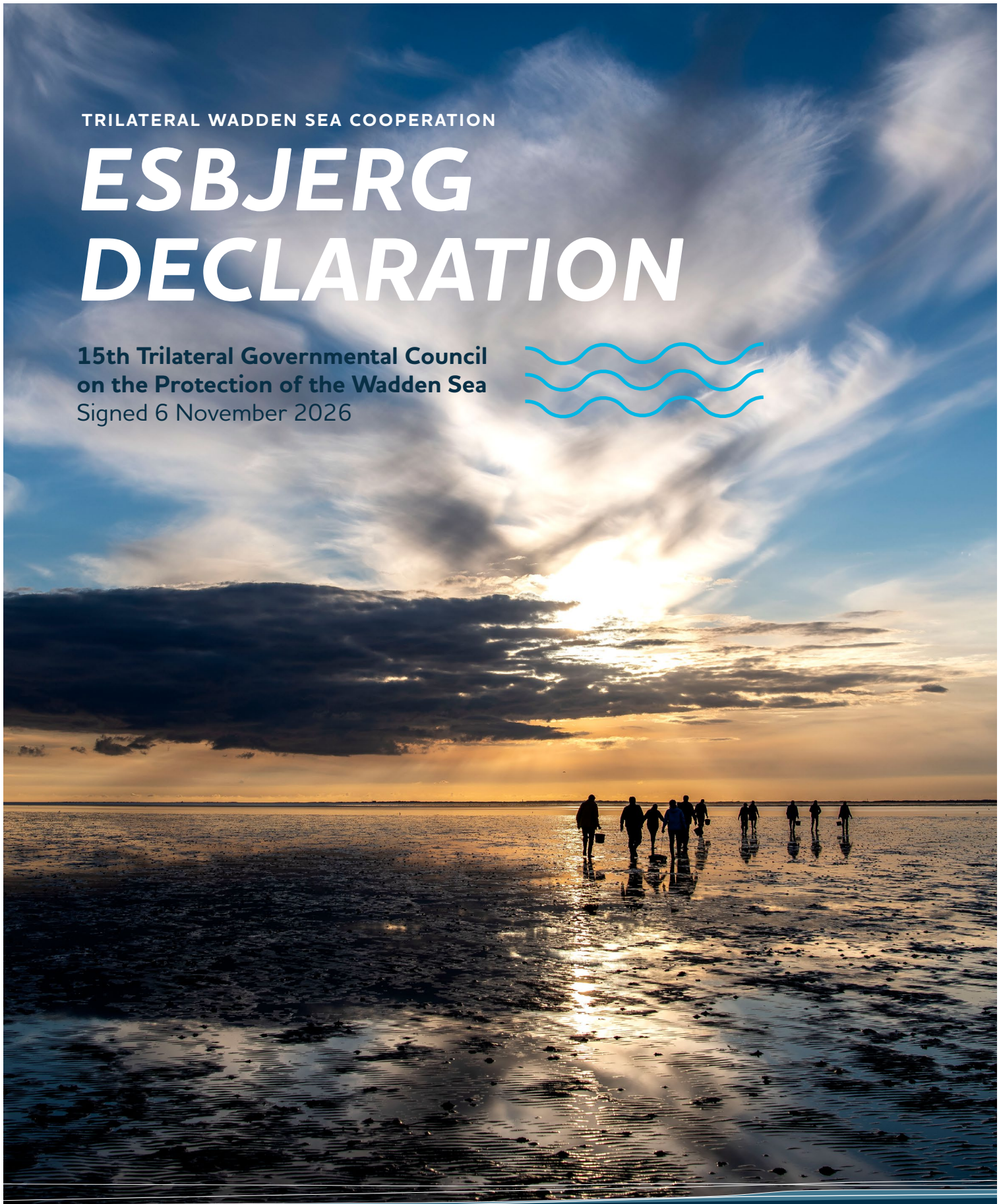
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TRILATERAL WADDEN SEA COOPERATION

ESBJERG DECLARATION

15th Trilateral Governmental Council on the Protection of the Wadden Sea
Signed 6 November 2026



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Preface

The **15th Trilateral Governmental Conference** on the Protection of the Wadden Sea of Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands was held in Esbjerg, Denmark, on **27 to 29 May 2026**. The meeting of the Trilateral Governmental Council and the Wadden Sea Conference were accompanied by an extensive programme developed by numerous partners, all under the event's motto "Protection Through Recognition". The Conference was well visited with over 200 participants.

Hosted by the Danish Ministry of Green Transition, the Conference focused on safeguarding the area's Outstanding Universal Value, sustainable use, natural resilience against climate change, and efficient cross-border and cross-sector collaboration. The discussions highlighted how collective, science-based and cross-border cooperation is essential to sustainably conserving the Wadden Sea in the face of increasing pressures. The Conference was chaired by Lars Gregersen, Director of the Danish Agency for Green Transition and Aquatic Environment. Bettina Hagedorn, Parliamentary State Secretary of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, represented Germany. Peter Paul Mertens, Director of Fisheries and Large Bodies of Water at the Dutch Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature, participated for the Netherlands. The State Ministers of Environment Tobias Goldschmidt (Schleswig-Holstein) and Katharina Fegebank (Hamburg), and the Lower Saxon State Secretary for Environment, Energy and Climate Protection, Anka Dobslaw, also participated.

Due to the concurrent process of government formation in Denmark, the drafted Esbjerg Declaration could not be formally adopted and signed at the time of the Conference. The Danish representatives underlined their firm continued commitment to the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation. It was decided that the signing of the "Esbjerg Declaration" should be done at the earliest possible date after a new Danish government is in place. The delegations thanked Germany for chairing the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation in 2022-2026 and welcomed the Danish presidency.

The Conference ended with the political representatives of Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands issuing a **Joint Statement** reaffirming their shared commitment to the Trilateral Cooperation on the Protection of the Wadden Sea.

SASCHA KLÖPPER
Executive Secretary to the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation



Esbjerg Declaration

THE WADDEN SEA – PROTECTION THROUGH RECOGNITION

The 15th Trilateral Governmental Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea, held in Esbjerg, Denmark, on 29 May 2026, reaffirms the strong commitment of Denmark, Germany, and The Netherlands in safeguarding our globally unique Wadden Sea ecosystem listed by UNESCO as World Heritage. Building on our continuous cooperation since 1978, we present the Esbjerg Declaration 2026, in conjunction with specific Strategic Targets, as a testament to our shared responsibility for our ONE Wadden Sea World Heritage.

Our Mission, Vision and Approach

We, the Ministers, aim for as far as possible, a natural and sustainable ecosystem in which natural processes proceed in an undisturbed way for best safeguarding the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the UNESCO Wadden Sea World Heritage.
We are therefore committed to preserving, strengthening, and developing the natural values, diversity, coherence, and dynamics of the Wadden Sea also recognising the challenges from its partly multifunctional use.
We, the ministers, are committed to a future in which:

- The Wadden Sea World Heritage status is further consolidated through coordinated and effective protection regimes and management.
- Conservation efforts enable the Wadden Sea ecosystem to fully unfold its natural potential to adapt to climate change effects in order to ensure a resilient environment.
- Scientific research, monitoring, assessment and data provision support continuous improvement in conservation efforts.
- Human uses and nature conservation are linked in a way that preserves the Wadden Sea's natural values and processes while allowing only sustainable practices.
- Local communities, stakeholders and regional advisory boards, NGOs and especially the younger generations are actively engaged in and supportive of conservation and management and contribute to the Wadden Sea Partnership.

To realise our mission and vision, we confirm to further continue our approach of a comprehensive cycle of science-based management, including climate change adaptation and protection that involves broad stakeholder engagement.

Our Commitment

We, the Ministers, are committed to **(I) safeguarding the Outstanding Universal Value** on strategic and practical levels by protecting and allowing natural processes to proceed as undisturbed as possible. We will continue to enhance coordinated monitoring and research delivering added value for policy implementation across sectors and knowledge-based management to protect the OUV.

Furthermore, we pledge to drive a coordinated implementation of the precautionary principle **(II) aiming for exclusively sustainable use** that fully respects the World Heritage status. We commit to support piloting, mainstreaming and **(III) advancing nature-based climate change mitigation and adaptation** measures by integrating successful projects and best practices into long-term management and policy frameworks.

By maintaining our resolution to position the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation as a flagship for **(IV) cooperation on trilateral and international level** of nature conservation, we contribute to reducing climate risks and improving nature resilience. Nature-based solutions and protection of natural processes, key species and habitats are vital for a healthy ecosystem, securing ecological connectivity.

We will continue to **(V) strengthen stakeholder engagement** and collaboration with key sectors, networks, partners and communities, anchoring our global heritage into local ownership.

We are committed to **(VI) continue to fill the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation with life** for the period 2026–2030.

Our Decisions

We, the Ministers, responsible for the protection of the Danish, Dutch and German Wadden Sea World Heritage adopt this Declaration and commit to safeguard the Outstanding Universal Value of the Wadden Sea inscribed as one World Heritage Site on the UNESCO World Heritage List being "the largest unbroken intertidal back-barrier sand and mudflat ecosystem in the world, a depositional coastline of unparalleled scale and diversity with natural processes undisturbed throughout most of the area and considered to be one of the most important areas for migratory birds in the world."

We, the Ministers, adopt the Strategic Targets of this declaration, as well as the Trilateral Strategy on Renewable Energy Infrastructure, the updated Trilateral Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Swimway Vision and Action Programme.

The **Strategic Targets** of the Esbjerg Declaration 2026 are based on and align with existing trilateral strategies, plans and organisational guidelines. The outlined strategic targets will be the basis for designing and implementing conservation projects and activities during the Dutch presidency (2026–2030) under the lead of the trilateral Wadden Sea Board.



STRATEGIC TARGETS

I. Safeguard the Outstanding Universal Value – Shared Responsibility

1. Ensure continuous compliance with the World Heritage Convention, safeguarding the OUV from impacts on the inside as well as from outside and supporting UNESCO reporting cycles.
2. Conduct a comprehensive trilateral joint Strategic Environmental Assessment as a basis for proactive management of cumulative impacts and to reduce the pressure from human uses in collaboration with respective sectors.
3. Consider OUV protection in all strategic, environmental and appropriate impact assessments and decisions on new plans and projects in and in the vicinity of the site in line with the national law in force.
4. Deliver comprehensive, periodic Quality Status Reports based on the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme, national monitoring programmes and further relevant information including an integrated assessment on the state of the OUV also as input for actions and evaluations under the Guiding Principle for protecting the OUV.
5. Aim to expand strictly protected areas as part of the implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030.
6. Aim for better understanding of natural sediment transport processes to improve knowledge on natural dynamics also considering climate change effects on national sediment strategies.

II. Aim for Sustainable Use – Responsible Human Activities

7. Continue to reduce pressures from the five key topics of the Integrated Management Plan for ONE Wadden Sea World Heritage (fisheries, tourism, shipping and ports, energy and coastal flood defence and protection) and their cumulative impacts by implementation of the plan and building on existing tools and knowledge, by stimulating exchange and cooperation to use synergies, i.a. between conservation targets and interests of sustainable uses by continuing joint research and by improving awareness. Explore how the Management Principles can safeguard the OUV.
8. Ensure the exchange and implementation of best environmental practices on avoidance and mitigation of negative impacts by specific human activities.
9. Aim for reflecting trilateral conservation targets in North Sea and coastal marine spatial planning processes.
10. Prohibit new extraction of fossil fuels within the boundaries of the Wadden Sea World Heritage property.
11. Position the Trilateral Cooperation as a European best practice for cross-border nature management through a coordinated approach, while exploring complementing EU funding opportunities.

III. Advance Nature-based Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation – Improve Natural Resilience

12. Enhance trilateral knowledge exchange, identify gaps and address them through coordinated research and monitoring of climate effects and corresponding measures.
13. Integrate nature-based pilot projects and measures on mitigation and adaptation into Wadden Sea policies where appropriate.
14. Protect and where appropriate restore resilience and natural CO2 sequestration functions of Wadden Sea key habitats (like salt marshes, sea grass meadows and seabed habitats) and strengthen the alignment of corresponding policies.

IV. Cooperate on Trilateral and International Level – Improved Efficiency

15. Further expand scientific ecological knowledge generation and ensure respective coordinated monitoring for effective management and strengthen scientific cooperation also to contribute to international conservation initiatives.
16. Coordinate regional restoration activities trilaterally to support national planning under the EU Nature Restoration Regulation and other relevant EU Directives.
17. Strengthen the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative by intensifying the engagement with partners along the East Atlantic Flyway – from West Africa to the Arctic region.
18. Ensure habitat connectivity through maintaining and developing ecological corridors also beyond the cooperation area.
19. Continue to protect the species with relevance to the Agreement on the Conservation of Seals in the Wadden Sea (WSSA) under the auspices of the UN Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (Bonn Convention, CMS).
20. Protect natural habitats and native species including preventing the introduction of invasive species.
21. Share expertise with the existing global partnerships (MoUs and UNESCO Marine Programme) and contribute to further UN initiatives towards sustainability.

V. Collaborate with Partners and Communities – Strengthen the Wadden Sea Partnership

22. Build long-term stewardship culture through the trilateral education network.
23. Foster trilateral research, explore the possibilities for a trilateral research programme and engage the next generation by encouraging youth participation.
24. Further strengthen stakeholder engagement, partnership schemes and ownership on various levels.

VI. Realise the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation 2026-2030

25. During the Dutch presidency, we will:
- Conduct the 17th International Scientific Wadden Sea Symposium (ISWSS) in Denmark
- Conduct a Youth Conference in the Netherlands
- Undertake a policy review in preparation of the next Trilateral Governmental Conference (TGC) and Ministerial Declaration.
- Hold the 16th Trilateral Governmental Conference to conclude the Dutch presidency

SIGNATURES

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF THE NETHERLANDS

Jaimi van Essen, Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries, Food Security and Nature

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE KINGDOM OF DENMARK

Christian Rabjerg Madsen, Minister of Nature and Animal Welfare

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Carsten Schneider, Federal Minister for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety