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**Sea change: Ministers seize once in a decade opportunity for a healthier North-East Atlantic**

Ministers from around the North-East Atlantic met today in Cascais, Portugal, to renew and extend their commitments to protect and conserve the North-East Atlantic and its resources.

The 15 countries represented at the meeting are all signatories to the [OSPAR Convention](https://www.ospar.org), along with the European Union whose Commissioner was also in attendance. The meeting designated a new high seas Marine Protected Area (MPA) for seabirds which is larger than the land mass of the United Kingdom and Germany combined. A new North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy was also agreed setting out ambitious commitments for the coming decade in an effort to turn the tide on three of the biggest issues facing the ocean: the impacts of climate change and ocean acidification, biodiversity loss, and pollution, including marine plastic pollution.

Opening the meeting, host Minister of the Sea, Ricardo Serrāo Santos said “OSPAR should intensify its actions to find solutions for the major problems the planet is facing, namely climate change, loss of biodiversity, and sustainability of human systems”. Key outcomes of the meeting included:

* The designation of the high seas North Atlantic Current and Evlanov Sea basin MPA, which will cover nearly 600,000 km2 and protect a vitally important area for seabirds. Based on tracking data, the Site was found to be an important feeding and foraging area and is used both by seabirds breeding on the coasts of the North-East Atlantic, and by those migrating across the globe or nesting in other parts of the world.
* The launch of OSPAR’s North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030 setting objectives until the end of the decade. It is based around four themes: clean seas; biologically diverse seas; productive and sustainably used seas; and seas resilient to climate change and ocean acidification. It includes a target to reduce marine litter by 50% by 2025 and by 75% by 2030, and a commitment to designate 30% of the OSPAR Maritime Area as MPA by 2030.
* Action to reduce the loss of plastic pellets into the marine environment through pellet loss prevention standards and certification schemes for the entire plastic supply chain. This action is supported by a set of guidelines for Contracting Parties and industry.
* Protection for important carbon sequestering kelp forest habitat to minimise adverse effects from human activities and climate change.

With little over 4 weeks till [COP26](https://ukcop26.org/) in Glasgow, ministers reaffirmed OSPAR’s leadership role on the world stage, including in global negotiations on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity in the high seas, and OSPAR’s contribution to the achievement of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its [Sustainable Development Goals](https://sdgs.un.org/goals).

Ocean Ambassador [Dr Sylvia Earle](https://mission-blue.org/about/) said, “Actions taken in the next 10 years, will determine the fate of the next 10 thousand years”.

OSPAR Chair, Richard Cronin (Ireland) said “The time for talking is over, we now embark on a decade of action to protect and conserve the North-East Atlantic”.

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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 Union.

2. OSPAR’s current North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy (NEAES) 2010-2020 can be viewed here www.ospar.org/convention/strategy. We will launch our NEAES 2030 at our Ministerial meeting on 1 October. This will include objectives on climate change and ocean acidification for the first time.

3. For more information on the Ministerial meeting 2021, please see this page [www.ospar.org/ministerial](http://www.ospar.org/ministerial)

4 . For a full list of Ministerial deliverables, please visit [www.ospar.org/ministerial/deliverables](http://www.ospar.org/ministerial/deliverables)

