

Agenda Item 7.3: Protected Areas

Report on the OSPAR-IMPACT meeting 1999 (Brest, 15 - 19 November 1999)

Submitted by: Belgium



ASCOBANS

NOTE:
**IN THE INTERESTS OF ECONOMY, DELEGATES ARE KINDLY REMINDED TO BRING
THEIR OWN COPIES OF THESE DOCUMENTS TO THE MEETING**

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Submitted by Belgium

1. Introduction

The meeting was held at the Institute IFREMER in Brest. ASCOBANS was represented by Jan Haelters. Many subjects were dealt with. The most relevant for ASCOBANS were:

- Ecological Quality and Ecological Quality Objectives;
- Assessment of species and habitats in need of protection;
- Protected Areas.

Besides these subjects, IMPACT is also looking into the impact of human activities on components of the marine environment (having regard to the relevant competent authorities). Human activities or the consequences thereof include shipping, litter, fisheries, sand and gravel extraction, artificial reefs and islands, tourism, mariculture, etc.

2. Ecological Quality (EcoQ) and Ecological Quality Objectives (EcoQOs)

Norway, as a lead country, gave an overview of the evolution of the development of EcoQOs. During the NSC/IMPACT workshop held at Scheveningen (1-3 September 1999), the concept of EcoQO and EcoQO was more or less agreed upon, together with ten sets of issues under which it could be possible for them to be developed. The focus was on identifying EcoQOs for the North Sea. EcoQOs should have a linkage with one or more human activities. For these activities, management objectives could be formulated in order to meet the set EcoQOs. As such, EcoQOs are suggested as a tool in the implementation of OSPAR Annex V and the related strategy. The definitions agreed during the Scheveningen workshop are as follows (Nordic Council, 1999):

- EcoQ: an overall expression of the structure and function of the aquatic systems;
- EcoQO: the desired level of the EcoQ relative to a reference level.

It is clear from the definitions, that a selection of variables, quantitative expressions of the present state, reference levels and objectives need to be developed. It was agreed that the relevant OSPAR working group should continue to ‘*oversee and co-ordinate the further development of EcoQOs for the OSPAR maritime area with the North Sea as a first step*’. A list of bodies that could provide the information and advice required by OSPAR to develop a set of agreed EcoQOs for the OSPAR maritime area is given in Annex V to the summary record of the meeting, together with the set of agreed issues. One of the sets of issues is ‘*sea mammals*’. The representative of ASCOBANS stated that ASCOBANS ‘*would look into the possibilities of offering contributions to the development of EcoQOs for small cetaceans in the North Sea*’. Under the issue of sea mammals, the document on the further development of EcoQOs within OSPAR (with, as a test case, the North Sea) states the following (from the IMPACT meeting summary record, Annex V):

Context in which the EcoQOs for this issue should be framed

Sea mammals include top predators in the marine food web and they have a high public profile. Knowledge of the status of sea mammals is useful, both from ecological and

political points of view. They are in general good indicators for long-term effects due e.g. to contamination or littering. Sea mammals seen as a group may potentially be good indicators for the overall, long-term ecosystem health.

Variables within the issue for which EcoQOs should be considered

Different species could be used to reflect different impacts, and operational EcoQOs should leave room for specification to geographical regions. EcoQOs for sea mammal populations may be defined in terms of a % range of natural long-term average population size. Possible operational elements of EcoQOs for sea mammals could be levels of incidental mortality resulting from fisheries, reproductive success, survival of offspring and the sensitivity to and occurrence of diseases. Impact on individual and population health could be measured or indicated using levels and trends in biochemical and physiological responses, such as tissue concentrations of chemicals, hormone and enzyme disruptions, incidence of diseases, and reproductive success. This should be supported by additional variables reflecting the population dynamics, such as population size, size and age distribution, age at first maturity, etc.

Data, information or advice required

*Population size and trend in sub-areas and any long-term averages;
Levels of incidental mortality resulting from fisheries;
Health/reproductive status of individual species of marine mammals with consideration of which variables might provide the most robust indicators of marine mammal health and potentially of ecosystem health.*

Principal bodies that could provide information and advice to assist OSPAR in developing EcoQOs for this issue

ICES has working groups dealing with various issues related to health and population dynamics of sea mammals. ICES (WGMMPD, WGMMHA, ACME), ASCOBANS.

3. Assessment of species and habitats in need of protection

The criteria for the selection of species and habitats that need protection were accepted as working instruments to help in the implementation of Annex V of OSPAR during the forthcoming years. The testing of the criteria for birds and cetaceans and the different ways of applying them had been done by Bird Life International and Peter Evans (ECS) respectively, and were presented in documents (Evans, 1999; this document was presented to the meeting by Belgium, because the ECS does not have observer status to OSPAR). It is clear that much work remains to be done to fine-tune the criteria and the ways of applying them.

4. Marine Protected Areas

According to the statements at the Ministerial Meeting of the OSPAR Commission at Sintra (1998), where the new Annex V to the Convention was adopted, the Commission can, *inter alia*, draw up programmes and measures for the selection and the establishment of a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), to ensure the sustainable use and protection and conservation of marine biological diversity and ecosystems.

At the IMPACT meeting, The Netherlands presented an inventory of existing Marine Protected Areas. IMPACT agreed on the proposal for an OSPAR programme on the '*development of a system of Marine Protected Areas in the OSPAR Maritime Area*'. This programme (summary record of the IMPACT meeting, Annex 13) is related to, and parallels the ongoing work on habitat classification and the criteria for the selection of species and habitats that need protection. The programme will first review and finalise the list and map of proposed and already existing MPAs in the maritime area, and continue with a finalisation of guidelines for the identification and selection of MPAs. Possible management options for MPAs will be developed and the legislative instruments for the establishment and management of MPAs will be examined (especially for the offshore area). In a second phase, proposals for sites which qualify for becoming MPAs can be put forward. Emphasis will be placed on the EEZs of Parties and on the high seas.

REFERENCES

- Evans, P.G.H., 1999. Testing the application of OSPAR criteria for the selection of priority species for protective measures, using cetaceans. OSPAR IMPACT meeting, Brest, 1999; document IMPACT 99/04/11-E(L), 5 p.
- Nordic Council, 1999. Workshop on Ecological Quality Objectives (EcoQOs) for the North Sea – Scheveningen – The Netherlands, 1-3 September 1999. Tema Nord 1999:591, 75 pp.