

## What has been done? Did it work?

In order to reduce the adverse effects of dredging and dumping operations on the marine ecosystem OSPAR has developed Guidelines for the Management of Dredged Material (Reference Number 1998-20; revised version 2004–08) that specifically address the disposal of dredged material by dumping in the maritime area (OSPAR, 2004a). Contracting Parties are encouraged to exercise control over dredging operations, including sidecast and agitation dredging practices, in order to minimise the quantity of the material that has to be dredged and the impact of the dredging activities. The technical Annex III to the guidelines contains Best Environmental Practices (BEPs) for minimizing the effects of dredging operations on the environment.

The BEPs describe how the volume of dredged material can be minimised, how the dredging process can be improved and how the impacts of dredging can be minimised. Minimizing the volume includes minimizing the need for dredging and optimizing the management of dredging operations by using accurate survey systems and by evaluating the process. Improving the dredging process means the use of the best suited techniques (dredging techniques, degassing installations, *etc.*), the use of selective dredging techniques and controlling the dredging process *e.g.* by measurements. Minimizing the impacts of dredging consists of minimizing the increase in turbidity and in oxygen depletion.

Potential negative effects of dredging operations are also reduced through the implementation of EU legislation. The Council Directive (97/11/EC) requires environmental impact assessments in case of capital dredging operations. The Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) and the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) require measures in case of negative impacts of human activities on species and habitats listed in these directives. Where dredging activities are carried out in or adjacent to Natura 2000 sites (*i.e.* protected areas that are established under the Birds and Habitats Directives and part of the Natura 2000 network), EU legislation on the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna may protect the sites sufficiently. Decisions relating to dredging activities need to be taken in accordance with the procedures laid out in the EU Directives.

All Contracting Parties that responded to the 2002 questionnaire regulate dredging operations by national laws and recommendations. Most Contracting Parties carry out Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) before dredging operations start, however to different extents. Only Spain, France and the Netherlands reported that an EIA is generally required. Generally, impact assessments are carried out in special cases with a high risk of environmental impacts, *e.g.* in sensitive or highly contaminated areas. In almost all Contracting Parties, regulatory authorities or agencies impose restrictions in cases where negative environmental impacts due to dredging were observed or are expected. Restrictions include *e.g.* use of protective or mitigating measures in order to minimise effects of dredging, such as silt screens or sealed grabs. Furthermore, temporal or seasonal restrictions for dredging are imposed (“dredging windows”).

The protection of the environment depends upon the appropriate and effective application of existing regulations. However, at present the effectiveness of existing regulations and BEPs in minimising the volumes dredged, improving the dredging process and minimising the impacts of dredging activities in species and habitats and ecosystem processes cannot be judged on the basis of currently available information.

→ *Go to full QSR assessment report on the environmental impact of dredging for navigational purposes (publication number 366/2008)*