

Wadden Sea Conference, October 31, 2001 in Esbjerg - Esbjerg revisited

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The next Trilateral Governmental Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea will be held in Esbjerg, Denmark, on the invitation of the Danish government on October 31, 2001. The conference will be the 9th ministerial conference, held between the three Wadden Sea countries of The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark to discuss the overall protection and management of the Wadden Sea. The 1st conference was held in The Hague in 1978. At the 3rd conference in Copenhagen, the three governments signed the Joint Declaration on the Protection of the Wadden Sea which remains the foundation for the collaboration.

It is the second time that a Wadden Sea Conference will be held in Esbjerg. The first one in 1991 signified a major leap forward in the cooperation. It was at this conference that the common principles and policies for the overall protection and management of the Wadden Sea were adopted. It was also at this conference that it was decided to elaborate a common management plan, which was developed on the basis of the principles and policies and became the Wadden Sea Plan adopted at the last Conference in Stade in 1997.

The preparation of the 2001 Esbjerg Conference has started. It is anticipated that the conference will primarily focus on the implementation of the Wadden Sea Plan and the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Program and the follow-up actions agreed at the Stade Conference. An important contribution to this discussion is the Quality Status Report published in 1999, which will be politically assessed for the conference.

An important follow-up element is the potential nomination of the Wadden Sea national parks and nature reserves or parts of them as a natural

World Heritage Site. This is a follow-up of decisions of previous conferences and a recent feasibility study has concluded that an inscription in the World Heritage List under the current conservation and management arrangements is feasible. The inscription in the List would constitute a major award for efforts of the people of the Wadden Sea including those who live and work in the area for the protection and sustainable management of the area. The World Heritage List entails natural and cultural heritage monuments unique on a worldwide scale, like the pyramids, Taj Mahal and the Great Barrier Reef. In the three countries, the list encompasses, e.g. the old Hanse city of Lübeck, the Beemster Polder, and the Jelling Mounds. It is expected that the consultations in the countries will start soon. As a next step, it is intended that the inscription as a cultural site will be undertaken as soon as the preconditions have been fulfilled, e.g. the conclusion of the LANCEWAD project.

Other issues, which will be addressed at the conference, include discussing the results of the projects launched at the Stade Conference, e.g. the inventory of the landscape and cultural heritage of the Wadden Sea region and the sea level rise project.

The Inter-regional Wadden Sea Cooperation launched the NetForum project in the past period. The collaboration will table a proposal for a common policy on sustainable tourism to be discussed by the ministers.

The 2001 Conference will be an Esbjerg-revisited event. 10 years after the 1991 conference - same city - same conference center - looking back and setting the future agenda for Wadden Sea protection.