

OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic

Meeting of the Intersessional Correspondence Group on the implementation follow up of measures for the protection and conservation of species and habitats (ICG-POSH)

Trondheim (Norway) and by webex: 14 – 16 November 2023

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Report of the meeting

Agenda Item 1 – Opening of the meeting

1.1. The 2023 meeting of the Intersessional Correspondence Group on the implementation and follow up of measures for the protection and conservation of species and habitats (ICG-POSH) was held from 14 - 16 November 2023 as a hybrid meeting on the kind invitation of the Norwegian government, in Trondheim, Norway. The Co-Convenors thanked Norway for hosting the meeting and Elisabet Rosendal as host welcomed the participants to Trondheim.

1.2. The meeting was chaired by Michael McLeod (UK) and Marianne Olsen (NO). It was attended by representatives from the following Contracting Parties: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

1.3. The Co-Convenors welcomed participants to the meeting. The draft agenda (23/01/01rev.01) and meeting timetable (23/01/01 add.1) were presented and agreed. A list of participants was sent to attendees to facilitate following the discussion. It was noted that statements in the Teams chat would not be included in the summary record. A copy of the final agenda and a list of documents submitted to the meeting is provided in Annex 1, a list of participants as Annex 2 and a list of the actions arising from the meeting can be found as Annex 3.

1.4. Co-Convenor introduced the Co-Convenor letter (23/00/00) to highlight the most important issues to be discussed at ICG-POSH 2023; Michael McLeod (UK) would step down from OSPAR work after this meeting cycle and Co-Convenor Marianne Olsen thanked him for his efforts in the past 7 years.

1.5. The Co-Convenors welcomed Debbie Hembury as the new OSPAR Deputy Secretary for BDC.

Update from OSPAR meetings

1.6. The Secretariat provided an update on the latest developments in OSPAR in the last meeting cycle. Document 23/01/02 summarised key points of interest to ICG-POSH from EIHA 2023, BDC 2023, OSPAR Commission meeting 2023, and the first meeting of WG COCOA 2023. Amongst other things, EIHA and BDC reflected on ICG-POSH NEAES tasks, as well as on the collective actions roadmap, where the updated version was agreed, describing how collective actions could be reported by other means, such as JAMP, status assessments or NEAES. Nonetheless, the updated roadmap would be an important guide for reporting on the implementation of POSH Recommendations during the next reporting round in 2025.

1.7. CoG (1) amongst other things agreed on leads on the task *Reduction of marine bird bycatch (S7.O6.T2)* and the ToR of an Ad Hoc Working Group on amendments to the OSPAR Convention (WG-AOC), which would adopt provisions relating to Offshore renewables but would also consider other topics such as cables, deep sea mining, or geo engineering.

1.8. WG COCOA (Working group on Changing Ocean Climate and Ocean Acidification) had their first meeting in September 2023. The meeting included a review of the many links between its terms of reference and the work of ICG-POSH, e.g. regarding the work on resilience. Jos Schilder (NL) would provide the link between ICG-POSH and WG COCOA.

Agenda Item 2 – Status assessments of OSPAR listed features

Progress on the status assessment

- 2.1. The Secretariat presented document 23/02/01, summarising progress with the status assessments, including two new assessments tabled for consideration at this meeting, further status assessments planned to be presented to POSH 2024, and the status assessments that remain to be completed in this assessment cycle. The document invited ICG-POSH to consider whether any Contracting Party could volunteer for any status assessment that doesn't yet have a lead and remains to be completed in this status assessment cycle.
- 2.2. ICG-POSH agreed to consider the draft status assessment for ocean quahog, which had been submitted after the five-week deadline.
- 2.3. ICG-POSH 2023 noted two draft status assessments: *Cymodocea meadows* submitted by Spain and *Ocean Quahog* submitted by the Netherlands. Both draft status assessments had been uploaded to ICG-POSH SharePoint, in a folder set up for the purposes of sharing and commenting on draft status assessments.

Modiolus modiolus as presented by United Kingdom – verbal update

- 2.4. The UK confirmed that the status assessment would be produced for ICG-POSH 2024.

Cymodocea meadows presented by Spain

2.5. Spain, as lead for *Cymodocea meadows*, presented the draft status assessment (23/02/02), which has been produced by a researcher contracted by the Spanish Government and developed in collaboration with Portugal. *Cymodocea meadows* was added to the OSPAR List in 2008 and occurs in OSPAR region IV. Spain noted that no questions or comments on the draft had been received in advance of the meeting.

2.6. In discussion, ICG-POSH noted:

- a. The draft status assessment shows that the overall status of *Cymodocea meadows* is poor because of a decrease in extent and distribution of *Cymodocea meadows* and an uncertain condition status, but that there has been some improvement in knowledge;
- b. That *Cymodocea meadows* are subject to emerging pressures including climate change and algal competition and that the distribution and low genetic diversity of the species appears to have exacerbated the poor condition of *Cymodocea meadows* along the coast of Portugal;
- c. The status assessment suggests some specific actions that could be taken, although the potential effectiveness of measures at avoiding or mitigating impact is not clear.

2.7. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. That there were no further comments or questions on the draft assessment;
- b. That the draft *Cymodocea meadows* status assessments should be submitted to BDC 2024 for agreement to publish.

Bluefin tuna, cod and orange roughy as presented by Ireland – verbal update;

2.8. The Secretariat noted that ICES has been commissioned for advice for these three species, and Ireland confirmed that they will be prepared for submission to ICG-POSH 2024.

Long-snouted seahorse and Short-snouted seahorse as presented by France – verbal update;

2.9. France confirmed that they have funding and experts in place to complete the status assessments for these two species, and that they will be prepared for submission to ICG-POSH 2024.

Ocean quahog as presented by the Netherlands;

- 2.10. The Netherlands, as the task lead for ocean quahog, presented the draft assessment (23/02/03), noting that it is presented as an early draft.
- 2.11. Additional information provided over the summer by Norway, Ireland and the UK had been incorporated in the draft status assessment available on SharePoint. Belgium had noted that they have no ocean quahog. Additional information had been sourced from a PhD conducted in the Netherlands.
- 2.12. The draft assessment shows that the distribution of ocean quahog has reduced and that the status in the OSPAR area is still critical. The Netherlands noted that it is planning to put in place an MPA under the MSFD that focuses on conservation of ocean quahog.
- 2.13. Based on data received to date, the distribution of ocean quahog is found to be smaller, and the extent and condition is found to be the same, compared to the background documents. The pressures are showing some signs of reducing, but climate change represents a new pressure.
- 2.14. In discussion the following points were noted:
- a. Ocean quahog is uniquely long-lived, which is not addressed in the draft status assessment;
 - b. That inclusion of information on reproduction and recruitment would be valuable;
 - c. The threat / possible impacts of climate change could be better reflected in the assessment;
 - d. Sweden has provided a response and data, and noted publication of a national Red List assessment in 2020 where the species was assessed as LC (not threatened). Another Red List assessment is planned for 2025;
 - e. France is checking its historical data and hopes to resolve the issues by the end of the year;
 - f. Germany has provided comments on the SharePoint draft and information on the species;
 - g. The Netherlands confirmed that the UK's condition report for the feature in MPAs will be included in the assessment;
 - h. Denmark is investigating if it has data to share, and will respond to the Netherlands.
 - i. Norway has provided data, and noted some data on ocean quahog reproduction in Svalbard.
- 2.15. The Netherlands welcomed any further data on the ocean quahog, including national status assessments or GIS data sets, and ICG-POSH agreed that the Netherlands would present a further developed draft to ICG-POSH 2024.
- 2.16. In summary, the Co-Convenors thanked the Netherlands for the draft status assessment, thanked Contracting Parties for their data contributions, encouraged Contracting Parties to submit any additional data they have available on ocean quahog, and looked forward to seeing the updated status assessment at ICG-POSH in 2024.

Roseate tern and Macronesian shearwater as presented by Portugal – verbal update;

- 2.17. Portugal confirmed that the draft status assessments for these two bird species will be presented to ICG-POSH 2024.

Remaining status assessments without identified leads;

- 2.18. ICG-POSH discussed the status assessments that do not currently have leads. In discussion, leads were identified for the following features:
- a. Ireland offered to lead the harbour porpoise status assessment, noting the need to collaborate with OMMEG, and proposed to deliver the draft assessment to ICG-POSH 2025. The assessment would cover all five OSPAR regions. Spain offered to support the assessment.
 - b. Norway offered to lead on the status assessment for ivory gull and Stellar's Eider and proposed to bring the draft status assessment to ICG-POSH 2024.

2.19. France reported that administrative constraints mean that it has not yet been possible to commission the work to produce the *Sabellaria* reef assessments. The Netherlands and France agreed to work together to produce the draft assessment, aiming to bring it to ICG-POSH 2024. The UK is still exploring whether it has the capacity to support the task and will inform France and the Netherlands of the outcome.

2.20. The Azorean barnacle, Azorean limpet, littoral chalk community and dogwhelk status assessments remain without leads. The Co-Convenor noted that the Azorean barnacle and Azorean limpet only occur in the waters of one Contracting Party, and littoral chalk communities in the waters of two Contracting Parties, making it difficult for another Contracting Party to lead those assessments.

2.21. The Co-Convenors invited views on other methods by which to complete the assessments, including pooling money to fund external contractors. In discussion the following views were made:

- a. Sweden recalled previous discussions on considerations for delisting the dogwhelk, which if progressed would make it a pilot case for the delisting process;
- b. Denmark noted that it lacks funding to take the lead on status assessments but will seek experts who could support the remaining assessments remaining to be assessed this cycle;
- c. Germany suggested that the status assessments without leads might be taken up by the OSPAR Science Agenda;
- d. Ireland suggested that the status assessments without leads might be completed under an ICES science advice request. The Co-Convenors noted this as a potential route if the ICES science advice isn't oversubscribed, but that we may be able to generate funding within ICG-POSH;
- e. France suggested a survey on the perceived barriers to leading status assessments, which could guide the approach to requesting leads for the status assessments, however the Secretariat suggested that this might not be necessary as there were specific reasons that the remaining status assessments had not been taken up.

2.22. The Convenors thanked the Contracting Parties who had offered to take forward status assessments and thanked all participants for the helpful discussion.

2.23. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. That Ireland will lead the status assessment for harbour porpoise, with support from Spain and in consultation with OMMEG, presenting a draft status assessment to ICG-POSH 2025;
- b. That Norway will lead the status assessment for Stellar's eider and ivory gull, presenting a draft status assessment to ICG-POSH in 2024;
- c. That ICG-POSH will recommend to BDC that the remaining status assessments without leads should be moved into the next status assessment cycle.

Lessons learned from the Status Assessment process

2.24. The Co-Convenor of ICG-POSH, Marianne Olsen, presented document 23/02/04 concerning the lessons learnt exercise on the status assessments and overview assessment process (23/02/04 Annex A). It was noted that some of the lessons learnt discussed at BDC 23, including expanding the red/green option to cover additional parameters, are already included in the current version of the guidance ([Agreement 2019-05](#)).

2.25. BDC23 agreed that ICG-POSH would continue the lessons learnt in this meeting cycle and will report back to BDC 24 on:

- a. How and when the discrepancies will be addressed (agenda item 6.3);

- b. How to address key issues identified during the status assessment (agenda item 2.5);
- c. Whether the OSPAR List or Recommendations require modification (agenda items 6.4, 6.5);
- d. The frequency and timing for future assessments (agenda item 2.4).

2.26. The results were presented of a questionnaire to the status assessment expert leads (23/02/04 Annex B), which was intended to better understand how the process and Guidance could be improved and noted that the updated guidance already includes wording on a webinar to support status assessments.

2.27. Responses from expert leads to the questionnaire reported less connectivity than expected between habitats and species. Approximately half of expert leads experienced some issues, of which data gathering was the dominant issue, as well as issues identifying experts, technical definitions, and the template.

2.28. Responses suggested improvements for the next cycle including: addressing data access issues; clearer guidance on whether the assessment should report past or future trends; clarification of habitat definition issues; harmonisation of methods and metrics to reduce incompatibility of data between Contracting Parties.

2.29. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. Some of the lessons learnt presented in Annex A would need a revision to better reflect the main conclusions and knowledge gaps shown in the status assessments, and Annex B Figure 1c x-axis should read only 1 or 2. Contracting Parties were invited to email amendments to Marianne Olsen;
- b. Support for the questionnaire feedback that assistance from the Secretariat with status assessments was helpful, and suggestion of a single point of technical assistance going forward;
- c. Suggestion of a recorded webinar guide to producing status assessments, which could be supplemented with online meetings with the status assessment leads to tackle some question and answer 'surgeries';
- d. That many of the difficulties reported relate to data issues, which will not be solved by a webinar;
- e. That a clearer steer on data used for status assessments would be helpful, for example, can status assessments include data from international databases, or only from Contracting Parties?
- f. It might not be possible to be prescriptive with respect to data included as information availability varies significantly between Listed species and habitats;
- g. Germany shared a PowerPoint that it has previously used to brief people making status assessments for the first time, which could be used as a starting point for a webinar;
- h. Work has been done on webinar guidance for reporting contaminants in HASEC, and the Secretariat could seek input on the experience of producing those;
- i. The Secretariat noted that, if Contracting Parties wish, it could investigate setting up a 'POSH funding pot' to fund production of a webinar, and potentially other POSH related work, where volunteers from Contracting Parties are not forthcoming;
- j. The secretariat noted that ICG-POSH needs to consider whether the guidelines need to be amended to be fit for purpose for the next cycle.

2.30. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. That the Secretariat would investigate the mechanism and cost of a pre-recorded webinar and/or Q&A sessions to assist leads in the process of producing a status assessment;

- b. That the Secretariat will have internal discussions about the HASEC webinar, seeking ideas on how to make it an interesting and engaging OSPAR product;
- c. To present the idea of a status assessment guidance webinar to BDC24 if funding is required;
- d. That Contracting Parties would consider whether they could contribute to a “POSH pot” to pay for the webinar and/or other pieces of work that might need to be done;
- e. That the Co-Convenor will present a document summarising lessons learnt to ICG-POSH extra on 5 February 2024, with the intention to finalise the document for presentation to BDC in 2024.

Assessment timing and frequency of future assessments

2.31. The Secretariat presented document 23/02/07, which sets out the status assessments completed in the second status assessment cycle, notes that two status assessments will be presented at this meeting and that nine status assessments are planned to be presented to ICG-POSH 2024, and notes that 8 status assessments do not have identified leads and so are not planned to be conducted before the end of the status assessment cycle in meeting year 2024/25.

2.32. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. That grouping some of the features could reduce the numbers of future assessments;
- b. For some of the features different frequencies were suggested, e.g. for European eel a higher frequency was proposed;
- c. For some of the features, knowledge gaps, e.g. on definitions, needed to be closed before the next assessment. It was proposed to include a revision period in the timeline to work on the conclusions, take time for lessons learned and consider the appropriate measures, and by this ensure a sustainable assessment cycle;
- d. ICG-POSH should consider whether the Recommendations needed to be updated;
- e. It was noted by the Co-Convenors that the next intermediate assessment and QSR (2028) could be considered in timing and frequency of the assessment cycle;
- f. There was general support regarding the proposed frequency and timeline for status assessments for the next assessment cycle, but some exceptions from the rule might be needed, if there was urgency for an earlier assessment, e.g. emerging pressures or other proxies;
- g. A source for proxies could be the prioritisation of increasing pressures, which will be submitted to EIHA 2024
- h. The Secretariat pointed out that NEAES task S5.O4.TX (currently in the holding pen) could look at features not covered by an action plan, ICG-POSH could use this task for prioritisation;
- i. France offered to take the lead on the Status Assessment ‘Kelp forest’, to be delivered by 2026/2027;
- j. Denmark and Sweden considered leading on the Status Assessment ‘Haploops’;
- k. Sweden suggested to align with the timeline in the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan regarding Haploops, i.e. assess status by 2024, develop a joint conservation plan by 2026 to be implemented by 2028;
- l. UK mentioned that regarding the proposed timing for the next Status Assessment ‘Black-legged kittiwake’ that the delivery by 2026/2027 would allow it to be included in the indicator

assessment 2028, and suggested to consider this for other Contracting Parties leading on Status Assessment for bird species;

- m. The question on future plans of Iberian guillemot was raised, when it was found to be extinct;

2.33. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. To a default of the proposed 6-year cycle, but that there could be exceptions for shorter or expanded frequencies;
- b. that Contracting Parties would provide information and ideas on features, which might be exceptions of the 6-year frequency;
- c. For the Secretariat to update guidance for assessment cycle 3, to be discussed at ICG-POSH extra on 5 February 2024;
- d. For France to lead on the Status Assessment 'Kelp forest' to be delivered by 2026/2027 and for other Contracting Parties to confirm if they can support by 2025;
- e. For Sweden and Denmark to consider the lead on the Status Assessment 'Haploops', seeking to align with HELCOM timeline;
- f. For Contracting Parties to consider taking the lead on the remaining features, which do not yet have a lead, and with BDC's agreement will be completed in the next assessment cycle (§2.23 c).

Findings of the completed status assessments

2.34. The Secretariat invited a discussion on the measures and initiatives that have previously been taken, or could be taken in future, to act upon the results of the status assessments with the aim of improving the status of OSPAR listed features.

2.35. In discussion, the following points were noted:

- a. That the benthic and bird action plans fulfil the need to develop actions on those habitats or species groups, but there are other habitats or species that are not covered;
- b. Ireland has been leading work to review the status assessments of large whale species group and consider what actions might be required to improve the status of large whales.
- c. Clear presentation of factors affecting a species/habitat status and potential measures is useful. ICG-POSH discussed producing communication products for use in international fora, within national administrations or to influence research calls, noting ICG-Noise work. This could help connect science and measures and communicate actions that could be taken.

2.36. In conclusion, the Co-Convenor noted that there is a task in the holding pen to take forward work to identify actions that could be taken to improve the status of OSPAR Listed Features, which would be discussed under a later agenda item.

OSPAR science needs agenda and knowledge gaps from the status assessments

2.37. Norway, as co-lead with the Netherlands of the OSA 'special task force', presented an update on progress with the OSPAR Science Agenda (OSA). OSPAR had agreed that the OSA would be updated following publication of the QSR 2023, and a consultant has recently been appointed to undertake this work, aiming to publish the updated OSA in spring/summer 2024.

2.38. The Secretariat presented an update on progress with analysing the knowledge gaps identified in the Status Assessments. Document 23/02/06 Add01 sets out knowledge gaps from status assessment and sought

views from Contracting Parties on where the knowledge gaps would best be taken up, for example in the OSA, JAMP, in an Action Plan, or in another way such as a workshop.

2.39. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. there are many benthic habitats knowledge gaps, especially deep-sea sponge aggregations;
- b. it would be useful to specifically define what additional data or information is needed;
- c. the benthic RAP only considers the shelf sea;
- d. the intention is to include the status assessment knowledge gaps in the update of the OSA, which should be published in spring/summer 2024;
- e. it was advantageous that status assessments had a separate section on knowledge gaps, which made it easy to identify the issues that need to be incorporated in the OSA.

2.40. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed to the following next steps to complete the table, including where and how the knowledge might be best taken forward:

- a. The RAP-Bird Task and Finish Group will update the bird section;
- b. The benthic RAP Task Support Group will update the benthic habitat section;
- c. Invite OMMEG to update the mammals knowledge gaps, taking into account the report on large whales;
- d. STEG will update the reptiles section;
- e. The Secretariat will investigate how to address the fish section.

OSPAR T&D habitats list and EUNIS habitats

2.41. France presented document 23/02/05 summarising work on the correlation between EUNIS updated marine habitat classifications (2022) and OSPAR list of habitats (as requested by BDC23) and work to review the discrepancies and gaps in EUNIS habitat definitions, particularly in the Atlantic and Arctic regions.

2.42. The correlation tables developed by France and the UK were available in document 23/02/05 Add.01, and ICG-POSH was invited to review and agree the table for publication.

2.43. The lessons learnt process on the OSPAR status assessments highlighted the need to update the 2022 EUNIS habitat classification to ensure that they are complete and correct for the OSPAR area, particularly the Arctic region, and particularly at the lower levels of the classifications.

2.44. The Secretariat was asked to support approaches to HELCOM and UNEP-MAP on experiences of updating the EUNIS habitat classifications and the EEA on the process for updating the Arctic classifications.

2.45. In parallel, Contracting Parties were invited to assess the gaps in EUNIS habitat classifications, and bring information on gaps along with proposals to resolve the issues to a workshop ahead of BDC.

2.46. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. The correlation tables are important to ensure that the T&D habitats can be identified within the broad-scale habitats and helpful for the Baltic, wider Atlantic and Arctic regions;
- b. The correlation tables could be helpful for implementation of the forthcoming EU Nature Restoration Regulation, although the tables might require further review if/when the Law is approved;
- c. Sweden will contribute to the work on correlation tables from January;

- d. The task for other Contracting Parties is quite straightforward - a checking exercise;
- e. That the product would be most useful as a table, but not an OSPAR publication;
- f. That the checking of gaps and discrepancies in EUNIS 2022 could not be reasonably achieved before BDC 2024 and that should be taken forward via correspondence and if needed a workshop before summer 2024.

2.47. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. Contracting Parties will check the correlation tables and provide feedback to France and the UK by the end of January;
- b. France will circulate another draft of the correlation tables between OSPAR units and the Groups of Habitats types as defined in the Annex II of the forthcoming EU Nature Restoration Regulation to Contracting Parties in mid-January, if and when the Regulation is approved, with an anticipated deadline of mid-February;
- c. The Secretariat will consult with the Secretariat data team to identify a suitable place for publication of the correlation tables;
- d. France and the UK will develop the task template for presentation to BDC 24 (document deadline 23 February);
- e. The Secretariat will work with France and the UK to contact other RSCs for information on experiences of updating EUNIS habitat classifications, and the EEA on the process for updates.

France and the UK will request information from Contracting Parties on the issue of discrepancies and gaps in the EUNIS 2022 habitat classifications and, if there are a large number of discrepancies and gaps, France will organise a workshop to discuss and further progress the issue before summer 2024;

Habitats data call

2.48. The United Kingdom gave a verbal update on the habitat data call and ICG-POSH was invited to provide additional feedback and discuss how to deal with it as well as with the feedback that was already provided at BDC 2023;

2.49. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. The database has now been published on EMODNET, Secretariat to check whether it is published in ODIMS.
- b. The UK invited information from Contracting Parties on issues with updating the database, noting that the BDC SR included an issue raised by Germany.

2.50. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed to:

- a. Provide any further information on issues with updating the habitats database to the UK and the Secretariat, including clarification of the issue raised by Germany at BDC 23.
- b. Secretariat will follow up on whether habitats database is published in ODIMS.

Agenda Item 3 – Development of NEAES biodiversity action plans

3.1. ICG-POSH noted that two Biodiversity action plans were currently being developed. The OSPAR regional action plan for marine birds, planned to be adopted by OSPAR 2024, and the benthic shelf habitats action plan, planned to be adopted by OSPAR 2025.

NEAES task S5.O4.T1 Develop regional action plan marine birds

3.2. The progress on developing a Regional Action Plan for Marine Birds (RAP-Birds) was presented by UK on behalf of the Task and Finish Group (Presentation 23/P001, 23/03/02, 23/03/02 add01 – add04). Since ICG-POSH 2022 there had been engagement with JWGBIRD, Stakeholders and Contracting Parties, as well as ICG-MPA. The outcome of engagement would be used to develop the concept actions into draft NEAES tasks. The priorities suggested by Contracting Parties were well aligned with the views of the stakeholders.

3.3. ICG-POSH was invited to consider whether the skeleton for the RAP (03/02 add2) was a suitable structure for preparing a draft action plan to submit to BDC 2024.

3.4. The draft concept actions were presented and small drafting groups (hybrid or in person) of two or three participants worked on the drafting of the actions.

3.5. No Contracting Party offered to lead on one of the actions.

3.6. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. the ten suggested concept actions covered the most important issues;
- b. concept action 2 on marine bird by catch had already been drafted and agreed as a NEAES task (S7.O6.T2) at BDC 23;
- c. The Co-Chair of WG COCOA (Jos Schilder, NL) noted that the topic of climate change was underrepresented in the concept actions and would welcome if the RAP-Bird TFG could engage with WG COCOA on the draft task template on climate change early to identify how WG COCOA could contribute to drafting and in supporting the task;
- d. Regarding resilience and adaptation expertise could be delivered by WG COCOA, e.g. in terms of future projections. ICG-MPA suggested to include work on the sufficiency of the current MPA network regarding resilience;
- e. It was clarified that not every action / task template would require a background document as prepared for task S7.O6.T2 (see next agenda item);
- f. the following views were noted on the first drafts of the task templates prepared during the drafting groups:
 - i. Action 1: Ecosystem Based Management (EBM) was regarded of medium high importance by Contracting Parties (in request for information). Further work was needed to finalise the draft action.
 - ii. Action 3: It would be important to understand what was being worked on in Contracting Parties regarding Offshore Renewable Development and mitigation in order to set up an action where OSPAR could add value.
 - iii. Action 4: It was noted that further text on the rationale needed to be added.

- iv. Action 5 (Marine protected areas): it was suggested considering whether this actions could be split in two separate actions as it contained two separate work areas. One work area would be more related to MPAs and the other would concern terrestrial areas, such as nesting and breeding areas; it was further suggested to look into having an agreement as possible outcome, recognising the need to protect breeding sites, even if being outside of the marine environment; it was suggested to use EU data (and data of non-EU Contracting Parties) on species, rather than data of the OSPAR MPA data call.
- v. Action 6 (Environmental impact assessment): it was suggested that a single recommendation covering birds as a species group would be most effective. The HELCOM recommendations on species group could act as an example. It needed to be worked on the suggestion to consider this task as an overarching task underpinning the success of implementing all other actions under RAP-Bird.
- vi. Action 7: CBird/ CAFF offered to provide further comments on this and other actions (5 and 8) to strengthen links between OSPAR and CAFF.
- vii. Action 8: This task needed further work to implement the ideas of Contracting Parties to decide whether this tasks would rather follow a monitoring or modelling approach.
- viii. Action 9: Three activities were proposed, focussing on adaptation to climate change rather than resilience.
- ix. Action 10: Further work would be needed to fully develop this task and it would be investigated if the scope could be widened to include other diseases than HPAI.
- g. Comments of Contracting Parties, stakeholders and JWGBird on other pressures and activities, which were not covered by the concept actions, were also discussed. It was agreed that these needed to be kept in mind for potential inclusion in one of the actions.

3.7. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. For ICG-POSH to comment on the draft task templates on SharePoint by 30 November 2023;
- b. For RAP-Bird to finalise the draft task templates to be presented at ICG-POSH extra 2024 for forwarding to BDC 2024;
- c. For RAP-Birds TFG to prepare a final draft of the action plan for ICG-POSH extra 2024 for forwarding to BDC 2024;
- d. to follow up with WG COCOA on climate change task template (informally) and present at WG COCOA(1) 2024, 7 – 8 February 2024;
- e. to present the draft task templates at COBAM 23.

Draft recommendation S7.O6.T2 Reduction of marine bird bycatch

3.8. The UK on behalf of the task managers of task S7.O6.T2 (the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and the UK) presented the background document on marine bird bycatch and the draft recommendation (23/03/03 & 23/03/03 add01 – add02), which is planned to be submitted to BDC24 (12-week document deadline (23 December 2023)). The task managers thanked the Contracting Parties, who had responded to the request for information, which was circulated during summer 2023. The background document concluded that actions to reduce by catch of marine birds could be crucial. Only two Contracting Parties had reported on existing

national plans of action. The proposed recommendation would build on the information and conclusion of the draft background document.

3.9. The Co-Convenor thanked the TFG for the great effort in preparing the documents.

3.10. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. Germany noted that, contrary to the current wording in the background document on response of Contracting Parties to the request for information, it had submitted an overview of fisheries regulations and thus suggested a change of wording;
- b. Norway had no objections to the draft Recommendation;
- c. Contracting Parties would welcome a certain level of harmonisation, e.g. with HELCOM and MSFD; the TFG had not been particularly prescriptive in determining an appropriate level of bycatch monitoring, but this was an option if Contracting Parties wished;
- d. Concerns were raised by Contracting Parties regarding the practical implementation process, as the current default stated that if by catch could not be assessed it would be assumed that it is an unacceptable impact. It was suggested to include a guidance on the level of sampling in the background document;
- e. Clarification would be needed in the Recommendation regarding existing monitoring to also support the data that is needed here, as some areas are less well covered by Data collection Frameworks than others;
- f. The Netherlands informed, that due to the lack of observers on board in the Netherlands there were no data on marine bird by catch. § 3.1b of the Recommendation could be strengthened e.g. to include language on risk assessment;
- g. Denmark noted that a national seasonal ban of fisheries in specific areas was under discussion to avoid bird by catch. The topic of mandatory surveillance on fishing vessels was being discussed on EU level.

3.11. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. That Germany would clarify with the responsible administration what information was submitted and inform the TFG whether the wording in the background document needed amendment;
- b. To provide any further comments on the background document and Recommendation by 30 November, noting that there would be further opportunity for commenting during the national consultation phase (in the 12 weeks prior to BDC 24);
- c. To amend the Recommendation and background document accordingly and submit to BDC 2024.

NEAES task S5.O4.T2 Benthic shelf action plan

3.12. The task group on the development of the regional action plan for benthic shelf habitats (RAP Benthic), led by UK and Norway, supported by the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and Ireland (and most recently France and Denmark) presented an update on the development of the RAP (Presentation 23/P002 and 23/03/01 & 23/03/01 add01). The strong linkages to other groups were highlighted. ICG-POSH was asked for further steer, also regarding the timetable.

3.13. ICG-POSH was invited to note and discuss the ongoing work on the draft scoping document.

3.14. In discussion the following views were noted on the questions raised in the presentation:

- a. The list of existing NEAES tasks within the scoping document, which would be relevant to benthic habitats, could be one of the ways to move forward regarding the question, which other OSPAR groups should be contacted and informed on the development and the scoping document. The task group proposed to invite the task leads of relevant NEAES tasks to a workshop.
- b. The Co-Convenor suggested to report on progress on the action plan to all OSPAR Committees to ensure that it would be considered an OSPAR RAP rather than a BDC action plan.
- c. The idea of an adaptive plan was supported by Contracting Parties, and it was highlighted that the NEAES 2030 strategy envisaged “adaptive management to continually improve our policies and practices, in light of changes in knowledge, circumstances and environmental characteristics” (Agreement 2021-01, §3.1).
- d. It was noted that the expected EU regulation on restoration might lead to additional actions for the action plan in the next 5 years;
- e. Regarding the time period the action plan should cover, a 10-year period was suggested (2025 – 2035) following the example of the RAP-Noise (under development);
- f. An evaluation of progress could be considered for 2030, in line with the delivery of the NEAES 2030;
- g. Regarding the question whether the action plan should focus on a short priority list, concern was raised, that the action plan should reflect the number of things that need to be done in order to protect benthic shelf habitats, but it should avoid having too many actions;
- h. A transparent process for identifying priorities would be important, taking account of ongoing national as well as subregional processes and which actions could be taken forward from a subregional perspective;
- i. The Secretariat clarified that the RAP-Benthic was in a different position than the other action plans currently being developed within OSPAR. There were already drafted tasks in the strategy, e.g. on nature based solutions, which could be implemented in the action plan. The immediate challenge was to get them resourced and implemented.
- j. It was important to keep the question on the implementation process (e.g. additional technical assistance) under review;
- k. The criteria for selecting actions were widely supported by the Contracting Parties.
- l. One important criterion would be delivering the agreed tasks in the NEAES 2030 implementation plan, filling evidence and policy gaps, adding value and complementing other processes, e.g. measures in the HELCOM Baltic Sea Action Plan, or national/EU processes;
- m. Further understanding was needed how to apply the criteria, the QSR could act as a starting point;
- n. Regarding the question if a final selection of actions also could be informed by a high-level qualitative assessment of costs and benefits, it was suggested to contact ICG-ESA;
- o. It was discussed that not including it might be beneficial for implementation of the actions, noting that benefit should be put over costs. Therefore, it was suggested to amend the text to “Natural capital ecosystem services” (or similar);
- p. It was agreed to apply the approach of concept actions (as in RAP-Birds);

- q. It was considered as useful to include evaluation criteria in the action plan, it could be ranging from outcome indicators, outputs or evidence of national implementation;
- r. Denmark would welcome sufficient time comment on future products in the development process, taking into account the mandate required for potential actions;
- s. The Netherlands noted that fisheries measures would be important to fully protect areas/habitats in MPAs and stressed the importance of threshold values to determine habitat quality;
- t. France confirmed their support for the further development of the action plan;
- u. Denmark would like to get updated on the work with the benthic action plan, but is not in a position to support the work for now;

3.15. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. On the concept of an adaptive action plan;
- b. to apply the approach of concept actions;
- c. to a timeline 2025 – 2035 with an evaluation of progress by 2030;
- d. to take the comments made by Contracting Parties at the meeting into account in the further development of the action plan;
- e. that the RAP Benthic task support group will forward an updated scoping document to BDC 24;
- f. that the Tasks leads would organise a workshop with relevant experts and leads from other tasks relevant to the benthic RAP.

Agenda Item 4 – Implementation of other agreed NEAES tasks

S5.05.T1 Entanglement of sea turtles presented by Spain – verbal update

4.1. Spain presented the background to task S5.05.T1 entanglement of sea turtles, also action 26 in the ICG-POSH roadmap for the implementation of collective actions and action B.4.6 in the marine litter RAP. The 2020 OSPAR scoping study recommended further investigation of entanglement in the eastern Atlantic, and to this end Spain commenced a contract in March 2023 with the support of the University of Las Palmas.

4.2. Spain introduced a draft technical document that will be presented to ICG-ML in November 2023, which sets out the final draft of the state of play with entanglement of sea turtles within the OSPAR region.

4.3. To further progress this work, including identifying actions that could be taken, Spain is planning to host an online workshop in January 2024, issue a further data call in February 2024, and develop a background document on sources of entanglement before the autumn ICG meetings.

4.4. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. The Sea Turtle Expert Group (STEG) should be kept informed of this work, as they may wish to provide input.

4.5. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. Contracting Parties are invited to consider whether they wish to put forward any national experts (e.g. stranding networks and rescue centres) for the online workshop in January 2024;

- b. To review progress with the task at ICG-POSH 2024.

S5.05.T2 on prioritising actions for large whales presented by Ireland

4.6. Ireland introduced ICG-POSH 23/04/02 and 23/04/02 Add1, which presents work toward NEAES task “S5.05.T2: Scoping exercise on potential actions for large whale protection”, which had two main objectives: 1) what specific ongoing actions were in place to mitigate anthropogenic threats to Bowhead whale, Northern Right whale and Blue whale in the OSPAR maritime area and 2) what additional management measures could be considered to deliver improvement in the status of the listed whale species.

4.7. Dr Sinéad Murphy from the Atlantic Technological University presented the project (Presentation 23/P003), outlining that they had reviewed the implementation reports for the OSPAR Recommendations for each species, and issued a questionnaire to gather additional information for Blue Whale, to which seven Contracting Parties responded.

4.8. The work has resulted in some recommendations, including: reviewing the OSPAR reporting formats and supporting Guidance for the implementation of Recommendations; identifying key areas for the species and considering potential additional MPAs; collaboratively developing management guidelines and improving knowledge of anthropogenic activities. The project also recommended specific actions for the North Atlantic Blue Whale, Bowhead Whale and North Atlantic Right Whale.

4.9. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. Germany noted that commonalities between whale distribution patterns and the critical habitats work undertaken by Germany; Ireland and Germany agreed to be in touch to share information;
- b. This work is an example of taking action based on the results of Status Assessments;
- c. Several Contracting Parties supported inviting OMMEG to review the report, including considering how the suggested actions might be taken forward and how it fits with the OSPAR funding strategy;
- d. Norway noted that they will put the report to their marine mammal experts for their views, which they had not had time to do in advance of the meeting;
- e. Possible links with the seamounts work, especially if the report would provide information on the link between large marine mammal behaviour and benthic topography;
- f. The OSPAR Arctic Outcomes Working Group’s recent workshop in Copenhagen and the potential opportunity to collaborate on this matter with the Arctic Council.

4.10. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed to:

- a. Forward the task to BDC to agree that it is now complete;
- b. Invite OMMEG and the OSPAR Arctic Outcomes Working Group to consider the report, including how actions might be taken forward and links to the OSPAR Funding Strategy.

4.11. The Convenors thanked Sinéad for her presentation and the work undertaken on this subject. The presentation is made available for attendees at the [OSPAR ICG-POSH 2023 meeting site](#).

S5.06.T1 on improving data on elasmobranchs presented by Ireland

4.12. Ireland presented progress with task S5.O6.T1, which it currently leads without support, on improving data on deep-sea elasmobranchs. Ireland has been reviewing historical data sets of deep-sea elasmobranch distribution and evaluating knowledge gaps. The task seeks to bring together as much data as possible, and then potentially build a database or compile the data in existing databases.

4.13. Ireland plans to host a workshop for experts to review available data and identify areas of importance for deep sea elasmobranchs. Contracting Parties were invited to share elasmobranch expert contact points with Ireland, particularly for areas with relatively sparse data, particularly the mid-Atlantic and its surroundings, and also Macaronesia.

4.14. The work was discussed at the Collective Arrangement meeting in June and NEAFC are interested in collaborating, but Ireland would like to extend the collaboration and information sharing with ICCAT.

4.15. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. Germany offered to provide list of contact points that was used for the critical habitats work, and Ireland suggested inviting Moritz Mercker (Bionum) to the workshop;
- b. Norway offered to provide contacts details for its deep-sea elasmobranch experts and Sweden offered to provide contacts points in NAFFO and DFO;
- c. There is no specified definition of historic data; Ireland has been looking as far back as the early 1900s, but the workshop will need to consider a data quality threshold.

4.16. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed to:

- a. Invite Contracting Parties to nominate national experts (with contact details) on deep-sea elasmobranchs to Ireland, with the possibility of discussing existing data sets and of inviting them to the proposed workshop in Ireland in 2024;
- b. Invite Contracting Parties to share contact points in relevant international organisations with Ireland, particularly contacts in ICCAT.

S5.O6.T2 Critical habitat analysis presented by Germany

4.17. Germany introduced work that it has funded to contribute to collective actions 12 and 13, and to NEAES task S5.O6.T2 “Key area/critical habitat analyses of selected T&D species”. The objectives of the project were outlined as: the identification of key areas of critical habitats for 11 elasmobranch and whale species and Atlantic Salmon; determination of whether the critical habitats are already protected by existing MPAs, and; provision of an evidence base for identifying potential new MPAs.

4.18. Moritz Mercker from Bionum GmbH in Hamburg, Germany, presented the results of the project, including critical habitat modelling for 10 out of 11 species (Presentation 23/P004). The results show some correlation between the level of protection afforded to the species and the GAMM trend for the species. Due to a lack of data, Gulper Shark was not included in the analysis, and the report recommends specific surveys to fill data gaps. Due to their long-term experience with habitat modelling of harbour porpoises OMMEG was suggested as the best option to identify critical habitats for this species.

4.19. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. MPAs do not necessarily provide protection to the specific species, so the observed correlation between the protection of critical habitat and status of the species should not be over-interpreted;
- b. The report should also be circulated to COBAM for consideration;
- c. Initially, critical habitat was identified by sex and age class (i.e. distribution of large females/young males), but this reduced sample size for some species too much. Finally, all sexes and age classes were considered, and critical habitat defined as the areas with highest relative habitat suitability.
- d. The appendix to the report presents spatially resolved approximation of confidence intervals, which are factored into the procedure for suggesting area for potential new MPAs.
- e. Critical habitat was defined by relative habitat suitability of the species, survey effort data were incorporated for all fish species but due to sparse survey data not for cetacean modelling. So one Contracting Party suggested presenting confidence and survey effort side by side.

4.20. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed to:

- a. Invite the task leads to submit the final report to ICG-POSH 24;
- b. Forward the final report to ICG-COBAM for consideration.

4.21. Moritz was thanked for his presentation, which is made available for meeting attendees at the [OSPAR ICG-POSH 2023 meeting site](#).

S6.01.T1 on best practice for Zostera beds habitat restoration presented by Sweden

4.22. Sweden introduced document 23/04/01, the amended task template agreed by BDC23 that moves the deadline forward to 2024 (Add. 01), a previous draft outline of the Guidance as presented at BDC 2023 (Add. 02) and the current draft Guidance (Add. 03). Noting that one approach does not work for all OSPAR regions, the document is not prescriptive and is therefore proposed as Guidance rather than Guidelines.

4.23. Patrik Kraufvelin, consultant working on the Guidance, outlined that it includes an outline of *Zostera*, threats to *Zostera* and information on restoration approaches, aiming to provide an evidence base to support implementation of restoration approaches for *Zostera*, and invited comments on the SharePoint version.

4.24. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. The Guidance could be clearer that it does not reach a conclusion on defining success criteria;
- b. The Guidance should be clearer on the definition of restoration that is targeted (especially passive vs. active restoration)
- c. It is positive that the Guidance acknowledges that one approach cannot be applied to areas with e.g. different hydrographic conditions;
- d. The Netherlands noted national success with seagrass restoration and will provide information to Sweden before Christmas;
- e. Denmark noted work on restoration of seagrass, stony reef and biogenic reef and plans for some method documents, although some experience may only be relevant in the Baltic Sea.

4.25. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. To invite Contracting Parties to provide final data and comments or written amendments to the draft Guidance on SharePoint by 31 December 2023;
- b. That Sweden will incorporate comments into a new draft by the end of January and recirculate a new draft to ICG-POSH members for approval to forward to BDC24;
- c. That Sweden will work with the Secretariat to present the draft guidance to BDC 2024, noting the document deadline of 23 February 2024.

56.02.T1 Historical distribution of threatened and declining habitats presented by United Kingdom

4.26. The UK presented document 23/04/03 on historical distribution of T&D habitats, a task that was paused for production of QSR23 and is now being picked up again. The document invited Contracting Parties consider whether they have historical data to present, seeks information to inform redesign of the database, and presents a timetable for proceeding with the work.

4.27. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. That there is no specific definition of 'historical' for this task;
- b. The UK noted that all data could be useful, and that it will review the available data before designing the database. However, some Contracting Parties noted the cost associated with pulling data together and that some steer on priority data gaps, and the purposes of the use of the data, would be helpful;
- c. Sweden has some information on *Zostera marina* and Haploops from the Kattegat from the 1890s, and additional data from the 1960s and 70s, which the UK noted would useful if it is geo-referenced;
- d. It was suggested that discussion with neighbouring countries on what data they are interested in submitting would help steer which data to focus on;
- e. France noted that it has already begun to dig into historical data in preparation for the EU Habitat Restoration Law, with the intention to analyse data by polygons.
- f. The UK suggested a meeting of a small group of for a data prioritisation exercise to ensure that resources are used effectively;
- g. It is not clear at this stage whether the database modification will require funding, as it will depend on the volume of data to be incorporated.

4.28. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed to:

- a. Contracting Parties are invited to submit the names of representatives for an initial meeting of interested individuals (noting that France has already volunteered);
- b. Following this meeting, Contracting Parties will submit the prioritised datasets to the UK for the purposes of re-designing the database.

Agenda Item 5 – NEAES implementation gaps and links to other OSPAR groups

5.1. The Secretariat introduced document 23/05/01 on NEAES tasks of relevance to ICG-POSH which were currently in the holding pen. The document sought leads or funding to progress the tasks, views on

whether some tasks overlap and require amendment, and encouraged information sharing on national restoration activities. BDC HODs had met in October and had asked ICG-POSH to consider whether the various tasks on restoration and nature-based solutions (NBS) were distinct from one another or needed modification. From a quick review of the tasks the Secretariat thought that there were elements of holding pen task S6.02.T2 which could sit better with one of the other two related holding pen tasks and/or a new task, which was yet to be drafted, on developing a regional approach to applying NBS.

5.2. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. Denmark offered to work on the refinement of the restoration/NBS tasks (S6.O1.T2, S12.O4.Tx and S6.O1.T2) and drafting of an additional task on a regional approach, redistributing elements of S6.O1.T2 into the other existing and new tasks; Sweden offered to support; Denmark also offered to lead on the first of the tasks which would need to be implemented;
- b. Sweden offered to support the redrafting process, and noted the link to NEAES task S1.06.T1 on NBS and nutrient sequestration. The Secretariat had been in contact with the task template lead (Katherine Cronin, Ireland; HOD to HASEC) about progress with their element of the task, and the analysis of responses sent by Ireland to other HASEC HODs. Ireland were well linked up with the benthic RAP project team; Ireland confirmed that the analysis had not yet been completed but that a contract was in place to do this work;
- c. It was not clear what was meant by the reference in the task templates to “state of the art” NBS and restoration;
- d. It would be helpful for the work to include provision of guidance on the distinction between passive/active restoration and the definition of NBS solutions;
- e. On the sharing of information on national restoration activities, the Secretariat had received published material from the United Kingdom on manuals on restoration which it had placed in a folder on sharepoint; the folder could act as a repository for national restoration/NBS material; the folder could include details of on-going projects and project contacts, web links etc and could be organised to facilitate search by country and topic;

5.3. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. To invite Denmark and Sweden, with the support of the Secretariat, to prepare a redrafted set of tasks on restoration/nature-based solutions, including a new task on regional approach, for submission to BDC 2024;
- b. Denmark would act as task lead on the first of the redrafted tasks;
- c. To invite Contracting Parties to advise if they had any additional resources to support the implementation of the holding pen tasks;
- d. The Secretariat would maintain a sharepoint folder as a repository of national information on restoration/NBS.

Agenda Item 6 – Background Documents, Recommendations and the List

Feedback from the Sea Turtle Expert Group (STEG)

6.1. France as lead of the Sea Turtle Expert Group (STEG) presented a verbal update of the STEG's activities during the last meeting cycle. After discussion between France, the Co-Convenors of COBAM and the Secretariat it had been concluded that the group should principally report to ICG-COBM since the focus of their current work was on indicator development. However, this would be with the understanding that ICG-POSH could still ask STEG for advice on matters relating to the two listed sea turtle species. France confirmed that it would complete the turtles section of the knowledge gaps by 1 December.

Progress with implementation of the Recommendations for OSPAR listed habitats and species

6.2. The Secretariat introduced document 23/06/04 presenting a proposal on the content, process and timeline for national reporting on implementation of the Recommendations for OSPAR listed habitats and species and the production of the next overview assessment. National reporting would be due by the end of 2025, followed by the preparation of the overview assessment for review at ICG-POSH in autumn 2026 and approval by BDC 2027. The Secretariat invited support from Contracting Parties in managing the process.

6.3. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. Co-Convenor Michael McLeod offered his assistance in view of his extensive experience from the previous reporting round and the links to the long-term future of the relational database;
- b. Co-Convenor Marianne Olsen offered to support the process;
- c. The most recent reporting round had been well-structured; however, it would be helpful to have more guidance for Contracting Parties on the level of detail which was being sought in their responses; the guidance could also consider the links to the emerging regional action plans on birds and benthic habitats which had a wider scope than the list of T&D species and habitats;
- d. The most recent reporting round and overview assessment had benefited from an external contractor, funded by the QSR 2023 budget; Contracting Parties should consider financial support towards the next overview assessment, which would be required in 2026; a potential funding source could also be from any budget agreed for the 2028 integrated assessment;
- e. The timing of the reporting on implementation of POSH Recommendations should fit well with the completion of the present round of status assessments, due to be completed in 2024/25.

6.4. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. The timeline for implementation reporting of POSH Recommendations as set out in paragraph 9 of document 23/06/04;
- b. The Secretariat and the Co-Convenors will amend the guidance on national implementation reporting in line with comments from ICG-POSH by ICG-POSH 2024.

Discuss and consider the lead on discrepancy issues relating to the OSPAR list as described in ToR ("Future activities" – q)

6.5. The Secretariat introduced document 23/06/03 on the discrepancy issues listed under paragraph 10 (q) of the ICG-POSH Terms of Reference. The document proposed that the Secretariat identify a single process by which to make the more straightforward amendments, and sought leads to take forward further

analysis for the remaining discrepancies. The first group of relatively minor amendments covered Thornback ray, *Modiolus modiolus* beds, deep sea sponge aggregations, and *Lophelia pertusa* reef.

6.6. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. One component of the coral gardens habitat discrepancy should be relatively simple to resolve (attribution of OSPAR Regions) and could be included in the first group of minor amendments;
- b. The United Kingdom offered to work on the amendments linked to *Lophelia pertusa* reef as part of the first group; Ireland offered to support, subject to confirmation; Norway considered that a change of name to stony reefs would work well for them;
- c. France advised that the simpler single process should focus on the issues of definition and naming of habitats [OSPAR Agreement 2008-07 on descriptions of habitats, OSPAR Agreement 2008-06 on the OSPAR list]; amendment of case reports and background documents would be a more substantial piece of work; France offered to support on *Lophelia pertusa* reef and look into Intertidal *Mytilus edulis* beds.

6.7. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. To invite the United Kingdom, France and Ireland [tbc] to work with the Secretariat on a single process to manage the group of minor amendments, not including revisions to background documents or case reports;
- b. To invite France to consider how to manage amendments for Intertidal *Mytilus edulis* beds;
- c. To invite Contracting Parties to advise the Secretariat if they could take a lead on other features;
- d. To report state of progress to BDC 2024.

Proposals for listing or delisting of Species and Habitats

6.8. No proposals were made for listing or delisting of Species or Habitats.

6.9. Norway introduced document 23/06/01, and invited guest Giuliana Panieri from the Arctic University of Norway gave presentation Add1 and 23/P005 on characteristics, distribution and fauna of cold seeps, and the case for additional listing or amendment of the habitat definition relating to seeps/vents. This feature was distributed across OSPAR regions, but with most evidence in Region 1. Norway had not made a formal listing proposal yet but proposed discussion in ICG-POSH on whether this habitat would be relevant to report and how OSPAR should take the issue further.

6.10. In discussion the following points were noted:

- a. ICG-POSH members welcomed the report and presentation; they noted that there were relevant habitat types with the EU's Habitats Directive, on bubble reefs and pock marks as part of submarine structures containing leaking gases; there should therefore be additional information available from reporting by EU Member States; Ireland offered to provide more information on a special area of conservation in the Irish Sea which was protected because of the pock marks feature, though it was in relatively shallow waters; similar features occurred also on the United Kingdom side;

- b. Deep water cold seeps were more challenging to study but also likely to have higher levels of endemism;
- c. ICG-POSH members were interested in potential pressures and threats to cold seeps habitats; it was not known if bottom trawling could cause methane to be released where gas hydrates were close to the sea floor such as in the Barents Sea; however, there was evidence of sediment displacement; cold seeps could be evidence of sources of methane under the sea floor, so acting as an indicator of interest for oil and gas exploration; it was important to distinguish between cold seeps sites and hydrothermal vent sites involving the release of hot fluids and containing minerals nodules, which were potential sites for deep seabed mining;
- d. There was a case for protecting cold seeps in Region 1, which was beyond the scope of the Habitats Directive; this could be considered by the OSPAR Arctic Outcomes Working Group which was undertaking a review of features and pressures in the Arctic and was considering how OSPAR could engage more in that Region;
- e. A better understanding of pressures and threats would enable OSPAR to initiate the Texel Faial process; it was possible that cold seeps would require protection in some Regions but not others;

6.11. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. To invite Contracting Parties to share information on distribution of cold seeps and any analysis of pressures and threats;
- b. To invite Norway to consider and provide advice to ICG-POSH 2024 on next steps.

Identification of the need to revise any Background Documents or Recommendations

6.12. There were no proposals to add to the list of discrepancy issues for background documents or Recommendations under paragraph 10(q) of the terms of reference for ICG-POSH. It was noted that there are listed features that could benefit from revision but this would be labour-intensive, e.g. for some deep sea habitats.

6.13. In relation to kelp forests, Ireland observed that its waters had not been included within the Region III coverage in the Recommendation since there was insufficient information at the time. However, Ireland had drafted a proposal for a research project to work on distribution and density of kelp forest over the next 4 years. France had kindly agreed to join the steering committee for this project. Ireland would also welcome additional experts from Norway and the United Kingdom.

Long-term solution for the 'POSH relational database'

6.14. Co-Convenor Michael McLeod introduced document 23/06/02 setting out some initial ideas for the long-term future of the POSH relational database and ways to make relevant data available to Contracting Parties. Several options had been identified in the paper - principally the choice was between a professionally developed database that provides online access to all Contracting Parties or a split system where the database is still used to undertake the 6 yearly reporting but then output relevant datasets into other formats for universal use.

6.15. In discussion the following views were noted:

- a. Ideally, Contracting Parties should be able to enter reporting data directly into the database, though some Parties had liked the simplicity of Word documents when sending out to experts and compiling national information;
- b. It would be good if the database could be used by Contracting Parties for management purposes;
- c. It would be important to highlight the benefits of having a more developed database if seeking funding to get the work done; costs could be shared between Contracting Parties rather than having to be led by one Party only; consideration would need to be given to both the initial development as well as longer term maintenance;
- d. There was some comparable recent experience from the upgrade of the beach litter database, where a specification had been developed with a view to seeking voluntary contributions from Contracting Parties before going out to tender.

6.16. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed:

- a. To invite the Co-Convenor, Sweden and the Secretariat to develop advice for BDC 2024 on a specification for the database;
- b. To include this on the agenda for ICG-POSH Extra.

Agenda Item 7 – Terms of Reference

7.1. The Secretariat introduced document 23/07/Info1 on the terms of reference of ICG-POSH. It noted that some slight amendments would be needed to reflect the outcomes from the ICG-POSH meeting and invited comment on whether any other more substantive changes appeared to be required.

7.2. In discussion the following suggestions for revisions were noted:

- a. Clarify the reference to the JAMP, since the present JAMP had ended with the QSR 2023 and a new JAMP was still under preparation;
- b. Add a reference in paragraph 4 to the contribution towards the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework;
- c. Update references in paragraph 10(k) and (o) to the work on EUNIS classification;
- d. Remove 10(j) referring to turtle indicators.

7.3. In conclusion ICG-POSH agreed to invite the Secretariat to prepare a draft revision of the terms of reference for circulation to ICG-POSH by written procedure prior to submission to BDC 2024.

7.4. Co-Convenor Michael McLeod encouraged all members of ICG-POSH to consider whether they could volunteer to take over his role as Co-Convenor. He offered to discuss the opportunity with anyone interested between now and the BDC 2024 meeting.

Agenda Item 8 – Any other business

- 8.1. Co-Convenor Michael McLeod reminded the meeting that there was still no lead for holding pen task S5.04.Tx which acted as a catch-all for measures not covered by the regional action plans on birds and coastal benthic habitats or the review of actions on large whales. Parties could also consider picking out a particular piece of work within the scope of S5.04.Tx and coming forward with a more targeted task - there were some species groups that were obvious gaps, like fish. He encouraged Contracting Parties to consider this between now and BDC 2024.
- 8.2. The Secretariat informed the meeting that they had been approached by researchers working on a project on Strategic Infrastructure for Improved Animal Tracking (“STRAITS”) who were keen to see good take-up of their data. The project had only just started and would run until the end of 2026. The Secretariat proposed that they could be invited to present at the next full ICG-POSH meeting. The researchers had also asked for information on existing monitoring platforms that could be used to host their equipment.
- 8.3. ICG-POSH agreed that provision should be made within future ICG-POSH meetings to gather information on research developments, taking account of relevance to the OSPAR Science Agenda and ICG-POSH’s own work on knowledge gaps.
- 8.4. The Secretariat proposed that communication and coordination with ICG-POSH could be improved by setting up a list of primary contact points. It would send out a request for names and contact details.

Agenda Item 9 – Report of the meeting, date and venue for next meeting

- 9.1 The Secretariat advised that it would aim to circulate a draft of the summary record by 24 November, with a 7 day deadline for comments.
- 9.2 ICG-POSH agreed that an on-line Extra meeting should be held on 5 February 2024; the next full meeting of ICG-POSH was proposed for the week of 25 November 2024.
- 9.3 Denmark offered to look into whether it could host ICG-POSH 2024 and would confirm at BDC 2024.