



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

2 July 2025

Dear Sir/Madam,

Response by the OSPAR Commission to the request pursuant to General Assembly resolution 79/144 of 12 December 2024, entitled “Oceans and Law of the Sea”, for an OSPAR contribution to the eightieth 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 79/144, as requested in a letter from Elinor Hammerskjöld, Under Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, dated 19 March 2025. As requested, this response focuses on the main developments in OSPAR and in particular the adoption of measures and the development of programmes.

Introduction

2. The OSPAR Convention is the legal instrument guiding international cooperation on the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. 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 we hopefully see the ratification 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 human activities that may adversely affect the sea.

OSPAR Ministerial meeting 2025 ([OSPAR Ministerial 2025](#))

5. This year OSPAR held its fifth Ministerial meeting, kindly hosted by Spain in the city of Vigo, on 26th June 2025. Held in the immediate aftermath of the third **United Nations Ocean Conference** in Nice, the meeting provided an early opportunity for the Ministers of the OSPAR Contracting Parties and the Commissioner of the European Union to follow up on the momentum of the Conference and the active ocean diplomacy that led to a number of *commitments made to address the triple treats of climate change, marine pollution and biodiversity loss*.

6. OSPAR reviewed progress in meeting its vision, strategic and operational objectives set out in its **North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (2030)**. In doing so, OSPAR Contracting Parties concluded that its vision and strategic objectives, focussed around four themes: clean seas; biologically diverse seas; productive and sustainably used seas; and seas resilient to climate change and ocean acidification, remain as relevant today as they were in 2021. OSPAR published a report highlighting the progress made in implementing the Strategy which highlighted that:

- Contracting Parties are **working on 118 tasks** to deliver the objectives of OSPAR's NEAES 2030;
- **20% of the tasks have been completed** and **75% are progressing** with no major issues identified;
- Completed task include action to address the **decline in marine birds**, identifying **sources of turtle entanglement**, better understanding the **impacts of rocket launch debris** and agreeing further work to **minimise the dumping of offshore oil and gas installations**; and
- **20 new tasks** added in 2025 covering a broad range of topics from tackling nutrient pollution, Marine Protected Areas, underwater noise, offshore oil and gas and renewables and OSPAR's Intermediate Assessment 2029.

7. In a historic decision, OSPAR agreed to **enlarge the OSPAR maritime area** to include more than 2.5 million square kilometres of ocean. Of this, nearly 1 million square kilometres are within Portuguese and Spanish Exclusive Economic Zones and territorial waters, with the rest in international waters. This proposal will: ensure the coordinated protection of an area known to be important for numerous species and highly important habitats, including seamounts, coral gardens, sponge aggregations, and maerl beds; align OSPAR and the EU's Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD); and promote the integration between OSPAR and other EU processes including on maritime spatial planning and nature conservation in an area adjacent to the current OSPAR maritime area already considered part of the North-East Atlantic region.

8. OSPAR also agree a package of measures to **manage discharge water from Exhaust Gas Cleaning Systems on board ships**. This package included:

- An OSPAR Decision which requires OSPAR Contracting Parties to adopt measures to **prohibit** the release of discharge waters from EGCS operating in **open-loop** mode by 1 July 2027 and **any mode** by 1 July 2029, within its **internal waters and port areas** of the OSPAR Maritime Area (there is provision for Contracting Parties to delay implementation of this prohibition by a maximum of 3 years);

- An OSPAR Recommendation which **recommends** that Contracting Parties adopt measures for the purpose of **prohibiting** the release of discharge waters from EGCS operating in **open-loop** mode by 1 July 2027 and any mode by 1 July 2029, within its **territorial seas** of the OSPAR Maritime Area.
- The third element of the package is a roadmap which sets out a process to examine the case for **extending** the geographical scope of the OSPAR Decision on management of discharge water from exhaust gas cleaning systems on board ships in internal waters and port areas to **territorial seas**.

9. Looking ahead, and with the intention to **future proof the OSPAR Convention**, OSPAR reviewed the risks from new, emerging and increasing pressures on the marine environment and identified potential gaps in the scope of the OSPAR Convention that could prevent OSPAR from fully addressing these pressures now and in the future. To address these potential gaps, OSPAR Contracting Parties agreed a process to develop and consider proposals to amend the OSPAR Convention to address offshore renewables, space launch vehicle debris, carbon dioxide capture and storage and hydrogen production and storage in relation to offshore oil and gas, and to clarify the scope of the provisions on land-based sources of pollution.

10. OSPAR also agreed **two new Regional Action Plans**. The first aims to support OSPAR's commitment to **restore degraded benthic habitats** in the North-East Atlantic. It will provide tools and knowledge for the conservation of benthic areas of high ecological value, and for the recovery of benthic habitats adversely affected by human activities. The second Regional Action Plan is dedicated to **reducing anthropogenic underwater noise** to levels that do not adversely affect the marine environment. The action plan brings together knowledge and expertise to fill evidence, policy and implementation gaps.

11. To continue its work to tackle marine litter, OSPAR agreed a new legally binding Decision to **prevent and eliminate plastic pollution from entering the OSPAR maritime area by restricting the use of non-coated EPS, non-coated XPS and non-coated other forms of foamed plastic in pontoons and buoys**. OSPAR also adopted a Recommendation on the application of best practice to reduce marine litter, new dedicated best practice for the use of biomedica in wastewater treatment plants, and a report furthering its understanding of the use of chafing gear with a focus on dolly ropes.

12. In 2021, OSPAR Ministers highlighted the importance of **protecting the Arctic marine environment** within OSPAR's maritime. In response to that commitment OSPAR 2025 agreed a package of proposals that will strengthen OSPAR's work in this vitally important and unique marine environment. OSPAR agreed to:

- to identify priority sites to be considered in developing OSPAR's network of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures and will, where supported by the evidence, and respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and in accordance with the precautionary principle and ecosystem-based approach, collectively designate marine protected areas and support the adoption of other area-based conservation and management measures in areas beyond national jurisdiction in Arctic Waters, building on previous proposals and information;
- engage Indigenous Peoples Organisations of the region through the establishment of a special fund to allow them to actively participate as observers in OSPAR meetings; and
- strengthen collaboration and cooperation with the Arctic Council and the International Maritime Organisation on Arctic marine environmental protection.

13. The final outcome of the 2025 OSPAR Ministerial meeting was the agreement of the [Vigo Declaration](#). This key political outcome from the OSPAR Ministerial meeting sends a clear statement of OSPAR Ministers' and the EU Commissioners commitment to the work of OSPAR and the need to protect and conserve the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic while using it sustainably. It highlights the continuing threat that biodiversity loss, pollution and climate change poses to the health of the ocean and its ability to support human health, livelihoods and a sustainable blue economy. It reaffirms OSPAR's commitment to their



continuing and shared commitment to the international rules-based order and to multilateral regional cooperation on the protection and sustainable use of the North-East Atlantic. The Declaration reaffirms that the Contracting Parties are stronger when they work together.

14. 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