

# MEETING DOCUMENT

## Wadden Sea Board

(WSB 44)

20 November 2024

online



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<b>Agenda Item:</b>	<b>5.1 Protect and strengthen the Outstanding Universal Value (paras 1-16)</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	State of Conservation of the Wadden Sea World Heritage
<b>Document No.:</b>	WSB 44/5.1/1
<b>Date:</b>	7 November 2024
<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>TG-WH and CWSS</b>

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During their 45th session, 10-25 September 2023, the World Heritage Committee adopted the [Decision 45COM 7B.23](#). The World Heritage Centre and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) expressed concerns about different human activities within, nearby or beneath the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site and requested the submission of a trilateral State of Conservation Report (SOC Report) by the State Parties. This [state of conservation report by the States Parties](#) was submitted to UNESCO on 14 February 2024.

During their 46th session, 21-31 July 2024, the World Heritage Committee adopted the [Decision 46COM 7B.51](#) (Annex 1). This Decision recalled concerns about different human activities within, nearby or beneath the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site and requested the State Parties to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by 1 February 2025, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 47th session. This SOC Report will contain a response to all relevant paragraphs of the Decision, including a trilaterally -to be- further developed way forward towards the joint Strategic Environmental Assessment. The report will also provide additional information on current conservation issues that may affect the Outstanding Universal Value in a positive or negative way.

This document is also to inform on the process and timeline for the joint SOC Report also under consideration of necessary steps proposed for the SEA development (Annex 2). It furthermore summarises the timeline followed for the development and submission of the SOC Report from 2023 - 2025 as well as further communication from and to the WHC, State Parties, and environmental NGOs.

Due to the timely submission deadline for the SoC, it is proposed that the coordination of the incorporation of regional information into the draft SOC Report to be developed by CWSS should be organized during November 2024 to allow, where it is mandatory, a regional consultation in December 2024. This coordination will be conducted by CWSS together with TG-WH with each country's members contributing with information on the specific topics mentioned in the Decision. The SOC Report and/or accompanying correspondence should also inform on the status of the SEA.

**Proposal:** The meeting is invited to **note** the outline and to **comment and endorse** the proposed way of responding and the preliminary roadmap of the SoC report.

## Decision 46 COM 7B.51

### WADDEN SEA (DENMARK, GERMANY, NETHERLANDS) (N 1314TER)

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/24/46.COM/7B.Add.3,
2. Recalling Decision **45 COM 7B.23** adopted at its extended 45th session (Riyadh, 2023),
3. Notes with concern the potential cumulative impacts on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property from numerous activities and infrastructure developments planned or established within and in the wider setting of the property, including extractive activities (oil, salt and gas), ports and shipping, and energy facilities, which could be exacerbated by climate change, especially through accelerating sea level rise;
4. Appreciates the efforts of States Parties to address these challenges by strengthening joint strategic management of the property and enhancing its protection and resilience to climate change;
5. Requests the States Parties to jointly adapt and update management measures for the property in the light of the latest scientific data on climate change and to submit the updated thematic report on climate change in the Wadden Sea to the World Heritage Centre as soon as it becomes available;
6. Recalls its established position that extractive activities are incompatible with World Heritage status, and considers that the numerous ongoing and planned extractive activities in the vicinity of the property and its wider landscape, including oil, gas, and salt extraction and associated sea floor subsidence which, in combination with sea level rise, could have a negative impact on the OUV of the property;
7. Also requests the States Parties to:
  - a) Operationalise the measures included in Paragraph 112 of the Operational Guidelines, which highlights that an effective management approach extends beyond the property to include its wider setting, as its management is related to its role in supporting the OUV of the property,
  - b) Align the national legal frameworks related to planning procedures and decision-making with Paragraph 118bis of the Operational Guidelines and ensure that impact assessment processes are systematically carried out for proposed projects that may impact on the OUV of the property, in line with the Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context, to fully consider the potential impacts on the property's OUV,
  - c) Not to authorise projects that may contribute to seabed subsidence in the property;
8. Further requests the States Parties to ensure that any extractive projects in the wider setting of the property, including the pending GEMS project application for a gas field exploitation, undergoes an appropriate impact assessment procedure and that the project is not approved if it may cause negative impacts on the OUV of the property;
9. Welcomes the decision by the State Party of the Netherlands not to approve the proposed gas extraction project at Ternaard based on the assessment by the supervisory authority that the risk of subsidence in the Wadden Sea was too high in light of new sea-level rise projections, and urges the State Party of the Netherlands to take an unequivocal decision not to approve the project, also in accordance with the legislation adopted in March 2024, not to issue any new gas extraction permits within and under the property;
10. Also welcomes the reported draft rejection of the pending application by Wintershall Dea for oil extraction below the property from an exclave encircled by the property, and requests furthermore the State Party of Germany not to grant final approval to this application, in accordance with the draft rejection and the State Party's commitment under the Wilhelmshaven Declaration to work towards the closure of exclaves within the property, and therefore not to grant any new extractive activities within these exclaves;

11. Further welcomes the ongoing evaluation by the State Party of the Netherlands of the 'hand-on-tap' monitoring method in order to consider updated sea-level rise scenarios and reiterates its request that, in accordance with the precautionary principle, no further extractive projects be approved, and that consideration is given to limiting or halting existing salt extraction activities, as required, to effectively maintain and protect the OUV;
12. Acknowledges the importance and necessity to accelerate renewable energy production, nevertheless, notes with serious concern the increasing number of onshore and offshore energy facilities (e.g., wind) within the wider setting of the property, and requests moreover the States Parties to:
  - a) Adopt a joint strategic and systematic approach to the planning and implementation of projects to connect offshore infrastructures with the mainland, with the aim of avoiding negative impacts on the OUV of the property,
  - b) Ensure that the planning and implementation of onshore energy facilities (e.g., wind) avoid negative impacts on migratory bird pathways and habitats;
13. Requests furthermore the State Party of the Netherlands to ensure the timely submission of the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for the PAWOZ-Eemshaven programme, as soon as it is available, to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN;
14. Further appreciates the updated information on the requested joint SEA to assess the cumulative impacts of extraction and infrastructure developments within and around the property, and requests moreover the States Parties to:
  - a) Ensure that the focus of the SEA is on the potential impacts on the attributes which convey the OUV of the property, as well as other heritage/conservation values, in accordance with the principles of the Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context,
  - b) Submit the scoping report of the SEA to the World Heritage Centre for review;
15. Finally requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2025**, an updated report on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 47th session.

## Roadmap for the State of Conservation Report for 1 February 2025 and Strategic Environmental Assessment

This timeline is developed further from [WSB 43/5.1/1 SoC timeline](#).

<b>Date</b>	<b>Achieved milestones</b>
28 Aug. 2023	Online publication by the World Heritage Centre of the draft decision on the state of conservation of the Wadden Sea World Heritage.
10-25 Sept. 2023	45th session of the World Heritage Committee and adoption of <a href="#">Decision 45COM 7B.23</a>
15 Sept. 2023	Meeting with World Heritage Centre, IUCN, Dutch representatives, TG-WH chair and CWSS to ask for clarification on specific Decision paragraphs and on the scope of the trilateral SOC Report incl. joint SEA.
27 Nov. 2023	Meeting of TG-WH with World Heritage Centre and IUCN for final questions on the trilateral SOC Report and check if we are on the right track regarding the joint SEA.
5 Dec.-11 Jan.	Stakeholder participation process on draft trilateral SOC Report.
18 Dec. 2023	Letter from NGOs to World Heritage Centre: <i>World Heritage Wadden Sea in danger?</i>
2 Feb. 2024	Letter from WHC to State Parties requesting to consider NGO letter from 18 Dec. and Annexes (publications and news items adding to NGO letter).
12 Jan. -13 Feb. 2024	TG-WH integration of comments and review of the trilateral draft SOC Report, and submission to WSB for political approval (written round).
13 Feb. 2024	Approval by WSB of the trilateral SOC Report 2024.
14 Feb. 2024	Submission of trilateral SOC Report 2024 to World Heritage Centre.
28 Feb. 2024	Letter from NGOs to WHC: <i>State of Conservation Report for the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site: Trilateral Response of the Nature NGOs.</i>
15 Mar. 2024	Letter from TWSC to World Heritage Centre in response to their letter from 2 Feb. 2024, also considering the NGOs letter from 28 Feb. 2024 and providing available updates on the aspects addressed in the SOC report 2024.
29 Mar. 2024	Letter from the State Party of the Netherlands to the World Heritage Centre with an update on: <i>No gas extraction at Ternaard at this time.</i> (States Parties reporting under para. 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention).
24 Apr. 2024	Letter from the State Party of Denmark to the World Heritage Centre: <i>Information about a proposed Power-to-X facility in Esbjerg, EIA report.</i> (States Parties reporting under para. 172 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention).
5 July 2024	Draft technical report and draft Decision from World Heritage Centre and IUCN in response to trilateral SOC Report will be published in UNESCO website.
July – August 2024	TWSC reviews draft technical report and draft decision from World Heritage Centre and IUCN for accuracy and feasibility of each new request and respective deadline.

21-31 July 2024	46 <sup>th</sup> World Heritage Committee meeting (and adoption of draft decision).
August – September 2024	Analysis by the TG-WH of the decision of the World Heritage Committee, consequences and requested activities for the TWSC/State Parties, also regarding the joint SEA process.
<b>Date</b>	<b>Upcoming events and processes</b>
November 2024	Coordination of the incorporation of regional information into the draft SoC report.
December 2024	Regional consultation processes SoC report where mandatory (NL?).
January 2025	Consultation meeting on requirements of joint SEA report with World Heritage Centre/IUCN.
01 February 2025	Submission of state of conservation report to UNESCO.
End 2024- Aug2025	Initiate development of the national components of the SEA and integration into joint SEA.
TBC	Examination of SoC report by the World Heritage Committee at its 47th session in Sofia, Bulgaria.
TBC	Plan meeting on joint SEA progress with World Heritage Centre/IUCN.
TBC	WSB approval of draft joint SEA for stakeholder participation.
Aug - Oct 2025	Review and public consultation SEA.
TBC	Plan Meeting on draft joint SEA with World Heritage Centre/IUCN.
Nov/Dec 2025	Integration of comments from public consultation, WHC and IUCN, NCEA
Dec 2025 -April 2026	Joint SEA results considered into Ministerial Declaration
TBC/May 2026	WSB/TGC approval of final joint SEA and submission to World Heritage Centre.