

28-05-2008

Dear colleague Sigmar Gabriel, dear Ms. Helle Pilsgaard,

Dear Mr Enemark,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Wadden Sea is a nature reserve of enormous significance and as such more than deserves our protection. I am therefore delighted to have this ceremony in honour of our great partnership 'Our great partnership' is not an empty phrase here. Much has been achieved in the thirty years we have worked together. We have taken major steps to protect the ecological values of the Wadden Sea.

But our trilateral cooperation has not only led the way in protecting and managing an ecosystem of international importance. It has also widened our focus to include the sustainable development of the whole Wadden Sea Region, in sharp reflection of international trends. And to paying more attention to the people living in these areas. That is why I welcome and support the Wadden Sea Forum.

In this context I think we should not forget the efforts made to conserve the landscape and cultural and historical values in the Wadden Sea Region. These values are vital for people's involvement in Wadden Sea policy. And they are what give the area its identity. We must cherish these values, which form the basis for development.

But we must now press on under the maxim 'conservation through development'. For although we may be proud of our achievements, we cannot afford to sit back and relax. We must keep looking for ways to further improve our partnership and how we jointly manage the area. Whether it is mussel fishery, harbour expansion, seal numbers or adapting to climate change, these issues are very much in the public eye and are the source of many a heated discussion. And these issues are close to people's hearts, which is why we must tread carefully. We must proceed in the spirit of the motto of this conference: one nature, one World, our future, for this also holds true for the Wadden Sea.

In the light of our achievements so far, I am convinced we will be successful. Just as I am confident of the success of our new Joint Declaration, to be signed at the beginning of next year. Regional involvement is key to this. Which is why public consultations will be organised this autumn to guarantee public support.

I would like to conclude by thanking secretary Jens Enemark and rest of the staff of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat for their unwavering support and inspiration. And I would like to thank my colleagues Sigmar Gabriel and Troels Lund Poulsen. They have contributed much to the friendly atmosphere of our working relationship. And finally I would like to thank our host for providing the venue for this joint exhibition, which has allowed us to so vividly experience the Wadden Sea here in Bonn.

Our partnership has endured for thirty years. I hope we can renew our efforts, so that our partnership may continue to benefit the Wadden Sea area for many years to come.

Thank you.