

Han Frankfort, Ministry of
Housing, Spatial Planning
and the Environment, The
Hague, NL

Dutch Government Drafting New Policy Document on Wadden Sea

Key National Planning Decision, Third Policy Document on the Wadden Sea

The Dutch government is drafting a new policy document for the Dutch section of the Wadden Sea. In February of last year, the Dutch Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment gave the green light for the preparation of the new policy document known as the Key National Planning Decision (abbreviated to PKB in Dutch), Third Policy Document on the Wadden Sea. This is the third policy document on the Wadden Sea. The first and second were issued in 1980 and 1993, respectively.

The PKB on the Wadden Sea lays down the main tenets of government policy concerning the Wadden Sea, including policy on human activities in the Wadden Sea, such as natural gas drilling, military activities, recreation and fishing, as well as subjects such as the borders of the area covered by the PKB on the Wadden Sea, the framework for evaluating whether activities are to be permitted or not and the "external effect" of the PKB, i.e. the impact Wadden Sea policy has on activities happening outside of the Wadden Sea.

The main point of political debate in the preparation of the PKB thus far has been exploratory and natural gas drilling in the Wadden region. In December of 1999, the government decided to make a major policy shift. The then-applicable PKB on the Wadden Sea still permitted exploratory drilling in the Wadden Sea and slant-drilling for gas under the Wadden Sea from the mainland. The new policy no longer allows exploratory drilling in the Wadden Sea and extends the ban on new drilling at sites

in the Wadden Sea. The government also decided that it would no longer grant permission for either exploratory drilling or for drilling for natural gas, if gas extraction should cause the floor of the Wadden Sea to subside and if any and all chance of potential lasting damage to the Wadden Sea by such drilling cannot be ruled out with total certainty. The next few years will be used to explore the question of whether remaining uncertainties about the possibility of satisfying absolute criteria can be cleared up. Pre-existing drilling sites in the Wadden region will remain unaffected.

Now that the government has made a decision about natural gas, the government will first want to critically review other policy measures set out in the PKB. The Minister of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment has cited fishing, recreation and military activities as examples of subjects to review in this context. Efforts are now being made to work out the details. It is still uncertain at this point exactly when the draft PKB is to come out.

Once the draft PKB has been published, a comment procedure will start, giving the general public the opportunity to comment on the draft PKB in writing. There will also be formal consultation within the governments of the Wadden provinces and Wadden municipalities, and the external advisory council on Wadden Sea policy, the Wadden Advisory Council, will be asked for its recommendation. Once it is published, the draft PKB will be posted on Interwad, the Dutch Wadden Sea web site (www.waddensee.nl). Comments received during the comment period and results from formal government consultation and the Wadden Advisory Council's recommendation will all be used to formulate the government's position concerning the PKB on the Wadden Sea.

Key National Planning Decision Procedure

In the Netherlands, the procedure set down in the Town and Country Planning Act is followed when making key national planning decisions (PKBs) of national impact. This procedure comprises 4 parts:

PKB part 1 consists of the drafting of the key national planning decision; the government presents its policy plans.

PKB part 2 consists of responses to the draft key national planning decision, including comments by citizens and social organisations, results of inter-governmental consultation and, if requested, the recommendations of an outside advisory council.

PKB part 3 is the government position that is submitted to the Lower House for approval; after the Lower House has reviewed it, the policy document – possibly in revised form – is submitted to the Upper House for approval.

PKB part 4 is the national planning decision approved by both Houses of the States General of the Netherlands.

Han Frankfort

Ministerie VROM/Rijksplanologische Dienst
Postbus 30940
NL 2500 GX The Hague
han.frankfort@ucbrpd.minvrom.nl