

Sea Use and Spatial Planning

Background and rationale

At the 5th North Sea Conference, Ministers recognised the potential conflicts between the requirements for conservation and restoration of the marine environment, and the different activities in the North Sea.

They agreed that strengthening of the spatial planning process of North Sea States related to the marine environment was required, and invited OSPAR to take forward a number of initiatives on this subject (§ XI, Bergen Declaration, 2002).

One of these initiatives was "to investigate the possibilities for further international co-operation in planning and managing marine activities through spatial planning of the North Sea States, taking into effect transboundary and cumulative effects".

The request to OSPAR was put to the Biodiversity Committee meeting in January 2003, who agreed to hold a workshop to discuss the subject of marine spatial planning in more detail.

The need (for marine spatial planning)

The OSPAR Maritime Area includes some of the most intensively used areas of sea in the world. The mix and the scale of activities taking place in the North-East Atlantic, as well as the desire to add to this as new technologies become available, has created a very complex pattern of use and regulation. All of this has taken place without any overall framework for planning and management in the marine environment. This

approach is becoming less and less sustainable as the competition for resources (including space) intensifies and needs to be balanced against the conservation of marine biodiversity. At the same time, it is also contradictory to the desire for an ecosystem-based approach to planning and management, which requires a holistic and integrated view rather than an almost total reliance on sectoral decision making.

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The benefits (of marine spatial planning)

The benefits would include a directed approach towards *overall objectives*, rather than a reactive system with poorly integrated or piecemeal decision making on the use of marine resources. There would be an improved ability to *minimise conflicts* of use and to take into account *cumulative and in-combination effects* in decision-making. A framework of marine spatial planning also presents the possibility of being *forward-looking* and would provide a clear, easily accessible, mechanism for *stakeholder involvement* in the planning and management of activities in the marine environment.

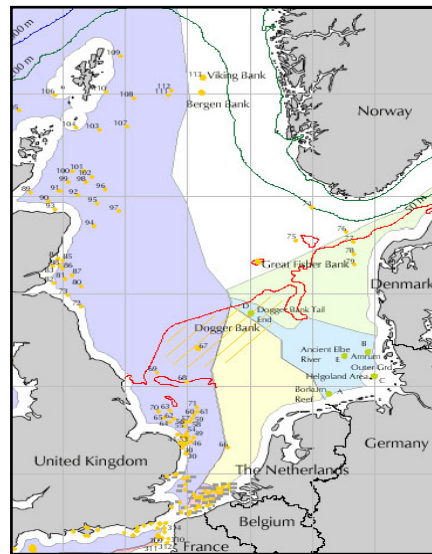


Fig. 1:
 Map of the North Sea showing:
 * the boundaries of countries' Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and/or 200 nautical miles (nm) zones
 * submerged sandbanks including the Dogger Bank.
 Source: WWF Report on Implementation of the EU Habitats Directive Offshore, 2001.
 Credit: Sabine Christiansen

Example: The Dogger Bank

The Dogger Bank (Fig. 1) marks the division between the southern and central North Sea. The area was one of the most important fishing grounds in northern Europe in the 17th and early 18th centuries. The discovery of oil and gas fields on its northern and southern extremities is more recent and today it is crossed by oil and gas pipelines as well as subsea communications cables. The southern edge of the Dogger Bank has been included in recent consideration as a possible area for offshore windfarms, and the area is also a potential Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats & Species Directive. In administrative terms the Dogger Bank falls within the jurisdictions of Germany, the Netherlands and the UK, while all EU countries have access to fisheries in this area through the Common Fisheries Policy.

Management of these and other activities takes place on a sectoral rather than integrated basis with no overall policy or forward looking plan for the sustainable use of the Dogger Bank. It presents a classic case of the need for the framework of spatial planning in the marine environment.

The elements (of marine spatial planning)

Some of the elements needed to operate a system of marine spatial planning already exist. They include Strategic Environmental Assessment, which will help link decisions on sea use to agreed broad objectives and provide an ecosystem-based approach to management. Data sharing, risk assessment, ecological and socio-economic mapping including use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), will also help deliver spatial planning and there are already many operational systems that could be harnessed. A regional approach, would enable such a system to reflect the different pressures, opportunities and knowledge base in different parts of the OSPAR Maritime Area, as well as providing an underpinning ecological basis to the planning framework.

Some OSPAR Contracting Parties already have experience of marine spatial planning albeit limited to their inshore waters and therefore with a national focus. There is also interest in looking at the issue further offshore. One example is work in the Irish Sea which is examining the broader planning framework that is needed to deliver marine nature conservation in the region.

A tool for the ecosystem-based approach to management

A system of spatial planning for the marine environment is a necessary tool for the delivery of an ecosystem-based approach to management of human activities in the marine environment. It will also provide an essential framework in which conservation of marine biodiversity, through initiatives such as Marine Protected Areas, can counterbalance the growing demand for space at sea for human use.(Fig.2)

...WWF calls on Ministers to

• **recognise** the benefits of marine spatial planning as a tool for ecosystem-based approach to management of human activities in the marine environment.

- **agree** to initiate a pilot project by 2004 to highlight the practical, legal and administrative issues that would need to be addressed to deliver marine spatial planning for the North Sea and to demonstrate its role in an ecosystem-based approach to management.
- **agree** to involve Contracting Parties that do not border the North Sea in the pilot project by seeking views on how marine spatial planning might be taken forward in other regions of the OSPAR Maritime Area.
- **agree** to apply Strategic Environmental Assessment procedures, including mapping on GIS, as necessary delivery tools for marine spatial planning, and to publish guidance on how these elements can be integrated into a system of marine spatial planning for the OSPAR area by 2005.

Text prepared by Susan Gubbay

Further reading

BirdLife International (2003): Developing a Framework for Marine Spatial Planning in the North Sea: Principles. Paper to the BDC Meeting of OSPAR. BDC 03/4/15-E OSPAR Commission.London.

Gubbay, S., Baker, C.M. & Bett, B.J. (2002): The Darwin Mounds and The Dogger Bank. Case studies of the management of two potential "Special Areas of Conservation" in the offshore environment. WWF UK. Godalming.

OSPAR (2003): Spatial Planning. Secretariat Paper to the BDC Meeting of OSPAR. BDC 03/4/10-E(L). OSPAR Commission. London.

WWF (2001): Implementation of the EU Habitats Directive offshore: Natura 2000 sites for reefs and submerged sandbanks. Vol. II: North East Atlantic and North Sea. WWF UK. Godalming.

WWF (2002): Making Space for North Sea Wildlife. Briefing. WWF North-East Atlantic Programme. Bremen.

Fig. 2: Illustration of the different components to an ecosystem-based approach to management indicating the role of spatial planning and related elements such as Strategic Environmental Assessment. Credit: Sabine Christiansen

