

**Wadden Sea Board**

**WSB 11**

**4 February 2013**

**Tønder**

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Attached is the final version of the Progress Report, drafted in agreement with the decision of the WSB-10 meeting. Comment to the first draft, which was circulated on 20 January 2014, have been submitted by the German delegation and are included in this final version.

The Progress Report is the basis for the presentation by the secretary at the Ministerial Council Meeting.

**Proposal: The meeting is invited to note the document**

**Wadden Sea Cooperation since the Sylt Conference 2010**

**PROGRESS REPORT by the CWSS**

1. **Introduction**

The 11th Trilateral Governmental Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea, held on the island of Sylt, 18 March 2010, marked the start of a new era of the Cooperation. A new Joint Declaration on the Protection of the Wadden Sea was signed to replace the 1982 one, a new Wadden Sea Plan was adopted and new governance structures were launched with the Wadden Sea Board as the governing body of the cooperation in between the meeting of the Ministerial Council and the Governmental Conferences.

The period since the 2010 Conference has been a very active, engaged and fruitful period but also a very demanding one. The 2010 Declaration and the Wadden Sea World Heritage activities outlined a very broad agenda for the period, which in retrospect required a longer period of work and therefore a rescheduling of the Conference into 2014. Without substantial input from inside and also from outside the cooperation, the achieved substantial progress would not have been possible. In chapter 2 of this report some highlights of the progress made in the implementation Sylt Declaration are given. Chapter 3 focuses on selected issues regarding the quality of the Wadden Sea ecosystem that will guide the trilateral work in the coming years.

1. **Highlights in the implementation of the Sylt Declaration**

**Wadden Sea World Heritage**

**SD§4. Agree** to start in the forthcoming period a possible nomination of the Danish Wadden Sea in accordance with encouragement of the World Heritage Committee [....]

The Danish nomination was submitted in January 2013 together with a proposal for an extension of the German (Niedersachsen) part of the property, following an extension of the Niedersachsen Wadden Sea National Park in 2010. Since the Danish nomination is a response to the request of the World Heritage Committee, its inscription by mid 2014 is anticipated.

**SD§5. Instruct** the Board to initiate and organize the development of an overall Sustainable Tourism Development Strategy for the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site, in order to meet the request of the World Heritage Committee [...]

The Dutch-German-Danish project “PROWAD – Protect and Prosper. Sustainable Tourism in the Wadden Sea” started in October 2011, co-financed by the Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme. The project has brought together all relevant stakeholders in the Wadden Sea and developed the “Strategy for Sustainable Tourism in the Wadden Sea World Heritage Destination” in a participatory approach with stakeholders on local, regional and trilateral level. The strategy is annexed to the Tønder Declaration.

**SD §6. Engage** in a close cooperation with the African Eurasian Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) with a view to promote and strengthen cooperation on management and research on the African Eurasian Flyways with relevant state parties as requested by the World Heritage Committee and **establish** cooperation for the protection and management of migratory birds relying on the Wadden Sea.

Two flyway projects in West Africa focusing on capacity building and monitoring were launched by Germany and the Netherlands and started under the umbrella of the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative (WSFI) in the beginning of 2012. Since February 2012 both projects have closely cooperated on the basis of a joint action plan with the Conservation of Migratory Birds (CMB) project of Birdlife International and Wetlands International. The projects have, amongst others, resulted in a flyway vision outlining how to strengthen the cooperation with partners along the flyways. The vision is annexed to the Tønder Declaration.

**Nature Conservation and Management**

**SD§9. Focus** future harmonisation efforts on high priority challenges, for example climate change, invasive non-native species, decline of birds, and on fisheries, in the national implementation of the Birds, Habitats, Water Framework and Marine Strategy Framework Directives.

Harmonisation of high priority nature conservation issues has been done with regard to climate change, invasive species and fisheries. This has resulted in a common Strategy on adaptation to climate change, a strategic framework for dealing with alien species and on common principles for sustainable fisheries.

**SD§15. Reaffirm** the guidelines concerning taking and releasing of seals from the Leeuwarden Declaration (§§60 and 61) and **instruct** the Board to update the Seal Management Plan, which will expire this year, for the period 2012 – 2016, based on an evaluation of the current Plan.

The protection of **seals** is a huge success owing also to the Seal Agreement which provides a coordinated framework for conservation and management. The close cooperation on the implementation of the Agreement has to be continued. In view of the very successful increase in the population it is necessary to look at the rehabilitation practises in the different regions to ensure a continued healthy population.

**Sustainable Fisheries**

**SD§17. Acknowledge** promising developments of recent years towards sustainable fisheries, notably on shrimps and blue mussels, and ask the Board to develop Wadden Sea wide trilateral policy principles for a further development of sustainable fisheries [....]

A comprehensive overview of **fisheries** in the Wadden Sea was prepared, as well as an analysis of current fisheries practices for compliance with different forms of sustainability. It was concluded that fisheries in the Wadden Sea should comply with the principles of sustainability in order to be compatible with the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directive. Subsequently a catalogue of principles for sustainable fisheries was elaborated and attached to the Tønder Declaration.

**Climate, Sea Level Rise and Coastal Protection**

**SD §23 Aware** that more knowledge is needed for adaptation and mitigation measures and therefore **determined** to improve the trilateral knowledge base and **instruct** the Board to

* Initiate a trilateral study on sustainable solutions to balance the expected sediment deficits on the basis of research questions specified by the CPSL.
* Initiate a project developing model spatial plans for pilot sites in the Wadden Sea region with the aim of developing a practicable spatial planning methodology to meet the challenges of climate change.
* Establish a working group focusing on increasing the adaptability of the Wadden Sea ecosystem and landscape to climate change, also responsible for coordinating and supervising the above studies.

The Task Group Climate (TG-C) has drafted a climate adaptation strategy for the Wadden Sea, also based upon the experiences made by the trilateral CPSL working group during the period 1998-2010. The climate adaptation strategy is annexed to the Tønder Declaration. The focus of the implementation of the Strategy is on issues with trilateral added value. The Strategy takes due account of the many uncertainties related to climate change and its impacts and promotes a flexible approach with regard to Wadden Sea policy and management, as well as close contacts with the scientific community. So called “no-regret-measures” may contribute to a flexible approach that considers uncertainty. The Strategy also underlines the central importance of spatial planning as an integrative instrument.

**Alien Species**

**SD §25. Support** the ongoing international efforts to prevent and manage alien species introductions [....]

Also following the request of the World Heritage Committee, a draft strategic framework for dealing with Alien Species in the Wadden Sea has been developed. In the coming years it will be further consulted and a management and action plan for the implementation of the framework will be elaborated. The proposal covers all relevant marine vectors, i.e. ballast water, hull fouling, transport of shellfish and transport via bordering countries.

**Communication**

SD §39 [....] **strengthen** the communication about the Trilateral Wadden Sea and the Cooperation, in particular regarding the World Heritage Site and the Danish and Hamburg National Parks, by developing a trilateral communication strategy, which should include the activities of the International Wadden Sea School (IWSS), and **enable** the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat accordingly to fulfil these tasks.

The IWSS has developed some high level products such as the small booklet on the different “fives” and posters for school classes. The past period has shown that the current organizational framework needs to be reconsidered. The IWSS serves a much broader audience than is possible for an inter-governmental organization and demands a competent pedagogic and almost full time background, which is currently not available at the CWSS. The IWSS must therefore be given back to the working field and WWF has offered to host its coordination.

**Monitoring, Assessment and Scientific Research**

**SD §41. Support** the establishment of a trilateral research platform preferably directly connected with existing national networks. The platform will elaborate a trilateral agenda for policy-relevant research [....]

Work is ongoing on the establishment of a trilateral research platform and on the development of a trilateral research agenda, elaborated in close consultation with the Dutch Waddenacademie and based upon the major topical trilateral policy issues and the availability of knowledge.

**SD §43**. **Reconfirm** the continuation of TMAP and incorporate, as necessary, parameters to develop TMAP in order to facilitate an integrated assessment across the relevant EC Directives and better monitor new challenges, e.g. climate change and its impacts, and agree on a long term development strategy to increase its value to a wider range of stakeholders.

A long-term strategy for the TMAP has been developed, presenting the added value of the TMAP leading to a long-term vision for the programme. On the basis of the long-term vision, objectives are formulated, including medium and short-term activities and their implementation in order to meet the objectives. The strategy is annexed to the Tønder Declaration.

**International Cooperation**

**SD §48.Continue** the cooperation with Korea in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding, concluded in 2009 with emphasis on information exchange and capacity building.

The joint activities with Korea in the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding (2009) focus on three topics: 1) information, awareness and environmental education, 2) policy and management, and 3) monitoring and research (migratory birds, benthos, monitoring strategies). Since 2009, managers, scientists and NGOs from the Wadden Sea and Korea have participated in nine joint workshops or conferences, which have resulted in good cooperation and exchange of experiences at the working level.

1. **Selected issues on the status of the Wadden Sea ecosystem**

The last comprehensive assessment of the Wadden Sea was presented in the Quality Status Report 2009 and submitted to the 2010 Conference. A comprehensive assessment was not planned for the 2014 Conference but the monitoring and assessment have continued in the context of the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme, and it is possible to present some assessment results for selected themes.

**Breeding Birds**

Despite conservation efforts on local, national and international level, coastal breeding birds in the Wadden Sea are threatened. On the basis of annually published trends on breeding bird numbers and on trilateral expert analysis it has become clear that 2/3 of the trilaterally monitored breading bird species are declining and that some species are even on the brink of disappearance. The decrease can be attributed to low breeding success.

Specific recommendations have to be prepared for the management of threatened breeding bird species, which is addressed in the Tønder Declaration.

**Seals**

The Trilateral Seal Expert Group (TSEG) informed in its annual report that the greatest number of Harbour seals since the beginning of the Wadden Sea-wide seal count in 1975, were counted during the surveys in 2013. The results lead to a total number of 39,400 Harbour seals in the Wadden Sea.

**Fish**

The experienced climatic changes have led to changes in fish abundance that are sometimes outranging the long-term average and can lead to a regime shift in the ecosystem. The marine juvenile fish species in the Wadden Sea seem to reflect the heavy fishing pressure in the North Sea in combination with the climatic and hydrographic changes. The abundance of several other fish species have decreased to levels below the long-term average, but factors (natural or anthropogenic) causing these changes are still largely unknown. The diadromous fish currently seem to suffer most from bottlenecks in the upstream parts of (some) estuaries, where water quality and essential habitats are failing, resulting in some species missing and low abundance of the remaining. Nevertheless, it is concluded that nearly all of the typical Wadden Sea species are still present.

The trilateral fish targets provide the framework within which national institutes can work together to identify suitable indicators and to develop a management strategy for the achievement of the targets. In the Tønder Declaration the intention is expressed to implement the trilateral fish targets.

**Salt Marshes**

The salt marshes of the Wadden Sea constitute about 20% of the total salt marsh area along European coasts and are an irreplaceable habitat for a wide range of plants and animals, which are adapted to highly variable saline conditions.

With the aim of harmonizing the monitoring programme, the Trilateral Salt Marshes and Dunes Expert Group presented the TMAP-Typology of Coastal Vegetation in the Wadden Sea Area. It constitutes a complete overview of all TMAP salt marsh and dune types of the Wadden Sea region. Former basic versions of the typology have been widely used for monitoring the extent and composition of this habitat in Germany and in the Netherlands for more than 10 years. Furthermore, the Wadden Sea Day 2013 was dedicated to the topic “Salt Marshes: Our Heritage between Land and Sea - Biodiversity, Ecosystem Services and Management”.

**Alien species**

Invasive Alien Species (IAS) are organisms that have been introduced by human activities outside their natural distribution range and can affect biodiversity by spread and successful establishment in the recipient ecosystem. Studies from the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark show that substantial populations of IAS already occur in the Wadden Sea. Long-term ecological consequences of IAS are not fully understood. Even though outcompetition of native organisms in the Wadden Sea has not been documented so far, ecosystem engineering species forming new habitats like reefs or “algal forests” are facilitating settlement of both native species and new IAS. If IAS affect native key species and habitat-forming species, they interfere in food web relationships of numerous other predatory species like fish, birds or mammals. Additionally, it has to be realized that bioinvasion processes in coastal areas may affect ecosystem services, society and economy.

**Climate change**

The most important aspects of climate change in the Wadden Sea region are:

Sea level rise and storm surges: projections on global mean sea level rise vary among 0.2 and 1.4 m for the period 1990 – 2100. So far, no indication of accelerated sea level rise could be observed in the Wadden Sea.

Precipitation patterns. Due to projected lower summer and higher winter precipitation, fresh water discharge into the Wadden Sea may become more fluctuating with larger extremes.

Temperature: projections indicate that mean annual temperatures in the Wadden Sea region may increase among 2.0 and 4.7 degrees Celsius until the end of this century. Water temperatures in the Wadden Sea are already increasing and are expected to increase further. Due to the high uncertainty regarding the magnitude and direction of the above climate change aspects, as well as the complexity of geophysical and biological interactions, projections on the direction and magnitude of these aspects still constitute a major scientific challenge. Still, they are highly likely to negatively interfere with the aims for the protection of the Wadden Sea. As long-term impact, it is expected that not enough sediment will be available to balance enhanced sea level rise. As a result, the Wadden Sea may start to “drown”, resulting in changing structures and functions, flora and fauna as well as the landscape (i.e., from an intertidal to a lagoon ecosystem). Such and other impacts may occur after a certain threshold value, the so-called tipping point, has been exceeded, after which the system is no longer resilient. [see flyer “Sediment and sea level rise in the Wadden Sea]. Furthermore, enhanced sea level rise will induce/accelerate coastal retreat of the barrier islands, thereby reducing the extension of the back-barrier bays. Without proper management, higher storm surge water levels will impair flood safety of the inhabitants. Finally, increasing water and air temperatures will impact the ecosystem by causing geographical shifts of species and habitats, changes in species composition, phenological changes and mismatch phenomena.

1. **Outlook**

This progress report makes clear that the 2010 Sylt Declaration has been largely implemented and, based also on the work of the many organizations involved in the Cooperation, a firm foundation has been laid for the work in the forthcoming period until the planned Wadden Sea Conference in 2018. A very essential basis for the 2018 Conference is the elaboration of a comprehensive assessment of the Wadden Sea ecosystem in cooperation with the scientific community, experts and policy workers, well in advance of the conference to allow for a strategic and policy-relevant assessment.