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

MEETING OF THE OSPAR COMMISSION (OSPAR)

BREMEN: 23 - 27 JUNE 2003

Guidelines for the Identification and Selection of Marine Protected Areas in the OSPAR Maritime Area

(Reference number: 2003-17)

1. Introduction

1.   At Sintra, Portugal, in 1998 the Ministerial Meeting of the OSPAR Commission adopted a new Annex V 'On the Protection and Conservation of the Ecosystems and Biological Diversity of the Maritime Area' and an accompanying OSPAR Strategy. The objective of the Commission is to take the necessary measures to protect and conserve the ecosystems and the biological diversity of the maritime area which are, or could be, affected as a result of human activities, and to restore, where practicable, marine areas which have been adversely affected.

2.   The Commission will, *inter alia*, promote the establishment of a network of marine protected areas ("MPAs") to ensure the sustainable use, protection, and conservation of marine biological diversity and ecosystems – the OSPAR Network of Marine Protected Areas ("the OSPAR Network").

3.   The establishment of the OSPAR Network will also contribute to and take account of Contracting Parties' obligations under other international Conventions and Directives, including EC Directives (and in particular the Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and wild flora and fauna and the Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of birds), and measures taken under the Berne, Bonn (including its regional agreements) and Ramsar Conventions, the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Helsinki Convention, the Barcelona Convention, the Trilateral Wadden Sea Co-operation and the commitments made, *inter* alia, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the North Sea Conferences.

2. The aim of the OSPAR Network

4.   The components of the OSPAR Network will, individually and collectively, aim to:

- protect, conserve and restore species, habitats and ecological processes which are adversely affected as a result of human activities;

- prevent degradation of and damage to species, habitats and ecological processes, following the precautionary principle;

- protect and conserve areas that best represent the range of species, habitats and ecological processes in the OSPAR maritime area.

5.   The OSPAR Network should take into account the linkages between marine ecosystems and the dependence of some species and habitats on processes that occur outside the MPA concerned. These relationships are often more complex, and occur on a larger scale, than those of terrestrial ecosystems.

6.   The OSPAR Network should form an ecologically coherent network of well-managed MPAs. This is particularly important for highly mobile species, such as certain birds, mammals and fish, to safeguard the critical stages and areas of their life cycle (such as breeding, nursery and feeding areas).

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3. The process of identification and selection of MPAs

3.1 Stage 1: Identification of possible sites

7. For this stage, the ecological criteria/considerations listed in Appendix 1 should be applied.

8. In some cases, this stage will identify a number of possible sites, for example to protect a certain species, and it may not be possible to establish them all as MPAs. On the other hand, it may be necessary to select priority sites from a number of possible sites that each meet one or several, but not the same, ecological criteria. For these reasons, sites that meet the ecological criteria/considerations need to be further prioritised at Stage 2.

3.2 Stage 2: Prioritisation of sites for designation

9. In this second stage of the process, the ecological criteria/considerations listed in Appendix 1 should be reapplied to help prioritise the identified sites. For example, an area that holds a higher population of the species concerned, or that meets additional ecological criteria, may warrant a higher priority. In addition, at this stage, the practical criteria/considerations given in Appendix 2 should be taken into account in developing a prioritised list of sites. For instance an area with a comparatively higher level of support from stakeholders and political acceptability will be more suitable to be established as an MPA.

3.3 Use of the criteria to meet the aims of the OSPAR Network

10. The table in Appendix 3 provides guidance on which criteria should be used to select areas as components of the OSPAR Network in relation to the identified aims given above.

4. Information on each proposed MPA

11. Information to support the selection of an MPA within national jurisdiction should be compiled on the proforma given in Appendix 4. The information should be submitted to the OSPAR Commission. Any proposals for action by the OSPAR Commission in respect of areas outside national jurisdiction should be submitted in the same way.

Ecological criteria/considerations

An area qualifies for selection as an MPA if it meets several but not necessarily all of the following criteria. The consideration and assessment of these criteria should be based on best available scientific expertise and knowledge.

1. Threatened or declining species and habitats/biotopes

The area is important for species, habitats/biotopes and ecological processes that appear to be under immediate threat or subject to rapid decline as identified by the ongoing OSPAR (Texel-Faial) selection process.

2. Important species and habitats/biotopes

The area is important for other species and habitats/biotopes as identified by the ongoing OSPAR (Texel-Faial) selection process.

3. Ecological significance

The area has:

- a high proportion of a habitat/biotope type or a biogeographic population of a species at any stage in its life cycle;

- important feeding, breeding, moulting, wintering or resting areas;

- important nursery, juvenile or spawning areas; or

- a high natural biological productivity of the species or features being represented.

4. High natural biological diversity

The area has a naturally high variety of species (in comparison to similar habitat/biotope features elsewhere) or includes a wide variety of habitats/biotopes (in comparison to similar habitat/biotope complexes elsewhere).

5. Representativity

The area contains a number of habitat/biotope types, habitat/biotope complexes, species, ecological processes or other natural characteristics that are representative for the OSPAR maritime area as a whole or for its different biogeographic regions and sub-regions.

6. Sensitivity

The area contains a high proportion of very sensitive or sensitive habitats/biotopes or species.

7. Naturalness

The area has a high degree of naturalness, with species and habitats/biotope types still in a very natural state as a result of the lack of human-induced disturbance or degradation.

Practical criteria/considerations

1.   Size

The size of the area should be suitable for the particular aim of designating the area, including maintaining its integrity, and should enable the effective management of that area.

2.   Potential for restoration

The area has a high potential to return to a more natural state under appropriate management.

3.   Degree of acceptance

The establishment of the MPA has a comparatively high potential level of support from stakeholders and political acceptability.

4.   Potential for success of management measures

There is a high probability that management measures and the ability to implement them (such as legislation, relevant authorities, funding, and scientific knowledge) will meet the aims for designation.

5.   Potential damage to the area by human activities

It is an area where significant damage by human activity may happen in the short term.

6.   Scientific value

The area has a high value for scientific research and monitoring.

Use of the criteria to meet the aims of the OSPAR Network

The following table provides a correlation between the ecological and practical criteria/considerations and the aims of the OSPAR Network:

Aims of the OSPAR Network	Protect, conserve and restore species, habitats and ecological processes which are adversely affected as a result of human activities	Prevent degradation of and damage to species, habitats and ecological processes following the precautionary principle	Protect and conserve areas which best represent the range of species, habitats and ecological processes in the maritime area
Ecological considerations	(1.1) High priority habitats & species which meet the Texel-Faial criteria of 'Decline'	(1.1) High priority habitats & species which meet the Texel-Faial criteria of 'high probability of a significant decline' (1.2) Important habitats & species which meet the other Faial criteria (global importance, local (species)/regional (habitats) importance, rarity, sensitivity, keystone species, ecological significance) (1.6) Sensitivity	(1.3) Ecological significance (1.4) High natural biological diversity (of species within a habitat and of habitats in an area) (1.5) Representativity, including the biogeographic regions (1.7) Naturalness
Practical considerations	(2.1) Size (2.2) Potential for restoration (2.3) Degree of acceptance (2.4) Potential for success of management measures (2.6) Scientific value	(2.1) Size (2.3) Degree of acceptance (2.4) Potential for success of management measures (2.6) Scientific value (2.5) Potential damage to the area by human activities	(2.1) Size (2.3) Degree of acceptance (2.4) Potential for success of management measures (2.6) Scientific value

Note: Numbers in brackets refer to the specific criteria in the Guidelines for the Identification and Selection of MPAs in the OSPAR maritime area (see Appendices 1 and 2).

Proforma for compiling the characteristics of a potential MPA

A   General information

1.   Proposed name of MPA

2.   Aim of MPA

Indicate aims:

- protect, conserve and restore species, habitats and ecological processes which are adversely affected as result of human activities;

- prevent degradation of and damage to species, habitats and ecological processes following the precautionary principle;

- protect and conserve areas that best represent the range of species, habitats and ecological processes in the OSPAR area.

3.   Status of the location

Indicate: territorial sea, Exclusive Economic Zone, or outside national jurisdiction.

4.   Marine region

e.g. North Sea, English Channel, Skagerrak.

5.   Biogeographic region

Indicate, when appropriate, after: Dinter, W.P. (2001.): Biogeography of the OSPAR Maritime Area. A synopsis and synthesis of biogeographical distribution patterns described for the North-East Atlantic. – Angewandte Landschaftsökologie Vol. 43, German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Bonn. 166 pp.

6.   Location

Draw delimitation of the proposed MPA on a navigational map of the most appropriate scale with geographical co-ordinates clearly indicated and attach to the proforma. Co-ordinates should also be submitted in electronic form.

7.   Size

The size (e.g., in hectares) of the area should be suitable for the particular aim of designating the area, including maintaining its integrity, and should enable the effective management of that area.

8.   Characteristics of the area

Ecological characteristics, human uses, etc.

B   Selection criteria

a.   *Ecological criteria/considerations*

1.   Threatened and declining species and habitats

Indicate whether the area is important for species, habitats and ecological processes that appear to be under immediate threat or subject to rapid decline as identified by the ongoing OSPAR (Texel/Faial) selection process.

2. Important species and habitats

Indicate whether the area is important for the other selected species and habitats identified by the ongoing OSPAR (Texel/Faial) selection process.

3. Ecological significance

Indicate whether the area has:

- a high proportion of a biogeographic population of a migratory species;
- important feeding, breeding, moulting, wintering or resting areas;
- important nursery, juvenile, or spawning areas;
- a high natural biological productivity of the species or features being represented.

4. High natural biological diversity

Indicate whether the area has a naturally high variety of species in comparison to similar habitat features elsewhere, or includes highly varied habitats or communities in comparison to similar habitat complexes elsewhere.

5. Representativity

Indicate whether the area contains a number of habitat/biotope types, habitat complexes, species, ecological processes or other natural characteristics that are typical and representative for the OSPAR-Area as a whole or for its different biogeographic units.

6. Sensitivity

Indicate whether the area contains a high proportion of very sensitive or sensitive habitats or species.

7. Naturalness

Indicate if the area has a high degree of naturalness and species and biotopes are still in a very natural state as a result of the lack of human-induced disturbance or degradation.

b. *Practical criteria/considerations*

1. Potential for restoration

Indicate whether the area has a high potential to return to a more natural state under appropriate management.

2. Degree of acceptance

Indicate whether the establishment of the MPA has a comparatively high level of support from stakeholders and political acceptability.

3. Potential for success of management measures

Indicate whether there is a high probability that management measures and the ability to implement them such as legislation, relevant authorities, funding, and scientific knowledge will meet the aims for designation.

4. Potential damage to the area by human activities

Indicate whether in or around the area damage by human activity may happen in the short term.

5. Scientific value

Indicate whether there is a high value for research and monitoring.

C.   Proposed management and protection status

1.   Proposed management

Indicate which actual or potential human activities taking place in the area might need regulation through a management plan.

2.   Any existing or proposed legal status

I   National legal status (e.g., nature reserve, national park):

II   Other international legal status (e.g., NATURA 2000, Ramsar):

Presented by

Contracting Party:

Organisation:

Date: