

## Overview of OSPAR's activities with relevance to the ocean affairs and UN Law of the Sea 2014 – 2015.

### Executive Summary

The OSPAR Convention is the legal instrument guiding international cooperation on the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. Work under the Convention is managed by the OSPAR Commission, made up of representatives of fifteen Governments and the European Commission, representing the European Union.

This year the OSPAR Commission reviewed its activities related to climate change and ocean acidification producing a list of specific activities to supplement ongoing work. On ocean acidification, a joint OSPAR-ICES expert group produced a strategy on monitoring and assessment of ocean acidification for OSPAR to implement. The need for improved collaboration with the Arctic Council was the key conclusion of another OSPAR review process, covering issues related to OSPAR Region 1 (the Arctic).

OSPAR has recently mapped the footprint of fishing activity in the North-East Atlantic using Contracting Party data. This is a step forward in assessing pressures from all human activities on the sea floor and its habitats. This work relates to recent agreement at OSPAR to test a methodology for assessing cumulative effects as an essential element of delivering an Ecosystem Approach.

OSPAR is acting as a regional platform for cooperation for its Contracting Parties which are implementing the European Union Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). Linked to this has been consolidating plans for an OSPAR Intermediate Assessment of the state of its seas, due in 2017. This includes a suite of new indicators of pressures and state in the marine environment, including developments in biodiversity, litter and noise. On noise, OSPAR has developed a new common indicator on impulsive noise, an impulsive noise registry, as well as an inventory of noise mitigation measures. Implementation of the OSPAR Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter includes development of indicators on beach litter, plastic particles in Fulmars stomachs, seabed litter.

While OSPAR has now adopted a total of 52 Recommendations on the OSPAR list of species and habitats that are threatened and/or in decline; it is now focusing future work on moving onto practical implementation of the measures.

This year OSPAR held the first meeting under the collective arrangement with the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission on cooperation on Marine Protected Areas in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. The meeting showed clearly the practical benefits of face to face meetings on priorities and ways of working. In other collaboration, the OSPAR assisted the Abidjan Convention in its ongoing development of a draft Offshore Protocol for the Convention area.

## Overview of OSPAR's activities with relevance to the ocean affairs and UN Law of the Sea 2014 – 2015

### **Regional cooperation (relates to Part XIII the UN Resolution 69/245)**

The OSPAR Convention is the current legal instrument guiding international cooperation on the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. Work under the Convention is managed by the OSPAR Commission, made up of representatives of fifteen Governments and the European Commission, representing the European Union. The OSPAR Commission is the mechanism by which the Contracting Parties can reach consensus on the issues of concern and develop binding measures to deal with them. The fifteen Governments are Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom. OSPAR's maritime area covers both areas within national jurisdiction (territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones) and areas beyond national jurisdiction.

OSPAR continues demonstrate regional collaborative governance of the marine environment, harnessing its unique Contracting Party driven process to make progress on innovative approaches to managing the marine environment, identify new issues and priorities and to take action, standing alongside national, European and global environmental protection initiatives. OSPAR's work focuses on the specifics of its regions (Arctic Waters, the Greater North Sea, Celtic Seas, Bay of Biscay/Iberian Coast and the Wider Atlantic) in terms of bio-geographic and ecosystem characteristics. Over the last year, OSPAR has continued to make progress in taking forward the North East Atlantic Environment Strategy, including regional cooperation for the EU's Marine Strategy Framework Directive ([http://www.ospar.org/content/content.asp?menu=01491300000000\\_000000\\_000000](http://www.ospar.org/content/content.asp?menu=01491300000000_000000_000000)).

### **Marine environment, biodiversity and marine resources (relates to Part IX and X of the UN Resolution 69/245)**

In applying the ecosystem approach to the management of human activities in the marine environment, OSPAR continues to embed integrated processes to help join up across its strategic priorities. This year this has included several areas of work that have been cross cutting. The first is on climate change and ocean acidification. Under the North East Atlantic Environment Strategy, the OSPAR Commission is committed to monitor and assess the nature, rate and extent of the effects of climate change and ocean acidification on the marine environment and consider appropriate ways of responding to those developments. A more detailed review by the OSPAR Commission and its Committees over the last year has resulted in a list of specific activities to look at over the next year, including examining what OSPAR Contracting Parties are doing on Blue Carbon. On ocean acidification, a joint OSPAR-International Council for the Exploration of the Seas expert group produced a final report in 2014 (<http://www.ices.dk/community/groups/Pages/SGOA.aspx>). OSPAR is now exploring how to implement the monitoring and assessment strategy contained in the report.

An essential element of Ecosystem Approach is being able to assess the cumulative effects of various activities occurring in the marine environment and their interaction with the ecosystem. OSPAR has now agreed to test a methodology for assessing cumulative effects. This followed a review of the three methodologies currently being applied in the North East Atlantic by different Contracting Parties. The proposed approach aims to deal with the inevitable complexity of the interactions, but display results in a transparent and clear way and to detect key pressures to support identification of measures. The trial will

use the OSPAR's common indicators of the state of the environment, hence able to link up across OSPAR's themes.

In order to support such integration work as the cumulative effects analysis, OSPAR is mapping the footprint of fishing activity in the North-East Atlantic. This is a step forward in assessing pressures from all human activities on sea floor integrity and understanding the impact on benthic habitats. This is the first time that this kind of information has been available in Europe at this scale. It was developed for OSPAR by the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas, using OSPAR's Contracting Party fisheries' VMS and log book data <http://www.ices.dk/news-and-events/news-archive/news/Pages/ICES-maps-the-intensity-of-fishing-activities-affecting-the-seabed-.aspx>.

While OSPAR has now adopted a further four Recommendations on the OSPAR list of species and habitats that are threatened and/or in decline (intertidal mussel beds, the Azorean limpet, the sea lamprey, the Allis shad), it is now focusing future work on moving onto practical implementation of the measures from the suite of 52 Recommendations. This activity takes in expertise from OSPAR's biodiversity and human activities experts and policy makers; a type of joint activity that will become more common as evidence and conclusions become available at regional scale from the OSPAR's biodiversity indicators.

Implementation is also proceeding on the OSPAR Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter. This has included related development to indicators on beach litter, plastic particles in Fulmars stomachs, seabed litter and other potential indicators, such as on turtles and microplastics. Some significant progress has been made in on engagement with industry on reduction of the use of microplastics in cosmetics.

In 2014 77 marine protected areas have been added to the OSPAR network. The OSPAR area now has a total of 403 MPAs in EEZs and 10 MPAs outside national EEZs with an area of 6% coverage against the total OSPAR area ([http://mpa.ospar.org/accueil\\_ospar](http://mpa.ospar.org/accueil_ospar)).

In taking in the wider issues in the marine environment, the Bonn Agreement, which has common secretariat staffing with the OSPAR Commission, is continuing with its development of a risk assessment for accidental spills of oil and other hazardous liquids in the North Sea and Celtic Seas. This EU co-funded work has now completed its modelling on risks of accidents and sizes of spills, with assessments of social and economic sensitivity and environmental sensitivity to spills of the coastlines surrounding these seas. It is now developing the final report to enable Bonn Agreement Contracting Parties to consider national priorities and resources related to emergency response to spills and their effects (<http://www.bonnagreement.org/be-aware>). As another example of the broad sweep of risks addressed, recently OSPAR agreed on Guidelines to reduce the impact of offshore installations' lighting on birds in the OSPAR maritime area.

### **Assessment of the State of the Environment (relates to Part XI and XII of the UN Resolution 69/245)**

A major consideration for this year, has been consolidating plans for the delivery of an OSPAR Intermediate Assessment of the state of its seas, due in 2017. This incorporates the development of suite of new indicators of the pressures on our seas and their state, including for instance, developments in biodiversity monitoring and noise monitoring. The assessment will also involve new ways of nesting our assessments done at different scales in our seas and a major development of our data and information systems to make the assessments and their underlying data more easily available.

As mentioned above another new area for OSPAR is developing understanding of marine noise. This includes the development of an OSPAR common indicator on impulsive noise and an impulsive noise registry. OSPAR has adopted an ambient noise monitoring strategy, with a proposal for joint monitoring to

be considered next year. An inventory of noise mitigation measures has been published by OSPAR, so far with a focus on underwater noise resulting from pile driving activities. In due course, OSPAR will also consider the need for Regional Action Plan on underwater noise.

### **Coordination and cooperation (relates to Part XV of the UN Resolution 69/245)**

OSPAR continues to work in partnership with other international organisations. Last year OSPAR successfully concluded its collective arrangement with the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission on cooperation on Marine Protected Areas in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction. This year we held the first meeting under the collective arrangement, which included both Secretariat and Contracting Party representatives. The meeting showed clearly the practical benefits by developing far better understanding of the priorities for each organisation and also on the ways of working/decision making in each that needed to be taken into account. OSPAR Contracting Parties are continuing to engage with other sectoral international marine/maritime organisations in order to widen the dialogue within the collective arrangement.

This year OSPAR also reviewed its work to see how well it was covering issues related to OSPAR Region 1 (the Arctic). Through the work of its Committees, the Commission identified particular priorities and areas that needed to be addressed in further work. However the main conclusion of the consideration was that collaboration with the Arctic Council should be prioritised by OSPAR, taking into consideration their respective mandates and objectives. This conclusion is especially pertinent given the current developments in the Arctic Council on the marine environment.

In other international collaboration, the OSPAR Secretariat assisted the (Abidjan) Convention for the Co-operation in the Protection and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the West and Central African Region in its ongoing development of a draft Offshore Protocol for the Convention area. This was taken forward under the existing Memorandum of Understanding with the Abidjan Convention.

Of strategic importance to OSPAR is the European Union Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD). The MSFD aligns with the North East Atlantic Environment Strategy, given a common focus on an ecosystem approach based on ocean and sea regions and sub-regions. OSPAR is acting as as a regional platform for cooperation for its Contracting Parties which are Members States of the EU, both a requirement of the Directive and as way of sharing the considerable work-load that the Directive creates.