



Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas

Recommendation

WWF calls on the Environment Ministers of the Baltic and North-East Atlantic to agree to take concerted action within the framework of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to promote the Baltic Sea, the Barents Sea and the waters of Western Europe*, as Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSA) along with appropriate protective measures.

* The waters of Portugal, Spain including the waters to the Straits of Gibraltar, France, and to the west and east of Ireland and the UK, including the Irish Sea and relevant parts of the North Sea.

Background

Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs) are areas of the seas and oceans that need special protection through action by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) because of their ecological, economic, cultural or scientific significance and their vulnerability to harmful impacts from shipping activities. To date 5 PSSAs have been designated globally and the 6th off the coast of Peru is in the pipeline. The most recently designated site, the Wadden Sea, is the first PSSA in European waters.

PSSAs can help coastal nations prevent accidents, avoid habitat damage and stop intentional pollution by regulating the passage of ships through or away from sensitive areas. The identification of PSSAs also serves to inform mariners of the need to take special care when approaching a sensitive area.

In 1998, the OSPAR Environment Ministers adopted a new Annex to the OSPAR Convention on the Protection and Conservation of the Ecosystem and Biological Diversity of the Maritime Area. Within Annex V a commitment was given in relation to action concerning maritime transport. The Annex stipulates that where it was desirable, the Commission should draw the attention of the International Maritime

Organization (IMO) to the need for action. In addition, the Contracting Parties should work co-operatively within the IMO to achieve an appropriate response, including action at a regional or local level. In a comparable but more specific way, Article 8 of the 1992 Helsinki Convention, in conjunction with its Annex IV, provides the basis for Baltic states to work co-operatively at regional level and within the IMO to prevent pollution from shipping.



Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas

PSSAs can benefit valuable ecosystems such as coral reefs, intertidal wetlands and important marine and coastal habitats. They are also important for migrating seabirds, dolphins, seals or other marine species, as well as feeding grounds for valuable fish stocks. In addition, they can benefit marine areas of particular importance for tourism, recreation, traditional subsistence, science or education. And if any of the above are close to shipping lanes, suffer from bad weather, have narrow passages, shallow depths, or submerged reefs, or are otherwise sensitive to shipping impacts, then they may need PSSA assistance to protect them.

For foreign ships not calling on local ports, international law limits the ability of coastal nations to impose and enforce their own environmental and navigation regulations. Within their 12-mile territorial sea, coastal nations may neither "impair" a transiting ship's right of innocent passage, nor impose new construction, design, equipment or manning standards. Beyond the territorial seas, in the Exclusive Economic Zone or equivalent extending out to 200 nautical miles from the shore, coastal states can only adopt regulations for transiting ships that have been previously approved by the IMO. Thus it can be difficult to impose uniform regulations applicable to all ships to protect discrete areas of the marine environment that are particularly sensitive. However, through PSSAs, area-specific rules can be matched to local needs and conditions.

Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas (PSSAs) in the North-East Atlantic and Baltic

For information, contact:

Stephan Lutter
WWF North-East Atlantic Programme
Am Gütphohl 11 · D-28757 Bremen · Germany
Tel: +49 421 65846-22 · Fax: +49 421 65846-12
E-mail: lutter@wwfneap.org

Protective measures suggested for the Barents Sea PSSA:

- * Establishment of mandatory ship routes in a safer distance from the shore - dependant on availability of tug boats
- * Mandatory reporting of traffic in and through the area
- * Areas to be avoided
- * Requirement for double hulls on ships carrying hazardous substances.

Furthermore, the identification of a PSSA also serves to inform mariners of the need to take special care when approaching a sensitive area.

PSSA Wadden Sea

The Wadden Sea is Europe's largest coastal wetland and one of its last natural areas. It is a shallow sea extending from Den Helder in the Netherlands, along the entire northwest coast of Germany to Esbjerg in Denmark. The Wadden Sea met the criteria for designation as a PSSA in terms of ecological sensitivity, social, cultural and economic importance and its importance scientifically and for educational purposes. It experiences around 260,000 shipping movements a year making it one of the most frequented seas areas world wide and in the German ports alone, 171.5 million tons of cargo were transferred in 1999.

Designating a PSSA

Within the IMO it is now acceptable to propose a PSSA alongside the existing protective measures. Furthermore, it is possible to introduce a PSSA submission and over the following two years bring forward the associated protective measures or further associated protective measures. Once the area is designated as a PSSA along with the appropriate protective measures, it remains possible to introduce further protective measures if these are deemed appropriate to the management and protection of the PSSA.

Draft Text for the Ministerial Declaration

The Ministers agree to take concerted action within the framework of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to promote the Baltic Sea, the northern Norwegian coast and the waters to the west of Portugal, Spain, France, including the Bay of Biscay and to the west and east of Ireland and the UK, including the Irish Sea and relevant parts of the North Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) along with appropriate protective measures. (for boundaries see Fig 2)

Briefing prepared by
Sian Pullen, Kristina Gjerde, Anita Mäkinen, Jochen Lamp,
José Luis Garcia Varas & Andreas Tveteraas



Fig.1:
WWF-Spain demonstration in Madrid at the Neptun fountain of Plaza de las Cibeles. "Neptun is in mourning. No more Prestiges" Credit: © WWF-Canon / Isaac VEGA

Further reading

HELCOM (2003): Proceedings of the Joint IMO/HELCOM/EU Workshop: further international actions needed (Warnemünde, Germany, 11-12 March 2003). Helsinki Commission. Helsinki.

IMO (2003): Identification and Protection of Special Areas and Particularly Sensitive Areas: Designation of a Western European PSSA - submitted by Belgium, France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and the UK. IMO-MEPC 49/8/1. International Maritime Organization. London.

WWF (1999): Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas - a precautionary tool to protect the world's sensitive marine ecosystems from shipping impacts such as oil spills, ship groundings, anchore damage and rubbish. WWF UK. Godalming.

WWF (2000): Protection of the Wadden Sea from ship accidents through the establishment of a PSSA Wadden Sea. A realisation plan for the trilateral cooperation of Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands. WWF Germany. Bremen/Husum/Frankfurt.

WWF (2002): Shipping on the Southern North Sea. What is PSSA Wadden Sea? WWF Germany. Husum/Frankfurt.

WWF (2003): WWF Proposal PSSA Baltic Sea. WWF Baltic Team. Solna. Sweden.

WWF (2003): The Barents Sea - a sea of opportunities and threats. Petroleum activities and fragile nature. WWF Norway. Oslo.

WWF (2003): Draft Guidance Document on Associated Protective Measures for PSSAs. Submission to IMO MEPC 49.

WWF (2003): Identification and Protection of Special Areas and Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas: Designation of a Western European Particularly Sensitive Sea Area. Comments on MEPC 49/8/1.

WWF (2003): The Baltic Sea – a globally unique and vulnerable sea area. Submission to IMO MEPC 49.

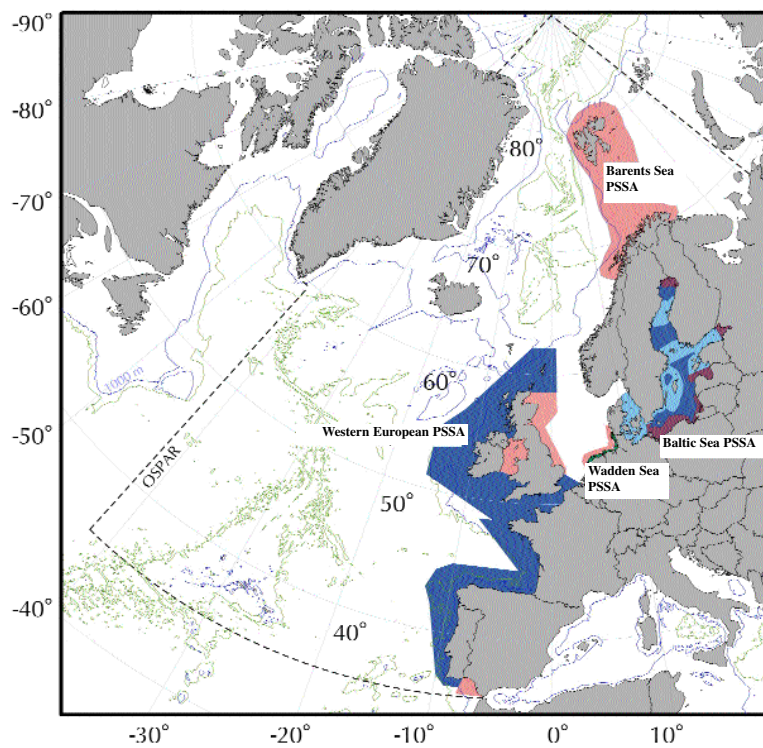


Fig. 2:
Map of existing PSSAs and governmental proposals for new PSSAs in the NE Atlantic and Baltic. Amendments proposed by WWF are highlighted. Note: It is not decided yet whether Baltic governments will agree to propose the entire Baltic Sea as a PSSA or just parts of it. Credit: Sabine Christiansen

- Wadden Sea PSSA (adopted Protection Area)
- Government proposals (Atlantic and/or Baltic)
- Core areas proposed by Baltic states
- Additional Baltic core areas proposed by WWF
- Additional areas proposed by WWF: SW Spain, East coast of UK, Irish Sea, Barents Sea, Wadden Sea Intervention Area