

DRAFT

15th MINISTERIAL COUNCIL DECLARATION

As adopted by the Wadden Sea Board
on 20 November 2025 in Hamburg



For trilateral and national consultations

Accompanying text for consultations

On the initiative of the current Danish Presidency, the format of the next Ministerial Declaration has been fundamentally revised in terms of its scope, structure and level of detail. The draft 15th Ministerial Council Declaration consists of a concise **Policy Paper** with continuous text outlining the overall mission of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation (TWSC) during the upcoming Dutch Presidency with recognizable and quotable text passages.

It is supplemented by **Strategic Targets** guiding the development and implementation of protection activities during the upcoming presidency. These strategic targets are organized under six (I-VI) headlines and will be the basis for planning and outlining concrete activities, e.g., within a trilateral business plan for the period of the Dutch Presidency.

In order to acknowledge the systematic approach of focussing on strategic targets, specific examples (i.e., naming specific habitats, projects or activities) were excluded and are foreseen to be further detailed in the trilateral business plan.

Furthermore, the intention is to limit the number of strategic targets in order to set priorities and to ensure a realistic framework for successful implementation during the Dutch Presidency. The strategic targets reflect tasks deriving from the SIMP Integrated Management Plan for ONE Wadden Sea World Heritage 2023 and the Wadden Sea Plan 2010, as well as from relevant thematic action plans and strategies (e.g., Breeding Bird Action Plan, Climate Change Adaptation Strategy). They furthermore include and prioritise assignments in response to current UNESCO requests.

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The Wadden Sea – “Protection Through Recognition”

The 15th Trilateral Governmental Conference on the Protection of the Wadden Sea, held in Esbjerg, Denmark on May 29th, 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-III Declaration (MCD-15), 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 multifunctional use. We, the ministers, envision a future where:

- 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.
- 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 sustainable practices.
- Local communities, youth in general, NGO's and economic stakeholders, supported by science 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 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 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 [updated Trilateral Climate Change Adaptation Strategy](#), [the Trilateral Strategy on Renewable Energy Infrastructure](#), and the [updated Swimway Vision and Action Programme](#).

The **Strategic Targets** of the Esbjerg Ministerial Declaration 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.

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 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 environmental and heritage impact assessments and decisions on new plans and projects in and in the vicinity of the site.
4	Deliver comprehensive, periodic Quality Status Reports based on the Trilateral Monitoring and Assessment Programme including an integrated assessment on the state of 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 sediment transport processes to improve knowledge on natural dynamics also considering climate change effects and the use of this knowledge for climate adaptation and sedimentmanagement.
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) by its implementation and building on existing tools and knowledge, by stimulating exchange and cooperation to use synergies, by continuing joint research and by improving awareness.
	Consider (in addition to de known (cumulative) pressure factors) trilaterally what strengthening resilience in a geopolitical context (defense, international security, energy transition, cables and climate change) means for the protection of the Wadden Sea. On these new topics cooperation and coordination must take place. Learn from the recent agreements that have been made in the North Sea and carry them forward. It is necessary to reduce damage to the Wadden Sea and the region to an absolute minimum. Carry these agreements, cooperation, and coordination at the highest administrative level through into the Trilateral Governmental Declaration.
8	Support the exchange and implementation of best environmental practices on avoidance and mitigation of negative impacts by specific human activities.
9	Ensure trilateral conservation targets are reflected in North Sea Marine Spatial Planning Processes.
10	Prohibit new extraction of fossil fuel or Carbon Capture and Storage within the boundaries of the 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. And explore the possibility of being designated as a European Region and the opportunities that this offers for collaboration and funding in the area.

III. Advance nature-based Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation – Improve Natural Resilience	
12	Enhance trilateral knowledge exchange, programming and financing , 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.
14	Protect and where appropriate restore resilience and natural CO ₂ sequestration functions of Wadden Sea key habitats and strengthen the alignment of corresponding policies.
IV. Cooperate on Trilateral and International Level – Improved Efficiency	
15	Further expand scientific ecological knowledge generation for effective management and strengthen scientific cooperation also to contribute to international conservation initiatives. And provide a robust research programme and budget. We also advise organising an annual trilateral science conference, focusing on knowledge exchange between scientists, governments and stakeholders on current themes.
16	Align regional restoration activities trilaterally to support national planning under the EU Nature Restoration Regulation.
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 Stakeholder Engagement	
22	Build long-term stewardship culture through the trilateral education network.
23	Foster trilateral research and engage the next generation. In the coming period, we will also establish a trilateral research program and budget.
24	Strengthen and support stakeholder engagement, partnership schemes and ownership on trilateral and various regional levels. In the work plan, we develop an approach for this in consultation with stakeholders.
VI. Realise the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation 2026-2030	
To make a good start with the new 4-year period, we will establish an action-oriented (SMART) work plan in the autumn with sufficient resources for implementation. In it, we will also develop an ambitious approach for stakeholder engagement. Stakeholders will be involved in the preparation of the work plan, and the work plan will be submitted for consultation.	
We aim to give young people a continuous voice and role in the trilateral cooperation and incorporate this into the work plan, in consultation with the young people themselves.	
25	During the Dutch presidency, we will: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 Trilateral Governmental Conference (TGC)
- Hold the 16th Trilateral Governmental Conference to conclude the Dutch presidency