

Status of the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas in 2021



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Policy Issue: Protection of marine biodiversity and ecosystems

Policy Objective: A network of marine protected areas (MPAs) should be established, which is ecologically coherent by 2012, includes sites representative of all biogeographic regions in the OSPAR maritime area, is consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) target for effectively conserved marine and coastal ecological regions, and is well managed by 2016.

Specific questions addressed

- How extensive is the OSPAR Network of MPAs?
- Is the network ecologically coherent?
- Is the network well managed?
- How are we progressing towards the CBD target?

Findings

Since 2005, all 12 Contracting Parties (CPs) bordering the North-East Atlantic have nominated sites to the OSPAR Network of MPAs both in their national waters as well as collectively in areas beyond national jurisdiction. By the end of 2021, the network comprises 583 MPAs with a total surface area of 1,490,552 km² or 11.0% of the OSPAR Maritime Area¹.

Good coverage of Territorial Waters

A total of 572 MPAs are situated within national waters of CPs. Most sites have been designated in territorial waters (20.9% covered by OSPAR MPAs^{2,3}) and far less in Exclusive Economic Zones (2.9% covered by OSPAR MPAs). The OSPAR maritime area beyond the limits of national EEZs holds 11 OSPAR MPAs, covering 19.9% of this area.

Distribution across the OSPAR Regions

OSPAR MPAs are currently distributed unevenly across the five OSPAR Regions (Figure 1). The Greater North Sea (Region II), the Celtic Seas (Region III) and the Wider Atlantic (Region V) are the best represented OSPAR Regions with 20.2%, 20.0% and 17.7% coverage, respectively. While coverage of the Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast (Region IV) is at 6.0%, the Arctic Waters (Region I) show the lowest coverage with 2.0% of the area being OSPAR MPAs.

Ecological coherence of the OSPAR Network of MPAs

Despite good progress, the OSPAR MPA network cannot yet be considered ecologically coherent. Although the OSPAR MPA network is well distributed in the Greater North Sea (Region II) and Celtic Seas (Region III), substantial gaps remain in particular in Arctic Waters (Region I). Further work is also required to ensure that habitats and species considered by OSPAR to be at risk are adequately protected by MPAs where appropriate. However, the network has a good representation of several biogeographic regions within the North-East Atlantic, which is one of the requirements for ecological coherence (Tab. 1). Data deficiencies and the lack of a feasible methodology currently hamper a sophisticated eco-coherence assessment but efforts are being made to solve these issues.

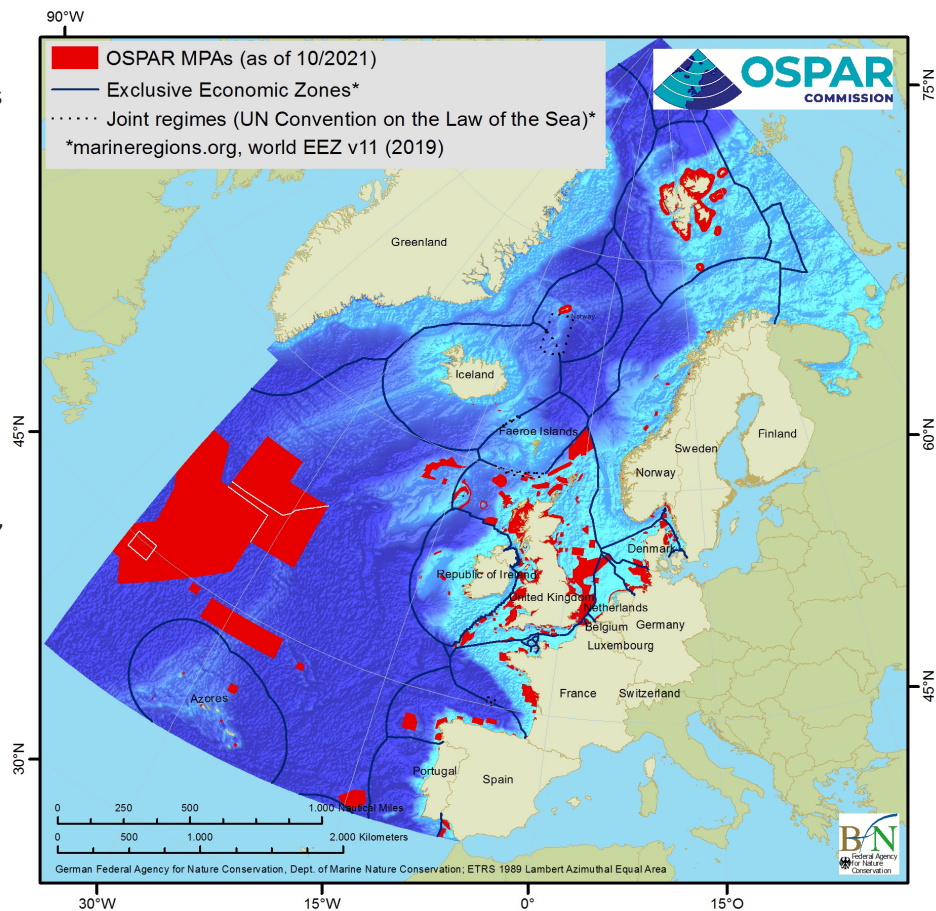


Figure 1: The OSPAR network of MPAs as of 1 October 2021

1: All areas were calculated using the Lambert Azimuthal Equal-Area Projection (European Terrestrial Reference System 1989).

2: For the calculation of the surface of TW and EEZ areas, Madeira (PT), Greenland and Faeroe (DK) and other areas were included. Thus, the percentages are not directly comparable to previous assessment sheets.

3: "Joint Regime Areas" are included in area calculations.

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*According to the classification by Dinter 2001 (Dinter, W. 2001. Biogeography of the OSPAR Maritime Area. German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Bonn. 167 pp)

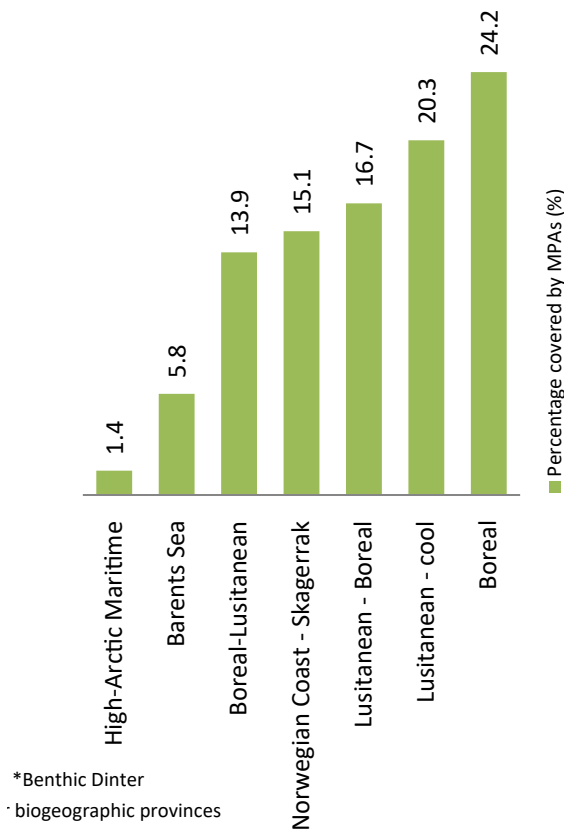


Figure 2: Examples of Dinter biogeographic provinces/sub-provinces and their coverage by OSPAR MPAs

Management of the OSPAR Network of MPAs

Appropriate management is in place for some OSPAR MPAs, but for many implementation is still required. As a result, only 17% of OSPAR MPAs are known to be moving towards or have achieved their conservation objectives. Thus, additional efforts to implement management measures necessary to achieve the conservation objectives of the protected features of OSPAR MPAs should be considered. In parallel, long-term monitoring programmes could be broadened to evaluate with greater confidence whether the conservation objectives of OSPAR MPAs are being achieved.

Countries have started also to implement management actions for OSPAR MPAs in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ). In ABNJ, successful management also requires cooperation with international organisations with competence for the management of human activities, such as fishing, shipping and deep sea mining.

What has been done?

The status of the OSPAR Network of MPAs and any changes since 2020 have been assessed.

Observed status and/or change

In 2021, the Kingdom of Denmark (6), Norway (9) and the United Kingdom (15) nominated new MPAs. One MPA was collectively nominated by all OSPAR CPs in ABNJ. In total, 31 MPAs covering more than 616,000 km² were added to the OSPAR Network of MPAs.

Does it work?

The OSPAR measure to establish a network of MPAs in the North-East Atlantic is progressing well in terms of MPA designation. By nominating more than 10% of marine and coastal areas as MPAs, OSPAR has reached the target set by the CBD (Aichi Target 11: to protect at least 10% of coastal and marine areas by 2020). Coverage of about 20% in some OSPAR Regions shows already good progress towards the OSPAR target of 30% coverage by 2030. Good representation of some Dinter biogeographic provinces represents a further progress towards an ecologically coherent MPA network. Ecological coherence of the network, however, cannot be achieved unless the remaining gaps in the network are closed. One major challenge of assessing ecological coherence and management effectiveness is the paucity of relevant data on e.g. occurrence, distribution and status of species and habitats, and a common understanding about what constitutes effective management, respectively.

Implications - What happens next?

With a better understanding of the current state of ecological coherence and of management effectiveness, Contracting Parties can consider where additional MPAs need to be nominated to fill the identified gaps in the network and if management measures need to be adjusted to meet OSPAR objectives. Improved reporting of relevant data on species and habitats as well as on management is required to understand what is being protected and if it is being protected effectively. Such information is essential for understanding whether the taken OSPAR measures are having the intended outcome.

Assessment method guide, further reading and data sources

[OSPAR Intermediate Assessment 2017](#).

OSPAR Recommendation 2003/3 adopted by OSPAR 2003 (OSPAR 03/17/1, Annex 9), amended by OSPAR Recommendation 2010/2 (OSPAR 10/23/1, Annex 7)

OSPAR. (2013). An Assessment of the ecological coherence of the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas in 2012. 31 March 2013; revised 7 May 2013 prepared by Johnson D., Ardron J., Billet D., Hooper T. and Mullier T. from Seascope Consultants Ltd.

