

**Meeting of the
OSPAR Commission
Reykjavik
Iceland
28 June - 2 July 2004**

In cooperation with the European Community, the first set of areas shall be identified by 2006. This set, including the Natura 2000 network, will be analysed as to which gaps remain

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Bremen + 1 = ...

Progress towards an ecologically coherent network of well-managed MPAs for the North-East Atlantic

Background

Following up on the commitments given at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (WSSD 2002), the Environment Ministers of OSPAR and HELCOM Contracting Parties agreed at their Meetings in Bremen, June 2003 to have an ecologically coherent network of well-managed marine protected areas established in both maritime areas by 2010. The OSPAR Commission also endorsed OSPAR Recommendation 2003/3 and guidelines for selecting and managing an OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). OSPAR and HELCOM adopted a joint work programme to ensure timely implementation of their respective instruments on MPAs.

OSPAR Ministers further expressed particular concern „about the status of vulnerable cold-water coral reefs, many of which are threatened with destruction. Bearing in mind the ecological importance of these reefs and the practical irreversibility of their damage, we shall take immediate measures to protect coral reefs from further damage due to use of active fishing gear on the reefs. Furthermore, we shall ensure that steps are taken by 2005 to identify additional threats to the cold-water reefs and that measures are taken to protect the reefs against these threats“ (Bremen Statement, §12).

Aims

By 2010, the OSPAR Network of MPAs shall

- a. protect, conserve and restore species, habitats and ecological processes which have been adversely affected by human activities;
- b. prevent degradation of, and damage to, species, habitats and ecological processes, following the precautionary principle; and
- c. protect and conserve areas that best represent the range of species, habitats and ecological processes in the maritime area.

In cooperation with the European

Community, the first set of areas shall be identified by 2006. This set, including the Natura 2000 network, will be analysed as to which gaps remain

to make it an ecologically coherent network, completed and supplemented with effective management measures by 2010 (OSPAR Biodiversity Strategy, § 4.4).

Status of MPA designation in June 2003

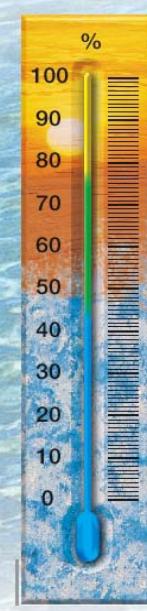
No agreed OSPAR MPAs existed in June 2003. According to WWF's indicator based evaluation report to OSPAR / MMC 2003 in Bremen (Fig.1), work towards designation of protected areas in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) of EU Member States under the Habitats and Birds Directives was in progress in Belgium, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal (Azores), Sweden and the UK. Denmark, Iceland and Portugal had not acknowledged the need for additional protection measures in their waters. In 2002, the Azores (autonomous region of Portugal) had announced the establishment of the first deep sea MPAs in their waters, namely two hydrothermal vent sites, but have so far not succeeded in implementing them in national law. Norway continued its national MPA project focussing initially on near-coastal sites which were presented to stakeholders. As an immediate step towards habitat protection, Norway has progressively banned bottom trawling in several cold water coral areas on its continental shelf since 1999. The first coral reef became an MPA under nature conservation law in 2001. Apart from this, cold water coral reefs, like all other habitats in offshore waters throughout the North-East Atlantic were not yet subject to any measures regulating human activities which affect the marine environment.

Effective protection for North-East Atlantic treasures still on ice

OSPAR contracting parties agreed in 1998 to "protect and conserve the biological diversity of the marine ecosystems..." by promoting the establishment of a network of marine protected areas (MPAs). Five years later, WWF takes the temperature on the process to implement such a network, and finds that marine protection still is on ice.

None of the countries have succeeded in establishing sufficient protection for habitats and species in coastal areas, and no offshore MPA has yet been fully implemented.

In order to secure the highly threatened biodiversity of the North-East Atlantic Ocean, WWF calls upon the OSPAR countries meeting in the Bremen Joint Ministerial Meeting to urgently take action to implement the "ecologically coherent network of well-managed marine protected areas" and to realise effective protection and management measures through the ecosystem-based approach.



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International institutional progress since June 2003

OSPAR established a working group (Marine Protected Areas, Species and Habitats - MASH) in charge of developing measures under the joint OSPAR/HELCOM work programme and/or OSPAR Recommendation adopted in 2003. While most topics are being addressed in this context, the most pressing problem of minimizing the fisheries impact cannot be dealt with efficiently due to limited competence and lack of integration. The European Commission strives for improved integration and harmonisation of its marine legislation by developing a Marine Strategy which also integrates the Natura 2000 network. An amendment of the set of criteria applicable to select potential Natura 2000 sites is also envisaged. However, the extent of integration of fisheries management and marine conservation is still unclear.

WWF's showcase examples for the OSPAR system of marine protected areas

On the road from OSPAR / MMC 1998 in Sintra to OSPAR / MMC 2003 in Bremen, WWF presented 20 offshore MPA proposals to the OSPAR Commission and Contracting Parties
<http://www.ngo.grida.no/wwfneap/Projects/MPAmap.htm>

Conclusion on the occasion of OSPAR 2004 in Reykjavik

To date, no sites have been designated as OSPAR MPAs. This will hopefully change in the near future - at least in some northern countries. However, the interim result is likely to almost exclusively reflect the legal requirements of the EU Habitats Directive. Many years were spent on the elaboration of the OSPAR list of species and habitats under immediate threat and decline as adopted in 2003. However, the implementation of effective measures has still to be fully determined and where the threat is related to fishing activities progress depends on the performance of fisheries authorities. As yet, there are no formal communication procedures established between OSPAR and the fisheries management bodies to facilitate and improve the integration needed to establish, *inter alia*, well-managed MPAs.

National progress on offshore MPAs - June 2004

Belgium - designated an offshore area under the Birds Directive, but within territorial waters.

Denmark - now considers further offshore areas for Natura 2000, including possible transboundary sites.

France - no visible progress.

Germany - nominated a full set of potential Natura 2000 sites in its EEZ to the European Commission in May 2004. Measures can only be taken after adoption by the EC.

Iceland - there is intense research on the relationship between cold water coral areas and fishing activities and the plan to test the effects of a fishing-free zone at a relatively intact coral site.

Ireland - ongoing stakeholder consultation on four cold water coral reef areas to be designated as SACs and/or OSPAR MPAs.

The Netherlands - are about to adopt a spatial planning law including several offshore areas under consideration for Natura 2000 and/or OSPAR MPA status.

Norway - continues the process to develop a national system of MPAs. An advisory board considered measures to improve coral protection in Norwegian waters, the report currently being assessed by the Norwegian Ministry of Fisheries. In the Barents Sea, an integrated management plan is being developed piloting the possible implementation of an ecosystem approach.

Portugal - no visible progress. The management of inshore sites is hampered. The Azores have proposed a first set of five OSPAR MPAs in their waters, three of them offshore, still to be followed up by the national government.

Spain - increased the efforts to afford conservation including to offshore areas, hampered by lack of funding and research.

Sweden - nominated two offshore banks as potential Natura 2000 sites to the European Commission in November 2003. Inventories of a number of offshore banks which are of interest for wind farm establishment will be carried out during 2004-2005. Negotiations on the transboundary management of the Koster/Hvaler area are initiated.

United Kingdom - to announce the first list of sites in 2004. The draft offshore regulations that will transpose the Habitats and Birds Directives in the offshore environment are scheduled to be tabled in Parliament over summer 2004. The Darwin Mounds have received permanent protection from fisheries and, subject to the above regulations, will be on the list of potential Natura 2000 sites which is under discussion.

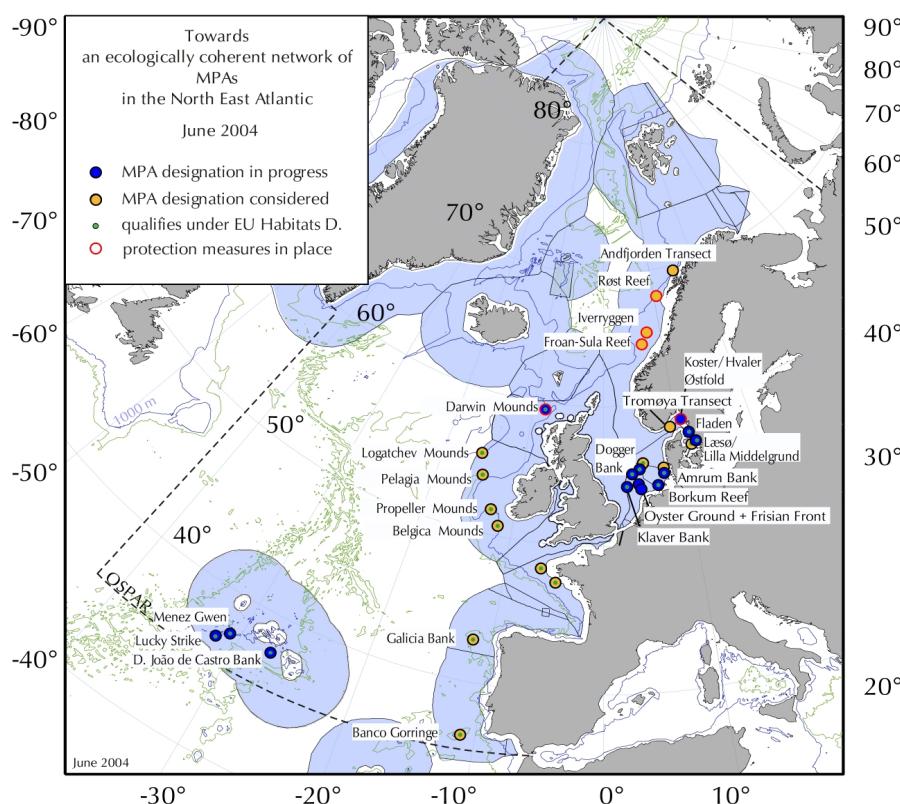


Fig. 2:

The OSPAR Maritime Area with potential offshore sites beyond territorial waters being currently considered as marine protected areas either nationally or in the framework of the Natura 2000 and/or OSPAR networks of MPAs.