

Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea of the Office of Legal Affairs**By email**

26 June 2026

Dear Sir/Madam,

Response by the OSPAR Commission to the request pursuant to General Assembly resolution 80/110 of 9 December 2025, entitled “Oceans and the law of the sea”, for an OSPAR contribution to the eighty-first session of the General Assembly, covering the period from September 2025 to August 2026.

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 80/110 of 9 December 2025, entitled “Oceans and the law of the sea” as requested in a letter from Elinor Hammerskjöld, Under Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, dated 19 February 2026.

As requested, this response focuses on the main developments and activities in OSPAR in the field of ocean affairs and the law of sea, particularly since 31 August 2025, focusing in particular on the adoption of measures and the development of programmes that are ongoing or have been undertaken in the implementation of provisions of General Assembly resolution 80/110 that are relevant to OSPAR Commission.

Introduction

1. 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.
2. 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 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.
3. The OSPAR's vision is a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.
4. 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.

Recent progress

5. After having reviewed progress, during the Ministerial Meeting held in 2025, towards implementing its North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (2030), OSPAR Contracting Parties continued to focus their work around four themes: clean seas; biologically diverse seas; productive and sustainably used seas; and seas resilient to climate change and ocean acidification, as they remain as relevant today as they were when the Strategy was initially adopted in 2021.

The Ministerial Meeting in 2025 also agreed to enlarge the OSPAR Maritime Area southwards to include Macaronesia and bring an addition 2.5 million square kilometres of ocean into the OSPAR Maritime Area. Macaronesia, an area that includes the Azores, Madeira, and the Canary Islands, is diverse and renowned for its unique biogeography. The islands' shared ocean includes highly important habitats such as seamounts, coral gardens, sponge aggregations and maerl beds.

OSPAR [Annual meeting 2026](#) (OSPAR 2026)

6. The OSPAR Contracting Parties met in Ostend, Belgium, from 22 to 25 June 2026, and agreed a series of new actions to strengthen the protection and conservation of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic, advancing the implementation of the [North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030](#), in support of their common vision.

7. OSPAR Contracting Parties welcomed the new OSPAR **Marine Protected and Conserved Areas database** and agreed to launch it in 2026, the same year of the entry into force 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 (ABNJ). OSPAR has 12 MPAs in ABNJ of the OSPAR maritime area. Of these, eight have been collectively designated and four have been nationally designated by OSPAR Contracting Parties. Together, these 12 MPA cover 19.5% of OSPAR's ABNJ area. OSPAR manages the collectively designated MPAs in the ABNJ through OSPAR Recommendations, which outline the measures and actions to be taken, either separately or collectively, by Contracting Parties to OSPAR. OSPAR can adopt measures and actions to regulate activities that fall within its regulatory competence, for example measures relating to scientific research, cable-laying, dumping, construction of installations and artificial islands, and deep-sea tourism

8. OSPAR continues to work through the [Collective Arrangement](#) – a collective and multilateral forum composed of all competent entities addressing the management of human activities in the North-East region – to collaborate towards strengthened area-based management in the North-East Atlantic region. In this context, OSPAR has been considering how management plans for OSPAR's marine protected areas in ABNJ could be developed in collaboration with other relevant organisations with the competence to manage activities in ABNJ.

9. The **Regional Action Plan for Benthic Habitats** in the North-East Atlantic supports OSPAR's commitment to restore degraded benthic habitats in the North-East Atlantic, providing 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.

Additional actions to respond to the issues identified in OSPAR's Quality Status Report 2023 were agreed with the objective of addressing benthic habitats in need of recovery, conservation or restoration on the continental shelf and slope down to a depth of 800 metres, including relevant OSPAR listed 'Threatened and/or Declining' habitats.

The Regional Action Plan supports the achievement of the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 Strategic Objective S5.04 to “take appropriate actions to prevent or reduce pressures to enable the recovery of marine species and benthic and pelagic habitats in order to reach and maintain good environmental status as reflected in relevant OSPAR status assessments [...]”.

10. In 2025, a package of measures was agreed to manage discharge water from **Exhaust Gas Cleaning Systems** on board ships. The OSPAR Decision 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.

An OSPAR Recommendation on 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 their territorial seas in the OSPAR Maritime Area was also agreed last year.

Meanwhile, OSPAR launched a process to examine by June 2027 the appropriateness of 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.

11. As a part of OSPAR’s wider efforts to prevent and substantially reduce **marine litter** across the North-East Atlantic, OSPAR agreed in June 2026 a measure aiming at reducing the impact of marine litter from fisheries and phasing out the use of dolly ropes as chafing gear in fisheries. Dolly ropes are bundles of synthetic threads, typically polyethylene, attached to fishing gear to reduce wear and tear, and are a recognised source of marine litter and plastic pollution put into the sea inevitably affecting marine life.

The OSPAR Recommendation encourages Contracting Parties and relevant stakeholders to phase out the use of dolly ropes and promote technically and economically feasible alternatives that do not contribute to plastic pollution or harm marine species and habitats.

12. OSPAR Contracting Parties have considered how their work is progressing towards the publication of OSPAR’s next holistic assessment of the North-East Atlantic: The **Intermediate Assessment 2029**.

Preparations for the next OSPAR assessment have been significantly advanced, with climate change and ocean acidification considerations being, for the first time, integrated across all assessments, and the adoption of new indicator assessments on (1) the Composition and Spatial Distribution of Litter on the Seafloor; (2) Plastic Particles in Fulmar Stomachs.

OSPAR approved for publication the first indicator assessments contributing to the Intermediate Assessment 2029 on seafloor litter and plastic particles in fulmar stomachs. The assessments found that seafloor litter was widespread across the North-East Atlantic between 2012 and 2023, with plastics, including fisheries-related items, accounting for the majority of recorded litter.

Plastic ingestion by fulmars is widely recognised as an indicator of floating marine litter and its impacts on marine wildlife. The assessment showed that plastic ingestion levels in North Sea fulmars have not changed significantly between 2014 and 2023, highlighting the need for continued action.

The 2026 OSPAR Commission meeting also agreed new reports and scientific evidence contributing to the Intermediate Assessment 2029, including reports on the production and consumption of plastics; Marine geoengineering; Offshore renewable energy developments; and Aquaculture. Status assessments were also approved for species and habitats identified as threatened and/or declining: cod, *Saballeria spinulosa*, Azorean limpet and maerl beds.

OSPAR continues to work on the mapping of human activities, pressures, ecosystem components and impacts so as to have a better spatial understanding of cumulative effects of pressures in the North-East Atlantic, and

is also in the process of updating its Ocean Accounts framework, thereby supporting ecosystem-based management across the OSPAR region. This will result in two regional assessments that will be produced as part of the Intermediate Assessment 2029.

These reports will help strengthen the evidence base supporting future policy and management decisions across the North-East Atlantic.

13. Since 2021, OSPAR Contracting Parties intensified their engagement to protect the **Arctic** marine environment within the OSPAR's maritime area. OSPAR Contracting Parties aim to 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.

Further progressing the package of proposals agreed at the 2025 OSPAR Commission meeting, in 2026 OSPAR Contracting Parties commissioned a based-desk review as an initial basis to start looking into priority sites in Arctic waters (OSPAR Region I) to be considered in developing OSPAR's network of marine protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures. The report (produced by Mara Consultants) will soon be available on the OSPAR website.

In advancing this work OSPAR is considering the Indigenous Peoples' knowledge and actively engaging with Indigenous Peoples Organisations of the region (Saami Council and Inuit Circumpolar Council) to promote their involvement in this work as well to support their participation as observers in OSPAR meetings, while strengthening collaboration with the Arctic Council and its working groups.

14. OSPAR agreed to continue to look ahead to ensure the OSPAR Convention is ready to accommodate the risks from new, emerging and increasing pressures on the marine environment, and to address any potential gaps in the scope of the OSPAR Convention, in relation to offshore renewables, space launch vehicle debris, carbon dioxide capture and storage and hydrogen production and storage linked to offshore oil and gas, and the scope of the provisions on land-based sources of pollution.

15. In 2026 OSPAR published its [Science Agenda](#). This brings together key knowledge gaps that, if addressed, will support OSPAR's work to assess and protect the marine environment and deliver the [OSPAR North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy](#) (NEAES). This will help guide OSPAR's engagement in external research and policy initiatives and support the delivery of OSPAR's objectives.

16. OSPAR welcomed four new Non-governmental Observer Organisations: The [Nordic EPS Alliance](#), the [European Anglers Alliance](#), the [Atlantic International Research Centre](#) and the [Bellona Environmental Foundation](#).

Their participation will contribute additional expertise and stakeholder engagement in support of OSPAR's vision, and the achievement of the objectives of the OSPAR [North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy](#).

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

Susana Salvador

Executive Secretary