

The 2001 Esbjerg Wadden Sea Conference – Moving onto New Frontiers

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The 9th Wadden Sea Conference was held under the chairmanship of the Danish minister for the Environment and Energy Mr Svend Auken in Esbjerg (Denmark) on 31 October 2001. The theme for the conference was "Man and the Wadden Sea" beautifully portrayed in a painting by a school class of a primary school in Esbjerg, which became the official poster of the event.

Accordingly, people's relationship with the Wadden Sea was at the heart of the conference. And in this respect some remarkable accomplishments were made. A major issue the conference focused on was the issue of reducing the impacts from shipping and accidents with ships in the vicinity of the Wadden Sea.

Shipping

Prompted by the accident of the Pallas in 1998 and the recent accident in the Baltic, the discussions on the impacts of shipping with regard to the Wadden Sea intensified within the trilateral cooperation. The intend of designating the Wadden Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), considered also at 1997 Stade Conference, emerged as a pertinent issue. The discussion here on was further substantiated by the feasibility study on the issue by the Marine Research Center of the Southampton Institute, UK (see article page 9). Also the WWF Germany had delivered a report on the issue in 2000.

As a result of the feasibility study and the further discussions at the conference, it was agreed to submit a trilateral application for a Wadden Sea PSSA (Fig. 1) to the International Maritime Organizations (IMO) being the responsible body for such designations. The designation of the Wadden Sea as a PSSA would significantly increase the awareness for the particular sensitivity of the Wadden Sea to shipping activities to the international shipping community. The designation would further contribute to bolster the existing comprehensive national and international IMO and EU regulations in place. It is anticipated that the designation will indeed contribute to the prevention of accidents, and if they occur reduce the severity of the impact and the number of impacts in general.

There are currently two PSSAs designated, one of them is the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, and

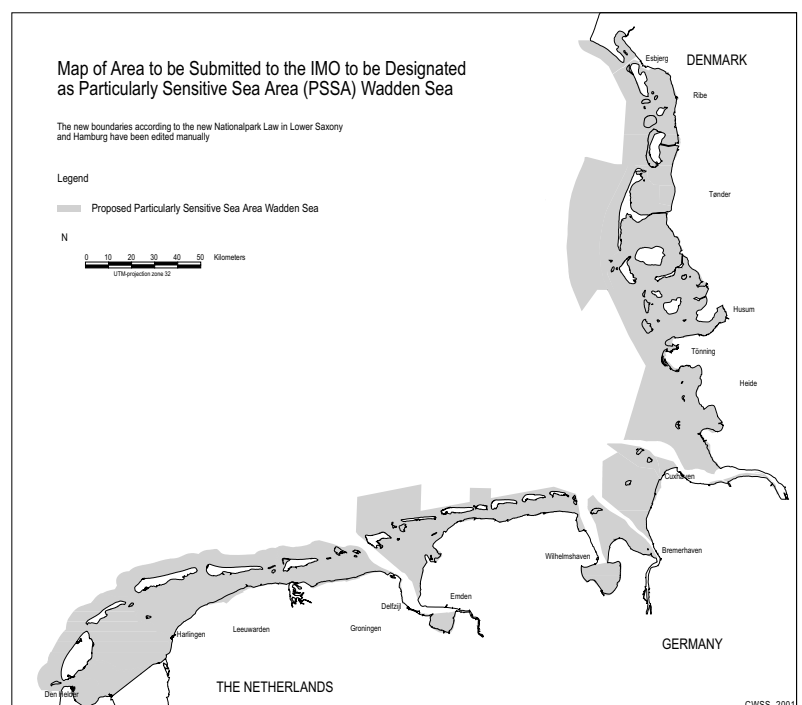
two designations are apparently under way. When the designation comes into effect within one or two years from now, the Wadden Sea will rightfully be a member of an international, exclusive alliance.

Also other measures were agreed. An important measure agreed is to strive for the introduction of a land-based Advanced Information System (AIS) for tracking ships at an earlier date than agreed by the IMO. This will also be important for the surveillance of shipping movements in the adjacent PSSA offshore zone.

Wadden Sea Forum

A central issue was the decision to establish a Trilateral Wadden Sea Forum. The forum will be chaired by the Queen's Commissioner of the Dutch Province of Friesland and former Dutch environment minister Mr Ed Nijpels. The task of the Forum will be to develop proposals for sustainable development scenarios and strategies for their implementation. The members of the Forum will be participants from user organizations, environmental organizations and local and regional authorities. The proposals by the Forum will be presented to the 2005 Wadden Sea Conference as a

Figure 1: Map of the Area to be submitted to the IMO to be designated as Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) Wadden Sea (Annex 4 of the Esbjerg Declaration).



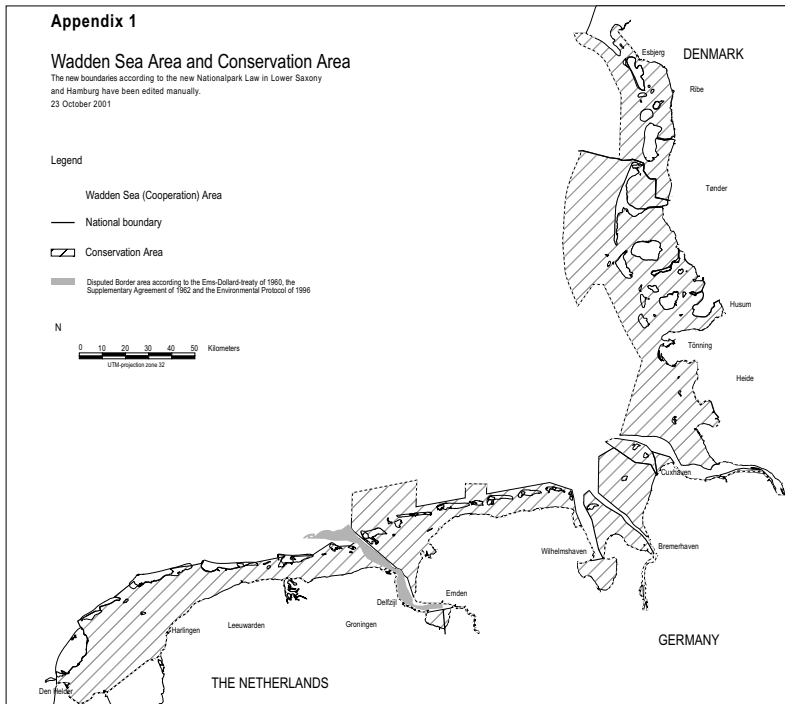


Figure 2:
 Adaptation of
 Delimitation Wadden Sea
 Area and Conservation
 Area (Annex 2 of the
 Esbjerg Declaration).

contribution to the further development and amendment of the Wadden Sea Plan. It is expected that the Forum will start its work by mid 2002, when the organizational and financial matters have been clarified.

The establishment of the Forum is an unequivocal invitation to the stakeholders in the Wadden Sea region to enter into a constructive dialog about the future of the Wadden Sea and the cooperation and to contribute to a sustainable development of the region. The work of the Forum will be decisive for the future work of the cooperation.

World Heritage Continues

The potential nomination of the Wadden Sea as a World Heritage Site was discussed in the months before the Conference. Since the consultation process had not been concluded, the Conference confined its deliberations to noting the status of the discussions in the countries and to acknowledging the support and reservations expressed dur-

ing the discussions. It was agreed to continue with the aim of reaching a conclusion within one or two years.

The conference also addressed a broad range of other issues. It was agreed to adopt a new Conservation and Management Plan for the Wadden Sea Seal Population for the next five years on the basis of the Seal Agreement, the first regional agreement concluded under the Bonn Convention in 1991. The measures of the new Seal Management Plan are based on an assessment and evaluation report compiled by a trilateral seal expert group and representatives of the management authorities. The conference addressed the landscape and cultural heritage of the Wadden Sea Region on the basis of the LANCEWAD Project report (see article page 13). The Wadden Sea Cooperation and Conservation Area was extended to reflect the extensions of the German national parks since 1997. The Wadden Sea Area comprises now an area of more than 15,000 km² (Fig.2).

Since the Stade Conference, the collaboration between the trilateral and the inter-regional level, collaborating in the Inter-regional Wadden Sea Cooperation, has intensified. Through a transboundary participatory process in the NetForum project the regional level has developed a tourism action plan which sets out policies, measures and projects for sustainable tourism in the Wadden Sea Region. The NetForum is a model for the Trilateral Wadden Sea Forum.

New Frontiers

The 2001 Esbjerg Conference was an Esbjerg revisit event. It was in the same city – and conference center – that the 1991 Conference was held in and which became crucial for the work of the cooperation for a decade. But also Esbjerg 2001 will undoubtedly be regarded as a conference which paved the way for new developments and led the cooperation unto new frontiers while at the same time taking decisions, which are essential for the conservation and wise management of the Wadden Sea, in particular in the field of shipping.

The Esbjerg Declaration can be found on the CWSS website (cwss.www.de).

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