

OSPAR Commission: Environmental Impact of Human Activities (EIHA) Committee 2015

Prof. David Johnson represented ACOPS at EIHA hosted by Spain in Santander, 13-17 April, 2015. EIHA is one of OSPAR's six technical Committees, each of which meet annually. The Committee's Programme of Work covers several topics of interest to ACOPS including underwater noise, marine litter, renewable energies, dredged materials, dumped conventional and chemical munitions, NOx emission control and Carbon Capture and Storage. EIHA also gives consideration to climate change adaptation. It is OSPAR's role to collectively monitor and periodically assess environmental pressures associated with these activities. Such efforts contribute to Quality Status Reports for the marine environment, which themselves must align with other processes such as the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive. To achieve this OSPAR has a Data and Information Strategy and will next produce a so-called "intermediate" assessment in 2017 and a full Quality Status Report in 2021.

EIHA 2015 considered indicators and cumulative effects for activities affecting the OSPAR List of Threatened and/or Declining Species and Habitats; a Regional Action Plan for Marine Litter; and a monitoring programme for ambient noise considering the possibility of an acoustic basins and sound maps (as a way of presenting the data) approach. Longer-term issues to be considered in future include deep-sea mining, wet marine renewables (e.g. tidal stream power arrays) and any implications of London Convention work on marine geoengineering. Interesting papers were presented on sources of microplastics, ICES advice on bottom trawling intensity mapping and an update by the UK on national climate change adaptation initiatives.

David presented an overview of seabed mining, an emerging human activity with likely environmental impact that will need to be regulated in future. Regulation in Area Beyond National Jurisdiction is the responsibility of the International Seabed Authority, with whom OSPAR has a formal Memorandum of Understanding, and within national waters regulation is for the coastal states concerned. To date the International Seabed Authority has only issued exploration contracts. A number of these 15-year licenses are almost at full-term and consideration is currently being given to standard terms and conditions for exploitation licenses. The most likely area where seabed mining may be feasible in the OSPAR Maritime Area in the short-term is in Portuguese waters close to the Azores. David highlighted the MIDAS Project, a 3-year EU FP7 initiative considering environmental aspects such as plumes, ecotoxicology and ecosystem recovery¹. Both test mining and exploitation will require contractors to undertake Environmental Impact Assessments. David suggested that at some future date OSPAR may consider developing or contributing to regional best practice guidance. For other activities of this nature, with potential for significant environmental impacts, OSPAR Contracting Parties have agreed protocols for monitoring and/or measures for collective action within an Ecosystem Approach.

¹ www.midas-project.eu/