



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

14 June 2024

Dear Sir/Madam,

Response by the OSPAR Commission to the request pursuant to General Assembly resolution 78/69 of 5 December 2023, entitled “Oceans and Law of the Sea”, for an OSPAR contribution to the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly

1. The following is the contribution by the OSPAR Commission for the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR) to the preparation of the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 78/69, as requested in a letter from Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under Secretary-General in charge of the Office of Legal Affairs, dated 19 March 2024.

Introduction

2. 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.

3. The OSPAR Commission is the Regional Seas Convention responsible for coordinating the efforts of its Contracting Parties to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic and ensure the sustainable use of its resources. Importantly, in the year that saw the adoption of the International Legally Binding Instrument on Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction approximately 40% of the OSPAR maritime area is in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

4. 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.

VIII Maritime safety and security and flag State implementation

5. OSPAR continues to assess and manage the impacts of radioactive substances in the marine environment. Activities this year focussed on development of assessment methodologies, including

agreement to develop three new indicators: discharges of radionuclides from the nuclear sector; discharges of radionuclides from the non-nuclear sector; and environmental concentrations of artificial radionuclides.

6. Work is also underway to address monitoring of environmental concentrations around offshore installations and the impact of leaving in-situ contaminated oil and gas infrastructure such as pipelines. OSPAR also considered the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification on sources, behaviour and fate of radionuclides as in the [GESAMP WG 45](#) report on Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Related Impacts on Contaminants in the Ocean.

7. In terms of collaboration with other international organisations, OSPAR's Radioactive Substances Committee (RSC) will organise a joint Working group on natural radiation sources of the Heads of European Radiation Competent Authorities ([HERCA WGNAT](#)) and OSPAR-RSC and to further liaise with the [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#) to review the practical arrangements between the IAEA and the OSPAR Commission on data sharing.

Part X Marine environment and marine resources

8. OSPAR continues to prioritize implementation of Part XII of the Convention to protect and preserve the marine environment and its living marine resources against pollution and physical degradation. In this regard, good progress has been made in implementing the second OSPAR Regional Action Plan on marine litter. Two new Recommendations were agreed on waste management handling of fish boxes and updated sustainability guidance for fishers. Future work is focussing on marine litter from artificial grass pitches, end of life recreational vessels, pollution from expanded and extruded polystyrene (EPS/XPS), plastic biomedica in wastewater treatment plants, and developing potential monitoring methods for riverine litter. To demonstrate its commitment to significantly reduce marine litter, OSPAR agreed an ambitious regionally coordinated quantitative reduction target for marine litter on beaches of 70% by 2030. This will complement the existing OSPAR target for a 75% reduction in commonly found single-use and maritime-related plastic items on beaches, to be achieved by 2030.

9. Further work is progressing on an action plan for underwater noise.

10. In response to the need for improving the understanding of the impacts of climate change on the ocean and seas, a new OSPAR [Working Group on Changing Ocean Climate and Ocean Acidification \(WG COCOA\)](#) was established in June 2023 to advance OSPAR's work on climate change and ocean acidification. This group will focus its work on monitoring and assessment, the formulation of biological indicators of impact of climate change and/or ocean acidification, looking into future projections of climate change and ocean acidification to inform risk assessments, and informing policymakers.

11. In support of activities to address oil spills in the marine environment, OSPAR's Offshore Industries Committee improved reporting on its inventory of offshore installations and on discharges, spills and emissions from offshore oil and gas installations.

12. On decommissioning, OSPAR continues to promote technological and scientific advances in support of [OSPAR Decision 98/3 on the disposal of disused offshore installations](#) which prohibits the dumping, and leaving wholly or partly in place, of disused offshore installations within the OSPAR maritime area.

Part X Marine biodiversity

13. Continuing its success in developing collective measures to address the threats facing the ocean, this year saw the development of Regional Action Plan for Marine Birds (RAP-Bird). The plan sets out, through a series of collective actions to be taken by OSPAR Contracting Parties to address the poor status of marine birds. Linked to this OSPAR agreed a Recommendation and Background Document on reducing marine bird



bycatch, which encourages Contracting Parties to develop national action plans and to collaborate to build evidence and understanding of marine bird bycatch. Further Regional Action

14. The extension of OSPAR's the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea Basin Marine Protected Area (NACES MPA) to include additional OSPAR listed species and habitats and the seabed, ocean floor and subsoil thereof came into force on 16 January 2024. This MPA, one of the largest in the world, is good example of how international organisations, like OSPAR, can play an important role in protecting the marine environment in areas beyond national jurisdiction. At the end of 2023, the OSPAR network comprised 597 MPAs with a total surface area of 1,473,100 km² or 10.9 % of the OSPAR Maritime Area¹

XII Regular Process for Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, including Socioeconomic Aspects

State of the North-East Atlantic

15. This year saw the publication in September 2023 of OSPAR's Quality Status Report (QSR) 2023. This holistic, once in a decade, assessment provides the most comprehensive assessment to date of the North-East Atlantic. 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. It is an important contribution to our collective understanding of the state of the world's ocean and the Regular Process, in particular World Ocean Assessment III.

16. 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.

17. OSPAR noted that the results of the QSR 2023 show that where measures are agreed and implemented, they can and do contribute to improving the state of the environment. In the OSPAR maritime area measures have: reduced pollution from the oil and gas industry; prevented pollution from radiation; decreased the levels of hazardous substances although they remain a cause for concern; and reduced incidences of eutrophication.

18. However, despite the positive results on some issues, the overriding message from the QSR 2023 is that biodiversity is declining and habitats continue to be degraded across many parts of the OSPAR maritime area. Two things are clear: additional measures are required in order to change a trajectory of nature decline to one of nature recovery, and the existing measures need to be more effective.

19. The results of the QSR 2023 are already being used to 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*.

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

20. One good example of international cooperation, was the agreement this year of a new assessment tool co-developed by the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme ([AMAP](#)), the Helsinki Commission ([HELCOM](#)) and the OSPAR Commission ([OSPAR](#)) with the support of the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea ([ICES](#)).. This tool is now available as a new *Harmonised Regional Seas Assessment*



Tool (HARSAT), an Open-Source R-based statistical package that is publicly available on [GitHub](#)¹. It enables all three organisations to better, more effectively and more efficiently monitor and assess hazardous substances in the marine environment, one of the key of pressures impacting on marine biodiversity.

21. OSPAR also continues to cooperate both bilaterally and multi-laterally with other Intergovernmental Organisations and competent bodies to improve the protection of the North-East Atlantic. Positive discussions were held under the OSPAR and North-East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC) Collective Arrangement². A positive outcome from this work was the agreement of a joint statement on how OSPAR and NEAFC's collective efforts on MPAs and Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECM) can improve the protection of the marine environment in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

22. Discussions also addressed the role the Collective Arrangement could play as a regional platform to facilitate cooperation and coordination on area-based management tools as envisaged under the newly adopted International Legally Binding Instrument on Biodiversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction.

23. 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 horizontal line.

Dominic Pattinson

Executive Secretary

¹ <https://github.com/osparcomm/HARSAT>

² www.ospar.org/about/international-cooperation/collective-arrangement, www.neafc.org/collective-arrangement