

# Objectives for OSPAR Secretariat 2021-2023

## Introduction

1. OSPAR is the Regional Seas Convention responsible for protecting and conserving the North-East Atlantic and its resources. It manages human activities impacting the marine environment and provides regular assessments of the state of the North-East Atlantic with a view to securing its vision of a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification. It relies on and welcomes the participation of representatives from industry, trade and environmental organisations.
2. The Secretariat's role is to support the 16 Contracting Parties to implement the OSPAR Convention and its strategies through the adoption of decisions, recommendations and other agreements. The Secretariat administers the work under the Convention, coordinates the work of the Contracting Parties and runs the formal meeting schedule of OSPAR.
3. This document sets out the objectives that will guide the Secretariat in its support to the Contracting Parties over the next two years. It will assist the members of the Secretariat in determining their priorities and objectives. The document will be reviewed and updated as necessary at the OSPAR Commission meeting planned for June 2023.

## **North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2030**

4. The NEAES 2030 sets out the strategic and operational objectives for the OSPAR Commission until 2030. It is the key operational document that will guide the work of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies. The objectives aim to address the triple challenge of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution. The Secretariat will support the Contracting Parties' collective efforts to deliver the strategic and operational objectives set out in the Strategy.
5. In support of this, the Secretariat will seek to embed the Implementation Plan into the work of the Committees and use it to help Contracting Parties and observers to identify, develop and implement tasks to deliver the Strategy. The Secretariat will use the Implementation Plan to monitor and report on progress and risks and bring to the attention of the Heads of Delegation any gaps and issues that need to be addressed.

## **OSPAR thematic priorities**

### **Biodiversity diversity and ecosystems**

6. The Secretariat will support Contracting Parties implementation of measures in the Recommendations on the OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats - all actions should be completed by 2025 in line with the NEAES 2030. The Secretariat will continue to support the rolling status assessments of all listed features. The Secretariat will support Contracting Parties that have taken the lead for the implementation of a collective action or a status assessment of a feature in timely communication of the issues to be progressed to relevant OSPAR subsidiary bodies.
7. The Secretariat will continue to support the operationalisation of OSPAR common biodiversity indicators. This includes supporting Contracting Parties' efforts to expand the indicators into OSPAR Regions

where they are currently not assessed. Where feasible the Secretariat will facilitate the development of data streams for the indicators to allow long-term rolling assessments.

8. The Secretariat will continue to support Contracting Parties on different elements of work on Marine Protected Areas. This will include facilitating assessments on eco-coherence and management effectiveness with the aim to evaluate if OSPAR strategic goals in relation to the MPA network have been met.

9. The Secretariat will support management of High Seas MPAs through the collective arrangement.

#### **Environmental impacts of human activities**

10. On impacts of human activity, the Secretariat will support the EIHA Committee in identifying and implementing priority tasks across its wide range of responsibilities (covering many of the NEAES strategic objectives). The Secretariat will continue to support existing ICGs on marine litter and underwater noise as well as the ICG-Feniks (essentially EIHA HODs). Given the scale of marine litter work, the Secretariat's efforts are supplemented by a technical assistance contract funded through voluntary contributions. This will help to ensure the successful launch and implementation of a new regional action plan on marine litter. Furthermore, the work of ICG-Noise is likely to expand, assuming that it is agreed to develop a noise regional action plan. This will necessitate additional resource either through the Secretariat or from Contracting Parties. The Secretariat will also give priority to getting the new ICG on offshore renewables up and running.

#### **Hazardous substances and eutrophication**

11. The Secretariat will continue to support the HASEC Committee and its subsidiary bodies on monitoring and assessing trends and impacts of hazardous substances in the marine environment. The Secretariat will support the maintenance and constant updating of the HASEC databases and associated analytical processes as an asset to regularly update common indicators and related assessments.

12. The Secretariat will support the development of shared information systems to assess hazardous substances and eutrophication, in collaboration with Contracting Parties, neighbouring regional seas and other relevant international organisations.

#### **Offshore industries**

13. On the offshore oil and gas industries, the Secretariat will support the OIC Committee in implementing its measures and tasks. The Secretariat manages the annual reporting on discharges, spills and emissions which will cover new data to assess emerging issues such as discharges of plastic substances contained in offshore chemicals. The Secretariat will continue to assist ICGs to achieve ongoing tasks like the harmonisation of OSPAR's Harmonised Mandatory Control System for the use and discharge of offshore chemicals with the EU REACH's Regulation, and emerging tasks like monitoring the containment of carbon dioxide in geological formations. Considering the significant amount of decommissioning that will take place in the OSPAR Maritime Area in the coming years, the Secretariat will make sure that the consultation procedure in Decision 98/3 on the Disposal of Disused Offshore Installations is followed.

#### **Radioactive substances**

14. On radioactive substances the Secretariat will support the RSC Committee and its ICGs in implementing its measures and tasks; and in establishing OSPAR common indicators for the assessment of discharges and environmental concentrations. The Secretariat will continue assisting the Expert Assessment Panel in the collection of data for discharges from the nuclear and non-nuclear sectors. The Secretariat will

facilitate initiatives to address emerging issues such as monitoring historic dump sites and the influence of climate change and ocean acidification in the behaviour of radioactive substances in the marine environment.

### **Quality Status Report (QSR) 2023**

15. The Secretariat will provide support to ensure the successful delivery of the QSR in 2023. It will support ICG-QSR and provide advice on planning, prioritise resources on the most important needs and ensure that OSPAR subsidiary bodies prioritise delivery of QSR deliverables.

16. A dedicated QSR Coordinator has been recruited as part of the Secretariat to provide the necessary project management support, especially on the delivery of cross-cutting aspects of the thematic assessment (i.e., climate change, ecosystem services, DAPSIR framework).

17. The Secretariat will promote and encourage the use of the QSR Guidance Document (agreement 2019-02) to ensure consistency across the different QSR assessments delivered by the different OSPAR Committees and subsidiary bodies.

### **Cross-cutting issues**

18. The Secretariat will provide the necessary support to help Contracting Parties meet the commitments made in the NEAES2030 and Ministerial Declaration on climate change and ocean acidification.

19. In particular, the Secretariat will provide support to the newly created Climate Change Expert Group to get the group up and running, and to enable the CCEG to deliver a specific assessment on climate change as part of the QSR 2023 process.

20. The Secretariat will support Contracting Parties in raising awareness about impacts and pressures, of ocean acidification, including those aspects associated to climate change in the search for new models, measures, and recommendations to achieve NEAES strategic objectives by 2030.

21. The Secretariat will support the Contracting Parties to develop methods for the analysis of cumulative effects and systems for accounting for ecosystem services and natural capital.

22. The Secretariat will support those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States to deliver their **Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD)** obligations with the aim of improving coordination, reducing duplication and improving effectiveness. The Secretariat will represent the interests of OSPAR at the EU MSFD Marine Strategy Coordination Group and relevant working groups associated with the MSFD Common Implementation Strategy.

23. The Secretariat will work with Contracting Parties in developing joint activities and complementary work plans with other relevant organisations such as **HELCOM** and the **Barcelona Convention**.

24. The Secretariat will provide ongoing support to update and develop the **Coordinated Environmental Monitoring Programme (CEMP)**. In particular, the Secretariat will support Contracting Parties in documenting OSPAR monitoring and assessment across all its activities to help coordinate monitoring where possible. The Secretariat will ensure the continued delivery of **Joint Assessment and Monitoring Programme (JAMP)** products to the extent that they are not already covered by QSR planning. The Secretariat will prepare for a review of the JAMP in 2023.

25. The Secretariat will support OSPAR's measures and actions programme (MAP), including assessment of the implementation and effectiveness of measures with a view of ensuring that the information systems and tools used for this work are fit-for-purpose and can achieve the aims as outlined in section 6 of NEAES 2030 including by promoting linkages with the NEAES Implementation Plan.

26. The Secretariat will support the North Sea Network of Investigators and Prosecutors to prioritise tasks on the enforcement, investigation and prosecution of MARPOL maritime pollution offences.

27. The Secretariat will look to continue and strengthen engagement with NGO and industry OSPAR observer organisations and encourage their involvement in the delivery of OSPAR's work.

### **Cooperation with others**

28. The Secretariat will represent Contracting Parties where appropriate in international and sectoral forums. This includes in attending meetings to present OSPAR's achievements and current activities. Such engagement should complement implementation of the North-East Atlantic Strategy 2030 and help to deliver Contracting Parties' objectives. Priorities for engagement by the Secretariat over the next period include engagement with the Arctic Council, engagement with NEAFC, implementation of the collective arrangement, and with our neighbouring Regional Seas Conventions (HELCOM, Barcelona Convention, Abidjan Convention and the Caribbean Environment Programme). The Secretariat will engage with all organisations in accordance with any Memoranda of Understanding. In particular, the Secretariat will make sure that issues of common interest with the Bonn Agreement are shared with the relevant Committees.

29. The Secretariat follow and contribute to global developments on ocean issues, including a new legally binding instrument on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction and a new agreement to reduce plastic marine litter. The Secretariat will work with UNEP and its Regional Seas Programme to strengthen the collaboration and coordination across regional seas conventions in order to raise OSPAR's profile, identify opportunities and help build capacity. The Secretariat will prioritise on engagement with the implementation of the CBD post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

30. OSPAR is very well placed to contribute to SGD 14 on the marine environment and other goals such as those on climate change are of interest to OSPAR.

31. The collective arrangement (Agreement 2014-9) adopted in 2014 by OSPAR and NEAFC is a good example of a cooperative mechanism between two complementary organisations with different competencies. Although the collective arrangement began as a bilateral instrument in respect of areas-based management, it has always been intended to be a multilateral platform involving different competent bodies from other sectors and marine regions. The Secretariat's priority will be on enhancing the current work under the collective arrangement, as well as seeking to increase the collaboration with other competent authorities.

### **Communication, data and information**

32. On communication, the Secretariat will continue to implement its Communication Strategy and Annual Plan, including through the use of social media and continued work on the website. During 2021-22 communication actions will particularly follow-up on the Ministerial Meeting and the 2<sup>nd</sup> iteration of the Marine Litter Regional Action Plan. A detailed communication plan will also be developed for the Quality Status Report.

33. For data and information, the priorities for 2021-2023 will continue to be supporting Committees in data and information related activities (via ICG-Data), providing support to Contracting Parties that are EU Member States in reporting under the MSFD via WISE-Marine, continuing development of metadata and data specifications content to help meet INSPIRE requirements, ensuring external data linkages are fully operational and making preparations for QSR2023. ODIMS and OAP will maintain on-going development programmes to ensure the systems remain relevant for all Contracting Parties.

34. The Secretariat will maintain the security of the OSPAR Secretariat IT system to ensure it is sufficiently robust to meet use requirements, which will imply server hardware upgrades, migration to new software and alignment of all users as required.

#### **OSPAR internal organisational challenges**

35. The Secretariat, in particular the Executive Secretary, will ensure that the Secretariat is structured to deliver effective and efficient support to the Contracting Parties. It will continue to deliver excellent value for money and remain focussed on delivering Contracting Parties priorities. The Executive Secretary will execute the Commission's decisions on sustainable finance, ensure that the workload of the Secretariat is well managed and provide a supportive and productive working environment for all staff.

#### **Finances**

36. The Executive Secretary will remain committed to maintaining proper accounts and ensuring effective internal financial control as well as to providing clear information to Contracting Parties on the financial position of the Commission.