidification shows that it has been observed in all OSPAR regions and is a major threat to marine species and ecosystems, with direct consequences to ecosystem services. The one on climate change identified rising sea levels and temperatures, reduced pH values, changes in rainfall amounts and reduced sea ice coverage, among others, as effects that had been observed in the OSPAR Maritime Area. These effects have in turn resulted in documented changes to marine ecosystems, for example in the distribution of species and the timing of key life stage events. It was also shown that local and regional impacts can vary, with some regions experiencing changes at a much faster rate (for example, in the Arctic Waters. Climate extremes, such as marine heatwaves, storms and waves are also becoming more prevalent.

OSPAR continues to implement its second Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter and adopted an OSPAR threshold value for beach litter and agreed updated guidelines for the assessment of seafloor litter. Progress has also been made in implementing OSPAR Recommendations on the reduction of plastic pellet loss and fishing for litter, noting that an OSPAR target to double participation in fishing for litter schemes by 2021 had been met and exceeded.

### **Part X Marine biodiversity**

This year OSPAR agreed to expand the conservation objectives of the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin (NACES) MPA. This MPA was originally designated for the purpose of protecting seabirds and which is larger than France has now been extended to include many migratory species such as large whales, and deep sea habitats such as abyssal plains.

Understanding the status of the marine biodiversity is a key part of understanding how to reverse biodiversity loss. As part of OSPAR's Quality Status Report, OSPAR agreed a total of 20 common indicator assessments, 9 pilot assessments based on candidate indicators and 40 status assessments of features on the OSPAR List of threatened and/ or declining species and habitats. The assessments show that many species and habitats are still in trouble and severely impacted by human activities. The influence of climate change is also more apparent.

### **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. After a gap of 4 years, OSPAR hosted the 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Collective Arrangement. The aim of this regional platform is to facilitate cooperation and coordination on area-based management as well as the sharing of information between competent authorities addressing the management of human activities in the North-East Atlantic region. Information on the Collective Arrangement is available on the OSPAR and NEAFC websites.<sup>1</sup>

Key topics for discussion at the meeting were: developments on Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM); the role of the Collective Arrangement in relation to the implementation of the newly adopted International Legally Binding Instrument on Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction; the role that OSPAR and NEAFC can play in the delivery of the targets under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) process; the sharing of data and the implementation of ecosystem based management.

During this period OSPAR has also established an [Arctic Outcomes Working Group \(AOWG\)](#) to deliver the [OSPAR Commission's 2022-2025 Arctic Outcomes Roadmap](#). A key feature of this work is developing closer ties with the Arctic Council and other Arctic stakeholders and the use of relevant sources of scientific

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ospar.org/about/international-cooperation/collective-arrangement](http://www.ospar.org/about/international-cooperation/collective-arrangement), [www.neafc.org/collective-arrangement](http://www.neafc.org/collective-arrangement)



information and traditional knowledge. The goal of this work is to identify and develop proposals for possible OSPAR measures and actions to enhance protection of the Arctic marine environment in the OSPAR Maritime Area.

I confirm that the full text of this report can be made available on the website of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "D. Pattinson", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

**Dominic Pattinson**

**Executive Secretary**