



The 2014 Call for Action for the Wadden Sea

Presented by the Green NGOs of the Wadden Sea Region at the Wadden Sea Day, 28 August 2014

■ We, the green NGOs, having worked for many decades in and for the Wadden Sea, are proud of what has been achieved for the protection of this unique ecosystem over this period. This has resulted in almost the entire area not only being protected, but also inscribed as World Heritage Site by the UNESCO: first the Dutch part and most of the German parts in 2009, the Hamburg part in 2011 and finally in 2014 the Danish part and additional areas seawards of the coast of Lower Saxony. This is a great achievement, it is every reason to be proud of, and an excellent reason to even better live up to what we can and should call now ONE WADDEN SEA!

In 1991 the three Wadden Sea countries had already agreed that „*the Guiding Principle of the tri-lateral Wadden Sea policy is to achieve, as far as possible, a natural and sustainable ecosystem in which natural processes proceed in an undisturbed way*“. The Guiding Principle has meanwhile proven to be the most appropriate guideline for conservation of the large and wilderness-like protected areas of the Wadden Sea.

However, the Wadden Sea being protected and inscribed as World Heritage Site is no reason at all to sit down and relax. It is even more our common responsibility to live up to the guiding principle and to the conservation targets for the area in order to safeguard its „Outstanding Universal Value“ (OUV), which is the basis for the inscription as World Heritage Site. This is fully embedded

in the Statement of OUV as adopted by the World Heritage Committee, which must now be the basis for the protection and management of the Wadden Sea. There are still serious threats and risks for the Wadden Sea and we should not miss important opportunities to improve the conservation status, a necessity which has also been explicitly stated in the Statement of OUV.

The threats and risks of today involve human uses within or close to the protected area of the Wadden Sea and are mainly related to energy production, shipping, harbour development, industrial activities, pollution, fisheries, invasive alien species, tourism, coastal defence constructions, and, most dangerous in the long term, climate change with the associated increase in sea level rise. The Statement of OUV requires us to continue addressing these threats in order to safeguard the integrity of our common heritage. Moreover, a threat for a certain part of the World Heritage Site always concerns the entire Wadden Sea. However, if we react properly and act responsibly, the impact in many cases could be avoided or reduced to an extent that would allow the protection goals to be achieved. A good example is the joint work on a „Strategy for Sustainable Tourism in the Wadden Sea World Heritage Destination“, which has been agreed upon and signed at the Wadden Sea Conference 2014. Another good example is the agreement on a strategy to support protection of the Wadden Sea birds along their East Atlantic

Flyway. These strategies, however, need now to be implemented.

In our joint Call for Action at the Wadden Sea Day 2014 we would like to focus the attention on the underwater world of the Wadden Sea and on aligning the trilateral approach to fisheries. For a long time there have been declining trends in species and habitats; this urgently calls for a better protection of both if we want to keep or restore the natural values of the Wadden Sea. Today the chances are better than ever: Knowledge, laws, support in society, and dialogue between the stakeholders have progressed much further than ever before. Therefore, solutions that are acceptable for all are visible at the horizon. Also the UNESCO World Heritage Committee recommended recently in its decision to extend the Wadden Sea World Heritage by the Danish part, „to extend further the monitoring of impacts of fisheries activities within the existing and extended property, and consider the opportunities to ensure protection of the property from any detrimental impacts“.



We are aware that

- A number of species typical for the underwater world of the Wadden Sea such as large fish that stay long enough to become adult have been lost and that these species seem unable to recover to healthy populations under the present conditions. Examples are rays, sharks, seahorses and sturgeons, but also invertebrates such as *Sabellaria*-reefs. Mussels have been exploited to a point that natural banks underwater have seriously decreased. Shrimp fisheries are poorly regulated and are associated with too high amounts of by-catch and a negative impact of fishing gear on life at the sea bottom.
- Although the whole Wadden Sea is a protected area, only very small parts of it are also fully protected against impacts of fishery (no-take-zones). Actually, not even one of the tidal basins in the German and the Dutch part is protected completely. Such protection would be a prerequisite for restoring lost ecosystem functions and species.
- The Wadden Sea is a nursery area for young fish, which is important also for commercial fisheries in the North Sea, and this function must be preserved.
- Some useful experiments are already underway which might help to improve the situation, e. g. to restore fish migration between inland waters and the Wadden Sea, helping seagrass beds, catching shrimp with less by-catch, and supporting the return of sturgeons. We are actively involved in some of these experiments.



- The new EU Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) may improve the situation at the European level, but because fisheries in the Wadden Sea are only partially governed by CFP and because the Wadden Sea is a protected area with a high standard, there is a need for a specific management of the fisheries which is not adequately provided by the CFP.
- There is a strong wish among retailers and consumers to be informed about the sustainability of fish products. While this is already encouraging, for the credibility of a certification it is also very important that the standards to be achieved for fisheries within protected areas must be higher than outside.

Therefore, we urgently call for

- The understanding of fishery management in the Wadden Sea as a part of the management of the protected areas of the Wadden Sea and not as a separate item. There is a clear necessity to strengthen this management.
- An appropriate environmental impact assessment for all fisheries in the Wadden Sea. This is relevant also for smaller fisheries and if new techniques are introduced.
- A considerable part of the Wadden Sea, including a number of complete tidal basins, and across all regions, being fully protected from all kinds of fisheries.
- A large reduction of by-catch in the shrimp fishery by means of improved catching techniques and by avoiding areas with high by-catch.
- A strong reduction of the impact on wild mussel banks both in the intertidal and subtidal areas.
- The complete prevention of any further introductions of invasive alien species resulting from fishery or aquaculture activities.

We would like to highlight that we can only support – but also that we would support – a coastal fishery in the Wadden Sea Region which is fully in line with the protection goals and which accepts the priority of nature conservation in protected areas.

We appeal to both the governments and the fishery sector: Let us join forces and find solutions which protect and restore a healthy Wadden Sea with all its ecosystem functions and species, and at the same time allow for a viable coastal fishery which would really deserve to be called sustainable. In the face of the Wadden Sea World Heritage this is what the world expects and demands from us. The process we call for is not easy, but not impossible either. Some experience has already been gained in discussions between the relevant stakeholders. Adjustments with economic impact must be made, some research may be necessary, and people with different opinions and motivation must get together. Therefore, we strongly suggest to jointly start this process now, to finalise it and to implement the results in a period no longer than 10 years. We offer our continued concerted support and cooperation to achieve this goal. ■

The following organisations support this Call for Action:



Denmark:

Danmarks Naturfredningsforening
Dansk Ornitologisk Forening
Verdensnaturfonden (WWF-DK)

Germany:

Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland (BUND)
Mellumrat
Naturschutzbund Deutschland (NABU)
Naturschutzgesellschaft Schutzstation Wattenmeer
Niedersächsischer Heimatbund (NHB)
Verein Jordsand zum Schutze der Seevögel und der Natur
WWF Deutschland

Netherlands:

De Coalitie Wadden Natuurlijk, consisting of:
Natuurmonumenten, Waddenvereniging,
Stichting Het Groninger Landschap, It Fryske Gea,
Landschap Noord-Holland, Staatsbosbeheer,
Stichting Wad and Vogelbescherming Nederland
Wereld Natuur Fonds (WWF-NL)

