

Ministerial Meeting of the OSPAR Commission October 2021

Cascais Declaration

1. **WE, THE MINISTERS AND THE MEMBER OF THE COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**, meeting within the framework of the OSPAR Commission for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, **adopt** this Declaration and **commit** to achieve a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to the effects of climate change and ocean acidification. We will do this through the **implementation** of our new North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030.
2. As the OSPAR Commission, we form a like-minded community committed to the international rules-based order and regional multilateral cooperation on the protection and sustainable use of the North-East Atlantic. We **believe** that we are stronger when we work together, and **commit** to inclusive, transparent and consensus-based decision-making involving all stakeholders.
3. Guided by our Convention, we will **pursue** all possible actions to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, to prevent and eliminate pollution including marine litter and underwater noise and to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change and ocean acidification on the marine environment.
4. We **commit** to improve the health of the North-East Atlantic and through that the lives and prospects of everyone in our region and will continue to develop innovative programmes and measures that deliver sustainable solutions.
5. We will **ensure** that OSPAR remains a trusted multilateral partner that will continue to play a leading role in the global and regional ocean governance framework. We further **aim** to share our knowledge, expertise and best practice to help others build capacity.
6. We **commit** to adequately resourcing the implementation of the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 in order to fully achieve its objectives.

Significant and growing challenges that require individual and collective action

7. The world has changed dramatically in recent years. Megatrends and extreme weather events have become more evident, opportunities and threats more visible. The global climate, biodiversity and COVID-19 crises have underscored the inter-dependency and complexity of humanity's relationship with nature and the environment. The dire consequences of climate change, biodiversity loss and polluted oceans are clear and interlinked. If we do not act now, environmental degradation and biodiversity loss will have a devastating impact on our economies, societies, and future generations.
8. Our societies and our lives are intrinsically interlinked to the health of the ocean. We are living beyond our means. The air we breathe, the food we eat, our climate and weather systems are all at risk from growing pressure on the ocean. The decade ahead of us will see a growing demand for additional goods and services from the ocean, including renewable energy, blue carbon storage, and food production. We will not be able to meet those demands and our ambitions on sustainable use if we do not meet climate resilience, biodiversity protection and pollution prevention targets.
9. We **recognise** that public awareness of these problems, which extend far beyond national borders, has developed over recent decades. Society increasingly calls for action and declares itself ready for change. As an international organisation we must react to this call.
10. Science, digitisation, technological progress and innovation are shaping our understanding of the ocean, providing us with new evidence, solutions and opportunities. During the UN Decade of Ocean Science, we will continue to **use** and **scale up** our shared scientific knowledge and understanding of the state of the marine environment. We will use this knowledge and understanding, together with traditional knowledge and local knowledge, in our decision-making and in the development and implementation of programmes and measures, while also applying the precautionary principle.

We, the Contracting Parties to the OSPAR Convention, reaffirm our commitment to work together to take strong action to protect the North-East Atlantic...

11. We will **lead** by example and will intensify our efforts to protect, conserve and restore the North-East Atlantic.
12. We aim to achieve zero pollution by 2050 and commit to reduce single-use plastic items and maritime-related plastic items on our beaches by 50% by 2025 and 75% by 2030. We will **take** action to eliminate anthropogenic eutrophication and continue to reduce hazardous and radioactive substances to near background levels for naturally occurring substances and close to zero for human made substances.

13. We **commit** to halting and reversing the decline in biodiversity by 2030. As an immediate step on this journey, today we designate the North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin marine protected area, covering 595,196 km², to protect seabirds. This designation takes our OSPAR network of MPAs to 1,460,000 km² which equates to 10.8% of our maritime area. Mindful that this MPA has conservation objectives directed towards the protection of seabirds, we **affirm** that we will also exercise due diligence with regard to any activities pertaining to the seabed below the waters covered by the MPA. Furthermore, we **intend** to enhance the protection by including additional OSPAR listed features and the seabed, ocean floor and subsoil thereof in the scope of the NACES MPA as supported by an evidence review process. We request the relevant competent international organisations to take note of these actions. We further **commit** to expand our network of effectively managed, well connected and representative marine protected areas and other effective conservation measures across OSPAR regions to cover at least 30%, which is over 4 million km², of our maritime area by 2030, with a view to achieving a high level of protection over time.
14. Climate change is the existential crisis of our time and its effects on our oceans are profound. We **recognise** that the best way to protect the ocean from the impacts of climate change is to work through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the Paris Agreement to limit global warming to well below 2°C, and preferably to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. We **will** continue to monitor and assess the effects of climate change, and ocean acidification on the North-East Atlantic and further raise awareness of the climate-biodiversity-ocean nexus. We **will take** action to make the ocean more resilient to the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification by safeguarding the marine environment's role as a natural carbon sink. We **recognise** that nature-based solutions and effective protection and restoration of marine habitats each play a role in preventing biodiversity loss and supporting adaptation, resilience and mitigation to climate change, while providing benefits to people and livelihoods. We will **encourage** more research and improve our scientific knowledge of the effects of climate change on the resilience of the North-East Atlantic and on how existing and emerging pressures can be reduced or eliminated.
15. Offshore renewable energy will play a key role in decarbonising our economies in the coming decades but knowledge gaps still exist about its impact on the marine environment. We will **take** action to promote and facilitate the sustainable expansion of renewable energy developments while respecting our commitments to a healthy and biologically diverse marine environment.
16. Human activities are reaching further into the ocean than ever before, unlocking new opportunities for sustainable use of resources in the OSPAR maritime area. We will **lead** on assessing the impacts on the

marine environment of human activities taking place under our jurisdiction or control in ABNJ, in line with the precautionary principle and to avoid serious harm to the environment.

17. We **acknowledge** that the ocean is impacted by diverse pressures from land-based sources and **commit** to take additional effective measures in relevant land-based sectors.

....by working collaboratively with others to ensure sustainable, inclusive and resilient growth...

18. Through strong regional multilateral cooperation, we are confident that we can implement our vision and achieve our goals while enabling sustainable uses of the marine environment. We **recognise** the need for collaboration with regional and local governments to achieve our objectives. We will continue to build on the 29 years of successful cooperation within the framework of the OSPAR Commission and **recognise** the common benefit of further strengthening our cooperation.

19. We **recognise** that we work best when we work with others. As OSPAR we will continue to cooperate with the other regional and international intergovernmental bodies with whom we have agreements in place. We take this opportunity to expand on these agreements today by **agreeing** new memoranda of understanding with the Bonn Agreement and the Cartagena Convention and commit to reinforce our cooperation with the Abidjan Convention. We will **intensify** our efforts to cooperate with other competent organisations through the *Collective Arrangement* as the appropriate platform to address the management of human activities in areas beyond national jurisdiction in the North-East Atlantic.

20. We **recognise** the unique biodiversity of the Arctic, part of the OSPAR maritime area, and **commit** to protect the Arctic marine environment, including through collaboration with other relevant organisations, such as the Arctic Council and the International Maritime Organisation.

21. For European Union (EU) related policies, we recognise the unique position OSPAR plays in international cooperation for the protection of the marine environment. We **reaffirm** that the OSPAR Commission will continue to facilitate, for those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States, the coordinated and coherent implementation of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive and other EU marine related policies and legislation.

22. We also **reaffirm** that the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) sets out the legal framework within which all activities in the ocean must be carried out and is of strategic importance as the basis for national, regional and global action and cooperation in the marine sector. We **affirm** that

OSPAR will continue its active collaboration with all United Nations bodies with a role in ocean governance.

23. We commit OSPAR to play an ambitious role in delivering the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework to be agreed under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development and the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. We also commit to promote and actively work towards an international legally binding instrument on marine biodiversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. We commit to a global agreement to reduce plastic marine litter under the United Nations Environment Assembly process.

24. We support an ambitious new global framework under the United Nations Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management beyond 2020 and agree that the OSPAR Commission will join the High Ambition Alliance on chemicals and waste in support of this objective.

25. We are **determined** that our North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 adopted today will contribute to the delivery of the United Nation's Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Sustainable Development Goal 14 "Life below water".

...with a Commission working on the basis of science, transparency, and accountability.

26. We **regard** the OSPAR Commission as an essential platform for multilateral cooperation on the marine environment that actively contributes to setting the global ocean agenda including the protection of marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

27. We **believe** that our observers from a wide range of intergovernmental and non-governmental organisations play an invaluable role in delivering the OSPAR vision through their expertise and scrutiny of our work. They help to ensure that OSPAR remains transparent and inclusive in its decision-making and accountable for its actions. We **commit** to strengthening observer involvement in the implementation of the North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030.

28. We **consider** that we can only take ambitious actions to eliminate pollution, halt the loss of biodiversity and address the effects of climate change with the support of our pooled scientific, traditional and local knowledge and expertise. The forthcoming Quality Status Report in 2023 will demonstrate this cooperative effort.

29. We **reconfirm** that OSPAR will continue to dedicate its collaborative force to the agreed vision and common objectives of our North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy. To maintain momentum and to ensure that we reach our goals we **ask** the OSPAR Commission to report progress on the implementation of the Strategy every 2 years and **agree** to meet again within 5 years to review implementation and adjust the Strategy, if necessary, in light of the Quality Status Report 2023.