

ASSESSING THE STATE OF SEABIRD COMMUNITIES IN THE NE ATLANTIC

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Europe has a huge resource of marine ecosystems – while its land area covers 10 million km², its seas cover almost five times as much. Europe's seas support 62 bird species (c. 12% of all Europe's birds), seven of these are on global IUCN Red List (c. 16% of all European GTBs) and 45% of the 62 have an Unfavourable Conservation Status (UCS) in Europe. While many European countries already monitor seabirds, there is as yet no initiative to bring together data from these countries and report on trends and other significant information at a pan-European level. We will present the results of a survey of the temporal and spatial extent of seabird monitoring in Europe, what information exists and how representative it is. We explore the feasibility of collating international seabird data from across Europe to help conserve and protect seabirds and marine biodiversity.

In 2008, seabird count data were collated from countries bordering the NE Atlantic to construct an indicator that will help marine managers to monitor the state of seabird communities and then act in response to any substantial changes. ICES¹ have recommended the indicator is adopted by the OSPAR Commission² as one of their Ecological Quality Objectives or EcoQOs. There are currently 11 EcoQOs in place that set targets for the state of elements within the marine ecosystem (e.g. fish, seals, seabirds). They aim to inform the management of human activities so that the marine ecosystem will continue to sustain the legitimate use of the sea.

The proposed EcoQO on seabird population trends as an index of seabird community health is as follows: *Changes in breeding seabird abundance should be within target levels for 75% of species monitored in any of the OSPAR regions or their sub-divisions.* Each year, an assessment will be made to determine if the EcoQO has been achieved; if it has not, appropriate action (*i.e.* further research or management) will be triggered.

We will describe the development of the proposed EcoQO and suggest it as a possible model for international seabird indicators elsewhere in Europe.

¹ International Council for the Exploration of the Sea

² Responsible for upholding the OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic.