

OSPAR CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE MARINE ENVIRONMENT OF THE
NORTH-EAST ATLANTIC

MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON MARINE PROTECTED AREAS, SPECIES AND
HABITATS (MASH)

TROMSØ (NORWAY): 5-8 OCTOBER 2004

Ecological Coherence of MPA Network

MASH agreed that the definition of what constitutes an ecologically coherent network of OSPAR MPAs should be based on the following 14 recommendations and that they should be applied in the development of a set of criteria to enable an assessment of how sites submitted contribute to achieving an ecologically coherent network:

1. OSPAR network aims (a) and (b) should be considered to apply to a subset of the full range of species, habitats and ecological processes to be identified for aim (c)¹.
2. Identification of OSPAR MPAs for OSPAR network aim (c) should contribute substantially to the requirements for identification of sites to meet aims (a) and (b).
3. Meeting OSPAR network aim (a) should be partly addressed by identifying OSPAR MPAs for those species and habitats on OSPAR's Initial list for which MPAs are an appropriate measure.
4. The OSPAR MPA network must include features meeting aims (a), (b) and (c), For features meeting aims a) or b), a large² proportion of the total extent of the habitat/species population or ecological process should be included within the network.
5. OSPAR MPAs should be managed to ensure the protection of the features for which they were selected and to support the functioning of an ecologically coherent network.
6. The network should reflect biogeographic variation across the OSPAR maritime area by selecting the sites for the range of features within each biogeographic areas.
7. The biogeographic regions proposed by Dinter (2001) should form the initial framework for incorporating biogeographic variation within the network. Finer scale subdivisions may be developed to aid in practical application of OSPAR MPA selection criteria.
8. A system or systems for characterising habitats (and ecological processes) should be used to assist the implementation of aim (c), particularly through the assessment of achieving representativity of the range of such features.
9. The design of a network of marine protected areas needs to recognise aspects of connectivity and, where possible, place protected sites where they may have maximum benefit as measured against the objectives of the network.
10. Detailed connectivity issues should be considered only for those species where a specific path between identified places is known (e.g. critical areas of a life cycle).

¹ The OSPAR network aims are:

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

² 'Large' is to be defined during the next stages of the development of the network, relative to the proportion of the feature you would expect to include under aim c).

11. Lack of knowledge with regard to connectivity in the marine environment should not prevent the development of the OSPAR MPA network.
12. Replication of habitats, species and ecological processes in separate OSPAR MPAs in each biogeographic region is desirable where it is possible.
13. The appropriate size of a site should be determined by the purpose of the site and be sufficiently large to maintain the integrity of the feature for which it is selected.
14. In parallel with the identification of MPAs, and based on the key principles outlined here, OSPAR needs to further define the practical use of biogeographic areas, habitat characterisation systems and scales at which they are used, proportions of features and degree of replication³. This will facilitate Contracting Parties' identification of sites and aid the assessment of their contribution towards establishment of an ecologically coherent network.

³ 'degree of replication' is the number of sites needed within a biogeographic region that takes into account the size of that biogeographic region