



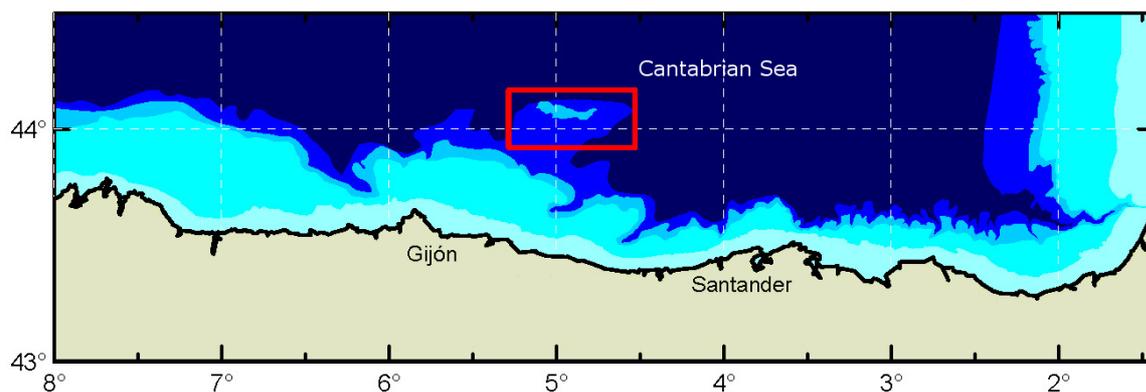
Press release

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Hello El Cachucho

The latest addition to the Network of Marine Protected Areas of the OSPAR Commission is a fascinating deep water ecosystem within the Spanish Exclusive Economic Zone in the warm waters of the Cantabrian Sea.

El Cachucho (also known as the Le Danois Bank) is an extensive offshore bank and seamount with surrounding slopes and a complex system of channels and canyons that covers 234 000 ha. The area to be protected also includes an ecologically valuable inner Basin separating the Bank from the continental shelf. Depths within the area vary from 500 – 4000 m – an amazing diverse biological hot-spot.



OSPAR's experts on Marine Protected Areas, Species and Habitats warmly welcomed this important contribution to the Network together with marine protected areas announced by other governments. Spain's policy to create new MPAs and some new fisheries marine reserves is entering a new and important chapter. A Ministry has been established to integrate the management of marine nature protection and fisheries. Spain has also pioneered OSPAR work to involve stakeholders, including fishermen and other users, improving everyone's understanding of where and why protection is needed. For El Cachucho this has been an intensive 2-year process.

Of real interest to marine scientists are important populations of deep sea sponges within the El Cachucho area. Some gigantic cup-shaped sponges are over 1m high and over 100 years old. Within the inner Basin there are up to 750 sponges per hectare. Deep water sharks and other species found on El Cachucho are vulnerable to fishing. In addition, the inner Basin is home to giant squid, extraordinary creatures which may weigh up to 950 kg and measure 14m. Already two new species to science have been identified.

Protection of this deep water ecosystem is considered vital for both science and surrounding fisheries. It is an 'essential fish habitat' for blue whiting, blue-mouthed redfish and forkbeard. El Cachucho has been declared by the Spanish government, supported by the Asturian Regional Government and this will be the first MPA created under the new Spanish law for Natural Heritage. Specific management of fishing activities, oil exploration, minerals and military activity is proposed in the area. The OSPAR Commission is committed to establishing a coherent well-managed Network of Marine Protected Areas throughout the North-East Atlantic by 2010. Momentum to protect more areas is gathering within the whole OSPAR Maritime Area.

Mr Olivier Laroussinie, Chairman of the OSPAR Working Group on Marine Protected Areas, Species and Habitats meeting this week in Baiona, Spain says:

"A healthy marine environment is essential for coastal communities. As part of working towards this, OSPAR has agreed a list of threatened and declining species and habitats. Establishing Marine Protected Areas is one way we can really make a difference to these species and habitats. Here in Galicia during a visit to the OSPAR MPA Islas Atlanticas de Galicia we have witnessed at first-hand the amazing productivity of Spain's coastal ecosystems. This makes us even more determined to safeguard our marine wildlife".

ENDS

Note for editors

(1) The [OSPAR Commission](#) was set up by the 1992 OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic, which unified and up-dated the 1972 Oslo and 1974 Paris Conventions. It brings together the governments of Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, together with the European Community. (<http://www.ospar.org/>)

(2) The [OSPAR Commission's Biological Diversity and Ecosystems Strategy](#) has a very broad focus, since it is concerned with all human activities, which can have an adverse effect on the protection and conservation of the ecosystems and the biological diversity of the North-East Atlantic. In addition to protecting and conserving ecosystems the OSPAR Convention makes provision to restore, where practicable, marine areas that have been adversely affected.

One of the tools that can be used to ensure the sustainable use and protection and conservation of marine biological diversity and its ecosystems is the implementation of [Marine Protected Areas](#) (MPAs). At the Ministerial Meeting in Sintra in 1998, OSPAR Ministers agreed at to promote the establishment of a network of marine protected areas and following a period of preparatory work, the 2003 OSPAR Ministerial Meeting in Bremen adopted Recommendation 2003/3 on a network of marine protected areas with the purpose of establishing an ecologically coherent network of well-managed MPAs in the North-East Atlantic by 2010. The aims of the OSPAR network of MPAs are:

- to protect, conserve and restore species, habitats and ecological processes which have been adversely affected by human activities;
- to prevent degradation of, and damage to, species, habitats and ecological processes, following the precautionary principle;
- to protect and conserve areas that best represent the range of species, habitats and ecological processes in the maritime area.

(3) The [Spanish Ministry of the Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs](#) was established in April 2008. This new Ministry has the responsibilities of the previous Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and Ministry of Environment, as well as the responsibility of the protection of the sea in close collaboration with the Ministry of Development: proposal and execution of the Spanish Government policy in the matter of fight against the climate change, protection of the natural patrimony, of the biodiversity and of the sea, water management, rural affaires, fisheries, and food. (<http://www.mapa.es/>)

(4) Deep sea sponge species present on El Cachucho (*Asconema setubalense*, *Pheronema carpenteri*, *Geodia megastrella*) are of particular ecological interest. In the northern area of the top of the Bank, where the sediment coverage is lower, cup sponges (*Asconema setubalense*) are present. In the deeper and muddy flat sedimentary grounds of the inner Basin, large aggregations of the sponge *Pheronema carpenteri* can be found. (<http://www.ecomarg.net>)

(5) Two very important Giant Squid species are present on El Cachucho : the "Giant squid" *Architeuthis dux*, and the Dana Octopus Squid *Taningia danae*. The former is a deep-ocean dwelling squid which can grow to a tremendous size: recent estimates put the maximum size at 13 metres for females and 10 metres for males. The second one is a highly manoeuvrable squid that uses the bright flashes to disorientate potential prey. They have both been observed recently in their natural habitats. (<http://www.ecomarg.net>)

(6) Islas Atlánticas de Galicia are four archipelagos belonging to the Rías Baixas (Lower Estuaries) off the coast of A Coruña and Pontevedra provinces in the north of Spain. The Marine Protected Area comprises the Cíes, Ons, Sálvora and Cortegada archipelagos and the surrounding waters. 80% is marine area which includes important marine biodiversity owing to the different habitats present: rocky, sandy, broken shell, maërl and underwater forests. This area was proposed by Spain as part of the OSPAR MPA network in November 2007.