

Wadden Sea Board

WSB 4
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Leeuwarden/
The Netherlands



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Attached is a progress report by the secretariat on developments and activities since the WSB 4.

Proposal

The Wadden Sea Board is **proposed** to comment and note, as appropriate, the progress report by the secretariat.

OVERVIEW OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SECRETARIAT SINCE WSB 4

Harbour and Grey Seals

In 2011 the coordinated aerial surveys for the harbour seal counts of the Wadden Sea were performed as usual. Although the growth was less than the average since the PDV epidemic in 2002, the counts from 2011 gave a solid increase in the maximum number of harbour seals hauled out during the moult in August (24,118 and an increase of 9% from last year). The number of pups born in 2011 followed the same trend, during the peak in pupping in June, a total of 7,044 pups were counted, equivalent of an increase of 8% over last year's count.

The total count of 24,118 harbour seals in the Wadden Sea was composed of 3,105 in Denmark, 8,493 in Schleswig-Holstein, 4699 in Lower Saxony and Hamburg and 7,821 in the Netherlands. The general increase of 9% is unevenly distributed; in Denmark there was an increase of 9%, in Schleswig-Holstein the increase was just 2%, the counts in Lower Saxony and Hamburg dropped by 9% while numbers in the Netherlands increased by 34.

Based on results from recent years, it has been speculated that the population was approaching the carrying capacity of their habitat and growth was beginning to slow down (TSEG 2009). Even though this years' increase is larger than last years' low growth (3%, TSEG 2010), there is a trend for decreasing growth rates between years since the epidemic in 2002. The estimate for the total Wadden Sea harbour seal population - correcting for the animals not observed whilst in the water (TSEG 2009) - would result in an estimated population size of 35,500 harbour seals.

From 2006 onwards, aerial surveys of grey seals have been synchronized and coordinated trilaterally within the Wadden Sea. Despite the apparent growth in numbers in Denmark to a maximum of 57 animals counted in summer, despite the observation of pups, still no births have been documented there. The pups could have come from the German colonies. Dedicated grey seals surveys are only carried out in Germany and the Netherlands. Two aerial surveys are conducted during the moult (March-April) and several aerial or boat counts are conducted during the pupping season (November-January). On Helgoland (Germany), surveys are carried out from land.

The maximum number of grey seals counted in the Wadden Sea during the moult amounted to 3,312 animals. Numbers were higher compared to the previous count in 2010 (+25%). In the Netherlands, 2,388 animals were counted (+17%), in Lower Saxony/Hamburg 238 (30%), in Schleswig-Holstein 133 (+33%), and on Helgoland 553 (+65%). Most likely, the high increase in numbers for 2011 is partly due to an underestimate in 2010 as a result of environmental conditions in March-April that year rather than an actual increase. Hence, in 2010 a decrease in the numbers counted was observed at several locations. On average, the numbers have increased by 15.5% per year since 2007. This high rate can be explained by bringing immigration from the UK into consideration.

Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative

In response to the UNESCO request to strengthen the cooperation with countries along the East Atlantic flyway and on the basis of recommendations of the international flyway workshop in Wilhelmshaven, Germany and the Netherlands launched the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative with two flyway projects. The German Project "International Co-operation for the Protection of Waterbirds along their Flyways" with focus on capacity building and funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment (BMU) started on December 1, 2011. The Dutch project "Establishing an international monitoring framework for Wadden Sea waterbird populations" funded by the Programme Rich Wadden Sea (PRW) on behalf of the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and innovation (EL&I) with focus on monitoring started in February 2012.

A first coordination meeting of the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative projects and the Wetlands International and BirdLife International partnership project 'Strengthening networks for the conservation of migratory birds and their habitats along the west coast of Africa' (CMB project) was held in Wageningen in mid-December 2011. Both Wadden Sea projects tuned their activities and could find out possible joint activities and synergies with CMB.

The Wadden Sea project leaders were invited to a CMB steering and PRCM (marine protection programme of 7 countries in West Africa) partnership meeting in Freetown, Sierra Leone on February 6-7, 2012. The CMB meeting and the attendant AEWA coordinator of the AEWA African Initiative welcomed the Wadden Sea projects as important stimulation for migratory bird protection activities in W-Africa. CMB agreed to cooperate and carry out joint workshops and courses with the Wadden Sea projects in the field of capacity building and monitoring. The work plan and schedule of the three programs could successfully be coordinated and adapted. First activities in W-Africa will start in summer 2012.

The joint appearance and presentation of the Wadden Sea Initiative and the installation of a common scientific advisory board is coordinated and organized by the secretariat. In May 2012 a side event at the AEWA MOP5 with presentation of the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative is planned.

West Africa – Wadden Sea

The secretary was invited to give a presentation at the 6th West Africa Coastal and Marine Forum in the Gambia, 20-24 February 2012 on the Wadden Sea, the relationship with West Africa and what could be learned from the cooperation around the Wadden Sea for the cooperation in West Africa. The West Africa Coastal and Marine Forum is better known under its French abbreviation PRCM (Programme Régional de Conservation de la zone Côtière et Marine en Afrique de l'Ouest). The PRCM is an initiative of the IUCN, Wetlands International, the WWF and the FIBA (Federation International du Banc d'Arguin). It is a forum for all sorts of conservation initiatives of government and non-government organizations in 7 West African States (Mauritania, Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Sierra Leone, Guinea and the Cap Verdes) and an essential cooperation platform for West Africa, relevant for the

flyway projects and follow up activities. The relevance of the PRCM should be further discussed when reporting on the results of the flyway projects.

WaLTER

The CWSS is partner in the Dutch project WaLTER (Wadden Sea long-term ecological research) which started early 2011 and aims at making available all data relevant for research and policy and at optimizing Wadden Sea monitoring. The project has started with an inventory of questions of all relevant stakeholders. The role of the CWSS is to secure tuning with the trilateral monitoring and assessment. The CWSS and WaLTER are involved in the trilateral tidal basins study (see PRW below), a methodology which proves very promising for enhancing the policy relevance of available data. The CWSS is also working on establishing a working relationship between WaLTER and the German WIMO project, which has similar objectives as WaLTER.

PRW

The CWSS is involved in the Dutch program "Towards a rich Wadden Sea " (PRW). The international component of PRW contains several items from the trilateral agenda. It concerns, amongst others, Flyway issues, invasive alien species, sustainable fisheries and climate change, most of which are covered in more detail in this progress report.

In the framework of PRW currently a study is carried out into distribution and development of littoral mussel beds on the level of tidal basins. Results indicate that there are tidal basins where mussels beds are always present, be it with high fluctuations in coverage between years, and tidal basins where no mussel beds are found, probably because of the specific hydrodynamic features of these basins. This finding is very relevant for policy and management and will be investigated in more detail in the coming year.

Invasive Alien Species

With the support of PRW, CWSS has started with the preparation of a trilateral project proposal on invasive alien species, to be submitted under the LIFE+ program (call June 2012). Such a project can substantially contribute to the practical implementation of a trilateral strategy on invasive alien species, as currently elaborated by the TG-M. A national Dutch workshop with potential partners was held in December 2011 in Groningen. At this workshop several demonstration project options were discussed.

In Germany, a meeting with involved authorities was held 27 February 2012 with the aim to investigate the feasibility of such a project.

The results of the national deliberations will be brought together in a trilateral workshop to be held early 2012, as the basis for a project application.

Sustainable fisheries

A study into criteria for sustainable fisheries in the Wadden Sea has started at the beginning of November 2011. The study is carried out by a consortium of consultants

from the UK, Denmark and Germany. The study is jointly financed by the PRW and BMU. A first final draft report will be delivered in the first half of March 2012.

OSPAR Report on Contaminants in Bird Eggs

Ecological Quality Objectives (EcoQO) for the North Sea have been developed by OSPAR in cooperation with ICES tested in the period 2002 – 2009. Based on the experience of the TMAP parameter “contaminants in bird eggs” (implemented since 1998) and a cooperation with institutes in Belgium, Norway, Sweden and the UK, it was possible to extend the monitoring of pollutants from the Wadden Sea to the entire North Sea.

The results of the pilot study on “The EcoQO on Mercury and Organohalogenes in Coastal Birds Eggs” have now been published and submitted to OSPAR for further consideration. This report gives, for the first time, a North-Sea-wide overview about the spatial patterns of mercury and organochlorine pollution in coastal bird eggs, presenting data from Oystercatcher, Common Tern and Arctic Tern in the period 2008-2010. It is shown how the recently defined OSPAR Ecological Quality Objectives (EcoQOs) for organochlorines in coastal bird eggs have been fulfilled in the different parts of the North Sea. This report aims to provide input for the further development of EcoQOs in the North Sea area and for their potential role in the implementation of the EU Marine Strategy Directive.

The report can be downloaded as PDF (3 MB) at:

<http://www.waddensea-secretariat.org/TMAP/3-hazardous-substances.html>

13th International Scientific Wadden Sea Symposium

CWSS, together with the Wadden Academy, the Dutch Ministry of EL&I and the Dutch Delta Program, have continued working on the program of the 13th scientific symposium, (Leeuwarden, 21-23 November 2012), also taking account of the guidance from the WSB-4 meeting. A consolidated draft program will be submitted to WSB-5.

International Cooperation – MOU Korea

Since 2009, several MOU activities have been carried out focusing on three topics: 1) information and education (cooperation info centers), 2) policy and management (integrated ecosystem approach), and 3) monitoring and research (migratory birds, benthos, monitoring strategies). For 2012, the Korean partners proposed to organize joint workshop on tidal flat ecosystems worldwide in the framework of the IUNCN World Conference in Korea (with participation of scientist and managers from the US, East Asia, Europe and West-Africa). The next International Scientific Wadden Sea Symposium in Leeuwarden on 21 -23 November 2012 will be another opportunity to strengthen the scientific cooperation with Korea. A proposal on possible contribution by Korean scientists has been forwarded to the organizers.

Wadden Sea Day

Also this year, the Wadden Sea Day will be held in Wilhelmshaven on the last Thursday of August and prepared by the Lower Saxony National Park Authority and the CWSS. Preparations will start soon with the aim of circulating a first

announcement by the end of May. The theme has not yet been fixed. The day will also be an occasion to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the establishment of the CWSS (1 November 1987) and the theme of the Wadden Sea Day should therefore be topical, politically relevant and for a wider audience.