

Sustainable shipping and ports initiative for a well-protected Wadden Sea

The Wadden Sea at the southern North Sea coast is the largest tidal flat ecosystem in the world and home to a large and unique variety of natural habitats and species. Based on its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), the Wadden Sea has been designated as a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) since 2009.

At the same time, the southern North Sea, including parts of the Wadden Sea and the adjacent estuaries, is one of the world's busiest ship traffic areas, connecting the largest transit and transshipment ports; passing at a short distance the vulnerable, pristine Natura 2000 area of the Wadden Sea. In the Wadden Sea, shipping traffic is mainly associated with recreational uses, transportation to and from the islands and smaller harbors hosting activities such as fisheries, extraction of material and traffic to and from offshore platforms.

Finding an appropriate balance between an ecologically healthy Wadden Sea preserving its OUV and a viable shipping and ports sector is the objective of the ***Sustainable shipping and ports initiative for a well-protected Wadden Sea (SustSPI)***. In the past, important steps in this direction were taken such as the ongoing set up of operational structures for the handling of ship accidents, the [designation of the Wadden Sea as “Particularly Sensitive Sea Area” \(PSSA\) by the IMO](#) in 2002, the adoption of the [PSSA Wadden Sea Operational Plans](#) with the Tønder Declaration in 2014, the [Pact of Marrum](#) signed in 2018 by Dutch NGOs and representatives of the Dutch ports, or the [Letter of Intent](#) on a trilateral maritime co-operation to promote environmental efforts between the Dutch, German and Danish Wadden Sea Ports signed in 2018.

Despite all of this, there are still many challenges from a sustainability point of view. E.g. relevant impacts occur on habitats, species, landscape, and the natural dynamics. Possible causes are activities such as irresponsible dredging and dumping, high speed traffic, ship accidents, improper waste management aboard and ashore according to IMO and EU regulations and toxic substances such as oil released in the case of accidents. In addition, these impacts are accompanied by new challenges related to climate change such as sea-level rise and energy transition. The activities and their impacts vary according to the regions, but a lot can be achieved by exchanging, analyzing and implementing best practices. Therefore, representatives from the shipping and the ports sector together with nature conservation organisations jointly perceived that an extended trilateral and cross-sectoral dialogue process is needed to enable further progress. This process is currently funded by the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU) and the Wadden Sea Board (WSB) of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC) concerning activities and projects running initially from 2021 to 2023. The SustSPI is one component of this work.

The SustSPI, as described in this document, reflects the common understanding between stakeholders from Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands working together towards a well-protected Wadden Sea where natural processes proceed in an undisturbed way as much as possible, and where sustainable shipping and ports activities flourish.

The signatories of this initiative are representatives from the shipping and ports sectors, from environmental and nature conservation organisations, and from other stakeholders in the

Wadden Sea Region. This document, describing the common basis, the objectives, the next steps and the working tools of our initiative, is open for signature on the occasion of the 14th Trilateral Governmental Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea in Wilhelmshaven from 28 November to 1 December 2022. The purpose is to send a joint signal to stakeholders, to the public and to the governments of our three countries. The initiative shall continue to grow and, therefore, it will remain open for additional signatories after the conference. The signatories want to stand together and support each other to accomplish a better balance of ecology and economy.

OUR COMMON GROUND

We acknowledge the Outstanding Universal Value of the Wadden Sea World Heritage and the critical importance of safeguarding the marine environment and the natural values of this region for present and future generations.

We acknowledge the important role that shipping and ports have in and beyond the Wadden Sea Region as a significant source of employment and economic wealth.

We acknowledge that commercial and recreational shipping and ports in the Wadden Sea Region need to increase efforts to become sustainable. That includes to become nature and environmentally friendly, respecting the goals of the protected areas of the Wadden Sea, and becoming climate neutral with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. For this reason, we want to improve our dialogue and build mutual trust to achieve this result in an appropriate way.

OUR OBJECTIVES FOR SUSTAINABLE SHIPPING AND PORTS

We recognise the need for the shipping and ports sectors to minimise the impact of activities on the natural environment of the southern North Sea, reflected in particular by the Outstanding Universal Value of the Wadden Sea World Heritage. On the one hand, impacts are associated with land based port operations and facilities as well as its development. On the other hand, impacts are associated with ship operations and design. Overall, the ecological footprint of ports and shipping must be as low as possible and the safety measures to avoid and respond to ship accidents as high as possible.

To contribute to the objective set already in the [Sylt Declaration 2010](#) to make the Wadden Sea Region net climate neutral until 2030 and by taking into consideration the local circumstances and defined climate neutrality targets, we encourage and support the port authorities and shipping companies to become climate neutral as early as possible. Priority activities for this transition include adequate facilities and energy infrastructure within the ports, a climate neutral and clean fleet, and supporting economic incentives for the transition towards this. While new vessels should become climate neutral as soon as possible, the biggest and quickest results must be achieved by refitting the current fleet.

We support the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals which include to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources and to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. We also support the European Green Deal including its goal to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. Thus, we aim to ensure the viable development for the shipping and ports sectors in the Wadden Sea Region, balanced among the three pillars of sustainability, i.e. the economic, the social and the ecological components.

HOW TO ACHIEVE OUR OBJECTIVES – THE NEXT STEPS

We agree to enable and to support the exchange of best practices on specific topics such as, but not limited to, the reduction of light pollution, the development of sustainable dredging in ports and the transition to a climate-neutral and clean fleet.

We agree, in line with the [Letter of Intent](#) on a trilateral maritime co-operation, to promote environmental efforts between the Dutch, German and Danish Wadden Sea Ports (2018) and with inspiration from the experiences of the [Pact of Marrum](#) (2018), to actively work towards a non-binding and activity oriented trilateral agreement between the ports of the Wadden Sea, the nature conservation organisations, and other stakeholders from the shipping sector.

We agree to cooperate on and support the development of a proposal to our three governments on a swift implementation of improved protective measures for the safety of shipping in and around the Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) of the Wadden Sea. When necessary, this also includes Associated Protective Measures for the PSSA of the Wadden Sea.

WORKING IN DIALOGUE AND SETTING UP MUTUAL TRUST

We recognise the importance of developing a trustful, cross-sectoral dialogue process at the trilateral level, and active engagement to continue these ongoing efforts.

We aim to discuss jointly on relevant topics with reference to ports and shipping for the protection of the Wadden Sea World Heritage and to develop joint statements, if appropriate.

We agree to inform each other as early as possible about new developments, which could have cross-sectoral interests and benefits.

We prefer, if appropriate and if affordable, the trilateral dialogue process to be established and facilitated by a commonly appointed process management unit from the trilateral Wadden Sea Region.

We aim for and work towards a trilateral dialogue process that will be a trustful and constructive forum for all participants.

Wilhelmshaven, November 29, 2022