

## REPORT

Meeting: **OSPAR - Meeting of the Environmental Impact of Human Activities (EIHA)**

Date: **21 – 25 March 2022**

Location: **Edinburgh, United Kingdom**

**NSAC participant and rapporteur:** Jacopo Pasquero

### 1 Participation

The North Sea Advisory Council was the only physical observer present for the whole duration of the event, while other observers participated online or in-person for one or two days. Most OSPAR Member States were physically present. The Scottish Minister for the Environment visited on Tuesday.

There was initial general curiosity by OSPAR Members on the work of the NSAC and the NSAC participation in the EIHA Meeting was broadly welcome. One of the Dutch Government delegates, Rob Gerits, also participated in a meeting of NSAC Ecosystem Working Group in September 2021 and was pleased to see NSAC further involvement on the environmental dimension of human activities in the North Sea.

As this was the first OSPAR meeting the NSAC was attending, a presentation on the work and functioning of the NSAC was given to inform OSPAR Member States and observers about the NSAC.

### 2 Agenda items

The EIHA Committee meets regularly to discuss issues related to human-driven pressures on the marine environment and relevant policy frameworks, including:

- **BBNJ:** OSPAR Members are working on Area Based Management Tools (ABMTs) including MPAs and Environment Impact Assessments (EIAs) to see how Regional Seas Conventions like OSPAR can contribute to the BBNJ process. It was said that current measures proposed by OSPAR Members States (currently under development) still face challenges in the BBNJ context, as negotiations are pushing for more ambitious measures. Depending on how negotiations will unfold, OSPAR may facilitate implementation and coordination of BBNJ provisions in the North Sea.
- **Marine litter:** Work of OSPAR on circular management of fishing gear continues. OSPAR considers circular economy as part of their work, OSPAR National Focal Points (like the Netherlands) also participated in the NSAC-NWWAC workshop on the circular design of fishing gears back in December 2019. Following the deliberation of the latest UN Environment Assembly to negotiate a Plastics Treaty by 2024, Spain will host a conference on the role of Regional Seas Conventions in tackling plastics pollution. More details here: <https://www.marlice2022.org/es/home-es>

- OSPAR continues to work on MPAs in the North-East Atlantic and remains the main body sending (non-binding) recommendations to Member States on the matter.
- Natural capital accounting: The Dutch Government is also working on assessing the economic value of marine ecosystems for the blue economies in the North Sea, especially for fisheries, aquaculture, carbon sequestration and other sectors. Future plans include to better involve OSPAR in these activities.
- Fisheries: Some OSPAR Members mentioned bottom trawling as something of concern because of its impact on biodiversity and climate change. Destructive fishing practices are increasingly under scrutiny by OSPAR Members; while they cannot adopt fisheries management measures as it is outside the mandate of the Convention, OSPAR does provide recommendations to Member States on fisheries issues that impact the marine biodiversity and climate change in the context of the North-East Atlantic, which is in fact within the scope of OSPAR.
- Data: OSPAR is also very active on data management in the North Sea and there are several mechanisms OSPAR is using to facilitate data collection and reports regularly on these activities. With regards to fisheries, the Fishing for Marine Litter Data is within the OSPAR scope of work.
- Deepsea mining: like BBNJ, OSPAR is the regional organization working on regionalizing decisions being taken in the context of the International Seabed Authority (ISA), and is including deep sea mining in their Thematic Assessment of the Environmental Impact of Human Activities.
- Other issues: OSPAR is also working on issues that relate to the work of the NSAC, including carbon capture and storage and offshore wind energy (in the context of spatial planning). For the moment, the focus is on increasing understanding of the impact of these activities on North-Sea biodiversity as well as displacement of other human activities.

### 3 Future NSAC engagement in OSPAR meetings

The NSAC and OSPAR have overlapping geographical and thematic scope, especially in relation to the environmental dimension of fishing operations, including area-based biodiversity conservation, marine litter, climate change, the state of the seabed, underwater noise, and marine spatial planning, among others. Furthermore, OSPAR works on other economic activities whose developments are also kept track by the NSAC; these entail offshore wind energy and carbon capture and storage.

#### ⇒ What is in there for the NSAC

- Following what happens on environmental/ conservation issues in the North-Sea, in areas within and beyond national jurisdiction.
- Understanding how global developments (BBNJ, Plastics Treaty, Seabed Mining...) are regionalized in the North Sea.
- Being aware of recommendations adopted by OSPAR to Member States, including to NSAC Member States like Netherlands, France, Germany, Denmark, and Sweden. Some of these recommendations directly affect fisheries management: while OSPAR is not mandated to adopt fisheries measures, they provide advice on fisheries-related

issues, including on bottom trawling and the impact of fisheries on marine biodiversity in the North-Sea.

- Meet governments that are not present in Brussels but still have an influence in environmental measures in the North Sea, such as the UK and Norway.
- ⇒ Recommendations for future attendance
- There is no need to attend the whole meeting. Most observers attend only those days that cover agenda items relevant for their work. It could be useful to have a careful look at the agenda beforehand and focus on key issues relevant to the work of the NSAC.
  - While the NSAC continues to advise only the European Commission, it is possible to make statements as OSPAR observer. If NSAC past advice is relevant for the issues discussed within OSPAR, the NSAC representative could voice NSAC advice with the aim to make OSPAR Member States aware of the consensus achieved within the NSAC on that topic.
  - Several issues are being discussed that are relevant for the NSAC. The NSAC could also use this platform to invite OSPAR participants for presentations at relevant Working Groups/ Focus Groups and identify other ways of collaboration.