



GOVERNANCE IN THE NORTHEAST ATLANTIC SEA BASIN



Please note that this document is intended to present a snapshot of the current governance of EU Sea basins as of November 2024. However as highlighted by the sections that follow, this can be dynamic and is subject to change.

As a common good, for decades sea basins have been areas for cooperation between States. In the first instance, cooperation was driven by environmental aspects since marine ecosystems do not know legal borders, and their environmental status is dependent on the pressures/stressors from all around the sea basin. As a result, regional sea conventions (e.g., OSPAR, HELCOM, Barcelona Convention, Bucharest Convention) were set up in each sea basin with dedicated organisations to assess human impacts and to propose actions to recover a good environmental status for the marine ecosystems, notably under the policy framework of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive.

In parallel, and in line with EU integrated maritime policy (IMP), various maritime policy frameworks have been established and endorsed to support cooperation on maritime affairs in sea basins. Most of them have been engaging EU MSs and the non-EU neighbouring countries across whole sea basins (Mediterranean, Atlantic, Black Sea, Baltic, North Sea) or subsea basins (WestMED, Adriatic & Ionian Seas).

Considering the local, regional and sea basin specificities, this framework contributes to the Sustainable Blue Economy (SBE) in line with the European Commission's communication on "a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU" ([COM\(2021\)240 final](#)). Ministerial declarations, roadmaps and dedicated governance have been designed/anticipated to catalyse cooperation.

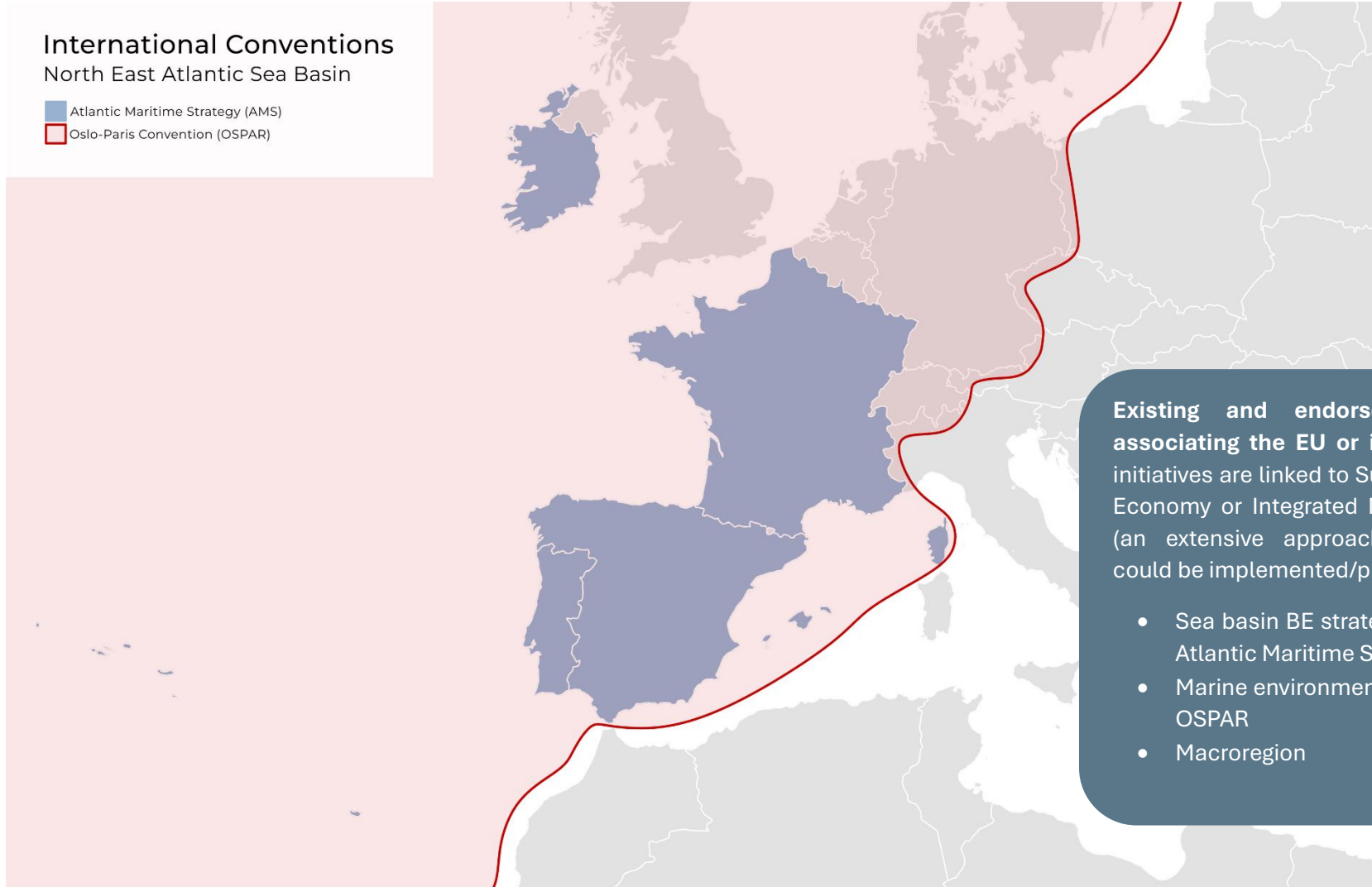
After a detailed review of the Northeast Atlantic Sea basin strategies, marine conventions and macroregions, this study provides an overview of how SBE and Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) have been considered within the Northeast Atlantic Sea basin by each initiative, and by recalling their objectives and governance, how each initiative can therefore be an enabler for SBE via MSP. It highlights the cooperation between EU MS and non-EU MS. This first edition will be published on the EU MSP Platform and updated accordingly following any related update.

In summary, it states that MSP has been a long-standing topic in certain Regional Sea Conventions (e.g., HELCOM) while in others, it is just emerging (e.g., Barcelona Convention) along with other concepts such as land-sea interactions and Integrated Coastal Zone Management. In addition, it highlights that the EU Mission "Restore our ocean and waters", the Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership but also projects under regional programmes and funding instruments (i.e. EMFAF) have a strong regional dimension with MSP playing an important role. Even if it is not a "governance framework" in the strict sense, it can steer cooperation amongst member states and beyond.

All the frameworks and initiatives included have declared an interest or have been implementing concepts and tools related to MSP to meet their respective objectives. All of them should enable the implementation of the future EU Oceans Pact via the cooperation framework that they constitute in each sea basin.

International Conventions North East Atlantic Sea Basin

- Atlantic Maritime Strategy (AMS)
- Oslo-Paris Convention (OSPAR)



Existing and endorsed initiatives associating the EU or its EU MS: the initiatives are linked to Sustainable Blue Economy or Integrated Maritime Policy (an extensive approach where MSP could be implemented/promoted)

- Sea basin BE strategy or initiative: Atlantic Maritime Strategy
- Marine environmental convention: OSPAR
- Macroregion

Initiatives' geographical coverage

General note: the borders presented by the map are the ones agreed by the UN.

Atlantic Maritime Strategy

PARTIES

EUROPEAN
UNION



FRANCE



SPAIN



PORTUGAL



IRELAND



Date of endorsement – legal context if any (hyperlink): the [Atlantic Maritime Strategy](#) was adopted in 2011 by the European Commission. The cooperation is exclusively between four EU MS around the Atlantic and the European Commission.

MAIN GOALS AND TOPICS

“Ambitious, open and effective cooperation in the Atlantic Ocean Area”. The EU’s 2013-2020 [Atlantic Action Plan](#) (AAP) set out practical steps to be taken on Atlantic coasts and the Outermost Regions of its parties to boost the Atlantic Ocean Area’s sustainable blue economy. The mid-term review of the AAP implied a revision of the AAP. Following this, the [AAP2.0](#) was endorsed in 2020.

GOVERNANCE (MINISTERIAL – STEERING COMMITTEE)

The Atlantic Strategy Committee (ASC) steers the implementation/action of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy (AMS) including the preparation of a Ministerial conference upon the proposal of the Chairing country (political guidance & validation, review of the action plan’s implementation). ASC is composed of a college of the national coordinators representing the four EU MS, the European Commission, associated members (Committee of Regions, European Economic and Social Committee, Atlantic Arc Commission of the Conference of Peripheral and Maritime Regions, Atlantic Arc Cities and ATN-Network of economic and social committees). Associated members participate but do not have voting rights. In addition, observers such as the OSPAR commission, Interreg Atlantic Area programme, INTERACT but also any third country representatives that expressed interest in joining the strategy, may join the ASCs in accordance with the agenda. In addition, working groups could be established to meet specific needs. Pillar and goal coordinators are nominated in order to facilitate each AAP2.0’s pillar of implementation.



INTERACTIONS AND SYNERGIES WITH OTHER FRAMEWORKS IN THE SEA BASIN OR BEYOND

- Increasing interactions with [Interreg Atlantic](#) since 2023 with back to back events and stronger alignment in funding priorities to support AAP 2.0 implementation by focusing Blue innovation and competitiveness or Blue environment in accordance with its [approved cooperation programme for 2021-2027](#);
- [All-Atlantic Ocean Research and Innovation Alliance](#) (AAORIA) give an international dimension to the action plan and support its implementation by improving the understanding of the changing Atlantic Ocean and its effects on coastal communities and by developing innovative solutions in line with the [Galway statement](#) (2013), [Belém statement](#) (2017) and [“All Atlantic” declaration](#) (2022) for research and innovation in the Atlantic with EC funding ;
- OSPAR, act as an identified observer in the ASC for environmental matters.
- WestMED Initiative and Common Maritime Agenda Black Sea via the participation of three EU MS in the WestMED Initiative but also via the joint [assistance mechanism for the sea basin strategies](#).

















STATEMENT ON MSP PROMOTION, IMPLEMENTATION, COOPERATION UNDER THE INITIATIVE BETWEEN EU MS (MSPD) AND ICZM

The AAP 2.0 and the associated ministerial declaration fully recognise the strategic role of the maritime spatial plans to support the blue economy in the sea basin thanks to co-existence and multi-use of maritime space but also by considering the Natura 2000 network. The AAP2.0 reiterates the strong cooperation between its parties on MSP, in particular for Pillar III which is related to Marine Renewable Energies. The Ministerial declaration recognised “the strategic role of national maritime spatial plans” to support co-existence and multi-use of marine space to reduce conflicts and develop synergies

REFERENCES

- [Atlantic Maritime Strategy](#)
- [First Ministerial declaration](#) endorsed in Porto on 18 October 2023
- [AAP2.0](#)

Oslo - Paris convention (OSPAR)

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|-----------------------------|---|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PARTIES | EU MEMBER STATES | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | European Commission | BE | DK | ES | FI | FR | GE | IS | IE | LU | NL | PT | SE |
| |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| NON-EU MEMBER STATES | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | NO | SW | UK | | | | | | | | | | |
| |  |  |  | | | | | | | | | | |

Date of endorsement : the [Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic](#) (the 'OSPAR Convention') was open for signature at the Ministerial Meeting of the [Oslo and Paris Commissions](#) in Paris on 22 September 1992. It was adopted together with a Final Declaration and an Action Plan.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

OSPAR covers five regions: Region I (Arctic waters), Region II (greater North Sea), Region III (Celtic Seas), Region IV (Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast) and Region V (Wider Atlantic). For the North-East Atlantic Sea basin, Regions III, IV & V are considered.

MAIN GOALS AND TOPICS

The OSPAR Convention is dedicated to protecting the marine environment of the North-East Atlantic. For the ongoing decade, the Convention has been implemented through OSPAR's [North-East Atlantic Environment Strategy 2030](#).

GOVERNANCE

The OSPAR Commission is the forum through which Contracting Parties cooperate. It normally meets once a year, usually at the end of June. The annual meeting is hosted by one of the Contracting Parties. Under the Rules of Procedure, the OSPAR Commission consists of representatives from each of its

16 Contracting Parties. The Commission elects a Chair and two Vice-chairs by the unanimous vote of the Contracting Parties present at annual Commission meetings. The Commission is supported by five main committees, some of which are in turn supported by working groups. In addition, the Heads of the Delegations of the Contracting Parties meet regularly to prepare the meetings of the Commission, to advise on management and to oversee the development and implementation of the agreements made by the Commission. The Commission is also supported by meetings of the Group of Jurists and Linguists and the Committee of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen.

In addition, several observers of the OSPAR Commission and its working groups are listed [here](#) among which can be found intergovernmental organisations working in similar fields, and international non-governmental organisations but also non-governmental organisations related to environmental protection, nature conservation organisations, industry and trade organisations and organisations of regional and local authorities.

The OSPAR Commission Secretariat facilitates the work of the Contracting Parties by supporting and organising an annual cycle of meetings together with intersessional work programmes.

INTERACTIONS AND SYNERGIES WITH OTHER FRAMEWORKS IN THE SEA BASIN OR BEYOND

The OSPAR Commission is an observer of the steering committee of the Atlantic Maritime Strategy.

The OSPAR Commission is an active member of the global group of Regional Management Organisations and cooperates closely with its partner organisations such as the Helsinki Commission (HELCOM) for the Baltic Sea and the different programmes established under the UNEP Regional Seas Programme. To further strengthen cooperation the OSPAR Commission has agreed Memoranda of Understanding or Agreements of Cooperation with a number of relevant international or regional organisations related to marine environment protection or sectoral issues (i.e., Fisheries).

STATEMENT ON MSP PROMOTION, IMPLEMENTATION, COOPERATION UNDER THE INITIATIVE BETWEEN EU MS (MSPD) AND ICZM

MSP is not directly mentioned as an axis of work for the OSPAR Commission. Nevertheless, as stated in its last ministerial declaration, the Commission is committed to “facilitate, for those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States, the coordinated and coherent implementation of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive and other EU marine related policies and legislation”.

The ministers committed to “*take* action to promote and facilitate the sustainable expansion of renewable energy developments while respecting our commitments to a healthy and biologically diverse marine environment”. Under the lead of a group on Offshore Renewable Energy Developments ([ICG-ORED](#)), OSPAR aims to develop guidance to promote and facilitate sustainable development and the scaling up of offshore renewable energy in a way that cumulative environmental impacts are minimised. It will be interesting for the environmental assessment of MSP when they include the development of offshore energy.

REFERENCES

- [Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic](#)
- Last [Ministerial declaration](#) endorsed in 2021 in Cascais (Portugal)
- [Previous ministerial declarations](#) (on OSPAR website)

ANY BEST PRACTICES OR RELATED ACTIONS IN THE SEABASIN

- [MarSP Project: Macaronesian Maritime Spatial Planning](#)
- [Advancing Maritime Spatial Planning in Outermost Regions \(MSP-OR\)](#)
- [Supporting Implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning in the Celtic Seas \(SIMCelt\)](#)
- [Supporting Implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning in the Atlantic region \(SIMAtlantic\)](#)
- [Supporting the Implementation of Maritime Spatial Planning in the North Atlantic Region \(SIMNORAT\)](#)
- [Regions to boost National Maritime Spatial Planning \(REGINA-MSP\)](#)
- [Earth Observation Atlantic for the society in the Atlantic \(ESA\)](#)

Conclusions at sea basin level

The Atlantic Maritime Strategy (AMS) is the key framework to support the development of cooperation on MSP beyond the MSPD commitment (Article 11) related to cooperation among Member States.

The AMS governance is supposed to be the place for multilateral discussions to define a joint vision which is then implemented during the MSP process which is first and foremost a national process.

The relationship/interaction between AMS and OSPAR is mainly driven to ensure MSFD implementation, in particular Ecosystem Based Management (EBM). The involvement of the EC and associated EU MS with the governance of each initiative is an enabler for synergies.

Beyond these two initiatives, it is interesting to consider any action within the wider [Atlantic cooperation declaration](#). The Atlantic Cooperation convenes under the leadership of the United States, together with some EU MS (Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Netherlands). As Blue Economy and MSP are to be discussed under this frame, it is important to follow it for practices and lessons for the Atlantic and beyond for all the EU.