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Onto new frontiers: Results of the Sylt Conference, 17 March 2010

Wadden Sea World Heritage



The signing of the joint Ministerial Declaration by Parliamentary State Secretary Ursula Heinen-Esser of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Germany, chair of the Conference; Karen Ellemann, Minister of Environment, Denmark and Gerda Verburg, Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the Netherlands concluded a very successful and productive Wadden Sea Conference on the Wadden island of Sylt on 18 March 2010. The Conference was the 11th Trilateral Governmental Conference in the framework of the Dutch-German-Danish cooperation on the protection of the Wadden Sea, the world's largest tidal barrier island system, since the first Conference in The Hague in 1978.

In June 2009, the Dutch-German Wadden Sea was inscribed on the World Heritage List. The nomination has been a tremendous success and been embraced by the region. Denmark was not able to nominate its parts because of the ongoing process of establishing a national part for its Wadden Sea. The ministers agreed to start in the forthcoming period a possible nomination of the Danish Wadden Sea and the nomination of the Hamburg Wadden Sea National Park for inclusion on the World Heritage List.

The ministers also supported the further extension of the communication and the marketing around the Wadden Sea World Heritage. Within the next year a tourism marketing strategy will be developed together with the tourism industry to further sustainable tourism and marketing of the World Heritage Site.

A revised Wadden Sea Plan was also adopted. The 2010 Wadden Sea Plan updates the trilateral policies and management since the first Wadden Sea Plan was adopted at the 8th Conference in Stade in 1997. The Wadden Sea Plan constitutes the common framework for the protection and sustainable management of the Wadden Sea as an ecological entity. It is also the common management plan for the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site.

In addition to agreements to enhance the international cooperation to protect the migratory birds, for which the Wadden Sea is a key site, climate, sea level rise, coastal protection and alien species were high up on the minister's agenda. Climate change and its consequences such as enhanced sea level rise, increased temperatures, and increasing sediment deficits will have impacts on the ecology and landscape of the Wadden Sea and may affect the safety of the inhabitants. It was agreed that there is a further need to strengthen the natural processes of the Wadden Sea in order to cope with such changes and to further cooperate in developing common strategies and enhancing the knowledge. For invasive species, which is an issue of concern for all parts of the Wadden Sea, a common approach will also be developed in the coming period.

Shipping safety was again on the agenda. It remains an issue which is of great concern for the region since an accident can have potentially enormous impact, ecologically and economically. It is of the highest priority that safety is kept on a high level and that everything is done to prevent accidents. The ministers agreed to a number of actions in this field including to continue to raise the awareness of the significance of the Wadden Sea amongst the maritime sector.

A highlight of the Conference was the signing of the 2010 Joint Declaration on the Protection of the Wadden Sea in a formal signing ceremony at the Kurhaus in Westerland. The 2010 Joint Declaration replaces the Joint Declaration, signed at the 1982 Wadden Sea Conference in Copenhagen, which had become progressively outdated. It will not alter the spirit or legal status of the Cooperation. This will remain a formal (but not legally binding) Cooperation between the governments of the three countries. In conjunction with the signing of the 2010 Joint Declaration new governance structures will be launched and replace the existing structures. The Trilateral Wadden Sea Board is the governing body of the Cooperation. Peter Ilsøe, Denmark, was appointed by the ministers as the first chairman of the Board.

The Sylt Conference introduced a new element into the Wadden Sea Conference. During the open session of the Conference an interactive discussion with the ministers, stakeholders and guests on "A Vision for the Wadden Sea - Steps to Achievement" was held. The overall objective for this session was to encourage all participants that they have a part to play in achieving the vision for the Wadden Sea. The session was moderated by Dr. Andy Brown who had earlier evaluated the Cooperation and had gained a considerable knowledge of the Cooperation. This session was much appreciated by the participants because it was felt that this was a central function of the Conferences: To obtain the good ideas and commitment of key stakeholders for the protection of the Wadden Sea, and a fruitful continuation of the Wadden Sea Cooperation.

The Sylt Conference was a milestone in the Wadden Sea Cooperation. One of the most productive periods of the cooperation was concluded with a new foundation for the Cooperation and new and pioneering future objectives.

The chair of the Cooperation has now been transferred to Denmark for the next three-year period until 2013.

Further information about the conference:

<http://www.waddensea-secretariat.org/tgc/TGC-Sylt-2010.html>

Impressum

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