

## Another Step Forward



Gila Altmann and Svend Auken listening to the presentation on shipping safety by the NGOs (From left to right: Senator Alexander Porsche, Hamburg, Karel van der Zwiep, Seas at Risk, Kim Carstensen, WWF, Anja Possekel, WWF, Parliamentary State Secretary Gila Altmann, Minister Svend Auken, Denmark) (Photo: Poul Anker).

## The Ministerial Conference in Esbjerg 2001 – Another Step Forward

Anja Possekel, Beate Ratter (WWF) on behalf of the Wadden Sea Team

During the Ministerial Conference in Esbjerg on October 31, 2001, some important improvements for a better protection for the Wadden Sea in the future could be agreed upon, especially a joint application to the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to declare the Wadden Sea as a Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA), the establishment of a Wadden Sea Forum, a special research on how the trilateral cooperation can be further improved in the future and a better protection of certain bird species and the harbour porpoise. The Wadden Sea Team, which addressed these topics within their so-called Package Deal and during the discussions within the Trilateral Working Group and the Senior Official Meetings, are in general satisfied with the outcome of the conference. However, some important questions remain with regard to the implementation and actual results of these decisions for the protection of the Wadden Sea. In addition some problems and threats to the Wadden Sea were neglected during the conference once more, e.g. the installation of Off-shore Windparks close, or as seen in the case of the current plans of the Netherlands, even within the trilateral conservation area. In our opinion these problems and threats should be taken more seriously. In the following we would like to address these issues more closely.

For ten years the prevention of disasters caused by shipping accidents has been on the agenda of

the Trilateral Cooperation, but little happened except accidents. In Esbjerg, the Ministers finally agreed on a joint PSSA application to the IMO. This is certainly one of the most important outcomes of the Ministerial Conference and an essential step forward. However, the PSSA will be limited to the conservation area of the Wadden Sea and it will also exclude the access routes to the harbors in the three countries. If the objective of a PSSA nomination is to send a strong signal to the shipping community regarding the particular sensitivity of the area, this seems to be a wrong signal: it means that one should only be careful when passing through a conservation area. But the major shipping lanes close to the conservation area and especially the access routes to harbors need the highest alert possible and should therefore be included in the PSSA. Moreover, the Ministers should use the chance to further discuss associated protective measures and a possible buffer zone, which was recommended by the independent Southampton Study, as well as by the study undertaken by the WWF. Otherwise the Wadden Sea PSSA will remain a purely symbolic step and will not set a good precedent for future PSSAs.

A very positive step is the establishment of a Wadden Sea Forum for a more participatory and integrated approach. This decision is an important follow-up of the Wadden Sea Plan, agreed

upon during the last Ministerial Conference in Stade. We also welcome that the Ministers decided on a good preparation of such a forum through an installation of a preparatory committee and an early nomination of a Chairman right at the Conference. This preparation is vital for a proper functioning and a positive outcome of the Wadden Sea Forum. Through a broader participation of the population and interest groups concerned and through the development of sustainable development scenarios, the Trilateral Cooperation will be definitely further improved. The outcome of such a process could be an adaptive and participatory management of the entire Wadden Sea Region. This way the Trilateral Cooperation could send out a very positive signal to the European Community, which focuses many efforts on a better application of Integrated Coastal Zone Management approaches.

In line with these developments we experienced another step forward during the Esbjerg conference: Within the coming four years, it will be checked if and how the Trilateral Cooperation can be further improved, e.g. by a Wadden Sea Convention or the establishment of an International Park. The actual plans of the Netherlands to establish an Offshore Windpark within the Trilateral Conservation Area shows that this discussion is absolutely vital. According to the Wadden Sea Plan, there are only very few prohibitions and Offshore Windparks in the Conservation area is one of them. A more committal juridical framework could, in our opinion, avoid national interest. The already existing concept developed by a juridical expert

group and presented by the Wadden Sea Team should be studied more closely in the coming months.

Another step forward is the agreement to reduce the by-catch of harbour porpoise in the future. In addition, it should be studied how the protection of harbour porpoises in the already existing protection area close to Sylt can be improved. Also, the Trilateral Cooperation should do some research whether we need additional protected areas in the Wadden Sea. Research is also needed with regard to the effects of industrial fisheries as recommended by the German delegation during the conference. This constructive idea should be taken on board in the years to come. Essential is a fast and reliable research on the effects of Mussel Fishery on the Wadden Sea ecosystem. It is certainly too late to come to final decisions with regard to sustainable Mussel Fishery in 2005. This should be done much sooner. Another important follow-up is getting the public on board for a joint application of the Wadden Sea as a World Heritage site. In this context, a short and impressive film, as presented by the kids of the Waddenvereniging at the beginning of the conference, could certainly be a great tool to make the idea work.

Overall the Esbjerg Conference 2001 is another important step forward for an integrated and better protection of the Wadden Sea in the Future – but still there is a lot of work to do and a big responsibility for the Dutch Chair to take the lead in this important process.

Anja Possekel, Beate Ratter  
Wadden Sea Team (WST)  
c/o Umweltstiftung WWF-Deutschland  
Am Güthpohl 11  
D - 28757 Bremen  
ratter@wwf.de  
possekel@wwf.de