



Reduce the number of oiled guillemots

North Sea EcoQO

The average proportion of oiled common guillemots in all winter months (November to April) should be 20% or less by 2020 and 10% or less by 2030 of the total found dead or dying in each of 15 areas of the North Sea over a period of at least 5 years.

What is the problem?

Oil pollution

Photo: ©Kees Camphuysen

What is the Ecological Quality Objective (EcoQO)?

Guillemots (*Uria aalge*) are deep-diving seabirds that live mostly at the sea surface. They are common and widespread throughout the OSPAR area. Guillemots are very sensitive to oil pollution. A guillemot will soon die once it is oiled, due to hypothermia and because it is unable to forage and feed. These dead birds wash ashore and the proportion of stranded guillemots that are oiled can be used as an indication of oil pollution in specific areas at sea.

Has the EcoQO been met?

In some parts of the North Sea, over 90% of all stranded common guillemots were oiled until a few decades ago. Since then rates of oiled birds have declined substantially in most areas and are still declining. This is thought to be a result of better enforcement of measures (e.g. under the MARPOL Convention of the International Maritime Organisation), improved awareness, and the introduction of port reception facilities for waste oils. However, the EcoQO is achieved in very few parts of the North Sea. Current rates of oiled birds in the North Sea vary significantly from over 50% in the southern North Sea (the Netherlands, Belgium and the south-east of England) to approximately 4% in Orkney in the northern North Sea.

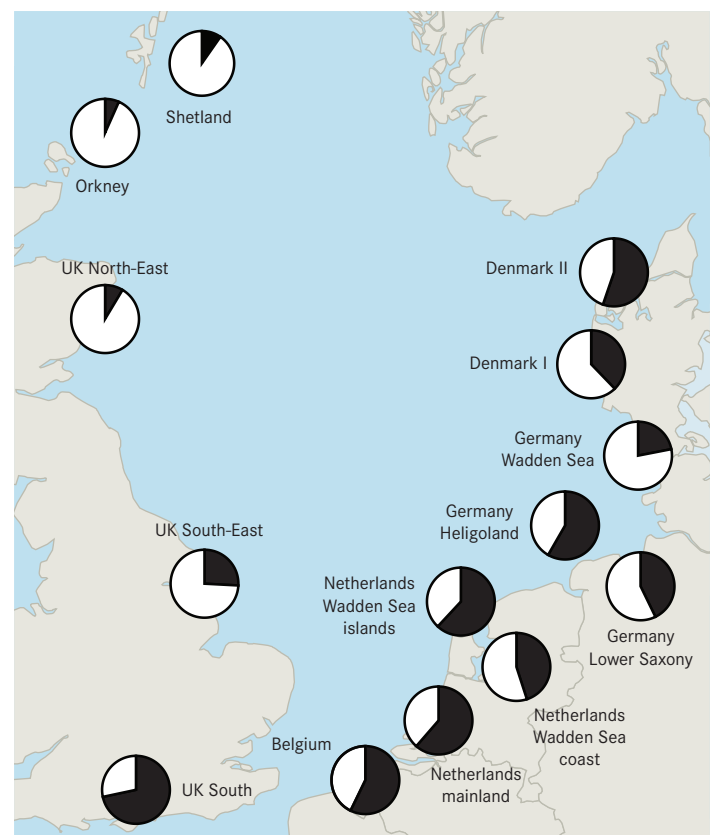
The main inputs of mineral oil originate from operational discharges from ships, land-based sources and, to a lesser extent, from the offshore oil industry. This partly explains why higher bird oiling rates are seen near busy shipping lanes (southern North Sea, Channel). Accidents at sea are a less frequent source.

How does this affect the quality status?

Oil pollution is a problem for many marine species and habitats. Reaching the EcoQO, e.g. having a low level of oil pollution, would benefit all those affected.

What happens next?

Since the discharge of oil or oily mixtures that cause slicks is prohibited in the North Sea, management measures need to focus on the further enforcement of current regulations and raising awareness among operators of vessels to reduce illegal oily discharges. Effective oil recovery may lead to cessation of illegal discharges.



Mean oiled rate (% oiled) in common guillemots in the North Sea in the period from 1997/1998 to 2001/2002