

12th Trilateral Governmental Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea

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Ministerial Council Declaration, Annex 2

VISION WADDEN SEA FLYWAY INITIATIVE

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Vision Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative

Objective

The aim of the flyway vision is to guide the implementation of the request of the World Heritage Committee at the inscription of the Wadden Sea as a World Heritage Site in 2009 to *'the States Parties of Germany and the Netherlands to strengthen cooperation on management and research activities with States Parties on the African Eurasian Flyways, which play a significant role in conserving migratory species along these flyways.'*

The vision should thus:

- strengthen cooperation across the flyway on the conservation, management and research of migratory birds depend on the Wadden Sea;
- be ecologically sound, cost effective and feasible;
- have full endorsement of the Trilateral Wadden Sea cooperation, other flyway states and relevant stakeholder.

The vision shall be adopted at the 12th Trilateral Governmental Wadden Sea Conference in 2014 together with a formal endorsement by other relevant partners in conjunction with a framework of cooperation and plan of action for its implementation. The Plan of Action (a rolling document) will subsequently take account of the results and outcomes of current and planned activities within the flyways for which the Wadden Sea plays a major role, especially activities of the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative (WSFI).

Introduction

The International Wadden Sea of The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark is of outstanding universal value for global biodiversity, especially for migratory birds. Yearly millions of migratory waterbirds stop over in the area to build up energy for their onward journeys between the Arctic and Africa. They depend on the presence of suitable safe breeding, resting and non-breeding sites. International cooperation and coordination are mandatory to provide the right conditions for them along their flyway.

The State Parties of the Wadden Sea World Heritage will mutually support, advance and communicate a sustainable and long-term management of the East Atlantic Flyway to improve the living conditions for migratory birds together with partners along the flyway on an equal and shared basis. This engagement will stimulate cooperation among other flyways for migratory bird conservation. Coming generations will thus continue to enjoy and admire the Wadden Sea World Heritage site when it is occupied by millions of birds, whilst such an appreciation will be fostered elsewhere along the flyway, connecting people and reminding us of our global shared responsibility to conserve migratory species.

Vision

Migratory birds find lasting refuge along the East Atlantic Flyway from northern breeding areas to their key Wadden Sea stopover and to the African coastline, and inspire and connect people for future generations.

Annotation

In human societies across the world - even far back in history - migrating birds have played an important role in the perception of nature. People recognise the periodic coming and going of birds and are in awe of their incredible feats of endurance. In the African-Eurasian region millions of migrating birds fly long distances between their breeding and non-breeding grounds, for instance between the Arctic and Southern Africa, or Central Siberia and Western Europe. Migratory birds are ambassadors connecting countries and people, ignoring

our own political and social barriers. Flyways encompass the whole life cycle of migratory birds and include essential sites for breeding, resting, moulting and feeding. This requires conservation and management to take place at the flyway scale, recognising the ecological connectivity between critical sites along the flyway.

Every year, the Wadden Sea in Northern Europe serves as a central hub and cross-over point for some 10-12 million migrating waterbirds of the East Atlantic Flyway, moving between the Arctic and Africa. At this critical stop-over in their long voyage, many bird species, often in huge flocks, refuel on the tidal flats and shallow waters of the Wadden Sea, forming a lively and magical spectacle. The presence of these migratory waterbirds attracts many visitors to the area, bringing significant economic and cultural benefits.

For more than 25 years the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation has been active in promoting wise use management of the Wadden Sea and migratory birds benefit from the implementation of nature protection targets and plans of the Trilateral Cooperation. However, nearly half of the trilaterally monitored migratory bird species in the Wadden Sea have declining trends in numbers. Factors threatening protection and conservation efforts can be found within the Wadden Sea itself and along the flyway. Thus there is a permanent risk of the Wadden Sea losing vital parts of its ecology, character, attraction and economic and cultural value.

In 2009 UNESCO acknowledged the protection efforts of the Trilateral Cooperation and the significance of the Wadden Sea for migratory waterbirds on the African-Eurasian flyways by inscribing the Dutch and German Wadden Sea on the World Heritage list. The Danish Wadden Sea applies for World Heritage status in 2014. According to the Statement of Outstanding Universal Value adopted by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, the Wadden Sea '*... is a key site for migratory birds and its ecosystems sustain wildlife populations well beyond its borders.*' (criterion ix). The statement continues with '*The clearest indicator of the importance of the property is the support it provides to migratory birds as a staging, moulting and wintering area. Up to 6.1 million birds can be present at the same time, and an average of 10-12 million each year pass through the property. The availability of food and a low level of disturbance are essential factors that contribute to the key role of the nominated property in supporting the survival of migratory species. The nominated property is the essential stopover that enables the functioning of the East Atlantic and African-Eurasian migratory flyways. Biodiversity on a world wide scale is reliant on the Wadden Sea.*' (criterion x)

This trilateral joint flyway conservation vision has been drawn up to interpret and fulfil the UNESCO request. It will form part of the trilateral policy and should subsequently be extended within the Wadden Sea Plan. As flyways span continents and countries, all potential partners along the flyway will be invited to share and join the vision.

The recognition that international cooperation between countries along the flyways is essential has already led to the creation of a number of international environmental treaties/instruments, of which the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA) developed under the framework of the Convention of Migratory Species (CMS) is the most relevant for the WSFI. AEWA's geographic range includes the whole East Atlantic Flyway, whilst the trilateral Wadden Sea state parties are also Contracting Parties to AEWA.

The flyway vision foresees effective implementation of the UNESCO request in terms of future cooperation, communication, coordination, management and implementation strategies through, focused activities guided by a framework of cooperation and a plan of action.

The vision draws on and is guided by the following elements:

- The Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation is aware of its global responsibility to protect and manage migratory waterbirds on a flyway level. The World Heritage designation has highlighted the need for flyway conservation at the global level both within the African-Eurasian Flyways and elsewhere.
- The Wadden Sea plays its most significant ecological role within the East Atlantic Flyway, which embraces the western coastlines of Africa and Europe to the Arctic. This flyway has therefore been identified as the primary focal region of the WSFI, bringing maximum conservation impact for Wadden Sea waterbirds from coordinated action. Close contacts with other flyways for information and experience exchange will be encouraged and maintained.
- An efficient network of World Heritage sites working actively together including the Wadden Sea, Doñana National Park, Banc d'Arguin and Arquipelago dos Bijagòs will strengthen the World Heritage approach and stimulate these sites to maintain their value as essential elements within the entire flyway.
- In close cooperation with the African Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement, the Wetlands Convention (Ramsar), the Convention on Migratory Species and other relevant instruments the vision will encourage implementation of internationally agreed migratory bird conservation objectives and activities.
- Close and practical cooperation and communication between governments, science, civil society and NGOs is crucial for flyway conservation. Communication, joint conservation and research and, awareness-raising, especially of the economic values of flyways, stand to promote effective flyway conservation.
- The Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative will integrate all trilateral flyway projects and activities under the coordination of the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat. The Initiative will play an important role within global flyway conservation frameworks.
- The Wadden Sea countries share migratory birds with countries along the East Atlantic Flyway. Conservation of Wadden Sea birds inside and outside the Cooperation Area will have wider benefits by also improving the management and conservation of other bird species and critical sites.
- Long-term rolling capacity building will produce capable managers and strengthen relevant partners and organisations at the national and local level. The Trilateral Cooperation has capacity and commitment to promote sustainable management knowledge including aspects of economic benefits along the East Atlantic Flyway.

Joint monitoring, conservation and research activities along the East Atlantic Flyway are essential for yielding information for effective species and site management and for regular assessment of the migratory bird targets of the Wadden Sea Plan.