Agenda Item 7.3:   **Protected Areas**

Report on the OSPAR-IMPACT Workshop on the criteria for the selection of species and habitats (Horta, Azores, 12 - 16 July 1999)

Submitted by: **Belgium**

ASCOBANS

Report on the OSPAR-IMPACT Workshop on the criteria for the selection of species and habitats (Horta, Azores, 12-16 July 1999)

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Submitted by Belgium

1. Background

The workshop was organised as a follow-up of the workshop held in Texel from 24 to 28 February 1997, during which preliminary criteria for the selection of species and habitats that need protection were developed. Protection of species and habitats is the subject of a new ANNEX V of the OSPAR Convention, and the related strategy on the protection and conservation of the ecosystems and biological diversity of the maritime area.

Related activities within OSPAR concern *marine protected areas* (OSPAR workshop, Vilm, 1998), *habitat classification* (OSPAR/ICES/EEA workshop, Oban, 1999), and *Ecological Quality and Ecological Quality Objectives* (OSPAR/NSC workshop, Scheveningen, 1999). Although ASCOBANS was unable to have any direct input to the Vilm meeting, Peter Evans, on behalf of ASCOBANS, tabled a paper on Protected Areas for Cetaceans in advance of the Horta workshop.

The objectives of the Horta workshop were to

1. finalise the Texel-criteria;
2. summarise information on relevant species and habitats;
3. test the criteria for these species and habitats;
4. develop a procedure for applying the criteria.

2. Report

Not all objectives were met. The Texel criteria were changed substantially and subsequently were renamed 'Faial-criteria'. The new proposed criteria were submitted to the IMPACT meeting held in Brest in November 1999. The criteria are given below (as slightly amended by IMPACT 1999).

Two main systems for applying the criteria were proposed, each based on a hierarchical structure. In one of these (termed the conservation cube approach), emphasis is given to the selection criteria localness, rarity and sensitivity for species, and regional importance, rarity, and ecological significance for habitats. In the other (termed the two-block approach, and applied only to species), the criteria are grouped into two blocks, one relating to the decline and sensitivity of a species, and the other to global importance, local importance, rarity and whether it is a keystone species. The two approaches differ primarily in that criteria are treated in a different order and with a different weighting. For species, the conservation cube approach gives emphasis to potential vulnerability to human activities by nature of specific habitat preferences and recoverability due to life history parameters, whilst the emphasis in the two-block approach is put on the actual evidence for rarity or decline of a species. As a result of applying either method, the species and habitats are, as objectively as possible, divided into categories of threat, which can then be used in the development of the OSPAR policy on the protection of these species and habitats.

Several parties and NGO's proposed to test the criteria and the different ways of applying them for a range of species and habitats. Peter Evans (European Cetacean Society) offered to perform the exercise with cetaceans, possibly in co-ordination with ASCOBANS. [After the meeting it became

clear that collaboration with ASCOBANS for this exercise would not be possible due to the short time between the Horta workshop and the IMPACT 1999 meeting, where the results of this exercise were to be presented.]

3. Follow-up

It is clear that criteria are needed to execute the strategy of OSPAR for the protection of species and habitats. With this workshop, acceptable working criteria were developed, together with suggestions for the guidance and means of applying the criteria. However, it was also clear that much work still has to be done in a short time to further develop the application of criteria and in developing programmes and measures.

From the summary record of the IMPACT 1999 meeting: criteria for the selection of species and habitats (excluding the guidelines proposed)

Selection criteria for species

In order to implement elements of the OSPAR Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of Ecosystems and Biological Diversity of the Maritime Area (in particular its § 2.2, its chapeau and subparagraphs a. and b.), Contracting Parties and Observers have developed the attached criteria and draft guidance [not printed here].

1. **Global importance:** Global importance of the OSPAR area for a species. Importance on a global scale, of the OSPAR Area, for the species is when a high proportion of a species at any time of the life cycle occurs in the OSPAR Area.

2. **Local importance:** Importance within the OSPAR Area, of the regions for the species where a high proportion of the total population of a species within the OSPAR Area for any part of its life cycle is restricted to a small number of locations in the OSPAR Area.

3. **Rarity:** A species is rare if the total population size is small. In case of a species that is sessile or of restricted mobility at any time of its life cycle, a species is rare if it occurs in a limited number of locations in the OSPAR Area, and in relatively low numbers. In case of a highly mobile species, the total population size will determine rarity.

4. **Sensitivity:** a 'very sensitive' species is one if very easily adversely affected by a human activity, and / or if affected is expected to only recover over a very long period, or not at all. A sensitive' species is one if easily adversely affected by a human activity, and / or if affected is expected to recover in a long period.

5. **Keystone species:** a species which has a controlling influence on a community.

6. **Decline:** means an observed or indicated significant decline in numbers, extent or quality (quality refers to life history parameters). The decline may be historic, recent or current. 'Significant' need not be in a statistical sense.

Selection criteria for habitats

In order to implement elements of the OSPAR Strategy on the Protection and Conservation of Ecosystems and Biological Diversity of the Maritime Area (in particular its § 2.2, its chapeau and subparagraphs a. and b.), Contracting Parties and Observers have developed the attached criteria.

1. **Global importance** (importance of the OSPAR Area for the habitat in a global context): a high proportion of the habitat occurs in the OSPAR Area.

2. **Regional importance** (importance of the sub-regions of the OSPAR Area for the habitat): a high proportion of the habitat occurs within a specific biogeographic region and/or region of national responsibility within the OSPAR Area.

3. **Rarity:** a habitat is assessed as being rare if it is restricted to a limited number of locations or to small, few and scattered locations in the OSPAR area.

4. **Sensitivity:** a 'very sensitive' habitat is one that is very easily adversely affected by a human activity and / or would be expected to, recover only over a very long period, or not at all. A 'sensitive' habitat is one that is easily adversely affected by a human activity and would be expected to recover only over a long period.

   Sensitivity will be expressed in terms of
       a.   impact of human activities (resistance)
       b.   capacity to recover (resilience), including a reflection of its degree of isolation or confinement to a small area.

5. **Ecological significance:** the habitat is very important for the wider significance of the ecological processes, functions and species that it supports.

6. **Status of decline.** Decline means a significant decline in extent or quality. The decline may be historic, recent of current. The decline can occur in the whole OSPAR maritime area or regionally.