

25th Anniversary



From left to right:
Minister Hans-Heinrich Sander, (Lower Saxony), State Secretary Peter Knitsch, (Schleswig-Holstein), Parliamentary State Secretary Simone Probst (Germany), Minister Cees Veerman, (The Netherlands), Director General Mr. Jens Peter Simonsen (Denmark) and Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention at the 25th Anniversary a „Schloss Gödens“. (Photo: Masch).

On invitation of the Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, Mr. Cees Veerman, over 120 guests celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Trilateral Cooperation on the Protection of the Wadden Sea on 22 October 2003 at the picturesque and over 350-year old "Schloss Gödens".

Minister Veerman welcomed the Parliamentary State Secretary Ms. Simone Probst (Federal Ministry of Environment, Nature Protection and Nuclear Safety, Germany) Director General Mr. Jens Peter Simonsen (Ministry of Environment, Denmark), and the Lower Saxon Minister of the Environment Hans-Heinrich Sander, as well as guests from science, policy and non-governmental organizations involved in the Wadden Sea cooperation.

The aim of the Wadden Sea Cooperation was primarily the protection of nature, Minister Veerman said, but cultural and landscape aspects were also

incorporated in its work. A sustainable development of the area, he underlined, requires to integrate aspects of resource uses and nature protection especially with regard to a future increased sea level rise. All speakers stressed the importance of creating sufficient support for policy and mangement at grass roots level.

Beside the official statements, there were also several opportunities in forum discussions and personal talks to look back on what had been achieved and to new challenges for the future cooperation.

The keynote address was held by Peter Bridgewater, Secretary General of the Ramsar Convention, who praised the excellent spirit of the cooperation but also addressed challenges to be met to accomplish a sustainable development of the Wadden Sea region. He particularly stressed the importance of linking culture with nature in the protection of the Wadden Sea.

Keynote address to the 25th Anniversary of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation

Peter Bridgewater
Secretary General, Ramsar
Convention

Minister Veerman, Director General of the Ministry of the Environment Simonsen, Secretary of State Probst, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It was with great pleasure I accepted your kind invitation to address you today, on the occasion of your 25th (or jubilee) anniversary of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation.

The Wadden Sea is truly significant globally – for nowhere else in the world can such a large unbroken stretch of tidal flats be found. So knowing that since 1978, your responsible ministries of The Netherlands, Denmark and Germany have been working together on the conservation and wise management of the Wadden Sea is of importance to the global community – not least to that part



Peter Bridgewater with Jens Enemark, Secretary of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, and Jan Kuiper, EcoMare, Texel (from left) (Photo: Marencic)

involved in the Convention on Wetlands. And it is a landmark of trans-border cooperation to ensure an area of great importance to the world is able to be managed within a set of coherent policies derived from the three governments acting together – building on your discussions in Esbjerg twelve years ago.

Why, then is this area so important – one could dismiss it as a few low-lying sandy islands in a vast sea of accreting mud, with an agrarian hinterland – surely nothing like the exciting verdant splendour of Tropical Forests? So why the fuss?

The importance of the Wadden Sea for biological diversity stems from the high growth rate of algae and sea grasses. Shallow, nutrient rich waters are the driving force for this high productivity. Additionally, the Wadden Sea has a multitude of transitional zones to terrestrial, marine, and freshwater environments, which is the basis for remarkable species richness. Yet in global terms, areas like the Wadden Sea are often forgotten in the rush to “preserve” so called hot-spots, chiefly in tropical systems. But the diversity of species, and the intricate landscape texture of ecosystems in the salt marshes and the tidal flats, makes a special contribution to the ecosystem services needed and desired by human populations – populations in the immediate vicinity, yes, but much, much, more widely as well.

For some 50 migratory bird species the Wadden Sea is a vital “Freeway stop”, to recharge their food resources, as well as providing a place to rest, on their migratory journeys. Every year an average of 10 to 12 million birds pass through this area on their migration routes. And for more than 30 species of birds, the Wadden Sea is an indispensable breeding area. Among these are many

rare and threatened species – and Minister, Director General of the Ministry of Environment and Secretary of State, I have to bring to your attention some very recent work performed by the International Wader Study Group, which is sounding a clear warning over the future of some of these species. Quoting from their report they say;

The task of ensuring the favourable conservation status of waders is inseparable from that of ensuring the conservation and wise use of their wetland and other habitats. Regrettably however, the loss and degradation of wetlands and other habitats continues apace all around the world. This is the underlying cause of the poor conservation status of so many species. Loss and degradation of habitat has many causes. It also has many consequences for waders including those of an ecological, reproductive and genetic nature. The consequences of the intensification of agriculture remain major adverse factors affecting the status of waders not only in western Europe, with its long-established agricultural landscapes, but also in other regions such as eastern Europe and central Asia where natural steppe landscapes have now been replaced by arable and other agricultural forms of cultivation.

I think these conclusions offer new reasons why it is so critical your work under this trilateral cooperation must continue and develop. I can only, from the perspective of the Ramsar Convention, urge you to remain vigilant on these issues, and increase the degree to which your national boundaries become blurred in the management strategies pursued in the Wadden Sea.

Of course, the biological richness of the region is well known and documented – it is a classic transition zone, and these zones typically have a high biological diversity. But, as your trilateral cooperation has already identified, the region also has special landscape elements, especially bio-cultural elements, which characterize it. From the perspective of that most basic of cultural attribute, language, we see the region has the three languages of German, Danish and Dutch. Looking closer, though, we see other richness – disregarding borders the region has its own language of Frisian, which itself has dialects.

It is still more complicated than that, however, since, in fact, five linguistic varieties are spoken in North Frisia: the standard languages of German and Danish and the non-standard languages of Frisian, Low German and Jutish (a Danish dialect). For all of the middle ages Frisian was the only language spoken in Friesland, and it was the language of the people and of the government. Of course, in the beginning of this century we have a

kaleidoscope of languages and dialects, reflecting history in part, as well as a new desire to rekindle cultural bonds, including with the landscape. This simply emphasises the need always to ensure people are put at the heart of nature, for environmental problems are typically people problems!

The Ramsar Convention at its last COP adopted guiding principles on cultural values of wetlands to help in their management and conservation, so it is very welcome that this trilateral agreement is also taking notice of this issue. It is my personal conviction that unless we balance our knowledge of the cultural and biological diversity of landscapes and seascapes we will not be able to manage or use them wisely.

Let me now turn another event of global conservation significance just completed in South Africa – the World Parks Congress. Convened every 10 years by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) this is a large gathering of professionals concerned with protected area management. This event however, concerned itself with changing the protected areas paradigm – and in no more significant way than a component which dealt with the issue of linkages in landscape and seascape, including trans-border cooperation. Again we see the Wadden Sea already demonstrating clearly the way ahead.

Historically your three countries have been world leaders in promoting the need to establish and manage protected areas in a wider context. This afternoon, I should like to take the opportunity to speak about 10 areas for action agreed by the World Parks Congress– all of which are relevant in the context of the Wadden Sea.

One conclusion was a clear view that parks cannot exist as unique islands, but must be seen as places in a matrix. A second conclusion was that protected areas both need, and can provide for, ecological, cultural and social resilience. Protected areas are indeed the “resilience parachutes” of the world, concentrates of biological and cultural diversity

The ten target areas for action are essential steps towards achieving more sustainable protected areas – while solving other pressing social and environmental issues. In brief the issues are:

- Alleviating Poverty
- Coping with Global change
- Getting better Governance
- Promoting the bio-cultural aspects of landscape
- Linking Marine systems to each other and to terrestrial systems
- Putting linkages at the heart of the Conven-

tion on Biological Diversity's Ecosystem Approach

- Initiating new Institutions for managing linkages
- Finding new funding to support linkages
- Reinvigorating Research which takes account of linkages, and
- Ensuring engagement of the Private sector

You will be pleased to see that your trilateral agreement has been engaged already in many of these actions in the Wadden Sea – I believe this an excellent example for other areas in the world to follow. And the timing of this 25th celebration allows me take the opportunity to table this plan – and taking account of my earlier remarks on language, I table it in Danish, Dutch, German, and English – but alas not Frisian!

But may I end my remarks by returning to my stable, as it were – the Ramsar Convention. The Wadden Sea includes 8 Ramsar sites covering over 1,000,000 hectares, which makes it special for us.

This occasion, as we look back on 25 years of achievement here in the Wadden Sea, and look forward to 25 more such years, seems the perfect moment to sketch out a vision of the future for the Ramsar Convention. Twenty five years ago, Ramsar was the obvious convention to be engaged in the Wadden Sea – but back then primarily because of its key role in protecting sites for migratory waterfowl. Since that time we have built on that role, but now fulfil that role in partnership with the Convention on Migratory Species and its regional agreements, which I have to acknowledge are well looked after in Bonn!

And we have grown in other directions. As you

Peter Bridgewater
presenting Minister
Veerman, Parliamentary
State Secretary Probst and
Director General Simonsen
with a copy of the Ramsar
Wetlands book.
(Photo: Marencic)



know, the Ramsar Convention is a global treaty for the conservation of wetlands: shallow open waters and any land regularly or intermittently covered or saturated by water. Of course, as we are in Europe, there are regional agreements to be taken account of – The EC Bird Directive 1979 aims at the protection of all species of naturally occurring birds in the territory of the member states through “special protection areas” (SPAs). And so the Wadden Sea Ramsar sites have also been designated as SPAs. Additionally, the EC Habitat Directive 1992 aims at the conservation of habitats of wild flora and fauna in the member states. NATURA 2000 – a coherent ecological network – has been established under this Directive, and, major parts of the Wadden Sea are included in this network.

Right now the world is poised to cope with the issue of ensuring enough freshwater for all – which also means ensuring enough water for wetlands and other ecosystems. I am convinced the Ramsar Convention can become a water convention – for we are already a Convention which deals with protection, production and natural purification of freshwater – as well as the near-shore marine environments.

The Convention has increasingly recognized that wetlands not only play a vital role in the hydrological cycle, but that to secure their conservation and wise use it is essential that they are managed in the wider context of basin-scale and water resource management. And wetlands typically perform many functions which could be described as purification of water, so much so that artificial wetlands are now being created for just this purpose. The challenge is to find ways of securing appropriate allocation of water to wetlands in the face of increasing water demand and diminishing water supply through over-abstraction and the effects of prolonged and increasing droughts and desertification in many parts of the world.

Arising from the last Ramsar COP, held in Valencia, Spain a year ago, and at which each of your Governments played key and highly effective roles, Resolution VIII.1 strongly urged all Contracting Parties to bring water allocation Guidelines to the attention of their national authorities responsible for water resource management. In addition, Contracting Parties at COP8 adopted several other Resolutions of direct relevance to the linkage between wetlands and water management, notably on:

- The Report of the World Commission on Dams (WCD) and its relevance to the Ramsar Convention;

- Agriculture, wetlands and water resource management;
- The impact of natural disasters, particularly drought, on wetland ecosystems; and
- Guidelines for rendering the use of groundwater compatible with the conservation of wetlands.

In recognition of the major importance to address issues of water management through the Convention on Wetlands, COP8 also requested its Scientific and Technical Review Panel to develop further guidance for Contracting Parties on:

- groundwater management,
- environmental flows,
- river basin management case studies, and
- the relationship between agricultural good practice and sustainable management of wetlands.

That work is now in full swing and when COP9 meets next in Kampala, Uganda, in 2005 Contracting Parties will have before them new guidance on these issues. It is, of course, more than appropriate that this will be the first Conference of the Parties meeting to be held in Africa – the continent where these issues press more urgently than most.

Minister, Director General of the Ministry of Environment and Secretary of State, you must, as do I, hear frequently about the need for a new focus, a new institutional framework, a paradigm shift, to deal with the water issue – and yet it seems we already have the pieces there, in place, to deal with this most critical of issues.

And so, as you contemplate the next 25 years of this trilateral agreement you have so successfully nurtured, I urge you to see how it can be an exemplar for the global community, as they seek to understand and manage the environmental complexities of the water issue.

And of course, I urge you especially to see how this leadership here can be transferred to the Ramsar Convention, as it seeks to promote better knowledge, wiser use, and ultimately better balanced management and conservation of the earth's water resources and the ecosystems which depend on them, and on which they depend.

I am sure I can say, in conclusion, *It sil heve!* Dank u wel! Tak! Danke! Tankje wol! And Thank you!

Peter Bridgewater

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