

Towards a Rich Wadden Sea - summary

Summary of programme plan for nature recovery in the Wadden Sea
TWG, 18 november 2009

The Wadden Sea – World Heritage Site, the largest and perhaps only wilderness in the Netherlands – and a beautiful and dynamic natural area. Many people visit it every year and many others earn their living here. We are very proud to have been given World Heritage Status, but this also creates responsibilities. In spite of this recognition of the unique values of the Wadden Sea, the area is also under pressure. But this is going to change. We have to make every effort to ensure that the Wadden Sea becomes a stronger and more resilient nature area again while appreciating that the whole Wadden Sea area must remain robust and healthy in socio-economic terms as an area for living, working and recreation. In short, a Rich (or Plentiful) Sea for nature and people.

In 2008 the mussel fisheries sector, nature organisations and the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality made agreements about the transition of the mussel sector and nature recovery in the Wadden Sea. The agreement aims to achieve a Rich Wadden Sea by 2030 for nature and for users. This report outlines our approach in reaching this goal. We have opted for a flexible approach. This programme plan is much more than a strict road map. We intend to work towards the target scenario through consultation and collaboration with all users, nature organisations and government bodies in the area, learning from each step as we go before taking the next step.

The publication of the Nature Recovery Plan represents the first step. The parties have agreed on a common aim: to create a Wadden Sea area of robust nature in combination with sustainable perspectives for the users in the area. Now we can set our sights on the course of action described.

The Rich Sea Nature Recovery Programme

The Wadden Sea area is unique in the world. It is therefore not surprising that in 2009 it obtained World Heritage status. The wonderfully varied nature in the land and water transition zones is vital to its rare plants and animals and to the 12 million migratory birds which visit the area every year. But this nature and co-use of the Wadden Sea are also under pressure. From fisheries, dredging activities, recreation, dike-cutting and land reclamation and from external influences such as climate change and the invasion of exotic species. This all has consequences for water quality, the construction of the food web, the space allotted to organic producers (mussel banks, etc), resilience to climate change and the function of the Wadden Sea in international ecology.

At the beginning of this year Minister Verburg commissioned a multi-year Nature Recovery Plan for the Wadden Sea. The direct reason was the covenant on the transition of the mussel sector and nature recovery in the Wadden Sea that was

signed by the Government, the mussel sector and several nature organisations in the autumn of 2008. This covenant also aims to promote sustainable alternatives to the practice of dredging the seabed to harvest mussel seed. The nature recovery plan is an elaboration of the key planning decision and the management and development plan for the Wadden Sea, linked at regional level to the commitments of the Third Wadden Sea Memorandum. These serve as integrated framework for the further elaboration of the various development pathways. The programme also has links for example to the Natura 2000 management plan, the Wadden Fund, individual projects and the Wadden Academy knowledge agenda.

As well as streamlining these and other initiatives, the Nature Recovery Plan will also seek new solutions. Finding solutions that benefit nature, while also providing opportunities for people working in the area demands a new approach. It will involve the different parties working together to achieve a sustainable future for the Wadden Sea where nature and economy go hand in hand.

Learning by doing approach

The Wadden Sea is a complex system and it is not always easy to determine which nature recovery measures should be used and how and precisely when. But the course is clear. The target scenario for a rich Wadden Sea describes a common ambition to recover nature and at the same time create new opportunities for sustainable use of the area. It is not a fixed objective, but a perspective that can be adjusted and fine-tuned during the process on the basis of experience gained as we go along.

The search for synergy between nature and use calls for an agenda drawn up by governments, nature organisations and users. This requires serious collaboration and involves learning by doing. The first steps will be based on current knowledge. Their effects on the ecology and economy will determine what steps must come next. Sometimes the learning process will take priority over the action to be taken depending on the complexity of each step and the knowledge that is available. The exact route will be worked out along the way in consultation.

The target scenario for 2030

The target scenario is based on a Rich Sea in 2030. Rich not only in ecological terms, but also in terms of a healthy tourist industry, fisheries and other sectors which can utilise nature to generate added-value for their products. The process will demand creativity and innovation.

The target scenario comprises five core themes:

- food web balance
- large presence of bio building organisms
- sufficient clean and clear water
- the Wadden sea as safe haven
- international embedding

From target scenario to development pathway

In the spring of 2009 five groups of experts started work on the five themes to examine the problems, possible solutions and measures to be taken. A sixth group worked on recommendations on the organisation and funding of the programme's implementation. This delivered the building blocks for the nature recovery programme which were discussed in the summer of 2009 with various users of the Wadden Sea and other stakeholders. The resulting ten development pathways are a collection of activities and initiatives for the short and long term aimed at achieving the target scenario.

Development pathways

The ten development pathways are divided into a number of clusters based on content, type of user and type of measure. The clusters vary in the extent to which the stakeholders agree about the problems and the effect of the measures. The greater the consensus, the greater the emphasis on action and achieving cohesion. If there is less consensus, the emphasis will be on the learning process. The following clusters have been identified:

Food web cluster

1. completion of food web
2. stimulation of sediment stabilising bio building organisms
3. learning from tide storage areas
4. making fisheries more sustainable

Morphology and water cluster

5. naturally accessible : innovation in dredging and transport
6. integrated management agenda Eems-Dollard

Tidal flats fringes cluster

7. transition zones between the land – tidal flat
8. Climate and smart sand suppletion
9. Nature recovery and the barrier dam (Afsluitdijk)

International embedding cluster

10. international embedding

In the coming months the development pathways will be further elaborated with users, nature organisations, experts and regional governments.

Organisation and funding: support and decisiveness

As many national and regional partners¹ are participating in the nature recovery programme, it can count on the necessary support. Yet implementation will require a decisive organisation, strong enough to act on initiatives in the short term and flexible enough to allow scope for developments in the future. The nature recovery programme will therefore have its own independent organisation which can be sure of support from existing programme partners.

The programme will be managed by the Rich Sea Operations Planning Group, comprising representatives from government, nature organisations and users. The programme office, headed by a programme manager, will coordinate implementation and organise monitoring. The programme activities will be implemented through existing organisations in the area.

In consultation, the various programme partners will supply the necessary funding and capacity. For the implementation of the recovery measures various funds and budgets will be called on, including the Wadden Fund.

How to proceed

From October 2009 users, nature organisations, experts and governments will further elaborate the ten development pathways referred to above. At the end of 2009 a first version of the final Nature Recovery Programme will be ready and updated from time to time. The plan will gradually give shape to the concrete measures to be taken in the short term and present the long-term objectives.

¹The Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality, the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment, Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management, Regionaal College Wadden, Coalitie Wadden Natuurlijk and an increasing number of partners.