Assessment of the quality of the marine environment forms an important part of the new 1992 OSPAR Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic that was ratified and entered into force on 25 March 1998. In the ministerial statement at the signing of the Convention it was agreed that the first assessment (Quality Status Report, QSR) for all Convention waters should be produced for the year 2000. To oversee this charge a new Environmental Assessment and Monitoring Committee (ASMO) was established and a junior group under this committee, to implement necessary actions, the Assessment Co-ordination Group (ACG).

Because of the wide geographical diversity and varying levels of information available in different parts of the Convention area it was decided to produce five regional reports for: I The Arctic; II The North Sea; III The Celtic seas; IV The Bay of Biscay and Iberian Coast; V The Wider Atlantic, which will be synthesised in a holistic QSR for the year 2000. The report for the North Sea will largely be an update of QSR 1993 and forms the third cycle of a developing management system for the North Sea. This paper will present the procedures that have been adopted to implement the QSRs, and outlines the guidelines that have been developed for their structure, format, design and publication.