OSPAR COMMISSION

OSPAR validation process for assessments delivered within the framework of the QSR 2023

OSPAR

QUALITY STATUS REPORT 2023

2022

OSPAR Convention

The Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (the "OSPAR Convention") was opened for signature at the Ministerial Meeting of the former Oslo and Paris Commissions in Paris on 22 September 1992. The Convention entered into force on 25 March 1998. The Contracting Parties are Belgium, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

Convention OSPAR

La Convention pour la protection du milieu marin de l´Atlantique du Nord-Est, dite Convention OSPAR, a été ouverte à la signature à la réunion ministérielle des anciennes Commissions d´Oslo et de Paris, à Paris le 22 septembre 1992. La Convention est entrée en vigueur le 25 mars 1998. Les Parties contractantes sont l´Allemagne, la Belgique, le Danemark, l´Espagne, la Finlande, la France, l´Irlande, l´Islande, le Luxembourg, la Norvège, les Pays-Bas, le Portugal, le Royaume- Uni de Grande Bretagne et d´Irlande du Nord, la Suède, la Suisse et l´Union européenne

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Executive summary

An open and fully transparent quality assurance process is important for ensuring quality, credibility, consistency as well as a means to build trust in all the OSPAR Quality Status Report 2023 products. A well described and executed validation process is an efficient mechanism for ensuring the best possible quality of assessment products.

This publication documents the OSPAR validation process. The publication notably describes the different validation steps that have been tailored to be applicable to different categories of assessment. The different categories of assessment differ in terms of content and audience. Within the steps of the validation process specific roles are attributed to different OSPAR subsidiary bodies based on their expertise and mandate, and different levels of validation exist.

The overall process for creating the QSR 2023 is described in greater details in the QSR Guidance document (Agreement 2019-02).

Récapitulatif

Un processus d'assurance qualité ouvert et totalement transparent est important pour garantir la qualité, la crédibilité, la cohérence ainsi qu'un moyen d'instaurer la confiance dans tous les produits du Bilan de santé 2023 d'OSPAR (QSR 2023). Un processus de validation bien décrit et exécuté est un mécanisme efficace pour assurer la meilleure qualité possible des produits d'évaluation.

La présente publication décrit le processus de validation OSPAR, et notamment les différentes étapes de validation qui ont été adaptées pour être applicables à différentes catégories d'évaluation. Les différentes catégories d'évaluation diffèrent en termes de contenu et d'audience. Au sein des étapes du processus de validation, des rôles spécifiques sont attribués aux différents organes subsidiaires d'OSPAR en fonction de leur expertise et de leur mandat, et différents niveaux de validation existent.

Le processus pour le développement du QSR 2023 dans son ensemble est décrit plus en détail dans le document d'orientation pour le QSR (Accord 2019-02).

OSPAR validation process for assessments delivered within the framework of the QSR 2023

1. The Quality Status Report 2023 – QSR 2023 - is a holistic assessment looking at the status of the North-East Atlantic over the period 2009-2021. The QSR 2023 involves close to 400 scientists and experts from OSPAR Contracting Parties and Observer organisations, collectively delivering more than 130 assessments.

2. The QSR 2023 aims to increase our knowledge and understanding of the marine environment through a comprehensive monitoring and assessment process. It will look both at the current state of the marine environment and ecosystems, and at human activities benefiting from the marine environment and interacting with it. The ultimate objective of the QSR 2023 is to provide the necessary scientific knowledge to achieve OSPAR's vision for a clean, healthy, biologically diverse sea, used sustainably.

3. An open and fully transparent quality assurance process is important for ensuring credibility, to build trust and ensure the best quality and impact of all QSR products. The QSR 2023 quality assurance process relies on the OSPAR validation process detailed below to ensure the best possible quality of these products.

A validation process involving the whole OSPAR community for maximum transparency and accountability

4. The lifecycle of assessments produced within the framework of the QSR 2023 includes several validation steps, which differ according to the type of assessment as detailed below. These steps are to ensure that no matter the type of assessment they will have been produced and scrutinised by different people and groups, for maximum transparency and accountability. Amongst these steps, one focuses on providing a strong scientific and policy basis for the assessment, three focus on the science and technical aspects of the assessments, and an additional step looks at consistency and coherence across assessments.

~~a.~~ Step 0: Before starting the process and carrying out the assessments, the methodological parts of the assessments – including threshold values, methodological standards, etc. – are agreed at policy-level by OSPAR bodies such as the OSPAR Commission.

b. Step 1: Assessments are developed by several experts in a specific field, led by an assessment lead, who is explicitly named. The draft assessment will during its production phase benefit from the review and feedback of these experts and others, all gathered in an expert group looking at one or several assessments.

c. Step 2: Intersessional Correspondence Groups (ICG) and Working Groups (WG) supervise the work of one or several expert groups, and review the draft assessment, providing comments and feedback until considered ready to be submitted to one or several Committees.

d. Step 3: Committees are then responsible for reviewing and approving the draft assessments under their mandate from a technical and scientific point of view, making sure they are in line with OSPAR's best practices. Inputs from Contracting Parties during Committees are the result of national consultations, usually involving national experts from different

administrations and institutions to ensure the co-construction of knowledge and benefit from the added value of a large pool of experts.

e. In addition to this careful scrutiny of the technical and scientific dimensions of the assessments, the ICG in charge of the entire QSR production process also plays a key role and will review the assessments to ensure that they are complete, consistent and live up to the required standards and format specific to the QSR 2023, such as the DAPSIR framework for thematic assessments and reporting formats for MSFD reporting, which is important for those Contracting Parties that are also EU Member States.

A validation process tailored to the different assessment categories to ensure the best quality of the QSR assessments

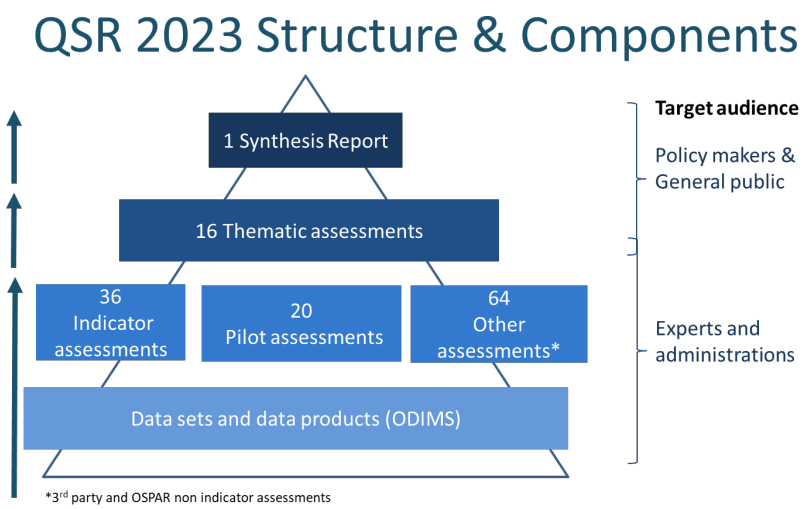


Figure 1: QSR 2023 structure and components

Assessments are based on robust data

5. The QSR 2023 "pyramid", as presented in figure 1, has its foundation based on datasets and data products. These are crucial elements and OSPAR follows rigorous review and long-term development of monitoring protocols and programmes to ensure the best available data. The monitoring programmes aim to deliver comparable data points regularly year on year, with programmes being validated and reviewed nationally with some using OSPAR guidelines internally.

6. OSPAR's data are gathered under the Coordinated Environmental Monitoring Programme (CEMP), which aims to deliver comparable data from across the OSPAR Maritime Area, which can be used in assessments to address the specific questions raised in OSPAR's Joint Assessment and Monitoring Programme, (JAMP). The CEMP Agreement explains the overall aims and concepts that apply within the CEMP and the scope and characteristics of the six CEMP thematic monitoring programmes (themes).

7. OSPAR issues regular data calls in response to the requirements of the CEMP, using detailed reporting formats. The data received in response to data calls are checked by quality control protocols, processed, checked by expert assessment panels, and stored in Secretariat and third party hosted databases. Data are published once the agreed process is completed.

8. OSPAR data products follow the rules of Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reuse (https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles), and as part of this commitment to the FAIR principles OSPAR publishes data on a freely accessible online platform, the OSPAR Data and Information Management System, ODIMS, https://odims.ospar.org/en/. Direct linkages are maintained between assessments and the data that underpin them.

Validation process of common indicator assessments

9. Common indicators are single, measurable components which together reflect the overall condition of the marine environment and the pressures acting on this, they provide most of the information and findings that will be lifted in the thematic assessments and in the synthesis report.

10. A clear validation process for those common indicator assessments is mentioned in the QSR Guidance Document, which states that "***Committees*** *are responsible for reviewing and approving the indicator assessments under their mandate, including the technical approval of thresholds".*[1]

11. In other words, Committees play a pivotal role in the validation process of the common indicator assessments under their mandate. Acceptance of an indicator assessment is done through consensus building during Committee meetings and/or written procedures. Scientific argumentation and viewpoints of delegations are recorded in the assessment templates (using track changes) and in the summary record of the meeting, which is checked and agreed by the Committee and publicly available via the OSPAR website.

Validation process of candidate indicators, resulting in pilot assessments

12. A candidate indicator is a common indicator in development. It follows as much as possible the common indicator assessment template, but it's "candidate" status reflects that it is either not complete or that it has not been agreed at OSPAR level. The assessment of a candidate indicator leads to a pilot assessment.

13. The main aim of Candidate indicators is to capture and demonstrate that progress is being made and that new developments are bringing forward interesting findings.

14. Pilot assessments are reviewed and approved by the relevant Committees.

Validation process of other assessments

15. An "other" assessment is based on an element which is not an OSPAR indicator, but which could prove useful to support the delivery of the QSR 2023.

16. Two main categories of 'other assessments' have been identified:

[1] *For more details, please consult section "6.3 Roles for approving the QSR 2023 components" of the QSR Guidance Document.*

a. OSPAR non-indicator assessments: An OSPAR non-indicator uses OSPAR data but does not follow the structure or template that would allow it to be considered a common indicator or a candidate indicator. They cover a wide array of themes and topics and can follow different formats, such as the Feeder Reports series produced by the EIHA Committee or case studies, and typically could present results from a spatially limited study.

b. Third Party Assessments are reports and/or assessments specifically produced by a third party for OSPAR, intended for use in the OSPAR QSR 2023. It is therefore different from entirely external sources. Few Third Party Assessments are expected to be delivered for QSR 2023.

17. Other assessments, in particular OSPAR non-indicator assessments, are produced and reviewed by expert groups before being submitted to Committees for agreement.

Validation process of thematic assessments

18. A thematic assessment is a product of the QSR process, which brings together, sometimes via an integrated assessment, one of several indicator-level assessments, data products and other relevant information to present the evidence base for the key conclusions and statements which will be presented in the synthesis report.

19. Due to their cross-cutting nature, *ie.* full inclusion of DAPSIR elements, the OSPAR validation process for thematic assessments involves multiple OSPAR bodies. The process is also detailed in the QSR Guidance Document. Paragraphs below are taken from the QSR Guidance Document.

20. The validation process for thematic assessments involves several OSPAR bodies:

a. **Committees** play a key role and are responsible for reviewing and approving thematic assessments under their mandate from a technical and scientific point of view, once these thematic assessments have been drafted and submitted by expert groups, ICGs, or WGs;

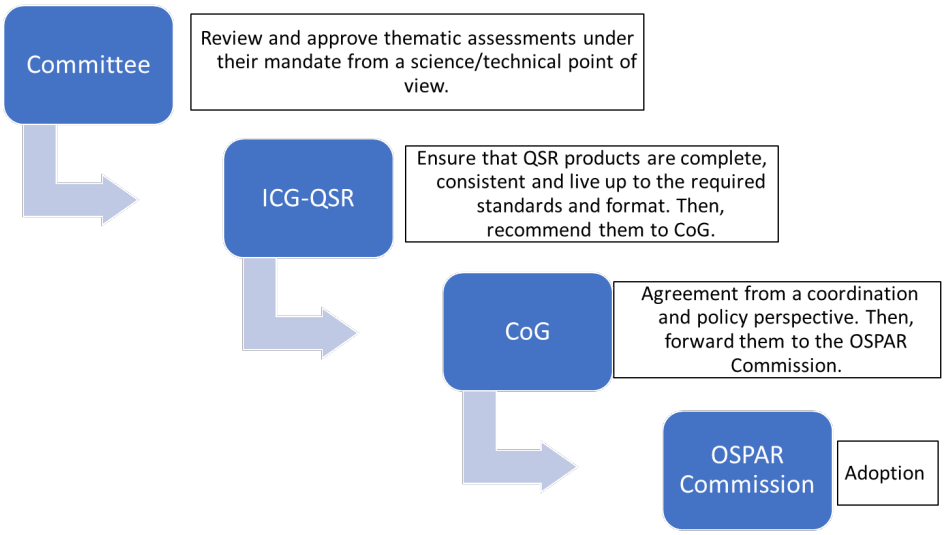
b. ***ICG-QSR*** *will also review thematic assessments from a managerial point of view during the drafting phase of the thematic assessments with the view of providing guidance on coverage, structure and drafting of key statements. Once Committees have agreed quality assured assessment products under their mandate, ICG-QSR will review the products to ensure that they are complete, consistent and live up to the required standards and format. If the assessments do not meet the standards, ICG-QSR will provide guidance to Committees on the standards and corrections required within a specified timeframe or decide that the assessment product will not be included in the QSR 2023. ICG-QSR will review and approve any integrated assessments that cut across committees, such as the cumulative effects assessment.*

c. *When ICG-QSR finds the assessments meet standards and formats, it* ***will recommend them to CoG*** *for agreement from a coordination and policy perspective. ICG-QSR will consider any disputed issues and options for resolving them, in conjunction with the relevant Committee Chair. Where a solution is not agreeable, ICG-QSR will prepare a briefing for CoG who will make a final binding decision.*

d. *CoG will endorse and forward the assessment products for adoption by the OSPAR Commission.*

21. The role of the different OSPAR bodies in the validation process for thematic assessments, once they have been submitted to the Committee in charge for final approval, could be summarised as per the figure below:

Approval process for thematic assessments



Source: OSPAR Secretariat, adapted from the QSR Guidance Document

Validation process of the Synthesis Report

22. The Synthesis Report and its executive summary are the top-level products of the QSR, are cross-cutting and target an audience made of policy makers, and the informed public.

23. The synthesis report is based on the validated results of the 'underlying layers' of assessments, namely the thematic assessments, the common indicator assessments and the other assessments.

24. Synthesised conclusions are drafted by a science writer and validated by ICG-QSR. The draft synthesis report is reviewed by OSPAR policy makers to ensure the messages that the report brings forward are accurate and based on evidence and effectively communicate key findings and policy priorities.

25. The validation process involves not only OSPAR bodies but also OSPAR Observers and a wide range of stakeholders as well, which will be invited to provide feedback and comment during a consultation process by direct engagement with relevant stakeholders. This consultation is envisaged in the later stage of the process, before the final publication of the Synthesis Report.

OSPAR's Quality Status Report 2023

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Our vision is a clean, healthy and biologically diverse North-East Atlantic Ocean, which is productive, used sustainably and resilient to climate change and ocean acidification.

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