

MARINE ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION  
COMMITTEE  
73rd session  
Agenda item 18

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## ANY OTHER BUSINESS

### Information related to OSPAR Commission's work on underwater noise

#### Submitted by OSPAR Commission

#### SUMMARY

<i>Executive summary:</i>	This document is submitted to provide information on the OSPAR Commission's activities on underwater noise
<i>Strategic direction, if applicable:</i>	Not applicable
<i>Output:</i>	Not applicable
<i>Action to be taken:</i>	Paragraph 12
<i>Related documents:</i>	None

#### Introduction

1 The 1992 Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (the OSPAR Convention) provides the mechanism by which 15 governments and the European Union cooperate to protect the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic (the OSPAR Maritime Area). The governments are Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

2 OSPAR started out in 1972 with the Oslo Convention against dumping and was broadened to cover land-based sources of marine pollution and the offshore industry by the Paris Convention of 1974. These two conventions were unified, updated and extended by the 1992 OSPAR Convention. A new annex on biodiversity and ecosystems was adopted in 1998 to cover non-polluting human activities that can adversely affect the sea.

3 OSPAR's Environment Strategy for the period 2010-2020 includes an objective related to noise: to endeavour to keep the introduction of energy, including underwater noise, at levels that do not adversely affect the marine environment in the OSPAR Maritime Area. The Strategy is currently in the process of being renewed.

## Assessment of underwater noise in the marine environment

4 OSPAR's 2017 Intermediate Assessment of the State of the North-East Atlantic marine environment ([IA 2017](#))<sup>1</sup> is published on the OSPAR website. The IA uses a suite of indicators to describe both status and trends in the marine environment across the North-East Atlantic. It includes consideration of biological diversity, eutrophication, hazardous substances, radioactive substances, offshore oil and gas industries, a range of other human pressures, ocean acidification and the impact of a changing ocean climate. Attention is also given to socio-economic analysis and a methodology to undertake a full ecosystem assessment. Finally, IA 2017 presents key messages and headline information that will set the foundation for progress and development. IA 2017 is a stepping stone for all Contracting Parties towards developing OSPAR's more comprehensive Quality Status Report in 2023. IA 2017 provides OSPAR's first assessment of anthropogenic pressure from impulsive sound for the OSPAR Maritime Area.

5 Data for 2015 were provided by Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the United Kingdom for four sound sources (seismic surveys, pile driving, explosions, and sonar and acoustic deterrents). The distribution of these impulsive sound sources was assessed in pulse block days, defined as the number of days in a calendar year in which impulsive sound activity occurred within a particular area (ICES statistical sub-rectangle).

6 This impulsive noise indicator for the OSPAR Maritime Area provides the first detailed information on the distribution of reported impulsive sound sources at the regional scale. The assessment concluded that reported activity was more prevalent in the northern and eastern North Sea, to the west of Scotland and in the Skagerrak, and was largely due to seismic survey activity. Sound sources categorized as low or very low intensity were more common than higher intensity sources. This distribution is likely to vary year by year, depending upon the activities undertaken. More comprehensive reporting in future years should result in improved assessments of pressure from impulsive sound generation in the OSPAR Maritime Area. The assessment highlights the locations where marine animals, if present, may have been affected (in 2015), although the occurrence of effects would also depend on the distribution and susceptibility of the marine organisms to sound exposure. The likelihood and consequences of the effects of impulsive sounds were not assessed.

## Further work on assessment of impulsive and ambient noise

7 Impulsive noise data is submitted directly to The International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) for inclusion in the OSPAR Impulsive Noise Register (<http://ices.dk/marine-data/data-portals/Pages/underwater-noise.aspx>) and then is automatically displayed in the OSPAR Data Portal ([www.ospar.org/data](http://www.ospar.org/data)). OSPAR Contracting Parties are working to improve the coverage and quality of the data. An updated assessment on impulsive sound sources is foreseen for 2019.

8 OSPAR Contracting Parties have recently agreed to work on a "Candidate Indicator" to provide quantitative metrics for the risk of impact from impulsive noise on selected species. This would build on the data reported to the OSPAR Impulsive Noise Registry under the existing monitoring programme for the impulsive noise Common Indicator. There is, in addition, ongoing work to develop an indicator for ambient noise. Two joint ambient noise monitoring proposals have been developed within the OSPAR Region. The first proposal (JOMOPANS) covers the North Sea, while the second, the Joint programme for Ocean Noise in the Atlantic Seas consortium (JONAS), covers the Atlantic Arc and English Channel. The JOMOPANS

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<sup>1</sup> <https://oap.ospar.org/en/ospar-assessments/intermediate-assessment-2017/>

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group of North Sea countries has received funding from the INTERREG programme of the European Union. It started in January 2018 and is planned to run for three years, aiming to have complete data over the year 2019. The JONAS consortium is formed of partners from Ireland, France, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom. The proposal aims to address the challenges to joint ambient noise monitoring presented by open boundaries, oceanic habitats, and major shipping routes (English Channel and Strait of Gibraltar). A suitable EU funding route has been identified under the Atlantic Arc INTERREG programme, with submission of the full proposal (following a successful Expression of Interest) in June 2018. A decision is expected by the second half of 2018 and, if successful, the project would commence in early 2019.

9 Apart from meeting OSPAR's need to monitor and assess the state of the marine environment, this indicator work will also help those Contracting Parties who are also EU Member States to fulfil their obligations under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive. One obvious benefit of this cooperative working is that an integrated assessment based on consistent data protocols can be produced at a regional sea scale.

### **Work on mitigation measures**

10 The main focus of attention as far as mitigation measures is concerned is the maintenance of an inventory of underwater noise mitigation measures. This developing inventory is designed to provide OSPAR Contracting Parties with an overview of the effectiveness and feasibility of mitigation options to avoid or reduce emissions and impacts of underwater noise. An updated version of the inventory that now includes chapters on piling and on seismic surveys has been published on the [OSPAR website](#).<sup>2</sup> Further chapters are foreseen, including chapters on explosions and shipping.

11 OSPAR looks forward to continued and increasing cooperation with IMO on matters of mutual interest, including shipping noise.

### **Action requested of the Committee**

12 The Committee is invited to note this information and its relevance to the Committee's work on reducing underwater noise from shipping.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ospar.org/about/publications?q=706>