

Sustainable Development in the Wadden Sea Region

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"Economic vitality, high quality and diversity of employment, improving education and research to keep young people in the region, good infrastructure, preserving the characteristic Wadden Sea landscape and protection of Wadden Sea ecosystem". These are some of the many issues which the trilateral Wadden Sea Forum regarded as important for sustainable development in the Wadden Sea region.

The Wadden Sea Forum, which held its third meeting in the Chamber of Commerce Oldenburg, Germany, was in favour of maintaining the typical features of the Wadden Sea landscape, i.e. wide views, rural areas, and cultural history. Also the necessity of increasing the social cohesion of the countryside was stressed.

But, to be able to realize the social, ecological and cultural historical ambitions, sustainable economic growth is absolutely necessary.

At the next meeting in April 2004, the Forum will continue the discussion on sustainability aims and will furthermore discuss how such aims can be used by local and regional administrations. Input to this discussion will be given by a study on sustainable development, currently carried out by the Danish consultant COWI. In the study, the situation with regard to the status of sustainable development in the Wadden Sea countries will be evaluated. It concerns not only the national sustainability strategies, but also to what extent sustainability has become part of policies of the private sector or plays a role in the behaviour of consumers.

On the basis of the inventory and the outcome of the discussions in the Wadden Sea Forum and its thematic working groups, proposals will be developed for a Wadden Sea region sustainability strategy.

Offshore windparks and shipping safety

The Forum furthermore discussed the topical issues of the planning of offshore wind parks, shipping safety and sustainable shrimp fisheries.

The Forum agreed that there should be balanced planning of offshore wind parks, both national and trilateral. With regard to shipping safety the meeting agreed to commission a study in which gaps in the existing national contingency systems for shipping casualties will be identified. On the basis of this study the Forum will, at its next meeting in April 2004, discuss the need for additional measures, mainly in the framework of the Wadden Sea PSSA (Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas).

The socio-economic situation in the Wadden Sea region

The Forum has commissioned a number of studies on the social-economic situation of the Wadden Sea region. The analyses of the German and Danish Wadden Sea region can be downloaded from the WSF website www.waddensea-forum.org. First results of an integrated analyses of the national studies were presented at the meeting.

According to the analysis the Wadden Sea region shows a relatively high population growth, although there are large differences within the region. Population growth in the period 1990-2000 has been highest in the German Wadden Sea region: 5% whereas it was 3.6% for the whole of Germany.

A comparison of developments in GDP and employment showed that the Dutch and Danish parts of the region have done well in the past 10 years, but that most of the German Wadden Sea region showed negative figures. A positive exception is the German Kreis Friesland with a relatively high increase in both GDP and employment figures. In a follow-up studies the specific perspectives and opportunities for the region will be investigated.

Sea level rise

A particular challenge for the Wadden Sea region is the expected increase in sea level rise. The results of a trilateral study into the possible impacts of increased sea level rise, carried out in 2001 by the trilateral expert group Coastal Protection and Sea Level Rise (CPSL), were presented to the Forum. The CPSL has elaborated three sea level rise scenarios. The first scenario is the present situation, meaning an average sea level rise of 10 cm/50 years. In the most plausible expectation for the future, which is a sea level rise of 25 cm per 50 years, the group expects that the system as a whole will be able to compensate the changes, but there will be large differences between different parts of the area.

However, if the sea level rise is faster, (50 cm/50 years), the size of the tidal flats could decrease by 15% (720 km²), the tidal basins getting more the character of tidal lagoons.

A sea level rise of 50 cm in 50 years will result in a marked decrease in all waders, owing to an expected increase in flooding time, leaving less time for the birds to feed on the intertidal flats. Duck and geese stocks will also decrease in number because salt marshes will be flooded more frequently, leaving less time for feeding.

For dikes (maintenance and strengthening) the expected increase in costs for the most realistic sea level scenario (25 cm in 50 years) is expected to be in the order of 5 to 15 % for the German Wadden Sea. In the Dutch and the Danish Wadden Sea, the relative increase is estimated to be much higher. This results mainly from the fact that at present dikes are only maintained in these two countries, not strengthened as in Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony. For the high sea level scenario (50 cm in 50 years) the costs to maintain present dike safety in the year 2050 may rise by up to 75 % (Germany) and even more in The Netherlands and Denmark. Another important consequence of an increased sea level is that possibilities for discharging fresh water from the mainland into the sea will become less and that additional sluicing, pumping and/or fresh water storage capacity is needed.

The meeting was informed that the group will continue its work with developing proposals for best environmental practices to cope with the anticipated impacts in a way which guarantees safety but which is compatible with the protection of the ecosystem.

Background information about the Forum, including records of the Forum and TG meetings, on the Wadden Sea Forum website: www.waddensea-forum.org



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