

## Summary of Activities 2017-2018

An OSPAR contribution under UN General Assembly Resolution 72/73, of 5 December 2017, on Oceans and the law of the sea, to the seventy-third session of the General Assembly.

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.

OSPAR Commission is a Regional Sea 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 up-dated to become the 1992 OSPAR Convention, which was then extended, in 1998, to cover biodiversity and ecosystems and non-polluting human activities that may adversely affect the sea.

OSPAR's main objective is to prevent and eliminate pollution and protect the marine environment from the adverse effects of human activities, while promoting the sustainable use of its goods and services. The Ecosystem Approach is the overarching principle reflected in the 2010-2020 North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES), alongside with the Precautionary Principle and polluter-pays principle. OSPAR's vision is of a "clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, used sustainably" and Contracting Parties apply Best Available Techniques and Best Environmental Practices in their activities.

OSPAR's guiding principles underpin the sustainable use of the marine environment, which requires a sound coordination amongst Contracting Parties, but also with other international organisations, using science-based evidence wherever possible. In that regard, the Memoranda of Understanding that OSPAR signed with other organisations (International Maritime Organisation, International Seabed Authority, *inter alia*) are of utmost relevance, alongside with the Collective Arrangement adopted in 2014 with North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), the regional fisheries management organisation competent for regulating fisheries in the same geographical area.

For Contracting Parties that are Member States of the European Union, OSPAR provides a regional context for coordinated implementation of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD).

OSPAR includes Arctic waters in its area and can therefore contribute to the protection of the unique and increasingly threatened Arctic marine environment.

Through the data collection on the different activities, its regular assessments and monitoring activities, OSPAR provides a comprehensive knowledge on the impacts of human activities and identifies priorities for action, which reinforces its key role as a *forum* for collective commitment and collaborative work.

### OSPAR activities 2017- 2018.

1. OSPAR's activities in 2017-2018 reflect an ambitious programme of work under the current OSPAR Ministers' North East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2010-2020. OSPAR continues to take forward

activities to support Contracting Parties' national, regional and global ambitions with regard to the protection and conservation of the marine environment.

2. In 2017, much of the effort has been directed to the publication in June 2017 of an Intermediate Assessment of the state of the North East Atlantic. The Intermediate Assessment introduces OSPAR, its assessment methodology, describing issues such as climate change, cumulative effects analysis and social and economic analysis, including a key messages section. The core of the Intermediate Assessment consists of a series of indicator-based assessments of environmental status, which, along with summaries of some of OSPAR's more regular periodic assessments, inform the public on the state of knowledge in the North East Atlantic. In 2018 the Intermediate Assessment was finalised and also made available in French via the OSPAR Assessment Portal, which received over 50 000 page views from 7 500 users between 1/7/2017 and 1/4/2018.

3. In November 2017 OSPAR initiated a strategic reflection on its future goals, targets and work, in particular on the need to develop a new OSPAR Strategy for the period after 2020 and the preparation of a Ministerial meeting in 2020. In 2018 OSPAR engaged in a debate on the content of a new ten-years Strategy, and also on the assessment of progress of OSPAR's work against its main objectives and thematic goals under the current NEAES 2010-2020.

4. In 2018 Committees developed their initial reviews for assessing progress against thematic objectives, including a reflection on the ways to assess the effectiveness of measures. In parallel Committees have also initiated a reflection on the content of the new NEAES 2020-2030 and have mapped their work against UN Sustainable Development Goals as a contribution to the development of the outline of the new NEAES. This work may become very relevant towards the preparation for the next Quality Status Report (QSR) due in 2023 and be used to align common and SDG indicators with OSPAR strategic objectives, EU MSFD descriptors and *criteria*. These initial reviews of the Committees will be refined during 2018 in accordance with continuing guidance from OSPAR's Coordination Group.

5. In 2017-2018 following previous discussions on the need to improve OSPAR's Governance, OSPAR took important steps towards outlining the objectives of a Governance Review so that specific outcomes, including any possible modification of the structure, functioning and decision-making process of OSPAR would be considered in the development of the new NEAES 2020-2030. In March 2018 an informal and very constructive OSPAR Governance workshop was held in Paris. The event was designed and facilitated by an internationally recognised team of facilitators and covered the vision and common purpose of OSPAR towards enhancing its performance and decision processes and the improvement of the internal governance of OSPAR Commission.

6. This summary of activities in 2017-2018 also highlights the work under OSPAR's thematic Committees on Biodiversity, Environmental Impacts of Human Activities, Hazardous Substances and Eutrophication, Radioactive Substances and Offshore Industry. These sections include details on marine litter, development of the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas (MPA), implementation of Recommendations on species and habitats of concern and the publication of the Third Common Procedure Integrated Report on eutrophication status in the OSPAR maritime area.

**(The two sections below relate to Part II and XV of UN Resolution 72/73 of 5 December 2017)**

## Cross cutting issues

1. The preparation and finalisation of the Intermediate Assessment, published online in June 2017 (<https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/intermediate-assessment-2017/>) has generally been the highest priority activity for many of OSPAR's intersessional groups, working groups and thematic committees. The assessment has had the benefit of European Union co-financing. The Intermediate Assessment includes sections introducing OSPAR, the assessment and its methodology, describing issues such as climate change, cumulative effects analysis and social and economic analysis under OSPAR, as well as a section on key messages and highlights. The core of the Intermediate Assessment is a series of assessments based on a suite of indicators of marine environment status adopted by OSPAR in the previous years. These indicator assessments, along with summaries of some of OSPAR's more regular periodic assessments, inform the reader on the state of knowledge in OSPAR across a broad swathe of pressure and state indicators in the North East Atlantic.
2. Compared to previous status reports in OSPAR, the Intermediate Assessment is an entirely new development in being an online-only publication. The Intermediate Assessment is available through the online OSPAR assessment portal <https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/intermediate-assessment-2017/>. Through this portal, the reader can explore both brief and more detailed versions of each indicator assessment. In addition the portal provides a 2-page summary of each indicator for download. The indicator assessments also include links to metadata and data snapshots so that the full details of how the assessment was produced are available, making them fully transparent and accessible in the future.
3. For Contracting Parties that are Member States of the European Union, the Intermediate Assessment can be used to help provide information on the state of the marine environment in the North-East Atlantic as the regional context for national marine status reporting under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. It is also available to be used as regional context to supplement national reporting under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.
4. Following the OSPAR data portal, the OSPAR Data Management and Information System, launched in 2016, a new stage of the Data Management and Information Strategy, running to 2020 was adopted in 2017. This will enable the development of the system to make sure all of the data used by OSPAR are available via an online tool and supports repeatable, accessible and transparent periodic assessments and reports.

## International context

1. In 2017 and 2018 OSPAR has been active in highlighting the relevance of regional cooperation in supporting national implementation of the UN's Agenda 2030 and on OSPAR's vision in particular with regard to the UN 'Sustainable Development Goal 14, through interventions made at "Our Oceans Conference" and participation in side events. The Ocean Conference (UN, June 2017, New York) provided further impetus for region-to-region cooperation, with both voluntary commitments between OSPAR and NEAFC on the promotion of the Collective Arrangement and between OSPAR and the Cartagena Convention (Caribbean Environment Programme) on the exploration of potential fields for cooperation.
2. The UN SDG 14 is of utmost relevance to the scope and mandate of OSPAR and to its Contracting Parties as they are expected to establish own frameworks for their achievement and the related 169 targets. The United Nations Conference to Support the Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 14 "Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development" recognised the need for enhanced engagement of regional bodies to achieve SDG14. OSPAR will play a

fundamental role as the appropriate Regional Sea Convention in assisting its Contracting Parties through existing monitoring and reporting mechanisms, in ensuring quality, accessible data collection and periodic environmental assessments, and through developing an effective regional management regime for the achievement of regional objectives that match the targets under SDG14. In 2017 OSPAR initiated a thorough reflection towards the streamlining of its overall mandate of work, strategic objectives and assessment indicators with the UN SDGs and targets, which will feed into the building up process of the future OSPAR North-East Atlantic Strategy for the period after 2020, subject to agreement by the OSPAR Commission at the 2018 annual meeting.

3. Regional and sectoral cooperation has been reinforced not only by the continuing cooperation between OSPAR and the North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission, but also under the 2014 Collective Arrangement, which held its fourth meeting in 7-8 May 2018 in Berlin, (<https://www.ospar.org/news/international-cooperation-in-areas-beyond-national-jurisdiction-in-the-north-east-atlantic>), and counted with the participation of Contracting Parties to OSPAR and NEAFC, other Regional Sea Conventions and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations, including ICCAT, NAMMCO, Cartagena Convention, Abidjan Convention, but also with UNEP, ICES, as well as consultants from IASS and Seascope, alongside contributions received from ISA and IMO. This 4<sup>th</sup> meeting in 2018 received a number of updates on relevant activities from the competent bodies and a decision was made to hold a 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Collective Arrangement in 2019 in Sweden.

4. OSPAR finalised a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IMO ([https://www.ospar.org/site/assets/files/1357/mou\\_imo\\_ospar\\_on\\_london\\_convention\\_and\\_protocol.pdf](https://www.ospar.org/site/assets/files/1357/mou_imo_ospar_on_london_convention_and_protocol.pdf)) on the promotion of the London Convention (LC) and London Protocol (LP). The MoU focuses on sharing experiences with the application of the London Convention and London Protocol guidance documents and developing new or revised guidance; and implementing technical cooperation and assistance activities, where the experiences within the OSPAR Commission can assist new and prospective Parties in other regions around the world. IMO and the OSPAR Commission are committed to strengthening their partnership, specifically for the promotion of the LC and LP and issues within the scope of these treaties at the regional level. The purpose and objective of the MoU is to cooperate in promoting issues within the scope of the LC and LP at the regional level to prevent marine pollution from dumping of wastes and other matter in order to protect the marine environment and promote the sustainable use and conservation of marine resources.

5. In the international context events bringing together many Regional Sea Conventions and Regional Fisheries Management Organisations presented an opportunity to share OSPAR's work and vision. The Collective Arrangement has been presented as an example of a regional sea dialogue platform for competent bodies committed to the protection and sustainable use of the North-East Atlantic and other marine regions, and the Intermediate Assessment as a specific example of "Interaction of science-based regional mechanisms/networks under regional organisations". Both examples were presented at the event on "Building Partnership to Enhance Science Based Ecosystem Approaches in support of Regional Ocean Governance" (<https://www.iwlearn.net/documents/26948/>), in Cape Town, South Africa, in November 2017, and at the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of Monaco Blue Initiative, in Edinburgh, UK, in April 2018, at a session on "*Blue Growth in our changing northern seas: Achieving synergies*" (<http://www.monacoblueinitiative.org/en/editions/2018-edition/program/>).

6. Following the 2017 Ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council in Fairbanks, where OSPAR was one of the seven new observers admitted by Arctic Council Ministers, OSPAR participated at the two Senior Arctic

Official meetings held in Finland under the Finnish Chairmanship, in 2017 and 2018 respectively. Furthermore, OSPAR has been actively engaging with its working groups since 2017 and throughout 2018, in particular with the “Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment” (PAME), as co-lead on a project on marine litter, including microplastics; and on the development of a report on underwater noise, to assess its impacts on the Arctic marine ecosystem and identify knowledge gaps.

**(Sections below relate to Part XV of UN Resolution 72/73 of 5 December 2017)**

### Biodiversity Committee (BDC)

1. The Biodiversity Committee contributed to the evaluation of progress against the objectives of the NEAES 2010-2020. The initial review shows significant progress made in achieving several of the objectives, however for other areas work has been delayed and more dedicated efforts are needed. The Biodiversity Committee also carried out the periodic review of applicability of OSPAR Decisions, Recommendations, and Other Agreements of relevance to BDC as a contribution to the work of maintaining the OSPAR *acquis*.
2. Twenty-two biodiversity indicator assessments were produced by the work by experts under the Biodiversity Committee for the Intermediate Assessment 2017. This represents a significant step forward in developing a regular approach to the assessment of biodiversity, which remains a new and challenging area of OSPAR’s work on assessment and monitoring. Work is ongoing to operationalise the agreed common indicators in terms of establishing data streams from collection of monitoring data to the final calculation of an indicator result, as well as further enhancement of the documentation of the indicator methodologies.
3. Another major work area has been the adoption of the Roadmap for the implementation of collective actions within the Recommendations for the protection and conservation of OSPAR listed Species and Habitats. Since the adoption of the roadmap in 2017, specific timelines and plans have been developed to implement the collective actions, marking a new phase in OSPAR’s work on protection of threatened and/or declining species and habitats, with a focus on implementation.
4. A report on the status of the OSPAR network of Marine Protected Areas (MPA) for 2016 was published by OSPAR in 2017 as a component to the Intermediate Assessment. This reports on an increasing network, with 448 MPAs, compared to 159 MPAs and 1% coverage in 2010. The brief assessment sheet produced in 2017 described the continuing work, noting the addition of 18 MPAs so that by the end of 2017, the network comprises 465 MPAs with a total surface area of 858,890 km<sup>2</sup> or 6.3 % of the OSPAR Maritime Area. Work to further enhance the OSPAR MPA network in the future continued as the Biodiversity Committee considered a new proposal for an MPA to protect seabirds to be established in the high seas of the OSPAR Maritime Area. The Biodiversity Committee considered the scientific basis for the proposal and outlined the plan for further work in the coming meeting cycle. Currently, a consultation on the new MPA proposal is being carried out with other regionally competent international organisations in order to enhance the scientific basis and general acceptance of the proposal with a view to support future management measures at the site.

### Environmental Impacts of Human Activities Committee (EIHA)

1. The Committee held initial discussions on a potential role for OSPAR in the regulation of deep-sea mining in areas within national jurisdiction. A background document will be developed in 2018 to consider the issues further and identify where OSPAR may need to take action.

2. Following OSPAR 2017 agreement that disposal at sea of mine tailings should be regulated under Annex I of the Convention, a 2018 background document will serve as a basis for any OSPAR measures to be taken.
3. The Committee is continuing to implement its Marine Litter Regional Action Plan, taking on a Project Coordinator to accelerate implementation. As part of the Plan, there is ongoing dialogue with the cosmetics industry to follow up on a voluntary agreement by the members of Cosmetics Europe to phase out the use of microbeads in wash-off products by 2020. Given the OSPAR Commission's concern about the pollution of the North East Atlantic by microplastic particles, including those from cosmetics and personal care products, noting that several Contracting Parties are implementing regulatory steps to phase out the use of microplastics in these and other products, further impetus was agreed in order to ensure a harmonised approach and level-playing-field for industry. States that are Contracting Parties to OSPAR therefore called on the European Union to introduce legal measures to achieve a 100% phasing out of microplastic particles in personal care and cosmetic products in line with Action 47 of the OSPAR Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter.
4. There are a large number of actions on marine litter, on both land-based and sea-based sources, that are currently being developed to hold dialogues with the fishing, shipping and plastics industry (on pre-production plastic pellets).
5. The OSPAR Marine Litter Regional Action Plan is being implemented in close coordination with the related activities of the EU Strategy for Plastics, published in January 2018.
6. New monitoring of marine litter is being developed through the funded INDICIT project, which will support the development of the candidate indicator on plastic particles in turtles' stomachs for the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast region. Work is also underway to develop a new indicator on the impacts of impulsive noise and on microplastics in sediments, based on existing contaminants monitoring in the Hazardous substances and eutrophication committee.
7. EIHA and the BDC are working together on the Plan for the implementation of collective actions within the Recommendations for the protection and conservation of OSPAR listed Species and Habitats. The plan, adopted at OSPAR 2017, has a lead party approach to the individual actions to ensure proper assessment of resource needs and better implementation.

### Hazardous substances and eutrophication committee (HASEC)

1. This year the Hazardous substances and eutrophication committee (HASEC) devoted significant time and effort to the review and renewal of the NEAES, specifically its progress against its two thematic strategies, eutrophication and hazardous substances for 2010-2020, was reviewed. There is evidence that the extent of eutrophication in the OSPAR Maritime Area has continued to reduce since 1990 and there have been significant efforts to reduce discharges, emissions, and losses of contaminants to both air and water. However, problems remain and this information informs HASEC's proposals for new objectives for the NEAES 2020-2030.
2. Cooperation and collaboration with external bodies continue to be important in HASEC's work. For example, working with AMAP<sup>1</sup> on methods and a process for including AMAP's Arctic Waters' data in the next OSPAR Quality Status Report, and more widely to support global initiatives such as the Minamata Convention. The contaminants experts and ICES are building a new online contaminant assessment tool,

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<sup>1</sup> Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme

which will be finalised in 2018/19. There have been significant new developments in the functionality and information available in the tool (currently available at <http://dome.ices.dk/osparmime/main.html>).

3. HASEC experts also worked with EMEP<sup>2</sup> to adapt EMEP's atmospheric nitrogen deposition modelling to make it relevant for the whole OSPAR Maritime Area. These modelled atmospheric deposition products greatly facilitate OSPAR's monitoring and assessment work, as well as assessment for WFD and MSFD.

4. The eutrophication experts have begun working towards harmonisation of the eutrophication common indicators, OSPAR's Common Procedure for the identification of eutrophication, and the EU's Commission Decision criteria. A joint work-plan is underway that aims to streamline these three processes and to automate the assessment of eutrophication as far as possible.

### Offshore Industry Committee (OIC)

1. OIC has reviewed OSPAR Decision 98/3 on the Disposal of Disused Offshore Installations to focus on technical aspects relating to the derogation categories of Decision 98/3.

2. Work continues on the use and discharge of plastic materials contained in offshore chemicals, and on understanding the scale of the discharge of both plastics and microplastics contained in offshore chemicals. OIC has agreed to amend the Harmonised Offshore Chemical Notification Format and associated guidance to identify those chemical products that contain a plastic substance and if that plastic is a microplastic.

3. OIC continue the important work on the assessment of impacts of discharges of oil and chemicals in produced water on the marine environment, draft assessment of impacts of decommissioned pipelines on the marine environment and on other users of the sea and draft assessment of the impacts of disturbance of cuttings piles related to decommissioning in order to fulfil OIC's obligations to the NEAES 2010-2020.

### Radioactive Substances Committee (RSC)

1. In 2018 the Radioactive Substances Committee discussed the progress and a method for assessing "additional concentrations in the marine environment above historic levels are close to zero".

2. RSC amended PARCOM Recommendation 2018/x on Radioactive Discharges, to make the Recommendation fit for purpose and apply the Best Available Techniques to minimise and, as appropriate, eliminate any pollution caused by radioactive discharges from all nuclear industries, their associated radioactive waste treatment facilities and decommissioning activities.

3. RSC identified new emerging issues and is working on the transport of a floating nuclear power plant within the North-East Atlantic waters.

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<sup>2</sup> Co-operative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of Long-Range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe