

Press release

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OSPAR on track to adopt a Marine Litter Regional Action Plan

The OSPAR Commission looks set to adopt an innovative Regional Action Plan for Prevention and Management of Marine Litter in the North-East Atlantic. The OSPAR Commission, which guides international cooperation on the protection of the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic, aims to finalise the plan in Cascais (Portugal) at its annual meeting next week.

The dynamic oceans coupled with the diverse sources of marine litter create a problem that straddles boundaries and requires collective action to solve. In 2010, OSPAR Ministers noted that quantities of litter in many areas of the North-East Atlantic were unacceptable and committed to continue to develop reduction measures and targets.

The Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter has been developed with the aim of following-up on OSPAR Ministers' commitments and of implementing the objective of the North East Atlantic Environment Strategy *"to substantially reduce marine litter in the OSPAR maritime area to levels where properties and quantities do not cause harm to the marine environment"*. The Plan will focus on:

- the development of regionally coordinated reduction/operational targets taking into account the European Union's Marine Strategy Framework Directive;
- specific sources and items of marine litter;
- the development of regional measures;
- monitoring and assessment;
- cooperation with other relevant regional and international organisations.

The OSPAR Regional Action Plan will support the Rio+20 global commitment to *"take action to, by 2025, based on collected scientific data, achieve significant reductions in marine debris to prevent harm to the coastal and marine environment"*. The OSPAR objective is in line with the European Union's Marine Strategy Framework Directive, where achieving Good Environmental Status also relates to the properties and quantities of marine litter that should no longer have harmful effects on coastal and marine environments by 2020. In this sense, OSPAR's plan for prevention and management of marine litter can be seen as an exemplar for a regional effort supporting multiple national, regional and global commitments.

Full details of the Regional Action Plan on Marine Litter will be announced following the meeting of the OSPAR Commission from 23-27 June 2014.

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Note for editors

1. The [OSPAR Commission](#) was set up by the 1992 OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, which unified and updated the 1972 Oslo and 1974 Paris Conventions. It brings together the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, together with the European Community.
2. More than 30 international non-governmental organisations are involved in OSPAR as official Observers. They represent a broad range of interests and expertise related to the marine environment and the uses of marine resources. Many contribute information, insights and standpoints. This is much appreciated feedback from civil society and the economy. The OSPAR Commission greatly values these partnerships that help inform its decisions and other results. (See list on OSPAR website at <http://www.ospar.org/content/content.asp?menu=0016>).
3. The [Bergen Statement](#) was adopted at the third Ministerial Meeting of the OSPAR Commission in 2010 in Bergen, Norway.
4. Marine Litter covers a wide range of materials which have been deliberately discarded, or unintentionally lost on beaches and on shores or at sea, including materials transported into marine environment from land by rivers, draining or sewage systems or winds. It includes any persistent, manufactured or processed solid material. Marine litter originates from different marine and terrestrial sources and is rooted in the prevailing production and consumption pattern.

Marine litter is not only an aesthetic problem but incurs socioeconomic costs, threatens human health and safety and impacts on marine organisms. It is broadly documented that entanglement in, or ingestion of, marine litter can have negative consequences on the physical condition of marine animals and even lead to death. Ingestion of micro plastics is also of concern as it may provide a pathway for transport of harmful chemicals into the food web. Additionally, marine litter is known to damage and degrade habitats (e.g. in terms of smothering) and to carry the risk for the transfer of alien species.

Marine litter consists of a range of materials, including plastic, metal, wood, rubber, glass and paper. Although the relative proportions of these materials vary regionally, there is clear evidence that plastic litter is by far the most abundant type. In some locations in the OSPAR region, plastics amount to 90 % of marine litter of shorelines. A similar predominance of plastics is reported from sampling at the sea surface and on the sea bed.

Most plastics are extremely durable materials and persist in the marine environment for a considerable period, possibly as much as hundreds of years. Plastics also deteriorate and fragment in the environment as a consequence of exposure to sunlight (photo-degradation) in addition to physical and chemical deterioration. This breakdown of larger items results in numerous tiny plastic fragments which remain in the marine environment along with other micro plastics produced either for direct use - such as for industrial abrasives or cosmetics - or for indirect use - such as preproduction pellets or nurdles.

Biodegradable plastics can also cause problems in the marine environment as most can only biodegrade under specific conditions of constant temperature and humidity in industrial composting installations and therefore do not degrade in a reasonable time when entering the marine environment as litter. Moreover, many biodegradable plastics may not degrade in the intestines of marine species. Hence injury and starvation are likely to remain issues.