

# 1 THE QUALITY STATUS REPORT 2010



## Ten years of managing, monitoring and assessing the marine environment

The vast sea area covered by the OSPAR Convention is the home of a wide range of ecosystems which vary in diversity and sensitivity. It hosts an ever-growing number of human activities, each with impacts on the marine environment, and there are emerging threats from climate change. How is the North-East Atlantic responding to these pressures? What are we doing about it? Is it working? These are the questions being posed by scientists, politicians, and the public alike. OSPAR's monitoring and assessment activities provide a solid basis for answering such questions and for the necessary political action to resolve them.

The Quality Status Report 2010 – the QSR 2010 – is a milestone for evaluating the quality status of the North-East Atlantic and for taking forward OSPAR's vision of a clean, healthy and biologically diverse sea. It follows up on the previous quality status report – the QSR 2000 – as well as earlier QSRs specific to the North Sea. The QSR 2010 reflects the collective effort made by Contracting Parties over the period 1998 to 2008 to manage, monitor and assess the many pressures on the diverse ecosystems of the North-East Atlantic and the impacts that they bring.

### The assessment process

This summary report provides policy makers and the wider public with a condensed overview of current knowledge on trends in pressures and impacts and the quality status of the North-East Atlantic and its Regions → **FIGURE 1.1**. It is backed up by a series of thematic assessment reports → **BIBLIOGRAPHY** prepared under the OSPAR Joint Assessment and Monitoring Programme. These set out the scientific evidence for this summary report and provide more detailed information for the interested reader. The assessment reports were prepared in order to deliver regional assessments, based, where possible, on collective monitoring and data collection undertaken by OSPAR countries, and on scientific literature relevant to the development of conclusions at the regional scale. This summary report also draws on information from other sources including the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) and its expert groups, and organisations within the European Union, for example Eurostat and the European Environment Agency. Together, this summary report and the thematic assessments form the QSR 2010. All levels of information are interactively accessible to the reader through an electronic version of the QSR (the e-QSR) on the OSPAR website and the DVD at the back of this book.

The QSR 2010 summary report is structured such that Chapters 4 to 10 report progress on OSPAR's five thematic Strategies for addressing the main threats within the North-East Atlantic (the Eutrophication Strategy, the Hazardous Substances Strategy, the Radioactive Substances Strategy, the Offshore Oil

and Gas Industry Strategy and the Biodiversity and Ecosystems Strategy). This information is set within the context of the socio-economic, physical and biological features of the North-East Atlantic (Chapter 2) and a changing ocean climate (Chapter 3). Chapter 11 reports on the progress made in applying tools to support the ecosystem approach to management of the North-East Atlantic, including ecological quality objectives and methodologies to assess ecosystem health. Chapter 12 brings together the findings of the preceding chapters in a qualitative summary for each OSPAR Region. These summaries describe the quality status and the delivery of OSPAR Strategies as well as the main pressures within these Regions and how these are expected to develop over the next decade. This provides the basis for the priorities for action identified for each Region. The Key Findings presented at the beginning of this summary report are intended to provide policy makers with a concise overview of the progress made, the main issues of concern and the need for action identified by the QSR 2010.

### OSPAR's role within the wider community

The OSPAR Convention is firmly rooted in global obligations and commitments on the protection and management of the sea. The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea which came into force in 1994 sets the global jurisdictional framework → **FIGURE 1.2**. The 1992 Rio de Janeiro United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity are the first major international agreements putting the ecosystem approach at the heart of environmental policy.

At a regional level, OSPAR cooperates with many other international organisations and has formal agreements with the North East Atlantic Fisheries Commission (NEAFC), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and ICES. Following the EU Water Framework Directive, the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive is now an important driver for OSPAR's future work → **FIGURE 1.2**. It is also a common platform for continued cooperation between OSPAR and other organisations concerned with protection

of the European seas. For example, in 2003 OSPAR and the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM – responsible for protecting the marine environment of the Baltic Sea) agreed to work together on a range of activities including marine nature conservation, impacts of fisheries and shipping, and the implementation of the ecosystem approach.

### QSR 2010 supports the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive

The Marine Strategy Framework Directive complements OSPAR’s existing work on protection of the North-East Atlantic. It requires 11 OSPAR countries to take the necessary measures to achieve or maintain ‘good environmental status’ of the EU’s marine waters by 2020, and to protect the natural resources upon which marine-related economic and social activities depend. To date, the Directive does not apply to Iceland and Norway.

The QSR 2010 forms an important regional contribution to the initial assessments of national marine waters that most OSPAR countries will submit in 2012 under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. It will provide a regional reference point and contribute toward delivering the ecosystem approach → BOX 1.1. In so doing it will support OSPAR’s role as a platform for the relevant OSPAR countries to coordinate their actions on the implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive within the OSPAR area.

### The way forward

It is essential that the biodiversity, resources and environmental quality of the North-East Atlantic ecosystems are conserved, protected and sustainably managed. OSPAR has had a number of successes in working to achieve this goal, but there is still much to do and cumulative impacts from past activities as well as a range of emerging pressures are now providing the focus for future work. An ecosystem-based approach is the way forward and this QSR 2010 summary report, together with the underlying assessments, provides a comprehensive baseline against which the effectiveness of future efforts can be measured.

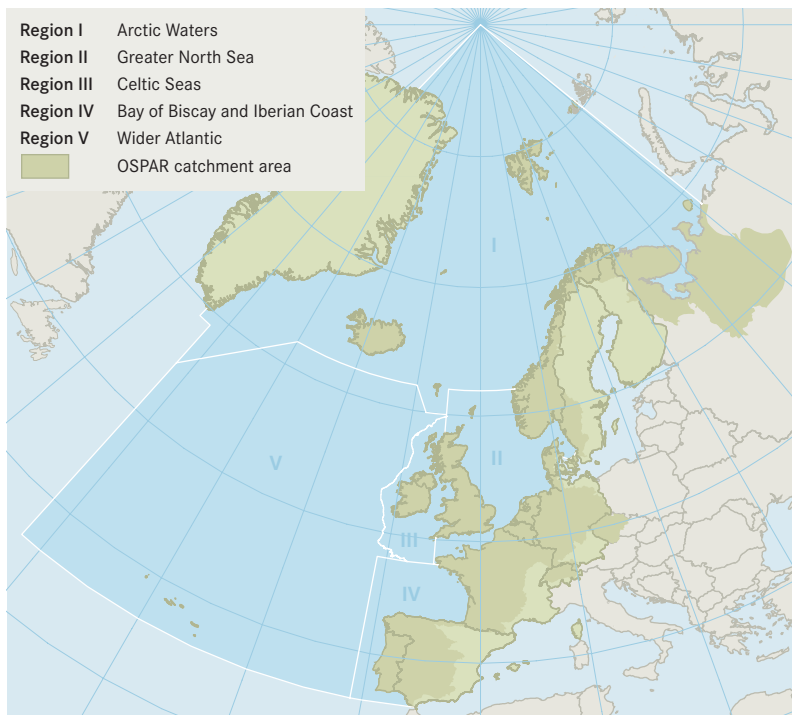


FIGURE 1.1 The OSPAR area and its catchment. For the purposes of assessment, the OSPAR maritime area is divided into five Regions.

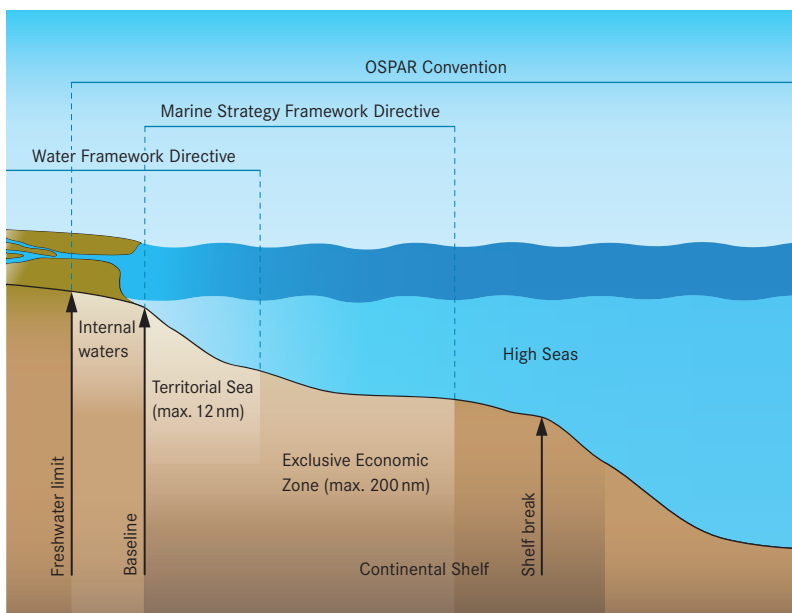


FIGURE 1.2 Jurisdictional zones of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the OSPAR Convention, the EU Water Framework Directive and the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The jurisdictional rights of coastal states over the water column extend up to 200 nautical miles (nm) from the baseline. Their jurisdictional rights over the Continental Shelf, relating to the seabed and subsoil, can extend beyond 200 nm.

#### BOX 1.1 The challenge of delivering the ecosystem approach

OSPAR’s work has been guided since 2003 by the ecosystem approach. This is also a main element of the EU’s Water Framework Directive and Marine Strategy Framework Directive. The essence of the ecosystem approach is to allow sustainable exploitation of natural resources while maintaining the quality, structure and functioning of the marine ecosystems. It has at its centre the integrated management of human activities and nature conservation needs. It involves consideration of the combined effects of all human activities on the ecosystem and the assessment of specified ecosystem components against defined quality objectives. The implementation of the ecosystem approach requires a good understanding of the ecosystem

and its dynamics and the development of appropriate indicators and scientific methodologies to enable evaluation of the quality status of the ecosystem in response to pressures from human activities. The development of tools for defining the desired quality of the ecosystem has been a key field of OSPAR’s work. The Ecological Quality Objectives (EcoQOs) developed for the North Sea provide an initial set of objectives for selected components of the ecosystem and function as indicators for human pressures. OSPAR’s progress towards assessing the ecosystem health of the five OSPAR Regions of the North-East Atlantic, in support of the ecosystem approach to their management, is reported in Chapter 11.