

SUMMARY REPORT - OSPAR WORKGROUP

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The OSPAR workgroup on actions and measures in relation to species and habitats of the OSPAR list, met in Paris between the 14th and the 16th of October. This meeting is part of a global approach to proposing actions for the meeting of ministers of the contracting parties at the November 2010 convention (Bergen). The conclusions of the workgroup will be revised and refined in November 2009 by the MASH group, and in June 2010 by the committee for bio-diversity.

The purpose of this group of experts (a majority of scientists, NGO environmentalists and professionals) is therefore to propose specific or global measures aimed at protecting listed habitats and species. The type of actions to be put forward were discussed, between objective measures based on known elements, and more radical measures to ensure forceful declarations during the meeting of the Ministers.

The work was broken down into 6 groups, according to the following themes:

- Birds and turtles
- Elasmobranchii (deep water sharks, Blue Skate, Porbeagle Shark, Dogfish, Bottlenosed Skate, Angelshark, Thornback Ray, Blonde Ray)
- Amphihaline species (Sturgeon, European Eel, Shad, Salmon, Sea Lamprey)
- Commercial species (Cod, Orange Roughy, Bluefin Tuna)
- Coastal habitats (Burrowing Sea Pens and Mega fauna, cyprine, mussel beds, oyster beds, intertidal mudflats, zostera areas)
- Deep water habitats (coral, sponges, hydrothermal springs, seamounts)

I personally participated in the group relating to Elasmobranchii (J. Portus, another NWWRAC representative, participated in the group relating to coastal habitats).

In the case of each species and habitat, workgroups were to make an assessment of existing knowledge (threat/pressure level, existing protection measures...). Specific measures were proposed, based on this data, before drawing up transversal priority measures for each of the subject groups.

The measures decided upon by the different groups are as follows:

1. Elasmobranchii

- Identification of critical habitats: concentration areas
- Improve species identification: improvement in statistics
- Study the survival rate of rejects: impact of prohibition on catches
- Collect and use data provided by professionals.
- Studies of species life cycles
- Encourage fishing authorities to follow scientific recommendations

2. Amphihaline species

- Habitat restoration
- Improve knowledge of species in the marine environment
- Put in places evolutionary measures taking into account future changes (climate and associated impacts)
- Improve knowledge on the impact of pollution and eutrophication

3. Commercial species

- Increase awareness among the stakeholders in the field
- Encourage the development of ecosystemic recommendations and socio-economic research
- Encourage fishing authorities to follow scientific recommendations
- Ensure that regulations are correctly implemented
- Reduce rejects (in particular for cod)
- Define the marine protected areas (in particular for Orange Roughy)
- Ban fishing for Orange Roughy in all the North East Atlantic;
- Co-operation with ICCAT.

4. Coastal habitats

- Reduce fishing pressure using closed areas or managed areas
- Spatial planning of the maritime;
- Improve impact knowledge (for example: pollution and benthic environments)
- Collect information on fisheries localisation, and the level of by-catch for demersal
- Communicate information on localisation and habitat protection to fishermen
- Develop actions for dealing with invasive species

5. Deep water habitats

- Improve habitat mapping
- Ban the expansion of deep water fishing activities
- Define marine protected areas
- Use Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) approaches
- Ban damage to deep water habitats

This OSPAR work session concluded with the definition of priority measures (through an informal vote by the participants) that should be communicated to the ministerial meeting in 2010.

The different directions brought out are as follows:

- Co-ordination of demographic monitoring of breeding colonies of Black-legged Kittiwake gulls
- Identification of critical habitats for elasmobranchii
- Habitat restoration for amphihaline fish;



- Strict adherence to scientific recommendations in respect of commercial species (Bluefin Tuna, Orange Roughy, cod)
- Freeze the deep water fishing footprint
- Reduce fishing pressure through closed areas and managed areas

It is difficult to envisage, from the discussions of this OSPAR workgroup, what measures will eventually be retained following the full OSPAR consultation process. The involvement of the RAC in OSPAR meetings seems essential, because, even if the making of decisions is not the purpose of the OSPAR convention, it can guide the actions of the contracting parties. In addition, one senses the presence of lobbyist pressure in OSPAR that can be prejudicial to the objectiveness of the discussions.