

# PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE

The six ministerial [North Sea Conferences](#) held between 1984 and 2006 resulted in a number of high level political commitments to implement what became one of the guiding principles of the OSPAR Convention – the precautionary principle. The principle enables decision-makers to adopt precautionary measures when scientific evidence is uncertain.

Originally limited in the [OSPAR Convention](#) to the pollution of the marine environment through the introduction of substances and energy, the precautionary principle has been broadened under the ecosystem approach of the OSPAR Commission to encompass all human activities.

By virtue of the precautionary principle, preventive measures are to be taken when there are reasonable grounds for concern that human activities may bring about hazards to human health, harm living resources and marine ecosystems, damage amenities or interfere with other legitimate uses of the sea, even when there is no conclusive evidence of a causal relationship. A lack of full scientific evidence must not postpone action to protect the marine environment. The principle anticipates that delaying action would in the longer term prove more costly to society and nature and would compromise the needs of future generations.

OSPAR's commitment to the precautionary principle was also expressed in its 2010 Bergen Statement which states that it will "*reaffirm* the need for Contracting Parties to continue and to intensify their efforts to develop and facilitate the use of diverse approaches and tools for conserving and managing vulnerable marine ecosystems, and protecting the biodiversity. This includes the establishment of marine protected areas (MPAs) and representative MPA-networks by 2012, in accordance with the [Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development](#), consistent with the [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea \(UNCLOS\)](#) and based on the precautionary principle and the best scientific information available".