

Dear Mr Pavel Kabat, and other members of the Wadden Academy Board, Dear Mr Crone, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First allow me to congratulate you on the way you have organised this symposium. The number of people attending today is testament to the appeal of the exciting programme you have prepared.

You have succeeded in bringing together several disciplines with experts from three different countries. Now they can, from their different perspectives, compare notes and work towards further progress in trilateral Wadden Sea research.

My minister, Henk Bleker, who is in charge of the trilateral wadden sea policy, could not be with us. I was asked to represent him, which I'm very happy to do. My name is Jaap Verhulst, I am Director of the Department of Regional Affairs North and Head of the Dutch delegation in the trilateral Wadden Sea Board.

Decades ago the research community initiated a trilateral partnership. And it was largely thanks to this same community that the Dutch-German Wadden Sea received a favourable inscription on the prestigious UNESCO's World Heritage List .

On request of the IUCN the submitted landmark studies revealed the importance of Wadden Sea research on a global scale. Although Hamburg was not part of the World heritage nomination process we hope it soon will be, and will then be followed by the inclusion of the Danish sector. This would give the entire Wadden the universal recognition it deserves.

The Wadden Academy started in 2008. Right from its beginning it adopted a multi-disciplinary approach. It aims to promote coherent research programmes, also at the international level.

It promotes public information and the exchange of knowledge between scientists, government, trade and industry and groups in society.

Its broad outlook, its multi-disciplinary approach and its efforts to connect scientists, government and civil society make the Academy an excellent partner in our trilateral cooperation.

This is reflected in the Declaration of Sylt and the new Joint Declaration between the three Wadden Sea Countries. The next speaker, my colleague from Denmark, will surely go into more detail on this. -----

Ladies and Gentlemen

I started summarising some trilateral achievements to date. Now, we have a new government in the Netherlands and what can already be said on their plans?

First, this government will respect international agreements. As you know, the Wadden Sea is governed by a number of agreements. The scope and flexibility, however, provided by the relevant European directives will be used to the full.

This, in my view, implies that we will have to harmonise matters very carefully as this government wishes to put in place a level playing field for users of the area.

Also: Innovative approaches and solutions will be actively sought. Moreover, we believe in the power of the combination of knowledge, business and government. We refer to this in the Netherlands as our 'golden triangle'. It has made us a leading international player in the agricultural world. This approach will have to be applied over a wider area.

This new government talks about strengthening investment in top areas and clusters like the Energy Valley in Groningen, Green Ports and Brainports. It wants to put more emphasis on water, food, high-tech, energy and the life sciences. The valorisation of innovative approaches will also become more important.

Some 30 years ago the focus was primarily on nature. This has led to an improvement of nature protection in the Wadden Sea. Now the focus has shifted to the balance between ecology and economy. And this leads to an interesting question:

Could the scientific community once again provide the impetus, the driving force?

Could it again be instrumental in fostering a fruitful exchange between science and policy in the Wadden Sea region?

All this begins with making knowledge more accessible. This is what the Wadden Academy does. Its website and popular scientific publications bear witness to this. In general: Joining forces is key. We must balance economic, ecological and social aspects. My first tentative conclusion is that the Wadden Academy must be able to recognise this approach!

Allow me to mention some recent major developments in the Netherlands on this aspect. On the interface between economic, ecological and social aspects. I would like to mention programmes like Towards a Richer Wadden Sea and the Deltaprogramme. I recall great and sensitive topics like gas extraction, sustainable fisheries and recreation. In all these examples two things become abundantly clear:

The first is the pressure the area is under. The pressure from the multiple actors and user claims. The second is the usefulness and the need to have a thorough understanding of the area. To have an understanding that is based on practical knowledge and reliable monitoring data.

This is a first requirement for making the right political decisions. And this brings me back to the 'golden triangle' of knowledge, government and business, which I mentioned earlier.

The matters I referred to are by no means unique to the Netherlands. They also apply at trilateral level. This is why we agreed to address these matters in a trilateral context. The three of us, Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands have indicated that current developments call for an interdisciplinary research agenda. Preferably policy relevant research.

You, Mr Chairman, have taken a first step by suggesting items for this agenda at the Sylt conference in March of this year. I am grateful you have organised this trilateral symposium. I welcome it.

I wish you every success in setting up a multidisciplinary trilateral research agenda. I am convinced an interdisciplinary approach will enhance our understanding and will make our message stronger.

I can say, I am already looking forward to the next regular International Scientific Wadden Sea Symposium in 2012. This symposium will be organised in the Netherlands, and I am glad the Wadden Academy has accepted our invitation to take the lead in organising this.

Finally, I wish you all a fruitful and inspiring symposium.

Thank you.