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Report on the State of Conservation of the World Heritage Property “Wadden Sea (N1314)”

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Preface

The World Heritage Committee’s Decision 47 COM 7B.22 appreciates the continued efforts of the State Parties to manage the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site. It also requests an update on specific activities and projects related to human uses within, near, or beneath the transboundary property including gas, oil, and salt extraction, as well as renewable energy infrastructure, as previously raised in Decisions 45 COM 7B.23 and 46 COM 7B.51. In addition, it requests to prioritise the completion of the joint Strategic Environmental Assessment addressing potential cumulative effects.

The World Heritage Committee therefore requested the States Parties to submit an updated report on the state of conservation of the property (SOC Report 2026) and the implementation of the decision, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 48th session.

This report represents the joint response of the States Parties of Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands organised within the Trilateral Cooperation on the Protection of the Wadden Sea, in short Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC). It addresses the requests outlined in the World Heritage’s Committee Decision 47 COM 7B.22 and provides a summary of the most recent developments concerning the state of conservation, progress on the joint Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and factors affecting the property, building upon information from the SOC Report 2025.

The IUCN World Heritage Outlook 4 report downgraded the conservation outlook of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site from *Good* to *Good with some concerns*. It indicated that several factors had contributed to this decline and assessed the overall level of threats to the property as *high*. It further noted that, while management responses had reduced the likelihood of direct damage to the site’s values, the potential cumulative impacts on its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) from numerous existing and planned activities and infrastructure developments, both within the property and in its wider setting, remained high.

The 15th Ministerial Council Declaration, the *2026 Esbjerg Declaration* (currently under preparation), represents a key political commitment and strategic instrument of the TWSC. Ministers from the Wadden Sea countries are expected to sign the Declaration in May at the Trilateral Governmental Council, held as part of the upcoming Wadden Sea Conference in Esbjerg, Denmark. In addition, the three States Parties remain active in the implementation of other related international policies and conventions that add to the management system of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site. This includes the Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Climate Action for World Heritage.

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The Process of Developing the SOC Report 2026

After the 47th session of the World Heritage Committee (6-16 July 2025), the trilateral Task Group World Heritage followed up on the requests in Decision 47 COM 7B.22 with regard to the Wadden Sea World Heritage property.

On 17 October 2025, the Wadden Sea Board approved the draft SOC Report 2026 for stakeholder consultation. The consultation took place between 21 October and 8 December 2025. It involved the trilateral and national levels.

The national consultation process, organised by each country in accordance with their governance structures, involved:

In Denmark, the Regional Round Table (Det Rådgivende Udvalg For Vadehavet), facilitated by the four Danish Wadden Sea Municipalities composed of multiple Wadden Sea stakeholders – including both public authorities and non-governmental organisations, were consulted in the hearing of the draft SOC Report 2026.

In Germany, the National Park Advisory Boards received the draft version of the SOC Report 2026 for information, with the opportunity to provide comments. Advisory Boards include representatives from regional and local governments as well as stakeholders from commercial, recreational, and environmental sectors alongside scientific institutions. The Federal Ministry of Environment and the respective ministries of the three federal states (Länder) were also involved.

In the Netherlands, all government layers in the Wadden Sea Region approved the SOC Report 2026, including provinces, municipalities and other ministries. Parliament was informed and given the opportunity to steer on the content of the reply. The Stakeholder Advisory Board (‘Omgevingsberaad') was also involved.

A number of environmental NGOs were invited to provide feedback in the consultation process through the CWSS via the Wadden Sea Board advisors.

This SOC Report 2026 was formally endorsed by the Wadden Sea Board.

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1. Executive Summary

This 2026 report on the state of conservation of the property (SOC Report 2026) provides the joint response of Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands to the World Heritage Committee Decision 47 COM 7B.22 on the Wadden Sea World Heritage property. It summarises progress since the 2025 report on the state of conservation of the property (SOC report 2025) on climate change adaptation, protection, extractive activities, renewable energy development, impact assessments, the joint Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and other key conservation issues of relevance for the preservation of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

The States Parties continue to advance climate change monitoring and adaptation measures, as welcomed in Decision paragraph 4. The Trilateral Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (CCAS) has been updated. It was adopted by WSB 45 in May 2025 and is foreseen for adoption at the Trilateral Governmental Council meeting in May 2026 in Esbjerg, Denmark. Efforts to harmonise climate-related monitoring within the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme (TMAP) are ongoing, including the development of new parameters on sedimentation accretion. National updates include Danish projects on water retention and climate resilient coastal protection, Schleswig-Holstein’s integrated long-term lowland strategy, and Dutch assessments of subsidence, sea-level rise, and sedimentation relevant to mining activities.

Regarding protection in the vicinity of the property (para. 5), the States Parties recall that the Nomination Dossiers explain that no buffer zone has been and will not be designated. Instead, buffer functions are effectively ensured through EU legislation, international conventions, and national legal regimes. Natura 2000 provisions, impact assessments, spatial planning rules, and water quality protections all contribute to preventing deterioration arising from the wider setting.

In response to Decision paragraphs 6–8, the report provides updated information on extractive activities. The GEMS gas development outside the property has moved forward following immediate execution of its permit. In the Netherlands, the government reached agreement with NAM and ExxonMobil to halt gas extraction from the Ternaard field, with compensation foreseen and withdrawal of the request for extraction. Shell extraction in the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea is not permitted following court decisions due to uncertainties about ecological impacts.

The States drafted a joint strategic approach to offshore and onshore renewable energy (paras. 8 and 9). The draft Trilateral Strategy on Renewable Energy Infrastructure, developed under the project “North Sea wide acceleration of LANding offshore energy while mitigating Impact on the Coastal Environment” (LANICE), aims to ensure the protection of the OUV while mitigating impacts from offshore energy expansion. It was adopted by WSB 47 in November 2025 and is foreseen for adoption at the Trilateral Governmental Council meeting in May 2026. The Netherlands has submitted the PAWOZ Eemshaven impact assessment, including a Heritage

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Impact Assessment, and further assessments will be shared with WHC and IUCN. Germany has also notified WHC under Paragraph 172 regarding spatial plans on grid connection routes.

On impact assessments (para. 10), all three States Parties continue to apply EU and national requirements for SEAs, EIAs, and Appropriate Assessments incorporating OUV considerations. Denmark submits SEAs in the Wadden Sea to UNESCO. Germany integrates considerations of OUV key values into SEAs and EIAs. The Netherlands introduced explicit OUV protection in the Environment and Planning Act in force since 2024.

The States Parties continue to prioritise the development of the joint SEA (para. 11). The draft Scoping Report 2025 has been consulted with stakeholders, and the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) is conducting an expert review. A trilateral SEA subgroup is preparing terms of reference to ensure consistency between national components and the joint SEA. Procurement is planned for early 2026, and the components will follow synchronised timelines. Ongoing and new activities will continue to undergo national impact assessment procedures in parallel to the SEA development.

Other current conservation issues affecting the OUV relate to the key topics of the SIMP Integrated Management Plan for ONE Wadden Sea World Heritage: fisheries, tourism, ports and shipping, energy, and coastal protection and are detailed in Table 2. The EU Nature Restoration Regulation requires national restoration plans by 2026, and the TWSC aims supporting national planning through knowledge exchange and coordinated inputs. A trilateral workshop is planned in March 2026.

The States Parties continue implementing the World Heritage Committee’s requests and strengthening coordinated conservation and management to safeguard the Wadden Sea’s Outstanding Universal Value.

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2. Response to the Decision 47 COM 7B.22

2.1 CLIMATE CHANGE (DECISION PARA. 4)

4. Welcomes the regular monitoring and data collection related to the impacts of climate change, the development of a joint 'Climate Change Adaptation Strategy', and activities aimed at preserving the underlying values and attributes of the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), and encourages the States Parties to continue implementing programmes to maintain the property's hydrological and ecological processes necessary for preserving the underlying values and attributes of the property's OUV, while mitigating the negative impacts of both climate change and anthropogenic activities;

In 2014, the trilateral Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for the Wadden Sea was first adopted aiming to increase the resilience of the Wadden Sea to the impacts of climate change. In line with the 2023 Wilhelmshaven Declaration as well as with the SIMP Integrated Management Plan for ONE Wadden Sea World Heritage (in short: Integrated Management Plan; CWSS, 2023), the trilateral Expert Group Climate Change Adaptation (EG-C) has reviewed and updated the strategy. The strategy includes an updated list of key activities on the trilateral level. The updated Trilateral Climate Change Adaptation Strategy was adopted by the WSB 45 in May 2025. After the consultation phase of the draft 15th Ministerial Council Declaration (2026 Esbjerg Declaration), it is foreseen for adoption by the three governments at the Trilateral Governmental Council meeting in May 2026. Once adopted, it will be submitted to the WHC and IUCN together with the 2026 Esbjerg Declaration.

Efforts to strengthen and harmonise the monitoring of climate change effects on the Wadden Sea ecosystem at the trilateral level are ongoing. This includes the integration of specific climate-related parameters into the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme (TMAP). For example, the Trilateral Expert Group on Salt Marshes and Dunes is planning to develop a parameter proposal on sedimentation and accretion rates to improve the understanding of sea level rise impacts on Wadden Sea salt marshes.

Denmark

Climate Change Adaptation

Climate adaptation in the Danish part of the Wadden Sea involves addressing both sea level rise and increased precipitation. This includes creating additional space for water retention through measures such as the establishment of Juvre Engsø on Rømø (Juvre Engsø-projekt indvies 5. maj 2025 - Nationalpark Vadehavet), as well as strengthening coastal protection.

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Ongoing research is examining how the Wadden Sea's natural processes can adapt while reducing nitrogen emissions, supporting a sustainable development pathway that enhances the area's resilience to climate change. Under this framework, the Local Tripartite for the Wadden Sea works in close collaboration with the Coastal Water Council and the Wadden Sea National Park to coordinate efforts across land and sea. This cooperation ensures that land-based nitrogen reduction measures directly contribute to improving water quality and strengthening ecosystem resilience in the Wadden Sea. The Local Tripartite is part of the new national structure established under the Ministry of Green Transition, which was created in 2024 to coordinate Denmark's green transition efforts related to land use, nitrogen reduction, and climate adaptation. The Local Tripartite for the Wadden Sea includes representatives from the municipalities, local agricultural organisations, nature organisations, and the Danish Nature Agency.

Denmark is planning a comprehensive hydrographic survey of the Danish part of the Wadden Sea, including tidal areas, to assess sea level rise trends and serve as a basis for climate adaptation measures. This initiative is part of the National Climate Adaptation Plan (2024).

Germany

Integrated Planning

The government of Schleswig Holstein adopted the Strategy for the Future of the Lowlands until 2100 (2024, Zukunft Niederungen) focussing on areas inwards the dikes in the vicinity of the Wadden Sea. The long-term goals of this strategy include:

- ensuring the sustainable development and use of the lowlands,
- achieving the goals of climate, water, and biodiversity protection, and
- the sustainable further development of the lowlands as a cultural landscape with value creation potential.

These goals are to be achieved through the further development and adaptation of the water management infrastructure into a modern irrigation and drainage system and through financial guarantees for the operation and maintenance of the facilities required to achieve the objectives.

The lowland strategy initiates a cross-generational adaptation process that brings together the closely interlinked fields of water and agriculture, nature, water, and climate protection, and spatial planning. It does not explicitly feature World Heritage but also considers the natural values of the region seaward and inward the dikes.

Netherlands

Update on Sea Level and Mining Activities

Below updates are provided regarding the 'hand-on-the-tap' method and the natural sedimentation of the Wadden Sea. The Netherlands Organisation for Applied Scientific Research (TNO) has written a report on a probabilistic 'hand-on-the-tap' method that takes into account long term

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uncertainties. Additionally, the research institute Deltares has evaluated natural sedimentation rates in all tidal basins of the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea where mining activities take place. These reports have been published with a letter to the Dutch parliament of 4 September 2025.

'Hand-on-the-tap' method

The evaluation of the 'hand-on-the-tap' method was published in 2021. One of the recommendations was to include the long-term uncertainties in the current method. The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate (now: Ministry of Climate and Green Growth) commissioned TNO to perform a feasibility study on a 'hand-on-the-tap' method that considers the long-term uncertainties. TNO proposes a probabilistic method that takes into account the long-term uncertainties and presents two probabilistic alternatives based on the yearly probability of exceedance and the early exceedance due to mining (as sea level rise due to climate change will irrevocably lead to exceedance of the subsidence limit of the tidal basins as well). Additionally, TNO proposed to update the sedimentation rates. Application of these new methods to the tidal basins of Vlie and Pinkegat revealed that the subsidence limit is not exceeded for Pinkegat and will only exceed for Vlie in 2037 for the method based on yearly probabilities. Compared to the current 'hand-on-the-tap' method, where the exceedance of the Pinkegat basin is in 2044 and for the Vlie basin in 2037, the probabilistic method is less conservative.

Natural Sedimentation Tidal Basins in the Wadden Sea

The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate (now: Ministry of Climate and Green Growth) commissioned Deltares to evaluate the natural sedimentation rates in the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea with improved hydro-morphological numerical models and new observations. Deltares wrote a comprehensive report on the sedimentation rate of all tidal basins with mining activities. The report confirms that the current sedimentation rates in the 'hand-on-the-tap' for all tidal basins are conservative. Deltares proposed a method to link the critical rate of drowning for the tidal basins to the sedimentation rate of the 'hand-on-the-tap' method. The sedimentation rates defined in this way are 7,8 mm/year; 7,0 mm/year; 10,2 mm/year; and 6,8 mm/year for the tidal basins of Marsdiep, Vlie, Pinkegat, and Zoutkamperlaag respectively. They advise to conservatively increase the sedimentation rates in the 'hand-on-the-tap' method from 5 mm/year to 5,5, mm/year for the tidal basins of Vlie, Marsdiep, and Zoutkamperlaag, and from 6 mm/year to 8 mm/year for the tidal basin of Pinkegat.

In the letter to parliament of 4 September 2025, it is concluded that both reports support that the current application of the 'hand-on-the-tap' method is very conservative. A decision on how to deal with the new insights is, however, up to the new parliament following the elections.

In addition, last October, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that states must also consider cumulative (Scope 3) CO_2 emissions when approving oil and gas field exploitation. Since

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then, Scope 3 emissions have been taken into account in the assessment of new oil and/or gas extraction plans.

Halting of Gas Exploration on Ameland Due to Higher Levels of Soil Subsidence

The gas production of Ameland-East was suspended in August 2025 by the operator following a letter of the supervisor (Staatstoezicht op de Mijnen) about the subsidence on the island of Ameland. According to the supervisor, the subsidence in two levelling points on the island of Ameland is above the prognoses for 2025 according to the production plan of 2011. The operator does not agree with the supervisor that the limits of the production plan have been exceeded but has voluntarily ceased gas production on 11 August 2025.

Climate Change Adaptation

At the end of September 2025, a passage in the dike Lauwersmeerdijk near Lauwersoog was opened to connect an inland nature area with the Wadden Sea. While the project aims to continue the reinforcement of the dike, it also includes nature projects that together ensure more resilience in the Wadden Sea region, these are executed in the frame of the national programme Programmatic Approach to Large Waters (PAGW).

2.2 PROTECTION IN THE VICINITY OF THE PROPERTY (DECISION PARA. 5)

5. Acknowledges that separate legislative frameworks, such as the EU Directives, provide protection for the area in the vicinity of the property, and also encourages the States Parties to formalise a joint buffer zone to provide an additional coordinated layer of protection for the property;

According to paragraph 104 of the Operational Guidelines, the purpose of a buffer zone is to provide an additional layer of protection to a World Heritage property.

The Nomination Dossiers (CWSS, 2008; 2013), submitted for the original inscription and the 2014 extension of the Wadden Sea World Heritage property, explain that a buffer zone has not been and will not be designated. This decision is justified by the substantial size of the nominated property and the extensive regulatory framework already in place.

The existing regulatory framework supports conservation and management within the Wadden Sea World Heritage property and also aims to prevent impairments originating from its wider setting. Therefore, it unfolds effective buffer functions which are grounded in EU legislation, international and regional conventions, and binding national regulations. Through this integrated approach, the three States implement Paragraph 112 of the Operational Guidelines, which emphasises that effective management extends beyond the property itself to its surrounding context, as this broader setting plays a key role in maintaining the site's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

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In the SOC Report 2025, the States Parties (in response to request "7.a 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*;"), provided updated information on existing regulations and management instruments used to protect the Wadden Sea World Heritage property and its wider setting. These include the 2023 Wilhelmshaven Declaration, which recognises the Wadden Sea as part of a broader ecological system and calls for its integration into trilateral and North Sea planning, particularly with regard to cumulative pressures, and the implementation of the EU Habitats Directive, which requires appropriate assessment of any plan or project likely to significantly affect the site, whether inside or outside its boundaries. The SOC Report 2025 also notes that, although no formal buffer zone exists, all three states apply extended protection through national legislation and the EU Natura 2000 framework.

Table 1 below outlines the buffer function provided by the relevant EU framework for protecting and managing the Wadden Sea World Heritage property, its Outstanding Universal Value, other ecological values, and manage the wider setting, with regard to its protective effect. Annex 1 details how this EU framework is transposed into and complemented by national legal regimes.

International treaties that influence EU environmental policies and directives, and that also directly affect national regulations relevant for the Wadden Sea, are not included in Table 1. Among the most significant are the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention, the World Heritage Convention, the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention) and its related agreements (AEWA, ASCOBANS, WSSA), the Bern Convention, and the regional OSPAR Convention.

The buffer function provided by the legally binding regime includes:

- Protection of natural habitats and species, especially Natura 2000 network adjacent to the property,
- Safeguarding and improving water quality,
- Spatial planning to regulate human activities and to promote regional sustainable development,
- Prohibitions on environmental deterioration and pollution,
- Local and transboundary impact assessments (EIA/ SEA /AA),
- Public participation in decision-making.

At national and federal state levels, a number of legal provisions specifically apply to the Wadden Sea.

In addition to legal frameworks, trilateral political agreements further support coordinated policies aimed at maintaining the Wadden Sea and managing external impacts (see section 2.5 Impact Assessments). In particular, the imminent joint SEA (according to Decision 45 COM 7B.23) process

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proposes assessing the spatial extent of relevant impacts based on functional criteria rather than a fixed radius (see draft Scoping Report 2025, 2.3 Study Area). This is because the range of impacts can vary depending on their mode of action, underlying mechanisms, transmission pathways, and the sensitivity of key value attributes. However, the application of this approach is constrained by the limits of national competencies to manage and regulate such impacts.

Table 1. *Relevant EU legally binding regime for the protection and management of the Wadden Sea World Heritage property's OUV, other values, and the wider setting.*

Name	Buffer function for the Wadden Sea	Wadden Sea World Heritage Site?	Adjacent to the Wadden Sea?
Directives 92/43/EEC – Habitats Directive/ 2009/147/EC Birds Directive	Protection of Natural Habitats by establishing the Natura 2000 network to protect natural habitats and species. Prohibits deterioration or significant disturbance to the protected habitats and species within the network and adjacent areas. Impact assessments for any plan or project in or outside the Natura 2000 site that may significantly affect it. If a project or plan would significantly harm the site, it can only proceed under exceptional circumstances. Member States must develop measures to avoid or mitigate negative impacts on Natura 2000 sites. These Directives provide the most important protection layers on European level.	x	x
Directive 2000/60/EC – Water Framework Directive	Promotes the protection and improvement of water quality across all European water bodies, including coastal and marine environments.	x	x
2008/56/EC Marine Strategy Framework Directive	Aims to achieve or maintain "Good Environmental Status" (GES) of the EU's marine waters and protect marine biodiversity. Encourages the development of marine spatial plans to manage human activities sustainably. Requires the protection of marine species and habitats.	x (not applied in the NL)	x
Environmental Impact Assessment Directive	Requires that projects likely to have significant effects on the environment undergo thorough environmental impact assessments. Ensures that activities such as construction or development are carefully evaluated for potential adverse effects, with provisions to prevent damage to sensitive areas. Promotes transparency by involving the public in the assessment process.	x	x
SEA Directive (2001/42/EC)	Requires the assessment of plans and programmes that may affect the environment. Promotes that environmental protection is integrated early in decision-making processes. Encourages the adoption of measures that protect the environment while supporting sustainable growth.	x	x

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ESPOO Convention	Ensures that potentially harmful activities in one country that may affect another country's marine environment, undergo transboundary environmental assessments. Facilitates public involvement in the decision-making process for projects with cross-border impacts. Aims to prevent environmental damage in shared ecosystems by requiring cooperation between countries.	x	x
Kyiv Protocol to the ESPOO Convention	Expands on the ESPOO Convention by requiring environmental assessments of projects that could negatively impact ecosystems across borders. Emphasises the importance of international collaboration in protecting shared environmental resources.	x	x
Maritime Spatial Planning	Encourages the development of maritime spatial plans to regulate human activities and protect marine environments. Requires the integration of environmental protection measures in spatial planning processes to minimise impacts on sensitive marine areas. Promotes cooperation between countries for coordinated management of marine spaces, enhancing protection across shared ecosystems.	x	x

2.3 EXTRACTIVE ACTIVITIES BELOW OR IN THE VICINITY OF THE PROPERTY (DECISION PARAS. 6-8)

6. Notes the updated information relating to various extraction projects and also appreciates the efforts of the relevant States Parties in reaching agreement with project proponents and operators to abandon further projects or cease activities;
7. Strongly requests the States Parties to continue to find legally binding, long-term solutions to ensure extractive activities do not adversely impact on the property's OUV, and requests the States Parties to continue to provide updates on individual projects in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines;

New developments in ongoing and planned extractive activities concerning oil, gas, and salt in the vicinity of the property since the SOC Report 2025 are provided in this section in response to the relevant paras of Decision 47 COM/7B.22.

The GEMS Gas Development

On 1 September 2025, the German State Office for Mining, Energy and Geology (LBEG) granted immediate execution of the permit for gas exploitation in the German territory outside the property, which had already been in place since August 2024. The outcome of the pending court proceedings no longer needs to be awaited. Hence, directional drilling from the N05-A platform into the German sector of the North Sea and natural gas production in German territory can now proceed despite ongoing lawsuits. As already reported in SOC Report 2025, no significant environmental effects on the OUV of the Wadden Sea World Heritage property are expected.

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To supply electricity for operating the drilling platform, a submarine power cable was laid from the Lower Saxon wind farm 'Riffgat' to the platform, located in the wider vicinity outside the property. For this facility, a permit according to water law was granted by the competent Lower Saxon authorities. The construction work resulted in the destruction of protected marine habitats (geogenic reefs) in the wider vicinity of but outside the Wadden Sea World Heritage property. Restauration measures are stipulated in the permit.

Update on the Gas Extraction in Ternaard

The Dutch Ministry of Climate and Green Growth has reached an agreement with NAM and ExxonMobil to halt gas extraction from the Ternaard field. As a result, the intended extraction from the Ternaard Field will not be permitted. The government of the Netherlands will compensate NAM and ExxonMobil € 163 million, after which the companies will withdraw their request for gas extraction from the Ternaard field and seek an adjustment of their permit so that it no longer includes the Ternaard field. Thereby, the government of the Netherlands will regain the ownership of the Ternaard field. A new request for gas extraction from the Ternaard field cannot be submitted, as no permit will be in place covering the area. Moreover, any new request would have to be rejected under the amended law that entered into force on 1 May 2024 and applies to all applications submitted since that date.

Extraction of Shells

A nature permit and an excavation permit for the extraction of shells in the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea were applied for. Objections were filed against both applications. The court ruled that no shell extraction in the Wadden Sea is allowed for the time being on the basis of the nature permit. This is because the consequences of shell extraction for nature are too uncertain. The procedure for the excavation permit is still ongoing. These permit procedures run at the same time as the procedure for granting the concession.

2.4 RENEWABLE ENERGY - OFFSHORE AND ONSHORE (PARAS. 8 & 9)

8. Also welcomes the States Parties' implementation of a joint strategic approach to the construction of onshore and offshore renewable energy and transition infrastructure, and further encourages the States Parties to continue these efforts to secure solutions that ensure the protection of the property's OUV;

As part of the trilateral project on the "North Sea wide acceleration of LANding offshore energy while mitigating Impact on the Coastal Environment" (LANICE), the Trilateral Working Group on Renewable Energy developed the draft Trilateral Strategy on Renewable Energy Infrastructure.

The aim of the strategy is to identify solutions that ensure the protection of the property's OUV and to help avoidance and mitigation of negative impacts of onshore and offshore renewable energy

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and transition infrastructure, while acknowledging the acceleration of offshore energy development.

The Strategy was adopted by the WSB 47 on 20 November 2025 for stakeholder consultation. After the consultation phase of the draft 2026 Esbjerg Declaration, the Trilateral Strategy on Renewable Energy Infrastructure is intended to be adopted by the three governments at the Trilateral Governmental Council meeting in May 2026. Once adopted, it will be submitted to the WHC and IUCN together with the 2026 Esbjerg Declaration.

9. Also requests the State Party of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to submit additional information on the PAWOZ-Eemshaven Programme to the World Heritage Centre for review by IUCN, including the results of an impact assessment, prior to any irreversible decisions being taken;

With reference to the letter from UNESCO WHC (CLT/WHC/ENA/25/15369), the impact assessment, including a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), for PAWOZ-Eemshaven Programme was submitted. The Minister of Climate and Green Growth adopted the results of the PAWOZ-Eemshaven Programme in July 2025 and selected preferred routes for the landing of offshore wind grid connections in Eemshaven.

In 2026, a project impact assessment will be executed, including a HIA for the selected route Schiermonnikoog Wantij. The government of the Netherlands will make this impact assessment available to UNESCO WHC and IUCN for review.

The Government of the Netherlands informed UNESCO WHC in a separate letter about the process concerning the PAWOZ-Eemshaven Programme and the follow-up planning. During the upcoming permitting process, discussions with stakeholders will take place.

The German Government informed UNESCO WHC in a separate letter according to § 172 of the Operational Guidelines on Spatial Planning for grid connection of offshore wind farms through German coastal waters and onshore wind energy production in adjacent coastal regions (10 April 2025). Meanwhile, initial soil investigations have taken place for new offshore grid connection routes through the World Heritage Site (via the island of Langeoog).

2.5 IMPACT ASSESSMENTS (DECISION PARA. 10)

10. Reiterates its previous request to the States Parties to ensure that impact assessment procedures are conducted for all relevant planned and proposed activities and developments

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within and around the property, in accordance with Paragraph 118bis of the Operational Guidelines;

Environmental assessments are required for all plans, programmes, and projects that may significantly affect the environment in the Wadden Sea, according to EU and national legislation and also covering OUV considerations. In the trilateral joint SEA, it is planned to include key topics that may cause significant impacts on the OUV including activities/uses currently without impact assessments.

In Denmark, SEAs for projects in the Wadden Sea are submitted to UNESCO, with EIAs encouraged to address impacts on OUV. In Germany, considerations of OUV key values are integrated in SEAs and EIAs, scoping on National Park protective purposes, requiring, e.g., evaluation of alternatives. Further improvements, e.g., concerning heritage assessments or some activities not yet covered, are in consideration.

Currently, the legal implementation of the EU Directive 2023/2413 (RED III) in Germany intends to accelerate approval processes for renewable energies. This entails restrictions on the application of existing EU and national legal regulations for environmental assessments in certain areas to be designated.

The Netherlands introduced the Environment and Planning Act in 2024, which for the first time explicitly protects the Wadden Sea’s OUV in national law, alongside existing Natura 2000 protections. However, implementation remains complex, and national guidelines are being developed to support the practical application of the new legal framework, referencing the UNESCO Guidance and Toolkit for World Heritage Impact Assessments (Para 7b). In addition, at the request of the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, a group of researchers at Wageningen University is currently translating the OUV criteria and key values into measurable indicators. This will help project initiators and Dutch licensing authorities to incorporate the OUV into decision-making. The Dutch Government welcomes an exchange with the WHC and IUCN on the translation of the OUV.

2.6 JOINT SEA (DECISION PARA. 11)

11. Also notes the submission of the scoping report for the pending joint Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), expresses concern regarding delays in this process, and further requests that the States Parties continue to prioritise the completion of the SEA to fully assess potential cumulative impacts on the OUV of the property, taking into account IUCN recommendations and comments on the scoping study and in dialogue with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN;

Intern gebruik

The trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation maintains close contact with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN whilst developing the joint SEA.

The draft scoping report for the joint SEA has been consulted with stakeholders at both national and trilateral levels, with inputs collected. The Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) has been commissioned by the TWSC to conduct an expert review of the 2025 draft Scoping Report. NCEA is an independent body with an MoU with WHC and IUCN on capacity building related to impact assessments and World Heritage.

NCEA's expert review will consider the input from the trilateral and national stakeholder consultation on the draft Scoping Report as well as the feedback from WHC and IUCN.

A trilateral SEA subgroup has been established to discuss, clarify and agree on arrangements for conducting the SEA, and to prepare terms of reference for the three national SEA components and the joint trilateral SEA to ensure methodological consistency. Procurement is planned for early 2026, and the national components will follow synchronised timelines to ensure comparability.

During the development of the SEA, existing programmes, plans and projects as well as the examination and approval of new ones will proceed in parallel. The planning and approval procedures for programmes, plans and projects are based on different regulations and decision-making structures in the three Wadden Sea countries. These procedures strictly follow EU and national legislation on impact assessments, including a holistic approach to potential adverse impacts including cumulative effects potentially altering the condition of the Wadden Sea.

All parties are prioritising the execution of the joint SEA, nevertheless trilateral coordination and integration remains a positive challenge. An updated preliminary timeline is provided below.

Date	Activity
Jan-Mar 2026	Expert review of the draft Scoping Report for the joint SEA by NCEA and expert group.
Jan-Mar 2026	Procurement of expert(s) to conduct the SEA study (national components and joint SEA).
2026-2027	Development of the SEA, including: • regular coordination meetings on national SEA components, • integration into a draft joint SEA, • regular progress updates and communication with stakeholders, WHC and IUCN. Review of the draft joint SEA, including input from stakeholders, WHC and IUCN, and potentially NCEA advice.
Feb. 2028	**Submission to WHC and IUCN to be considered in the World Heritage Committee meeting 2028.**

Intern gebruik

3. Other Current Conservation Issues Identified by the State Party(ies) Which May Have an Impact on the Property’s Outstanding Universal Value

Effective management of the Wadden Sea must secure nature conservation and an ecosystem approach that integrates management of existing protected areas with other key factors affecting the property. These factors include the most important economic activities in terms of impact, while safeguarding the OUV. Fisheries, tourism, shipping and ports, energy, and coastal protection are the most important socio-economic factors in the region. Nevertheless, the Statement of OUV (2014) also identifies these as key threats requiring ongoing attention. The information in this chapter focuses on these five key topics of the Integrated Management Plan. Other general issues affecting the OUV of the Wadden Sea (in positive or negative ways) are presented at the end of Table 1 as an additional category.

For each of the five key topics, the Integrated Management Plan presents objectives, a summary of main risks, the enabling environment, and activities directed to maintain and enhance the OUV of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site; therefore, they are not repeated in Table 2. The information given in the table provides an overview of the developments since the SOC Report 2025.

As reported in SOC Report 2025, with the adoption of the **EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR)** in August 2024, the three Member States are obliged to develop national restoration plans by 2026. The national restoration plans shall be tailored to specific ecosystems and regional context, outlining active and passive measures needed to meet the targets of the NRR to restore degraded ecosystems. These plans must include implementation of timelines, financing details, and expected benefits, particularly for climate change mitigation and adaptation, while aligning with other relevant policies such as agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and renewable energy. The process has to be transparent and inclusive, involving public and stakeholder input. Draft plans must be submitted to the European Commission by September 2026, with specific targets for 2030, 2040, and 2050. The Commission will review and comment on drafts, which Member States must address before finalising and publishing their plans. Progress will be monitored by the European Environment Agency, and the plans have to be reviewed in 2032 and 2042.

In regard to the Wadden Sea ecosystem, the TWSC serves as a platform for professional knowledge exchange and information sharing to support national planning processes, while also exploring the potential and added value of trilateral coordination. These efforts contribute to the OUV of the Wadden Sea, which is closely linked to conservation priorities under EU legislation. TWSC expert groups have developed specific recommendations that were shared with national teams preparing the NRR action plans. A trilateral workshop is planned for the first quarter of 2026 to bring together TWSC experts and national planning teams, using the public consultation phase as an opportunity to provide coordinated input to the national restoration plans.

Intern gebruik

These initiatives will be implemented in synergy with the EU-funded Technical Support Instrument (TSI) project *"Environmental Monitoring Tools for Adaptive Management of Coastal Wetlands for Migratory Birds"*, initiated by the Common Wadden Sea Secretariat in collaboration with the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, and the Danish Ministry of Green Transition. The project aims to develop a harmonised environmental monitoring approach that supports habitat and species conservation by providing scientific evidence to mitigate threats and guide wetland restoration along the migratory flyway.

Table 2. *Activities at trilateral and national levels which may have an impact (negative or positive) on the property's Outstanding Universal Value by key topics of the Integrated Management Plan and other general issues.*

Fisheries
TRILATERAL The review and update of the trilateral Framework for Sustainable Fisheries 2014 have been postponed to the period 2026-2029. www.waddensea-worldheritage.org/framework-sustainable-fisheries Several research projects on the environmental impacts of fishing have been conducted in the meantime and will be considered in the review.
DENMARK The information presented in the Nomination Dossier 2014 remains valid: in the inner part of the Danish part of the Wadden Sea there is no fishing. West of the islands, beam-trawl based fishing activities continue unchanged.
GERMANY There is new information compared to the SOC Reports 2024 and 2025 on latest developments in **blue mussel fisheries in Schleswig-Holstein**. Blue mussel fishery and culture are regulated by the Fishery Law and the National Park Act of Schleswig-Holstein and are based on a specific mussel fishery programme (2017-2031). The state of Schleswig-Holstein, mussel fishermen, and leading nature conservation associations have agreed on important additions to the 2015 framework agreement on mussel farming in the Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea National Park signed in July 2025. The new agreement includes on the one hand a reduction of the area accessible to mussel fisheries and cultivation in general, the protection of newly detected reefs (EU Habitat type 1170), and the complete cessation of mobile bottom mussel fishing, on the other hand an expansion and flexibilization of the use of mussel culture plots for the mussel farming sector and long-term planning security until the end of 2043. This is a major advantage both for the undisturbed natural development of the Schleswig-Holstein Wadden Sea National Park as part of the World Heritage property and for the businesses in the mussel fisheries sector. In **Schleswig-Holstein, a dialogue process on brown shrimp fisheries** was launched at the beginning of 2024. Under the leadership of the Ministry for Energy Transition, Climate Protection, Environment and Nature and the Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Areas, European Affairs and Consumer Protection, several meetings were held with representatives from the brown shrimp fisheries sector and nature conservation organisations. The aim of the dialogue was to safeguard the shrimp fishery and at the same time better align it with the objectives of the national park. Unfortunately, it has been concluded without results for the time being.

Intern gebruik

A dialogue process with the coastal fishery sector had its official launch for **Lower Saxony** on 28 April 2025. With the participation of the authorities of the Environmental and Fisheries Administration (NLPV, SFA), the Lower Saxony Chamber of Agriculture, environmental and fisheries associations, and representatives of coastal communities, the Lower Saxony Government (MU, ML) intends to develop a concept for coastal fisheries and nature conservation for the Coastal Sea/National Park of Lower Saxony. It will include a differentiated spatial concept of fishing and non-fishing areas and should ensure the compatibility of fishing activities (here: shrimp and mussel fishing) with the objectives of the national park and also be economically viable for Lower Saxony's coastal fisheries.

In Lower Saxony the management plan for the fishery of seed mussels has been in place since 1999 and incorporated into the Lower Saxon National Park Act since 2001 (correction from SOC Report 2024 which said the management plan had been in place since 2004). The due update of the mussel management plan (2019-2025) is a topic of the **Lower Saxony Fisheries Dialogue**.

Dialogues with local stakeholders are important in order to find viable solutions adapted to the specific situations that aim for achieving environmental goals as well as sustainable fishing.

THE NETHERLANDS

A **20-year permit has been granted for shrimp fishermen**. The permit was constructed to comply with legal restrictions, including the impact on nitrogen compound emissions. It includes reviews every six years. No significant impacts were identified, but no Heritage Impact Assessment was carried out. Nature conservation organisations do not agree with the assessment of the permitting authority and have filed a lawsuit challenging the permits. In parallel, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature is working at the policy level to address the balance between nature protection and shrimp fisheries.

Tourism

TRILATERAL

The information in the SOC Report 2025 on latest developments on tourism is still valid.

The trilateral Sustainable Tourism Strategy continues to evolve through the development and implementation of agreed priority themes. Since 2025, progress has been made on several fronts, all guided by the shared goal of safeguarding the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site. The **Network Group Sustainable Tourism** plays a key coordinating role and has been particularly active in implementing activities and maintaining momentum across the region.

Study Trips. A working group with representatives from regional partner programmes has been established to further develop the concept. Progress was reviewed at the local focal point meeting in September 2025. Broader involvement of target groups such as local governments, Destination Management Organisations (DMOs), and policymakers is under consideration to strengthen the strategy’s reach and reinforce its contribution to conservation efforts.

Waddi Goes South (Youth engagement and AI-based virtual tourism guidance). The Netherlands are taking the lead by refining the Danish concept to initiate structured dialogue with partners. A working group has been formed, and its first meeting has been organised to set the direction for next steps. The initiative aims to build connections and promote World Heritage values through storytelling, outreach, and education.

Code of Conduct. The next step is to identify responsible actors, likely the National Park Authorities in Germany. Dutch colleagues have offered to begin work on the related “Hostmanship” project, though no formal working group has yet been established. These efforts contribute to developing coherent visitor guidance and shared quality principles within the trilateral context, supporting both visitor experience and site protection.

Since December 2024, the trilateral project **Development of Monitoring and Assessment Guidelines to Detect and Mitigate Impacts of Tourism on the OUV** aims to develop guidelines for

Intern gebruik

monitoring and assessing tourism impacts on the OUV, outlining methods to identify, analyse, and quantify effects using existing data to support effective mitigation. The results will contribute to relevant trilateral processes, including the joint SEA, the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme parameter review, and future thematic Quality Status Reports on tourism.

DENMARK

The information in the SOC Reports 2024 and 2025 remains valid.

The Wadden Sea Boat Clubs represent the local sailing clubs from Varde to Højer and on the islands of Fanø and Rømø. They work to ensure that recreational boating in the Wadden Sea remains sustainable, safe, and respectful of nature, in line with the area’s UNESCO World Heritage status. The clubs actively engage in nature interpretation, public outreach, and the sustainable use of the area, including through environmental certifications such as Blue Flag and Green Marina, and through close cooperation with the Danish Wadden Sea National Park.

GERMANY

The information in the SOC Reports 2024 and 2025 on latest developments in visitor management to protect nesting birds, and the implementation of the trilateral and regional action plans on sustainable tourism remains valid.

In addition, the **partner programmes** facilitated by the German Wadden Sea National Park Authorities in Schleswig-Holstein and Lower Saxony have expanded significantly in recent years, both in the number of partner organisations and the range of sectors represented. Trilateral exchanges between the regional partner managers in the three Wadden Sea countries take place twice a year.

In 2025, **three visitor management projects were launched** in Lower Saxony's National Park. The aim is to gain a better understanding of visitor flows and use this information to develop visitor management strategies.

THE NETHERLANDS

The **new visitor centre** for the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea, Werelderfgoedcentrum Waddenzee (Wadden Sea World Heritage Centre, WEC), in Lauwersoog opened in April 2025. The WEC is the new home to the Pieterburen Seal Centre as both seal rescue and educational facility. The WEC exhibition focuses on a sustainable future for the Wadden Sea region. ontdekwec.nl/

Shipping and Ports

TRILATERAL

Led by the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management, the status of **implementation of the PSSA operational plans** is being reviewed trilaterally in collaboration with the competent authorities and other actors. On the initiative of the Dutch and German delegations, a Plan of Action was developed within a working group formed for this purpose and was endorsed by all three countries in 2024.

Since the SOC Report 2025, and as part of the agreed action plan, the three countries have completed inventories of the measures in place. Currently the countries are developing a joint assessment of the measures collected in the inventories in the context of **shipping safety** and identifying appropriate next steps.

No large shipping incidents occurred during 2025.

Intern gebruik

DENMARK

In 2020, the State Party informed the World Heritage Centre of the planned development of the Port of Esbjerg, including an expansion of the harbour area, and a SEA was submitted at that time. The development was completed in May 2025.

GERMANY

The information in the SOC Report 2024 on latest developments in regulation of marine traffic and adaptation of estuaries to the requirements of marine traffic is still valid. The following recent developments are additionally reported: Concerning the plans for deepening the Outer Ems a public participation procedure took place in 2024; no decision has been taken by the shipping authority so far (*status 01.10.2025*).

There is a noticeable trend towards an increase in dredged material volumes. Increase in dredging and dumping measures can have an impact, relevant factors are the disposal of dredged material and possible siltation, sanding and pollutant inputs, which can endanger a.o. benthic habitats. Due to increasing volumes of dredging material from maintenance of shipping lanes and harbours, applications for new dumping sites in Lower Saxon coastal waters are currently being prepared. These proposed sites are planned only outside the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site.

THE NETHERLANDS

The information in the SOC Report 2025 on latest developments remains valid.

Dredging for Ferry Traffic: In 2024, dredging volumes per storage area remained within the limits set by the Natura 2000 management plan. The total volume for the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea slightly decreased compared to 2022 and 2023. After a significant increase until 2020, volumes appear to be stabilising or declining. However, long-term trend analysis is limited due to changes in measurement methodology. Local increases were observed at specific fairways, such as De Boontjes and Eemshaven North Sea.

Ensuring Accessibility of Ameland: In 2024, the Dutch government launched a research project to identify the most suitable long-term solution for maintaining access to Ameland, with the aim of reducing dredging volumes. Options under consideration include the use of alternative vessel types and potential relocation of harbours. The project is currently in the exploration phase, during which various alternatives are being assessed in collaboration with citizens, businesses, civil society organisations, and governmental bodies. The set of viable alternatives will be established by the end of 2026, with a preferred alternative selected by the end of 2027.

In accordance with statutory obligations, **water discharge permits** issued by Rijkswaterstaat are regularly subject to review, and where necessary, revision to ensure conformity with current regulatory requirements. Amongst these permits, there are 58 water discharge permits for the Dutch parts of the Wadden Sea and the Ems-Dollard. Each review assesses whether the permitted situation remains consistent with prevailing operational practices and whether the discharge continues to comply with applicable legislation, including the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and Best Available Techniques (BAT). Permits considered most relevant for the attainment of the WFD objectives in 2027 have been accorded priority and are currently being reviewed, with any necessary revisions to be completed no later than 2027. These prioritised permits include water discharge permits of IPPC companies and permits of waste processors. The remaining permits shall be reviewed by the end of 2029, and revised, where appropriate, by the end of 2033.

Energy

TRILATERAL

The energy topic continues to be addressed in the trilateral Task Group Coordination and Management with **ad-hoc Working Group Renewable Energy** (WG-RE).

Intern gebruik

Within the trilateral **LANICE** project, the report "Offshore Grid Connections and the Wadden Sea: Environmental Impacts and Key Mitigation Action Fields" was published. A mitigation toolbox, as well as research on acceleration potentials are planned to be available by May 2026.

DENMARK

The information in the SOC Report 2025 regarding Denmark not having any oil and gas development that directly affects the Wadden Sea, but there are potential indirect effects as the Port of Esbjerg is the base harbour for all Danish energy activities in the North Sea (oil, gas, and green energy) remains valid.

GERMANY

The information in the SOC Report 2024 on latest developments in the NORD.LINK project, LNG terminals in Wilhelmshaven as well as the description of plans and projects for submarine high-voltage power cables and pipelines remains valid.

The information in the SOC Report 2025 regarding the initiative for a hydrogen pipeline "Aquaductus" is still valid.

The second LNG terminal in Wilhelmshaven (information in the SOC Report 2025 under construction) is now in operation.

In addition, there is the initiative of an interconnector 'Tarchon' connecting Germany with Great Britain.

Niedersachsen Ports GmbH & Co. KG is planning to build a further jetty for liquefied gases (AVG WHV for short) in the vicinity of the property. In addition to berths for LNG, the new transshipment facility will also offer transshipment options for other 'green' gases (in particular hydrogen and hydrogen derivatives) as a universal berth for liquefied gases.

With regard to the expansion of offshore facilities, it was generally noted in the course of BLANO (the German Federal-State Working Group on the North Sea and Baltic Sea) that there are gaps in knowledge and thus a need for further research, including on the effects of noise, zinc depletion, and pollutants (such as PFAS).

THE NETHERLANDS

The State Supervision of Mines (SodM) asked the Dutch Petroleum Company (NAM) to stop gas extraction under the East of Ameland on 11 August 2025 due to more soil subsidence than allowed. NAM stopped extraction in this field but is investigating the possibilities of submitting an objection to the regulator's (SodM) observation.

Coastal Flood Defence and Protection

TRILATERAL

Exchange on Nature-based Solutions for coastal flood defence and protection is on-going in the trilateral **permanent Expert Group Climate Change Adaptation**.

Information regarding the exchange on widescale application and implementation (mainstreaming) of Nature-based Solutions (NbS) in coastal systems of the North Sea Region in the **Project MANABAS COAST**, funded by the EU Interreg North Sea Region Programme, is still valid. Currently, pilot projects are ongoing as well as workshops to exchange knowledge and ideas on topics such as salt marshes and governance.

Ongoing **collaboration between the trilateral Expert Groups** Climate Change Adaptation and Salt Marshes and Dunes (EG-C and EG SMD) plans for a joint event on improving transition zones. Common interest is quantifying sedimentation and accretion rates (key to understand adaptability of salt marshes to climate change and for determining carbon sequestration potential/amount).

Intern gebruik

DENMARK

The information in the SOC Report 2025 regarding dikes is still valid.

GERMANY

The information in the SOC Reports 2024 and 2025 on latest developments in coastal protection is still valid, plans continue to successively strengthen dike segments and dunes, adapting to future sea level rise.

THE NETHERLANDS

Dike reinforcements: In the Netherlands, most dikes require reinforcement due to aging and rising sea levels. This often demands additional space, which is limited: on the landward side by privately owned farms and villages, and on the seaward side by Natura 2000 areas and the World Heritage Site. When reinforcement extends seaward, the aim is to achieve a positive impact on nature. Although this slightly reduces the size of the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea, the ecological value of the new dike increases through a gentler slope and improved saltmarsh development. All such projects require a Heritage Impact Assessment. The following programmes are currently expected:

Name	Location	Length	Year	Remarks
Dollard dike	punt van de reide - German border	15 km	2029	The intention is to reinforce the Dollard Dike with a Broad Green Dike, which was already implemented along a 750-meter stretch of the Dollard Dike in 2022 as part of a demonstration project.
Groote polder	Termunterzijl-oterdoemer pier	2 km	2029	Exploration of landwards nature development in a regional consultation process.
Lauwersmeerdijk	Lauwersoog - west polder	9 km	2023-2026	Implementation of the nature conservation measures began in June 2024: inland tidal area, artificial reefs, and salt marsh development.
Schiermonnikoog				*Information will follow*
Lauwersmeer-Koehool				*Information will follow*
Balgzanddijk				*Information will follow*

Other General Issues Affecting the OUV

TRILATERAL

Trilateral Partnership in Support of UNESCO Wadden Sea World Heritage. The information in the SOC Reports 2024/25 is still valid.

In August 2025, the TWSC and partners organised the **second trilateral summer school on Wadden Sea World Heritage** with the aim to engage with future scientists. Sixteen Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD students from across the Wadden Sea countries and beyond explored the region's ecology, conservation strategies, sustainable development, and management challenges. www.waddensea-worldheritage.org/news/students-wrap-wadden-sea-world-heritage-summer-school-insights-and-innovation

Intern gebruik

Dark Sky/Dark Sky Initiative. The information in the SOC Report 2025 is still valid. The Interreg project Darker Sky is ongoing. www.interregnorthsea.eu/darker-sky

Continuation of the **International Wadden Sea School** (IWSS). The information in in the previous SOC Reports is still valid. www.iwss.org

The WSFI's objective to strengthen capacity includes work with youth. The **East Atlantic Flyway Youth Forum** serves as an annual platform for young wetland conservationists to connect and develop an essential skillset from a flyway perspective. In 2025, the forum focuses on relevant decision of the Ramsar COP, and how youth can support their implementation: flyway.waddensea-worldheritage.org/news/webinar-data-action-strengthening-site-based-conservation-along-east-atlantic-flyway

Dutch-German science-call "Understanding complex pressures on the Wadden Sea and options for action". In the bilateral German-Dutch research call, five projects were selected to study the relation between ecological changes and human usage. Kick-off took place in January 2025. In the next four years, these research projects are going to focus on sediment dynamics, saltmarsh processes with benthic ecology, terrestrial biology, landscape, and legal design. They will pave the road to societal impact by charting options for action and developing strategies for management measures. www.waddensea-worldheritage.org/wadden-sea-research-projects-information-meeting-stakeholders

The **Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative** (WSFI) has continued to strengthen close collaboration with local, regional, and international partners along the East-Atlantic Flyway. The latest flyway assessment report highlights ongoing decline in nearly 30% of all monitored populations (van Roomen et al., 2025).

To further improve the flyway monitoring programme, the TWSC initiated an assessment of potential monitoring innovations funded by EU DG REFORM (Technical Support Instrument (TSI) project). The aim is to gather more concrete information on abundances, vital rates and environmental conditions at key sites to inform concrete management measures. Concrete steps towards implantations are taken through the WSFI capacity building programme. A follow up project has been approved by EU DG REFORM and started in September 2025 in close collaboration with other EU-countries. This project is working towards a harmonised approach for environmental monitoring to help identify and mitigate drivers of population changes.

The new **Climate-resilient East Atlantic Flyway project**, funded by the German International Climate Initiative (IKI), is a multi-partner initiative aimed at improving climate resilience of the flyway. Taking a holistic approach (including monitoring, management, policy making and collaborations with local communities), this 8-year project focuses on key coastal wetlands in 11 countries along the African Atlantic coastline.

DENMARK

In addition to the initiatives reported in SOC Reports 2024 and 2025:

The **Danish Wadden Sea National Park** has in collaboration with Copenhagen University, started a first funding for a climate change project on the small island Mandø. The investigation will have a strong citizen involvement and have a focus on strategies towards the rising sea level and how to protect cultural and natural amenities.

The Danish World Heritage Sites have initiated a closer collaboration and are about to make a broad analysis of **the value of local UNESCO designations**.

Global geopolitical uncertainty is increasing, which also affects Denmark. In response to this changing security landscape, the shipping lane to Esbjerg Harbour was tendered in 2020 to ensure access for NATO vessels. In addition, Denmark maintains a military training area for fighter aircraft; however, this area has not changed since the inscription.

Intern gebruik

GERMANY

In addition to the initiatives reported in SOC Reports 2024 and 2025:

Habitat restoration for increased CO2 sequestration: Wadden Sea habitats play a special role in natural carbon storage. In the framework of the “Federal Action Plan on nature-based solutions for climate and biodiversity” reported in the SOC Report 2025, five restoration projects have been approved and started in 2025. These will evaluate the storage capacity of natural intertidal and subtidal habitats and contribute to sea grass and salt marsh restoration.

Marine Strategy Framework Directive: Currently, the handbook for monitoring as well as the definition of environmental goals and the programme of measures are under review.

Expansion of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserves: The ongoing development of the transition zones as model regions for sustainable development in the hinterland of the German Wadden Sea National Parks has been further intensified. New projects are under way which contribute to sustainable development, nature protection, and education.

THE NETHERLANDS

Seagrass Restoration Wadden Sea Climate Buffer: In collaboration with Waddenvereniging and Rijkswaterstaat, seagrass beds in the Wadden Sea are being restored, which supports sediment binding, stabilises the mudflats and can increase overall resilience to sea level rise. klimaatadaptatienederland.nl/en/%40297365/seagrass-restoration-wadden-sea-climate-buffer/?utm

Sedimentation of silt outside the dikes: On 12 September 2025, the pilot project for silt sedimentation outside the dikes had been officially launched in the Eems-Dollard. As there is a lot of silt in the water of the Dollard, there was a need for clearing the water to increase oxygen levels for aquatic life such as fish, birds and plants. In this pilot project, Rijkswaterstaat was investigating whether it was possible to capture silt in a natural way (silt sedimentation). Along a strip of 2.5 km, wooden poles with braided willow branches in crescent shapes would be placed in various places. These dams would cause the silt to sink. The accumulation of silt would create a gradual transition between land and water. These would form new habitats for plants and birds. In the long term, this could grow into a young, lively salt marsh. In the coming years, research will be conducted into how the silt developed and what effects this would have on nature, water quality, the natural dynamics of the estuary, and the growing capacity of the coast.

Due to **geopolitical developments**, the Dutch Army is expanding and has increased training needs. In the National Programme Space for Defense (“Nationaal Programma Ruimte voor Defensie”) more locations are being appointed where military activities can take place in the future. The programme was approved by the government in December 2025 and will be implemented in the upcoming years. Implementation requires the completion of several projects, which will go through a regular planning and permission process, including an Environmental Impact Assessment and Heritage Impact Assessment. The Dutch government has also drafted a bill for military preparedness (“Wet op de Defensiegereedheid”). The proposal is currently being reviewed by the Council of State (Raad van State). Once the bill has passed the Parliament and the Senate, it will enter into force no earlier than Q1 2027. At this moment, therefore, the bill and the national programme have no direct consequences for the Wadden Sea. But in both initiatives’ areas are identified in the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea where possibly more and new activities will take place. Most of it is an increased use of the Ministry of Defence training grounds, but these activities may also have external effects on the Wadden Sea. Furthermore, there is the possibility of increased use of fast boats in the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea (within the designated areas for fast boats). When activities are planned, the Ministry of Defence must and will consider the potential impact on the OUV.

Intern gebruik

4. Potential Major Restorations, Alterations, and/or New Construction(s) That May Affect the Outstanding Universal Value of the Property

For specific aspects of new developments or projects which may affect the OUV of the property to be reported in conformity with paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, we refer to the ongoing communication with UNESCO.

5. Public Access to the State of Conservation Report

The State of Conservation Report 2026 should be made fully available for public access on the World Heritage Centre’s State of Conservation Information System, as well as the webpage of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation.

6. Signature of the Authority

This report is signed and submitted by Denmark on behalf of the three States Parties.

Intern gebruik

Annex 1. Preliminary List of the Relevant National and Federal State Legally Binding Regime for the Protection and Management of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Property's OUV, Other Values and the Wider Setting

Name	Buffer function for the Wadden Sea	Wadden Sea World Heritage Site?	Around the Wadden Sea?
Denmark			
Nature Conservation Act	Provides a legal framework for the protection of natural habitats as well as its scenic, cultural historic, natural science and educational values. Aims to improve and restore or create areas of significance for wild animals and plants and for landscape and historical interests and to provide access to nature and to improve opportunities for open-air recreation.	x	x
The Statutory Order for the Danish Nature and Wildlife Reserve	The Danish part of the Wadden Sea is subject to a comprehensive protection within the framework of the Statutory Order of the Nature and Wildlife Reserve Wadden Sea providing legal protection against activities that could disturb wildlife, particularly bird species and marine life. The Wadden Sea order specifically intends to promote the sustainable management of the Danish part of the Wadden Sea and preserve the area as a coherent natural area of national and international importance and as a habitat for seals and populations of waterfowl. Obligations of Natura 2000 are ensured within the order.	x	
Decree on Conservation and Game Reserve in the Wadden Sea	Promotes sustainable management of the Wadden Sea. Ensures fulfilment of Denmark's international obligations in accordance with the 1982 Declaration on the Protection of the Wadden Sea signed by the Danish, German, and Dutch governments, b) birds Directive, c) Habitats Directive, d) Ramsar Convention. The Decree mandates regular environmental assessments to evaluate the effects of human activities on these protected habitats and to guide conservation measures.	x	
Executive Order on the Wadden Sea National Park	Governs the establishment and management of the Danish Wadden Sea National Park, ensuring its protection under strict environmental guidelines. Promotes the preservation of migratory bird habitats, seals, and aquatic species. Mandates that projects within or near the national park undergo Environmental Impact Assessments to assess potential risks to the park's biodiversity and ecosystem health.	x	

Intern gebruik

Name	Buffer function for the Wadden Sea	Wadden Sea World Heritage Site?	Around the Wadden Sea?
Planning Act	Ensures coherent planning that unites societal interests in land use, contributes to protecting the country's nature and environment as well as climate and creates a good framework for growth and development throughout the country, so that social development can take place on a sustainable basis with respect for human living conditions, conservation of animal and plant life and increased economic prosperity. Integrates environmental protection into regional development and spatial planning, ensuring that land-use decisions consider conservation goals.	x	x
Maritime Strategy Act	Determines the framework for the measures that must be implemented to achieve or maintain good environmental conditions in the marine ecosystems and enable a sustainable use of the marine resources.	x	x
Maritime Spatial Planning Act	Promotes economic growth, the development of marine areas and the exploitation of marine resources on a sustainable basis. Contributes to the achievement of the objectives for maritime planning set out in this Act. Considers the interaction between land and sea and strengthen cross-border cooperation in accordance with the provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of 1982. Also refers to the Directive 2014/89/EU on maritime spatial planning. In order to achieve the objectives in aim to contribute to the sustainable development of the energy sector at sea, sea transport, transport infrastructure, fisheries and aquaculture.		
Act on the Protection of the Marine Environment	Contributes to protecting nature and the environment, so that social development can take place on a sustainable basis in respect to human living conditions and for the preservation of animal and plant life.	x	x
GERMANY National			
Federal Nature Conservation Act	Legally protects natural habitats. Actions that could lead to the destruction or other significant adverse effects are prohibited.	x	x
Navigation Ordinance	Regulates navigation on the waters within the three German Wadden Sea National Parks. It supplements the protective provisions of the respective National Park Acts with regulations governing navigation, such as by spatial and temporal restrictions and also on speed. As such, it takes account of especially sensitive areas, notably resting and moulting areas of birds and resting areas for seals. The	x	x

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	recent amendment takes up, for example, the introduction of new kinds of water sports as well as the seaward extension of the Wadden Sea World Heritage property.		
Bundesboden-schutzgesetz – Federal Soil Protection Act	Sustainably safeguard or restore the functions of the soil. To this end, harmful changes to the soil must be prevented, the soil and contaminated sites as well as any water pollution caused by them must be remediated and precautions must be taken against adverse effects on the soil. When impacting on the soil, impairment of its natural functions and its function as an archive of natural and cultural history should be avoided as far as possible.	x	x
Federal Water Act	The main purpose of the Federal Water Act is to protect all waters as part of the ecosystem, as livelihood for human beings and as habitat for plants and animals through sustainable management and use in line with the European Water Framework Directive. According to that, it aims to prevent deterioration of the condition of water bodies (also coastal and marine) and to conserve or achieve good quality by the determination of environmental goals as well as monitoring and assessment programmes.	x	x
Gesetz über die Umweltverträglich-keitsprüfung (UVPG) – Environmental Impact Assessment	Projects and plans that may significantly impact the environment must undergo an environmental impact assessment/ strategic impact assessment to identify potential effects on ecosystems and biodiversity. The law ensures that potential environmental impacts are properly reviewed and mitigated before projects or plans are approved. Includes provisions for public consultation.	x	x
Raumordnungs-gesetz – Federal Spatial Planning Act	Spatial planning should develop a balanced settlement and open space structure that also takes into account the functionality of the ecosystem.	x	x
Schleswig-Holstein			
Landesnatur-schutzgesetz, LNatschG – State Nature Conservation Act	Establishes the legal framework for the protection and management of natural habitats by designating protected areas like nature reserves and national parks. It mandates environmental impact assessments and promotes biodiversity conservation by regulating land use, water management, and habitat protection, including buffer zones to prevent degradation.	x	x
National Park Act Schleswig-Holstein	Protects the Wadden Sea and its natural development. Natural processes shall be permitted to take place as	x	

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	unimpededly as possible. The national park shall be conserved as a habitat for the plant and animal species that occur in it naturally, as well as for the relationships occurring between such species and their habitats.		
Ordinances for protected nature reserves and landscapes	In the adjacent coastal areas to the national park as well as seaward, there are other designated areas for conservation that contribute spatially to the environmental protection of the Wadden Sea and to its ecological connectivity, in particular in the Natura 2000 network.		x
Landesentwick-lungsplan – State Development Plan	Provides a framework for spatial planning in Schleswig-Holstein, ensuring that space-use decisions are made in a way that considers environmental protection. Promotes coordinated development across the region to balance economic growth and environmental protection. Environmental factors, such as preserving natural habitats and minimising impacts, are central to the planning process, including the integration of impact assessments for major projects. In mid-2024 the update to sections of the state development plan for onshore wind energy with public participation was formally launched. The draft contains provisions on where and in what form the federal state and municipalities may designate wind energy areas in future. For the first time, the draft of the new LEP also includes a map of the exclusion criteria (spatial planning objectives) in the plan for wind energy. In addition to the national park (where a legal ban on the construction of wind turbines has been in force since 1999) and other coastal protected areas, such as the Natura 2000 sites, nature conservation is given a high priority within a continuous coastal strip as a feeding and resting area for birds which is to be kept free of wind turbines. Wind turbines will also not be permitted in the breeding areas of grassland birds on the islands in the Wadden Sea and in the neighbouring inland areas.	x	x
State Water Law	Regulates all issues relating to water management in Schleswig-Holstein, from groundwater protection and coastal protection to wastewater management. Regulates water quality and quantity to ensure the protection of aquatic ecosystems by controlling pollution and managing freshwater inputs. There are management plans for the river basins that include specific statements concerning management.	x	x
Landesgesetz über die Umweltverträg-	Establishes the requirement for conducting EIAs for projects that may significantly affect the environment. It ensures that	x	x

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lichkeitsprüfung (Landes-UVP-Gesetz – LUVPG)	activities like construction, industrial development, and infrastructure projects undergo a thorough environmental review to assess potential risks to sensitive ecosystems. Provides mechanisms for public involvement in the decision-making process.		
Lower Saxony			
Niedersächsisches Ausführungsgesetz zum Bundesnatur-schutzgesetz (NAGBNatSchG)	Implements federal nature conservation regulations at the state level, ensuring the protection of Natura 2000 sites.	x	x
National Park Act Niedersachsen	Provisions to protect the special character and the characteristic landscape of the tidal flats off the coast of Lower Saxony and to protect them from impairment, as well as to preserve the natural processes in this unique ecosystem, including the special significance for flora and fauna, such as birds and marine animals. Mandates the management including zoning for different activities	x	
Ordinances for Protected Nature Reserves and Landscapes	In the adjacent coastal areas as well as seaward and in some estuary areas, there are other designated areas for conservation that contribute spatially to the environmental protection of the Wadden Sea and to its ecological connectivity, in particular in the Natura 2000 network.		x
State Planning Programme	Integrates environmental protection into regional spatial planning. Provides binding statements on spatially significant uses (Natura 2000, habitat network, linear infrastructure, maritime transport routes, material extraction, etc.) and their development. Serves to harmonise the often conflicting economic, social, cultural and ecological interests in the area. It thus represents the planning concept for sustainable regional development.	x	x
State Water Law	Establishes measures to protect water bodies, including those connected to the Wadden Sea, ensuring that water quality is maintained and pollutants are regulated. Applies to surface waters, coastal waters, groundwaters and parts thereof. Waters are to be secured as part of the natural environment and living space for human beings, animals and plants. They have to be managed in such a way that they meet the wellbeing of the community; once such a principle is complied with, their use may also suit individual interests.	x	x

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Niedersächsisches Umweltverträglich-keitsprüfungs-gesetz (NUVPG)	Requires that projects or activities with potential environmental effects undergo an environmental impact assessment (EIA) to evaluate their impact on ecosystems. Ensures that the public and relevant stakeholders can participate in the EIA process, providing transparency and an opportunity to address concerns. Environmental reports describe and assess the likely significant effects that the implementation of the plans will have on the environment. Ensures that developments are evaluated for their potential to harm protected ecosystems and biodiversity, enforcing mitigation measures when necessary.	x	x
Hamburg			
Ausführungsgesetz	Nature Conservation and Landscape Management	x	x
National Park Act Hamburg	Designates and protects the Hamburg Wadden Sea National Park, to conserve natural habitats and wild animals and plants. Defines rules regulating the human activities within the national park.	x	
Water Law	Governs the protection of water quality in the region, ensuring that marine and freshwater environments are safeguarded from pollution.	x	x
State Planning Programme	Integrates environmental protection into the development of space-use plans. Promotes sustainable regional development with provisions to mitigate adverse effects from activities such as urban expansion or industrial development.	x	x
Gesetz über die Umweltverträglich-keitsprüfung in Hamburg (HmbUVPG)	Mandates that projects likely to have significant environmental effects undergo an environmental impact assessment to evaluate their potential harm. Ensures that projects in or near protected areas are thoroughly assessed for their effects on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Includes provisions for public participation in the EIA process.	x	x
Netherlands			
Omgevingswet	Since 2024 the legalisation in the Netherlands changed. All national laws and regulations concerning the Physical environment are combined into one Law the “Omgevingswet” or in English, “the environment and planning act of the Netherlands”.	x	x

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	This Act strengthened the legal framework by addressing earlier amendments to Dutch nature conservation law that had shifted permitting procedures toward a narrower focus on specific species and habitats, thereby weakening the broader, holistic approach that supported the site’s inscription as a World Heritage Site in 2009. It provides a framework for spatial and environmental planning, ensuring protection for sensitive ecosystems like the Wadden Sea. Provides environmental protection measures for protected areas and surroundings including safeguards for biodiversity, natural habitats, and water quality. Includes provisions to protect Natura 2000 sites (like the Wadden Sea), ensuring that any development or activity in the region is in line with EU environmental directives. Includes regulations on activities potentially impacting the environment like tourism, fisheries, and energy production, emphasising the need for environmental impact assessments and mitigation measures when planning new projects. There is a focus on cooperation with neighbouring countries, especially in terms of shared management of the Wadden Sea, considering its UNESCO World Heritage status. The Omgevingswet incorporates all earlier laws like the Planning core decision Wadden Sea (Planologische kernbeslissing Wadenzee), Nature protection law, nature framework directive and others. The Omgevingswet additionally added preserving the Wadden Sea’s OUV for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention. The Omgevingswet states in article 4:29: (1) The rules referred to in Article 4.3 on activities relating to World Heritage shall be laid down with a view to preserve the exceptional universal value of world heritage. (2) The rules shall, in any event, serve to prevent damage to or destruction of world heritage. These rules to preserve and protect the OUV are laid down in the “The Environmental Activities Decree” (Besluit activiteiten leefomgeving) and “the environmental quality decree” (Besluit kwaliteit leefomgeving). The environmental Quality decree instructs competent authorities to incorporate world heritage protection in their spatial plans. The Environmental activities decree assigns competent authorities the right to issue customised instructions to protect the OUV. It also assigns a special duty care: “The party performing an activity relating to world heritage that is aware or may reasonably suspect that said		

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	activity may result in damage to or destruction of world heritage or part thereof, in as much as affecting that exceptional universal value, is required to take all measures that may be reasonably requested of said party to prevent this damage or destruction.” These regulations cover both activities in the World Heritage Site and outside of it.		

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