

OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic
 Meeting of the Intersessional Correspondence Group on Marine Protected Areas (ICG-MPA)
 Galway: 12-14 November 2024

Report of the meeting of ICG-MPA 2024

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Draft Report of the Meeting ICG-MPA 2024

Agenda Item 1 – Welcome and Opening of the meeting and adoption of the Agenda

- 1.1 The Intersessional Correspondence Group on Marine Protected Areas (ICG-MPA) met in Galway at the kind invitation of the Irish Government from 12-14 November 2024.
- 1.2 The meeting was convened by Janos Hennicke (Germany).
- 1.3 The meeting was held in hybrid format and attended by representatives of the following Contracting Parties: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. HELCOM, ACOPS, Birdlife International, Mercator Ocean International, and North Sea Advisory Council, participated in their capacity as Observers to OSPAR.
- 1.4 The Convenor welcomed the participants to ICG-MPA 2024. He thanked Ireland for their hospitality in Galway.
- 1.5 The meeting was opened by Oliver Ó Cadhla, Senior Adviser from the Marine Environment, Water Division of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, who welcomed the ‘OSPAR tribe’ to Galway, the city of tribes, and to Ireland. He gave an overview of some of Ireland’s ongoing national work on MPAs including the launch in October of a new EU LIFE project that aimed to bring Ireland from 9% MPA coverage to 30% coverage of Ireland’s maritime area by 2030, and the development of national MPA Bill that would include three key elements among its provisions: an Ocean Environment Policy Statement; a multidisciplinary MPA Advisory Group to develop and oversee proposals for new national MPAs, and extensive consultation and participation of stakeholders and the public in future MPA design and designation processes.
- 1.6 The agenda was adopted as proposed. A list of documents presented is at **Annex 1**, a list of actions arising from the meeting is at **Annex 2**, and a full list of registered participants is provided at **Annex 3**.

Agenda Item 2 – General and overarching issues

- 2.1 The Convenor referred to his letter to delegates (ICG-MPA 24/00/00) which highlighted the priorities and key topics on the agenda, particularly: the outcomes of BDC, OSPAR, and AOWG meetings, e.g., with respect to area-based management in the Arctic, considering the MPA knowledge gaps in OSPAR Science Agenda (OSA), and how ICG-MPA can further contribute to accomplishing NEAES 2030 tasks and objectives. The agenda also included specific progress of our work under the

NEAES 2030 on OECMs, assessment of eco-coherence, and MPA management, and reflect on experiences with the new data submission tool to inform the future for the MPA database. The Convenor recalled that the OSPAR Ministerial Meeting would be held in June 2025, so there would also be an opportunity to discuss potential content of an MPA package. There would be a discussion on a zero-draft NACES management plan, and the Convenor also looked forward to lively round-table discussions about national experiences on the implementation of fisheries management measures, and on specifically protected marine areas.

2.2 The Convenor thanked all participants in advance for their engagement in the work of ICG-MPA.

Intersessional progress, including against Terms of Reference

2.3 ICG-MPA noted progress made intersessionally, including against the [ICG-MPA 2024/2025 Terms of Reference](#) and the actions from ICG-MPA 23 (ICG-MPA 24/02/01). Many actions from ICG-MPA 23 had been completed, and others would be considered under various agenda items of the agenda. ICG-MPA participants were reminded of some ongoing actions, including considering whether they could take the lead on tasks in the holding pen and opportunities to collaborate with WG COCOA on the climate relevant tasks of the NEAES 2030.

2.4 Germany provided an update on a project mapping critical habitats for Threatened and/or Declining species (NEAES task S5.O6.T2), which would provide information of relevance to MPAs. One paper had been published from the project and another was in draft, and the report was almost finalised. **ICG-MPA agreed that the report should be provided to ICG-MPA contact points once finalised.** Germany was launching a new project on critical habitats for seabirds at sea, which would contribute to a task of the recently adopted [OSPAR RAP Bird](#).

Results and outcomes of BDC, OSPAR 2024, and other relevant subsidiary bodies

2.5 The Secretariat provided a verbal update of the results and outcomes of BDC, OSPAR and other relevant subsidiary bodies. The following issues were highlighted:

- a. BDC 24 took place from 18-22 March 2024 in Oslo, Norway. The meeting approved the [report on barriers to effective MPA management](#) (NEAES task S5.O1.T1) and the 2023 MPA [Status Assessment](#) and [Assessment sheet](#), and these documents had now been published. BDC discussed preparations for the Intermediate Assessment 2028 (IA 2028), confirming that MPA assessments would not form part of the IA 2028, and had accepted ICG-MPA's advice to retain the separate designations of the Milne Seamount Complex and NACES MPAs.
- b. BDC 24 had discussed resourcing issues and formed an ad-hoc group on BDC future resourcing comprised of Netherlands, Germany, UK, Sweden, Ireland, the co-convenor of ICG COBAM, the co-convenor of ICG-POSH and the Chair of BDC. This group had met twice since BDC 24 and would present information on BDC's most urgent resource needs to CoG and HOD the week after ICG-MPA 24; these related to indicator assessment for the IA 2028, the ICG-MPA database, and preparation of the ICG-POSH implementation review due by the end of 2025. The ad-hoc group on BDC future resourcing would continue to define the longer-term needs (including for NEAES objectives) and look at alternative funding models.

- c. The OSPAR Commission had approved closure of NEAES task S5.O3.T1 on developing a mechanisms for EIA/SEA on plans/project/programmes with the potential to impact on OSPAR MPAs in ABNJ, and that the OSPAR Secretariat had published a [statement](#) on the one-year anniversary of the opening for signature of the BBNJ.
- d. The Ad-hoc Ministerial Meeting Group (AHMMG) would continue to meet approximately once a month and maintain a live list of ministerial deliverables. To date, this included a Ministerial Declaration, a mid-term review of the Strategy (including Operational Objectives and progress on implementation of the Strategy), a proposal to enlarge the OSPAR maritime area in Macaronesia, amendments to the Convention to account for emerging pressures (aquaculture, offshore renewables, rocket debris, carbon dioxide storage and hydrogen production and storage), an MPA package, marine litter package, RAP package and AOWG work. There was strong support from the AHMMG for a package on MPAs.
- e. The Arctic Outcomes Working Group met in Nuuk, Greenland from 30 Sept to 1 October. The meeting agreed the final wording of an action on priority sites and area-based measures: *“OSPAR will identify priority sites to be considered in developing its network of marine protected areas (MPAs) and other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) and will, where supported by the evidence, and respecting the rights of Indigenous Peoples, collectively designate MPAs and support the adoption of other area-based conservation and management measures in areas beyond national jurisdiction in Arctic Waters, building on previous proposals and information”*. A draft template for a task to support this action would be presented to CoG(2) 24; this task was envisaged to be led by a Contracting Party with ICG-MPA in a support role to bring in previous relevant experience, information and proposals.
- f. The Working Group on Changing Ocean Climate and Ocean Acidification (WG COCOA) had met on 24-26 September 2024 and during that meeting had identified priority work areas including strengthening relevant monitoring in the OSPAR area, developing biological indicators, and developing climate and OA projections. WG-COCA noted that ICG-MPA had tasks in the holding pen on MPAs and climate change that would be of relevance and interest to WG COCOA (WG COCOA(2) 24/04/Info/04).
- g. The OSPAR Secretariat noted the OSPAR Project Mechanism, which recorded approaches for support made to the Secretariat from organisations or consortia preparing project proposals, and enabled proposals to be evaluated for their fit with OSPAR objectives. Through this Mechanism, the OSPAR Secretariat had proposed to become an associate partner in a consortium, led by Plymouth Marine Laboratory and including multiple OSPAR Contracting Parties, for an EU Horizon 2020 project that would focus on offshore MPAs. The project proposed to collect new data, consider the translation of science into management measures including the impact of climate change on MPAs, and would include case studies in four OSPAR regions. The Secretariat hoped to find out the result of the proposal evaluation in February 2025.

2.6 ICG-MPA **noted** the updates from BDC, OSPAR and other relevant subsidiary bodies.

OSPAR Science Agenda

2.7 The Secretariat presented ICG-MPA 24/02/02 and ICG-MPA 24/02/02 Add.01 which gave a status update on the OSPAR Science Agenda (OSA) and a spreadsheet of the ICG-MPA related elements of the OSA, based on contractor's compilation of knowledge gaps from the QSR 2023 assessments. ICG-MPA was invited to review the spreadsheet, provide feedback to the OSA Task Group on the gaps identified and prioritise the gaps using the method described in Annex 1 of the document. The outcome of ICG-MPA discussions, including revised wording of the knowledge gaps (as necessary) and prioritisation of ICG-MPA's OSA knowledge gaps was recorded in **Annex 4**. ICG-MPA noted that some of the OSA knowledge gaps presented to ICG-MPA were within the remit of other BDC ICGs.

2.8 ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. **To forward the revised wording and priority scores for ICG-MPA's knowledge gaps (Annex 4) to BDC 2025;**
- b. The Secretariat would invite **ICG-POSH 24 to consider the knowledge gaps that ICG-MPA had identified as being, first and foremost, within ICG-POSH's remit.**

Preparation of the Ministerial Meeting 2025

2.9 The Secretariat presented ICG-MPA 24/02/03 on the conclusions from BDC(2) 2024 (14 October 2024) on preparations for the Ministerial Meeting, which would be held in Vigo (Spain), on 26 June 2025 as part of the OSPAR Commission meeting (23-27 June 2025).

2.10 ICG-MPA noted the proposed amendments to the MPA Operational Objective of the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES), the potential implications of the proposed expansion of the OSPAR maritime area and other Ministerial deliverables, and discussed the content of the ICG-MPA package for the Ministerial meeting, the timeline and contact points for each component, and the ICG-MPA achievements that should be highlighted in the NEAES mid-term review.

2.11 The following components were proposed to be included in the ICG-MPA Ministerial package:

- a. Extension of the NACES MPA (inclusion of the seafloor)
- b. Intention to develop/intention to adopt/adoption of a NACES management plan (subject to progress with engaging relevant competent authorities, including via the Collective Arrangement 2025 meeting)
- c. New MPA proposals and progress towards 30 by 30
- d. Development of the OSPAR OECM Guidance

2.12 In addition, the following pieces of work were noted for consideration in the Ministerial progress report or to link with one of the other deliverables:

- a. Management Effectiveness of Protected and Conserved Areas (MEPCA) indicator and reporting on management effectiveness as multiple scales, linked to S5.O2
- b. Progress on the OSPAR database
- c. An update from Contracting Parties as part of the 'progress towards 30 by 30' component and/or a forecast of the progress expected in the new few years

2.13 A proposed RSC event on identifying and designating MPAs in ABNJ was also discussed: it was not agreed to be a Ministerial priority, however, some Contracting Parties and Observers supported further considering the idea, and ICG-MPA agreed that it could be an important activity to engage in. Such an event was envisaged as an information sharing workshop, perhaps as a dedicated event, part of another organisation's work or meeting programme, or as a workshop in the sidelines of UNOC 25 or the next global regional seas conventions meeting.

2.14 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. **To forward the components of the Ministerial MPA package (§2.11) to the AHMMG;**
- b. **To keep the components in §2.12 in mind during preparation of the Ministerial MPA package.**

Sufficiency of tasks to deliver the NEAES 2030

2.15 The Secretariat presented ICG-MPA 24/02/04 and ICG-MPA 24/02/04 Add.1 on the sufficiency of tasks to deliver the NEAES Operational Objectives. It was recalled that Committees were required to assess the sufficiency of tasks as part of the 2025 progress report on the NEAES. The methodology to assess the sufficiency of tasks was presented in Annex 1 of the document; the current sufficiency assessment of tasks was at ICG-MPA 24/02/04 Add.1, noting that S12.O2 was missing from the document but was included in the slides presented to ICG-MPA. As part of this exercise, ICG-MPA was asked to identify any additional tasks anticipated and discuss any barriers to the delivery of Operational Objectives and how these could be addressed.

2.16 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. **The sufficiency of tasks as presented in Annex 05 to be forwarded to BDC;**
- b. Not to develop new tasks for Operational Objectives where the tasks were assessed not to fully implement the Operational Objective;
- c. **To draw messages about the sufficiency or tasks into the MPA Ministerial Meeting package and/or other products for the Ministerial meeting, via BDC, as appropriate.**

Agenda Item 3 – Overview of ICG-MPA's implementation of the NEAES 2030

Eco-coherence

3.1 The Netherlands, on behalf of the eco-coherence task group, presented ICG-MPA 24/03/01 on progress against task S5.O1.T1 on improving eco-coherence assessments within the OSPAR network of MPAs. The background to the approach was presented in the document, i.e., the development of indicators/targets that help assess progress against five key network principles discussed in OSPAR (2006)¹: 'features', 'representativity', 'connectivity', 'resilience' and 'management'. An assessment of management was taken forward as part of a separate process within OSPAR.

3.2 As agreed at ICG-MPA 23, the Netherlands had drafted and delivered the eco-coherence chapter for the MPA Status Report, with support from a contractor. With respect to task S5.O1.T1, in September

¹ Guidance on developing an ecologically coherent network of OSPAR MPAs ([OSPAR Agreement 2006-3](#))

the Wageningen Marine Research (WMR) was appointed to work on the task. An online meeting between the TG and WMR was held on 17 October 24 to discuss progress with the task, and the TG agreed to finalise amendments to the task timeline and the workplan at ICG-MPA 24.

3.3 Oscar Bos and Jan Tjalling van der Wal (WMR) presented results of a trial of the ecoherence method applied to harbour porpoise, based on published data (**P01**). Some issues with obtaining information from the MPA database to support the trial were noted, for example; data queries did sometimes not provide accurate results; when English language was selected some menus appeared in French which had made it difficult to find information needed; outputs were provided in separate components but would be more useful as a single spreadsheet with multiple tabs; it was difficult to find the data required to calculate the buffer zones, Dinter provinces and OECMs and it would be preferable to have one geopackage containing all MPA boundaries and tables with additional data (e.g. characteristics per MPA, species and habitats it was designated for etc); when downloading a layer, different projections options appeared but only Lambert 93 projection was almost always provided.

3.4 The preliminary WMR eco-coherence trial results showed some fragmentation between sites, including gaps in connectivity around the Azores. No analysis had been made of whether management measures in place intended to benefit harbour porpoise nor the effectiveness of management measures. It was noted that it would be possible to automate Criteria A analysis for all species, producing maps and assessing functions, however this would be limited by current data availability. The trial focused on harbour porpoise, and therefore only considered marine MPAs, however, if undertaking an ecoherence assessment for seabirds then it might be valid to include terrestrial protected sites. Buffers were determined as 125km in territorial waters, 250km for EEZ, and outside EEZ 500km, and if the borders of the buffers touched then it was considered connected.

3.5 In discussion, ICG-MPA noted:

- a. SCANS would provide the best available data for harbour porpoise and could be obtained via the OSPAR Marine Mammal Expert Group (OMMEG, contact Anita Gilles); Ireland could provide additional distribution data that had not been included in the OSPAR assessment, from the ObSERVE Programme aerial project under Phase 2 of the programme. Steve Geelhoed (Netherlands) would be aware of the relevant contact points in Ireland, but Ireland can also provide such contacts if necessary.
- b. Given data availability, the task should focus on finding a proxy to make an eco-coherence assessment without datasets on each species, and that it would be for the task group to decide which additional species to apply the method for developing the proxy, but that ICG-MPA's ambition for the task would be to apply it to all OSPAR T&D species, subject to data availability and, importantly, quality.
- c. Noting these were preliminary results, it would be important to factor ecological traits into analysis, such as (in this case) the preference of harbour porpoise for water depths of less than 200m.
- d. Ecoherence assessment should not only consider distribution but also how species move, migrate, interact, etc.; it would be important that the task work did not simply overlay abundance (including with respect to areas important for breeding etc) with MPAs, as this work was already being done within ICG-POSH.

- e. With respect to buffers, the task should be developing at an alternative method to assess connectivity, to supersede the Madrid criteria, based on biological and ecological traits of the species. This will require expert advice, and the task group should be involved in this process.

3.6 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. **The amended task template for task S5.O1.T1 (Annex 6) to be forwarded to BDC 2025 for its approval and inclusion in the NEAES Implementation Plan;**
- b. **The Netherlands/WMR would provide the output of the updated trial, using SCANS data, as GIS files to ICG-MPA;**
- c. In progressing the task, it would be important **to focus on developing an alternative ecoherence method based on species' biological and ecological traits as well as distribution.**

Update on the development of OSPAR guidance on OECMs

3.7 Ireland presented ICG-MPA 24/03/02 on the development of OSPAR guidance on OECMs (NEAES task S5.O1.T3). A zero-draft of the OECM guidance had been prepared by Ireland, with support of an external consultant and the OSPAR Secretariat, which had been used as a basis for a workshop held in Trondheim, Norway, in June 2024 on the kind invitation of the Government of Norway. After the workshop, the zero-draft of the Guidance was produced, which used the CBD definition and criteria for OECMs as a basis (ICG-MPA 24/03/02 Add.1). It had been intended to engage with the Task Group over the summer in further refining the draft Guidance as well as to look into the possibility of: 'road testing' the Guidance with users; developing a task template; adding case studies; divide the Guidance into "Part I - policy briefing" and "Part II – technical/practitioners' guidance".

3.8 Due to national priorities and associated resource constraints, it would not be possible for Ireland to continue to lead this work and, noting that it was one of the intended deliverables for the Ministerial Meetings, Contracting Parties were invited to consider whether they could take on lead for the work or whether an alternative task management approach was needed. No Contracting Parties were forthcoming to lead the task.

3.9 During discussions of the first draft OECM Guidance, ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. Thanks to Ireland and all involved in producing a good, thorough first draft;
- b. Separation into two parts would be preferable and make the document more navigable, but there should be cross references between the two parts;
- c. Support for using all the CBD sub-criteria as outlined in the draft rather than picking only some, whilst leaving flexibility to accommodate the fact that some would not apply in every situation;
- d. 2024 CBD COP 16 in Cali has announced that the 2019 Technical Report would be updated in forthcoming Guidelines on OECMs; the Guidelines reinforce that, above all else, OECMs must deliver positive outcomes for nature;
- e. It was envisaged that national OECMs would be submitted directly to the world OECM database, and then submitted to the OSPAR network, whereas for OSPAR measures in

ABNJ OECMs would only be submitted via OSPAR or an alternative competent authority (i.e. not nationally);

- f. Birdlife International would be supportive of a process for candidate OECMs;
- g. Sweden's comments provided in writing before the workshop did not seem to have been taken into account and should be revisited;
- h. Sweden noted that their OECMs would include small land areas (mainly islands); this should be reflected in the reporting template so that the whole area could be recorded whilst noting that OSPAR would only 'count' the marine part of the total area of the OECM;
- i. Sweden noted that it would be helpful for the Guidance to be clearer on what needed to be done for national OECMs vs ABNJ OECMs, and a short paragraph should be included in the Guidance to note the two processes, i.e. for national MPAs, complete national baseline template (or use the OSPAR baseline template) and the WDOECM reporting template, then make small changes to information in the reporting template before submitting to OSPAR; for ABNJ complete the reporting template and baseline document provided by OSPAR and submit directly to OSPAR;
- j. Sweden has a draft OECM baseline template that could be shared with the Secretariat and the task group (but not for wider circulation), noting that it was based on the HELCOM approach;
- k. ICG-MPA was not completely clear on what kind of document the Guidance should be, e.g. an 'Agreement', 'Recommendation' etc, noting that Guidance documents were usually adopted as 'Agreements';
- l. It would be desirable to have the Guidance road-tested by Contracting Parties - the UK asked about the possibility of road-testing the guidance on existing OECMs. Testing could be completed on the Northern Ireland scallop fishery closure - and other international competent authorities, including NEAFC.

3.10 ICG-MPA went through the questions outlined in 24/03/02 Add.1 and **provisionally agreed**, subject to road-testing the Guidance:

- a. All CBD criteria should be met for a measure to be recognised as an OECM, on the basis that many of the sub-criteria are critical to whether an OECM will achieve conservation benefits, but a distinction should be made that those that are not relevant need not be applied;
- b. The common understanding columns did not need to be separated out into separate rows;
- c. The 'assessment template' and 'baseline template' were the same thing, and language used in the Guidance should consistently use the term 'baseline template';
- d. For ABNJ, ICG-MPA would be the body that would make a decision on adoption of an OECM;
- e. Not to make reporting on OECMs mandatory or update recommendation 2003/03 to recognise OECMS, but to keep this under review as part of the annual reporting process;

- f. That OECMS should be in the OSPAR database and ODIMS, differentiated from MPAs, and would need to include information about the measure of the OECM;
- g. OSPAR OECMs would also be reported under the MEPCA indicator for management effectiveness.

3.11 A small breakout group of Ireland, the Convenor and the Secretariat worked through the questions in the draft reporting template in the Guidance document (ICG-MPA 24/07/01 Add.1), which was based on the CBD template, and made adaptations to the fields as recorded in **Annex 07**.

3.12 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. **The current version of the OECM Guidelines (Annex 07) should be progressed by the task group with a view to adopting the Guidance as part of a MPA Ministerial Package;**
- b. **Contracting Parties would provide further, detailed written feedback on a copy of the draft Guidance placed on SharePoint, and any suggestions for types of case studies, by 13 December;**
- c. **The Secretariat would be in touch with the MPA contact in Canada (Andrea Mast) to ask for a copy of their ‘baseline template’;**
- d. **Ireland would work with the Secretariat to tidy the Guidance document, separate it into two parts, transfer into an OSPAR format and provide the document to the ICG-MPA contact points from each Contracting Party or organisation of the task group (DE, DK, NL, PT, UK, SaR, Birdlife) by 6 December;**
- e. **The Secretariat would organise a task group meeting in December (after 13 December) to discuss how to progress the task, road testing and to draft the ‘baseline template’;**
- f. **The task group would report to ICG-MPA Extra on 22 January on the progress with preparing the Guidance document;**
- g. **The Guidance should be road tested with some Contracting Parties and/or competent authorities (for ABNJ areas) between the December task group meeting and ICG-MPA Extra on 22 January or (latest) the BDC document deadline of 31 January;**
- h. **Contracting Parties were invited to consider whether they could road-test the Guidance document.**

3.13 Tamara Talevska, Secretary General of the North Sea Advisory Council (NSAC), presented an introduction to NSAC and outlined the work NSAC was doing on OECMs. NSAC was established with the EU Common Fisheries Policy, involved industry, countries and NGOs, and provided advice on EU fisheries. NSAC has been drafting its own Guidance on OECMS, particularly fisheries measures, developed with IUCN fisheries experts. NSAC’s advice was also based on the CBD criteria and was directed at EU MS and MS and advised them to enhance cooperation, promoted pilot measures to help speed the process, recognised NSAC’s role in stakeholder engagement and advocated for systematic involvement of stakeholders. It also advised to look at the existing spatial and technical measures to see whether they would qualify as OECMs, to mobilise expert and local knowledge, engage in cross-border collaboration (or wider) to ensure level playing field, address connectivity and identify and integrate local values.

3.14 NSAC would follow the OSPAR OECM process with interest. Their advice on OECMs is intended for adoption on Monday of next week and thereafter could be found on the NSAC website. NSAC had invited OSPAR to come to one of the working groups and would also be interested to have a presentation of the OECM Guidance document.

NEAES task S5.O2.T1: “Identify barriers to MPA management”

3.15 The Secretariat noted that [“OSPAR Report on potential solutions to overcoming barriers to effective management of Marine Protected Areas”](#) (NEAES task S5.O2.T1) had been published and ICG-MPA was invited to consider whether there was a need for follow-on work to address the second part of Operational Objective S5.O2, which related to implementing solutions to the barriers. In discussion, ICG-MPA noted that ICG-MPA already had several tasks in the holding pen without resources to lead their delivery, and therefore it was not considered a priority to draft a new task, nor was this necessarily the most appropriate next step as addressing many of the barriers identified in the report was not within the remit of ICG-MPA and should instead be raised with HODs to inform national prioritisation discussions.

3.16 The report clearly set out the barriers at national and regional scale, along with some possible solutions; Contracting Parties should continue to raise the issue at a national level, drawing on the report, and be clear about the risk that OSPAR would not deliver its objective S5.O2 unless action was taken to address some of the barriers. These points could also be drawn into the ICG-MPA Ministerial Meeting package and/or raised, via BDC, to be considered for inclusion in the messages around the 2025 Ministerial Meeting. It could be beneficial to prepare a one or two-page communications product outlining the barriers to effective MPA management.

3.17 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. It was not necessary, at this point, to draft an additional task to address the barriers identified in the OSPAR Report on overcoming barriers to effective management of MPAs
- b. **The barriers outlined in the OSPAR Report on overcoming barriers to effective management of MPAs should be brought into the Ministerial Meeting MPA package or Ministerial Meeting communications, via BDC, as necessary.**

NEAES tasks in the ‘holding pen’

3.18 ICG-MPA reviewed the NEAES tasks in the ‘holding pen’, and the ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. The UK was looking into whether it could support taking forward tasks S11.O2.T0 and S11.O2.T1, with the intention that the work would be delivered by contractors that had experience of delivering similar work at UK scale, noting that a Contracting Party (i.e. the UK) would need to be named as task lead²;
- b. No Contracting Parties were able to offer to lead any other tasks; furthermore, if a lead could not be found to continue to take forward the OECM task then it may need to be placed in the holding pen;

² Following the meeting, the UK confirmed that it would not be possible to provide funding for the contractors with experience of similar projects to do this work

- c. One of the obstacles to NEAES tasks being taken forward was uncertainty about the associated resource requirements, and that it would be helpful when drafting a task template to give some indication of the anticipated resource requirement;
- d. There was scope for further discussion and consideration of how ICG-MPA could work with OSPAR Observers and external organisations to take forward tasks.

3.19 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed** that the ICG-MPA tasks of the NEAES would remain in the holding pen and that the **Convenor and the Secretariat would raise the issue with BDC, CoG and HOD as an NEAES implementation gap.**

Agenda Item 4 - Assessing the status of the OSPAR MPA network

Examination of reports against Recommendation 2003/03 as amended by 2010/02, including any new MPA nominations and updates to the OSPAR MPA database, and OSPAR Recommendations 2010/11-2010/17 and 2012/1

4.1 The Secretariat presented a summary of the annual reports submitted against OSPAR Recommendation 2003/03 as amended by 2010/02 (component 1 of the data call), OSPAR Recommendations 2010/12-2010/17, 2012/01 and 2021/01 (component 2a), voluntary components on management actions on High Seas MPAs (component 2b), any information provided about OECMs (component 4.1), and non-OSPAR MPAs (component 4.2). The updated information, including on past reporting, provided by Contracting Parties against Recommendations 2010/11-2010/17, 2012/01 and 2021/01 was provided in ICG-MPA 24/04/01 Add.1 and the information regarding voluntary components on management actions on High Seas MPAs was presented in ICG-MPA 24/04/01 Add.2.

4.2 ICG-MPA welcomed the nomination of 15 new MPAs to the network of OSPAR MPAs (not 16 as presented in Annex 1 of the document). ICG-MPA noted that no voluntary reporting was submitted on OECMs, but one OECM had been removed and nominated as an OSPAR MPA. Voluntary reporting was submitted for one non-OSPAR MPA, by Belgium.

4.3 In discussion, ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. The change to the Loch Caron MPA (UK) was to add a new feature, rather than a new MPA;
- b. The Convenor suggested that the colours in the table were reconsidered for voluntary components (it was noted that blue had been used in the report to HOD); that the header in Addendum 2 should note Contracting Parties that had no new data to report (as opposed to having not reported), and; reiterated the importance of presenting accurate information to HODs;
- c. That there was variability in how question 2 in component 2a was answered; some Contracting Parties appeared to answer the question with a specific focus on ABNJ MPAs, other CPs appeared to answer the question more generally;
- d. That §§10 – 15 of the overview reporting document should be consolidated.

4.4 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. The amendments to the overview report and reporting formats as captured in **Annex 08.**

Management Effectiveness of Protected and Conserved Areas (MEPCA) indicator

4.5 The UK presented a brief reminder of the MEPCA indicator (**P02**) and the results of the trial of the indicator (ICG-MPA 24/04/02 and **P03**). The information about the trial was presented to ICG-MPA to gather views on the value of applying the MEPCA indicator to enhance future OSPAR MPA management status assessments. The document provided an overview of the MEPCA indicator and existing OSPAR management status reporting, a summary of the method of the trial, potential output plots, findings of the trial and proposed next steps.

4.6 In discussion, ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. Work under the HELCOM PROTECT BALTIC project to quantify MPA management effectiveness, dividing information into three components: governance targets; pressure reduction targets (e.g. implementation of measures), and; environmental/ecological targets. It was challenging to define and measure the ecological impact of the MPA management, which included both proxy measurement and real effects on the features. The MEPCA indicator factored the type of assessment into scoring (e.g. a proxy assessment would give a lower score), and the MEPCA indicator is a high-level assessment that would be expected to be underpinned by national assessments. The UK volunteered to provide more information about the MEPCA indicator to HELCOM groups such as EG MPA;
- b. The IUCN categories are descriptive information, which does not affect scoring in the MEPCA indicator;
- c. The threshold between adequate and inadequate effectiveness was too precise, i.e. 38,24%, and difficult to understand - it had been determined as the maximum score one could get if the response to either answer f and/or g (which have a heavier weighing) was “no” - and would need to be defined in the MEPCA indicator methodological documentation;
- d. To avoid the term ‘adequate management’ when applying the MEPCA indicator in the OSPAR context, and instead use effective/not effective management (noting that the MEPCA indicator uses pass/fail) and to define what “effectively managed” means in the context of the MEPCA indicator;
- e. It would be simpler to interpret the MEPCA indicator if the visualisations did not try to show too much per graph and focused on showing only ‘effective managed’ and ‘not effectively managed’ in addition to a separate figure for each of the MEPCA indicator questions;
- f. There was more than one way to ‘fail’, i.e. not get over the threshold (see point c) and they do not have the same causes and hence the interpretation of the result had to be made accordingly;
- g. It would be interesting to think about how to distinguish between what change is made by the MPA management measures and what is made by other changes, e.g. measures, regulations, outside the MPA;
- h. That the high-level summary figures would be valuable for MPA reporting to external audiences, but Contracting Parties would find it helpful to also have a colour coded

spreadsheet for internal use that displayed the score for each individual OSPAR MPA, that could be filtered by Contracting Party;

- i. The wording of the existing questions in the MPA reporting aligned with the MEPCA indicator questions, but the MEPCA indicator questions were more general so that they apply globally and to all protected areas (marine and terrestrial);
- j. If a Contracting Party does not provide new management information for a site, then the previous management information would be used;
- k. Due to the work required to make the MEPCA analysis, any management information reported after the 1 October deadline would not be included;
- l. If a site is moving away from its management objectives, it was suggested to note this in reporting using the comment field.

4.7 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. **To apply the MEPCA indicator for inclusion in the management section of future OSPAR MPA Status Assessments from 2025 onwards, including the numerical result for the OSPAR network and an ‘effectively managed’/‘not effectively managed’ figure;**
- b. **To publish the MEPCA indicator methodology along the lines of CEMP Guidance to be referenced in the MPA Status Assessment;**
- c. **The UK and the Secretariat to finalise the MEPCA indicator wording in the draft 2025 MPA data call and amend the reporting Guidance as required;**
- d. **The Secretariat would produce coding for a colour-coded spreadsheet of the MEPCA indicator management reporting responses site-by-site for internal purposes, including differentiating ‘0’ scores by whether it was a ‘0’ for ‘no response’/‘no data’ or ‘no’, as per example in Annex 09;**
- e. **To gather more information during MPA reporting about why CPs are answering unknown to question 4 regarding achievement of a site’s conservation objectives to give ICG-MPA a better understanding of the issues preventing effective management.**

Discussion of and conclusion on arrangements for 2024 MPA Assessment sheet

4.8 The Convenor, on behalf of Germany, presented the draft 2024 MPA Assessment Sheet (ICG-MPA 24/04/03) and noted that the outstanding issues identified in the document (§§6-8) had been resolved and the Assessment Sheet could be considered for approval as presented.

4.9 In discussion, the UK and Denmark confirmed that the three MPAs highlighted in the document were updates to existing MPAs rather than new nominations, and that the statistics in the draft assessment report remained correct.

4.10 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed** that the queries on the draft assessment sheet had been resolved and that the **draft could be forwarded as it was to BDC 25 for its approval to forward to the OSPAR Commission for publication.**

Update on the MPA Database

4.11 France presented ICG-MPA 24/04/04 on the latest developments of the MPA database and its management. It was highlighted that the information in the database appeared to be incomplete, and this could have implications for assessments. ICG-MPA was invited to discuss how effective providing the data excerpt to highlight missing information had been and how to resolve the issue of incomplete information for 2023-2024 in the MPA database. The importance of submitting complete information in the annual data call in 2024-2025 was stressed, as was the request to report any issues faced with the actual proforma when responding to the data call.

4.12 In discussion, ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. Contracting Parties thanked France for the missing data gaps spreadsheet;
- b. Some Contracting Parties noted that they had not been able to fill the data gaps identified, but France was not able to provide an overview of what missing data had been provided in the 2024 reporting round;
- c. Where MPAs were designated for species only, they should not be highlighted as a data gap on the basis of not containing habitat information; this had resulted in some incorrectly identified 'gaps';
- d. That it is the responsibility of the Contracting Parties to update information directly in the MPA database where there have been changes to existing MPAs, new nominations follow the existing process. The reporting Guidance would be reviewed with the aim of further clarifying this.

4.13 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. **The gap analysis should be circulated with the data call to allow Contracting Parties to make only one data request nationally, and that it should be clear that the information should be updated directly to the database;**
- b. **France and Germany, as database co-administrators, would investigate as soon as possible why there were cases where new nominations from Contracting Parties were missing species information when this information was submitted with the nomination proforma and should have been transferred automatically.**

Agenda Item 5 – MPA database

MPA data reporting

5.1 The Secretariat presented ICG-MPA 24/05/01 on feedback on the process of data reporting received during the 2023-2024 reporting of OSPAR MPAs, including from two online MPA reporting group support sessions; queries raised at the online sessions were included at Annex A to the document.

5.2 In discussion, ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. Contracting Parties had generally found the reporting group sessions very useful, but that it would also be helpful to have a session earlier following the data call so that it was not held so close to the data submission deadline;
- b. There were different approaches used by Contracting Parties to reporting an enlarged MPA; some Contracting Parties kept the same WDPAID and submitted new boundaries in a new nomination proforma, other Contracting Parties submitted a new nomination with a new WDPAID. France, as the database co-administrators, clarified that an existing MPA, including the boundaries, could and should be modified by the respective Contracting Party via the MPA database.
- c. If a new MPA would be placed over multiple existing sites and the protected features and measures would be the same, the process would be to nominate a new MPA and then remove the old sites. However, if the new MPA is designated for different features, this method would not allow capture of specific information regarding protections applying to different areas within the MPA, in which case the sites should be retained, and the calculations of the area coverage would make the necessary subtractions. The Guidance should be clearer on this matter, and on the process for removing MPAs for each type;
- d. New representatives undertaking MPA reporting for the first time had found the process difficult to understand and implement;
- e. If a non-OSPAR MPA was changed to an OSPAR MPA, the current process required the Secretariat to remove the non-OSPAR MPA; in future, it should be possible for Contracting Parties to remove the non-OSPAR MPA;
- f. In future, the OSPAR MPA database would need to have separate datasets for MPAs, OECMs and non-OSPAR MPAs, Guidance and a template for nominating OECMs for recognition as an OSPAR OECM would need to be prepared, and it may be necessary to rename the OSPAR MPA database, for clarity;
- g. In some cases, there would be a difference between how a Contracting Party delineated the landward boundary of the sea and the boundary of the OSPAR maritime area, but it was not always possible to resolve this difference.

5.3 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. **The Secretariat would remove the Netherlands' non-OSPAR MPA once the new nominations were approved by BDC, to reflect the fact that it had been approved as an OSPAR MPA;**
- b. **The Secretariat and the database co-administrators would seek to clarify the reporting Guidance, taking account of §5.2c;**
- c. **During discussions about improving the MPA database, the requirement for separate datasets was identified, and a function for Contracting Parties to be able to remove MPAs, non-OSPAR MPAs and OECMs.**

Development of the OSPAR Database of MPAs

5.4 The convenor reflected on discussions that had taken place during the meeting relating to MPA data management and the OSPAR MPA database on the first day of the meeting, recalling that the meeting had heard issues including: species and habitats from new nominations missing from the database; difficulties in retrieving information to support ecoherence and management assessment, and; difficulties from Contracting Parties with regards to submitting, editing and accessing the data and information in the database.

5.5 The Secretariat noted that its experience with other databases had shown through time data technology and data needs evolve, and there would come a point where amending and updating a database was no longer cost-effective and the database becomes obsolete; this is often seen to happen at around 10 years of age. The Convenor invited reflections from ICG-MPA on whether it preferred to try to fix the existing database or develop a new database.

5.6 In discussion ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. Germany, the UK and Sweden were in favour of developing a new database, noting that there were some key structural issues that would be difficult to solve, stressing the necessity of a functioning database for the work of ICG-MPA and OSPAR as a whole, and highlighting the importance of the database being fit for purpose also for years to come. No Contracting Party objected to the suggestion to develop a new database, only France was in favour of amending the current database to be fit for purpose;
- b. A request for funding for a new database would go to HODs, meeting the following week, and it would not be for the existing database co-administrators to fund the build of a new database;
- c. Sweden would find it helpful to compare the proposed costs to the existing costs, including for maintenance;
- d. The UK noted that the costs for maintenance seemed low; the Secretariat noted that the costs had been estimated based on recent similar OSPAR projects, e.g. the RID database, but also that a better estimation of cost would be determined when testing the market.

5.7 In summary, ICG-MPA **agreed** to proceed with development of a new MPA database.

5.8 Considering this view, the Secretariat presented ICG-MPA 24/05/02 on the future of the OSPAR MPA database and with a draft specification for a new OSPAR database (Annex A of the document). The document summarised the discussions between the MPA database co-administrators and the Secretariat regarding the future of the OSPAR MPA database, and invited ICG-MPA to discuss and refine the draft specification, according to requirements from both a user and technical perspective.

5.9 In discussion, ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. If funding for a new database was forthcoming, ICG-MPA would need to finalise the specification for presentation to BDC 25, after which the tender could be issued for a period of months;
- b. Deletion of user accounts should be considered when finalising the specification for the database;

- c. The additional functionality that had been discussed during the meeting should be included in the specification and may affect costs, although it was noted that it is often cheaper to have the correct functionality from the beginning as adding it retrospectively would likely incur one-off contractor/developer fees;
- d. Figure 1 should not only focus on protected areas as the database would include OECMs; consider using the term protected and conserved areas (PCAs) instead;
- e. That the Nature Restoration Regulations could be added to the use of information outside OSPAR section i.

5.10 In conclusion, ICG-MPA agreed:

- a. **Contracting Parties would provide additional comments and questions on the specification, in Annex A of 24/05/02, to the Secretariat by 31 December;**
- b. **The Secretariat would provide a new iteration of the specification to ICG-MPA by 10 January;**
- c. **ICG-MPA would consider and approve the new iteration of the specification by the BDC three-week document deadline of 31 January, when the specification would be forwarded to BDC for approval;**
- d. **ICG-MPA Extra 25 would consider how to include progress with the database in the Ministerial Meeting MPA package.**

Draft MPA data call 2025

5.11 The Secretariat presented ICG-MPA 24/05/03 on the draft MPA data call for 2025 and the associated files for reporting purposes, noting the feedback from the reporting sessions that were held to provide Contracting Parties with an opportunity to ask questions about the reporting process.

5.12 In discussion, ICG-MPA noted:

- a. An FAQ document based on the questions asked at the 2024 data submission support sessions and the discussions from this meeting, would be useful for Contracting Parties as a supplement to the data reporting Guidance that sat alongside the data call;
- b. An MPA Status Report was due in 2025, and that Germany would provide the statistics and compile the overall report, the UK would produce the management chapter, the Netherlands would provide the ecoherence chapter, and France would provide the information to calculate the Dinter Provinces, as had been the case for previous MPA Status Reports.

5.13 In conclusion, ICG-MPA agreed:

- a. **The Secretariat would update the draft data call to reflect the amendments agreed upon during the meeting;**
- b. **Components of the draft data call on management actions for MPAs and changes / clarifications to the questions in the guidance would be developed separately by the UK and the Secretariat;**

- c. **Another gap analysis of data missing in the database would be prepared by France, to be issued alongside the 2025 data call;**
- d. **The updated data call would be either presented to ICG-MPA Extra on 22 January or by written procedure for agreement to forward to BDC 25;**
- e. **The data call template/Guidance would be updated to capture management status information for the MEPCA indicator, but did not need to be approved by ICG-MPA; the Secretariat would coordinate with the UK to provide the updated Guidance with the 2025 data call;**
- f. **The Secretariat would liaise with France and Germany, as database co-administrators, to schedule two one-hour data reporting support sessions, one soon after issue of the data call and one a few weeks before the close of the data call 1 October 2025;**
- g. **The process for preparation of the 2025 Status Assessment Data as follows; after the MPA data reporting deadline of 1 October, Germany, the UK, the Netherlands and France would prepare their components of the report by 21 October, Germany would compile the report and circulate it to ICG-MPA on 24 October.**

Agenda Item 6 – Round-table discussions and exchange of experiences

6.1 The ICG-MPA convenor invited two round table discussions, one concerning “fisheries management in national OSPAR MPAs” and one concerning “enhanced protection MPAs”.

Round table discussion - fisheries management in national OSPAR MPAs

6.2 Contracting Parties shared information and experiences relating to fisheries management in national OSPAR MPAs. The full detail of the round table is available in **Annex 10**.

Round table discussion – enhanced protection MPAs

6.3 Contracting Parties shared information and experiences relating to enhanced protection for marine protected areas, noting that there would be variation in the obligations and the terminology between Contracting Parties. For example, EU Member States had a target to reach 10% area coverage for what was termed ‘strict protection’, other Contracting Parties may not have targets and/or might use a different terminology. The full detail of the round table is available in **Annex 11**.

Agenda Item 7 – Management of OSPAR MPAs in ABNJ

NACES Management Plan

7.1 BirdLife International presented a zero draft management plan for the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea Basin (NACES) MPA and considerations for further development of the plan including consultation and cooperation with other competent authorities managing activities in the MPA (ICG-MPA 24/07/01 and ICG-MPA 24/07/01 Add.1). It was recalled that the NACES MPA had been established in 2021 under OSPAR Decision 2021/01, alongside a Recommendation (2021/01) for its management. In 2023 OSPAR had expanded the conservation objectives of the NACES MPA to include

the protection of the seafloor and subsoil thereof, adopting amending Decision 2023/01 and amending Recommendation 2023/01.

7.2 The Recommendation on management of the NACES MPA sets out the types of management activities that OSPAR Contracting Parties should individually, and collectively, consider to achieve the conservation objectives of the MPA. However, the activities in the Recommendation on management were quite broad, and reporting on implementation could be improved. A collaborative management plan could provide specific and practical management actions, alongside providing a framework to engage with other competent authorities with a mandate in the area of the NACES MPA.

7.3 The zero-draft NACES MPA management plan presented in ICG-MPA 24/07/01 Add.1 followed the structure of the OSPAR Guidelines for the Management of MPAs in the OSPAR maritime area (Agreement 2003-18) and drew upon existing text where possible (referenced in [blue bracket] in the main body). The table at **Annex 1** of Addendum 1 provides the headings from the Guidelines for the Management of marine protected areas (2003-18) and sets out where the information in the zero-draft NACES management plan has been derived from, to provide an audit trail and to aid review.

7.4 In discussion, ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. Contracting Parties thanked BirdLife for preparing the zero draft and several noted the importance of the work, including from a national perspective;
- b. Several Contracting Parties supported the establishment of a task group to lead further development of the plan, and that it should include a broad range of Contracting Parties; Belgium was interested to be part of a task group;
- c. That the main activities in taking place in the NACES area were fishing and shipping, there were no active licenses for minerals extractions and the current ISA REMP doesn't extend as far as NACES. However, there are some cobalt crusts inside the NACES MPA so there is some potential for mineral exploration/extraction to be a threat for the site in the future;
- d. It would be vital to engage competent authorities managing activities taking place in the area in development of the management plan, particularly ICCAT and the IMO, noting that OSPAR does not have management competence relating to most activities taking place in the MPA;
- e. An appropriate first step in engaging the relevant competent authorities would be via the Collective Arrangement meeting to be held in January 2025 to raise awareness of OSPAR's intention to develop and adopt a management plan and invite their input on open questions such as what a management plan for a High Seas (ie., ABNJ) MPA should include, what data they can provide to inform the conservation objectives, and invite them to participate in the task group that would oversee development of the management plan
- f. There are established best practice mitigation measures for seabird bycatch from drifting long-lines (fishing at night, weighting the line, bird-scaring lines/tori lines);
- g. The 50km buffer to the NACES MPA was chosen as part of the annual activity monitoring report because it seemed reasonable for a large MPA, but alternatives could be considered;

- h. The annual activity monitoring report would provide a comparison to a baseline period prior to designation to inform collaborative discussions on any changes in activity or intensity, but as there are currently no specific management measures at the Site, the impact of MPA management in the NACES MPA can currently not be reported on;
- i. Portugal noted the synergies with the work planning under its national MPA management project; while it could not offer to be in the task group it would explore the possibility of collaborating;
- j. The NEAFC Executive Secretary had been in touch with the OSPAR Secretariat to express support for the development of the management plan and some specific thoughts, and that further feedback could be sought at the January Collective Arrangement meeting;
- k. The development of the management plan could also be brought into a possible event on high seas MPAs in the margins of UNOC 25 or other relevant international events or fora (§2.13).

7.5 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. **Contracting Parties would provide comments on the SharePoint version of the draft NACES management plan by 31 December;**
- b. To establish a task group to progress development of the draft NACES management plan;
- c. **Contracting Parties are invited to consider whether they could participate in the NACES management plan task group;**
- d. **The Secretariat would organise for the idea of developing a NACES management plan to be presented to the January meeting of the Collective Arrangement by the either Birdlife, the Secretariat or the Convenor of ICG-MPA, with an associated briefing document.**

Implementation of OSPAR Recommendations on management of MPAs in ABNJ

7.6 Contracting Parties were invited to share information on the implementation of the OSPAR Recommendations on management of MPAs in ABNJ. In discussion, ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. The voluntary reporting component 2b had been created to gain some more detailed information on management of MPAs in ABNJ. However, as this has now become a matter of repeated update, the question arose of whether to use the current spreadsheet to report if there was no updated management information;
- b. One of the possible management actions was to put OSPAR ABNJ MPAs on navigational sea charts; the organisation responsible for creating these sea charts was variable by Contracting Party; for example, in Sweden it was undertaken by a commercial company and in the Netherlands it was undertaken by the UK Ministry of Defence.

7.7 In conclusion, ICG-MPA **agreed**:

- a. **Contracting Parties should stick to reporting component 2b on the spreadsheet but that the guidance relating to the six questions in component 2b should be improved including considering how to capture if there is no new information;**

- b. **the Secretariat would investigate how changes to international maps are made and report back to ICG-MPA 25.**

Agenda Item 8 - Further development of the OSPAR MPA network

- 8.1 Contracting Parties were invited to provide information relating to any foreseen MPA nominations within national jurisdiction to the OSPAR MPA network. ICG-MPA **noted**:
- a. Portugal had existing national MPAs within the proposed enlargement area, which might in future be nominated to the OSPAR network
 - b. The Netherlands expected to have one additional MPA for 2025, an area south of the Dogger Bank that was going through the national nomination process and would also be put forward under a Joint Recommendation to the EU;
 - c. Denmark expected to nominate some strictly protected areas which will comprise both new MPAs and part of existing MPAs;
 - d. Sweden did not envisage nomination of new MPAs to the OSPAR network next year;
 - e. Ireland hoped to have four new MPAs to nominate next year; including new candidate SACs for reef covering a relatively large area that was going through the national nomination process and two large SPAs in the foraging range of birds that had been announced by their Minister and were in the appeals process;
 - f. Belgium had one national MPA that was not already nominated to the OSPAR network, that needed national confirmation before it could be nominated to the OSPAR network;
 - g. The UK noted no new sites for Northern Ireland, Welsh MPA designation process had been delayed such that sites would not be designated. The Isle of Man, also covered by UK, was working on a marine spatial plan. Scotland was proposing an amendment to boundary for the West of Scotland MPA to follow the continental shelf limit, which would remove the overlap with the Continental Shelf of Denmark. The amendment was being consulted on this year and expected to be implemented in 2025 and may come into the OSPAR network in 2025. This amendment would reduce the size of MPA by 2037 km²; scientific advice was that the reduction would not adversely affect the ecological integrity of the site due to the relatively small percentage reduction in size and the relative sparseness of the feature records in the area. This change would improve cooperation with the Kingdom of Denmark on fisheries management measures and enforcement;
 - h. France noted one new MPA anticipated in the Eastern Channel, and noted that it wishes to report all national MPAs that are not yet nominated to the OSPAR network and that fulfil the OSPAR criteria. France shared a map of sites and noted that the work to bring them into the OSPAR network would take time but they aimed to do it as quickly as resources would allow;

- i. Norway noted that it was developing a national plan with a list of MPAs, and hoped to have a MPA in the north of its national waters ready in early 2025 and ready to submit to OSPAR in 2026;
- j. Germany had no plans to designate new MPAs as it has already reached 30% coverage.

Reporting of any foreseen MPA proposals/activities beyond national jurisdiction to the OSPAR MPA network.

8.2 Portugal noted the Great Meteor MPA on its extended continental shelf, for which Portugal had competence to designate protection for the seafloor but aimed to propose that this area would be designated for protection of the water column by OSPAR. The timeline for progression of this proposal was unknown.

Agenda Item 9 - Progress from other Regional Seas, international organisations and initiatives

Marine issues at CBD COP 16

9.1 The sixteenth Conference of Parties to the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD COP 16) was held from 21 October to 1 November 2024 in Cali, Colombia. During these two weeks of negotiations, there were two marine Decisions on the agenda; one on Ecologically or Biologically Significant marine Areas (EBSAs) and the other on conservation and sustainable use of marine and coastal biodiversity and island biodiversity.

9.2 In discussion, ICG-MPA **noted**:

- a. EBSAs do not seek to regulate or manage an area, but identify areas with important ecological and biological features, e.g. biodiversity hot spots, which can in turn be used as a scientific foundation for the designation of MPAs. For several years CBD has been negotiating on the modalities for describing new EBSAs and modifying existing EBSAs.
- b. The CBD Decision on conservation and sustainable use of marine, coastal and island biodiversity identified issues that have not been sufficiently addressed for the implementations of the Kunming Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework targets, and annexed a list of these issues (for example, light pollution). A workshop was also agreed to consider how CBD could interact with other relevant organisations, with a focus on ABNJ.
- c. There were significant contributions of Germany, Belgium and Sweden in the preparations for the CBD COP16 (e.g. via SBSTTA-26) and in the negotiations at COP16.

The Collective Arrangement

9.3 The seventh Collective Arrangement meeting took place on 21-22 February 2024 at the NEAFC Secretariat. The meeting was organised by OSPAR and NEAFC Secretariats and attended by several OSPAR Contracting Parties, as well as representatives from the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic, North East Atlantic, Irish and North Seas (ASCOBANS), Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP), the European Environment Agency (EEA), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), HELCOM, the International Council for Exploration of the Sea (ICES),

the International Seabed Authority (ISA), the North Atlantic Salmon Conservation Organisation (NASCO) and the International Whaling Commission (IWC).

9.4 Following a further round of revisions after the OSPAR Commission meeting in June, the Collective Arrangement would soon adopt a OSPAR/NEAFC joint narrative on OECMs. The narrative intended to describe to an external audience how NEAFC's proposed OECMs and OSPAR's ABMTs interacted and complemented each other and was intended to be submitted in support of NEAFC's proposal to recognise its fisheries measures as OECMs.

9.5 The eighth meeting of the Collective Arrangement will be held on 27-28 January 2025, kindly hosted by the government of Belgium in Brussels. One of the topics for the 2025 meeting would be possible mechanisms to engage global authorities in the Collective Arrangement.

HELCOM Protect Baltic Project

9.6 Jannica Haldin (HELCOM) presented an overview of the PROTECT BALTIC project (**P02**), noting that the project would run from mid-2023 to mid-2028, included 19 partners and was coordinated by the HELCOM Secretariat with a budget of 8.5m euros.

9.7 In assessing the Baltic MPA network, the project would define ecosystem components to determine whether there were components that should be added to the Habitats Directive annexes, from broad scale habitats down to biotope components. The project would also compile a full species list from the Baltic (approx. 3000 species; macro species only). Data availability would then guide what species are used for assessment – only running the assessment where there is enough data to be sure that the assessment would be ecologically relevant. Modelling would be used for abiotic components to support the biotic units. Experts would validate assessments to extract artefacts, e.g. where biotic and abiotic components cannot co-occur. A data call would be finalised in December and only then would the project know how many of the Baltic species could be assessed.

9.8 The project had made great effort to collaborate with stakeholders through their active engagement on pre-defined sections of the work, but also all work is open to observers and stakeholder engagement was welcomed in all work strands. In addition, the project had a key stakeholder group of authorities, ministries and agencies as they would be taking over the work at the end of the project. WG Biodiv was the project advisory board. 200 stakeholders involved in initial workshop from sectors including energy, fisheries, tourism, shipping, education, and all had the opportunity to sign up to be informed of particular workstreams or the whole project.

9.9 One project output would be a map of the gaps in the HELCOM MPA network; Contracting Parties to HELCOM had requested a high degree of detail in the map, but that would be determined by data availability and ecological considerations. The project's planned MPA tool would be able to consider socio economics, based on the Zonation tool used in Finland, and would be able to prioritise based on avoiding conflict.

9.10 The project would separate direct and indirect pressures on MPAs, and would then look at how each could be addressed. It would build a matrix of measures harvested from the management plans; these management plans contained a variable level of detail on the link between measures to pressures, and whether the measures that would affect pressures are implemented.

9.11 The project would also identify the links to measures under non-marine jurisdictions; the project had evaluated where there are links to other legislation and would attempt to follow up the leads, but there were potentially a large number of management plans that needed to be followed up on.

9.12 Definition of MPA for the project was unexpectedly difficult, but the project was working with a practical definition that it has a marine component; if the marine component is small and the land component is large, the part more than 20km from the land sea border is not considered/counted towards coverage.

9.13 ICG-MPA thanked Jannica for the presentation, and looked forward to staying in touch with the PROTECT BALTIC project.

Portugal's MPA management project

9.14 Margarida Nunes (Portugal) presented a 3-year project for Portuguese Oceanic Marine Protected Areas (**P03**), which would look at how to manage oceanic MPAs outside the territorial sea, where international organisations interfere. The project aimed to support Portugal in meeting the 30 by 30 target and would run from mid-2024 to mid-2026. The project would:

- a. include a strong component of dissemination and promotion of oceanic marine protected areas, including through virtual reality
- b. seek to collaborate with international organisations to generate a generic governance model for oceanic MPAs and
- c. seek to prepare oceanographic campaigns and prospective studies of new MPAs to help Portugal reach 30% by 2030.

9.15 For those MPAs that are located in Portugal's extended continental shelf, Portugal only has jurisdiction over the seabed, and this project would help preparing the way for submission of those sites under the BBNJ.

9.16 ICG-MPA thanked Margarida for the presentation and suggested that the protection of seafloor for the NACES MPA could be included in the map of MPA locations in **P03**.

Agenda Item 10 – Any other business

10.1 Ireland drew attention to a forthcoming meeting in Bodø, Norway, in July 2025 as part of the MPA Europe project, which may be of interest to ICG-MPA delegates, regarding MPAs and Marine Spatial Planning. Details may be found at: www.mpa-europe.eu

10.2 The Secretariat drew attention to a seminar on marine sedimentary habitats for European Atlantic Biogeographic region in Lille, France on 12 and 13 March 2025. More information could be found at the seminar [website](#).

Agenda Item 11 – Agreement on the report of the meeting, date and venue for next meeting(s)

11.1 ICG-MPA agreed that the summary record would be circulated by Friday 22 November and there would be a week for comments in a written procedure until 29 November and then a one-week silent procedure until Friday 6 December.

11.2 An ICG-MPA Extra would be held online on 22 January 2025. The date for the next full, in-person ICG-MPA would be, tentatively, the week commencing 10 November 2025.

11.3 The Convenor and the Secretariat would update the ICG-MPA Terms of Reference, incorporating agreements from the meeting, and would provide the mandate for the work of ICG-MPA over the coming year. The draft Terms of Reference for 2025-2026 would be provided for ICG-MPA's comment and agreement by a written procedure, incorporating any relevant outcomes of the ICG-MPA Extra meeting on 22 January 2025, and then forwarded for the consideration of BDC25.

11.4 On closing the meeting, the Convenor thanked Ireland for their excellent arrangements and hospitality in Galway and to all participants for their active engagement.