

Ladies and gentlemen of the scientific community,

Dear Wadden Sea colleagues,

It is a pleasure to see so many research workers from all three Wadden Sea countries gathered for this first inter-disciplinary scientific conference covering all Wadden disciplines.

Certainly, there are grounds here for optimism for the future of the Wadden Sea area. On behalf of the TWSC as co-organizer of this conference – and on behalf of the Danish chair of the Wadden Sea Board, Mr. Peter Ilsøe, it falls to me to welcome all of you to Leeuwarden.

Since Mr. Ilsøe is unfortunately unable to attend the symposium, he has asked me to pass on his apologies for his absence, and to send you his best wishes for a successful conference.

Firstly, the Danish Presidency of the TWSC would like to express our gratitude to the Dutch Wadden Academy for their initiative in arranging these important days.

We sincerely hope that they will promote more intensive and visible Wadden Sea research, and we believe that these days will come to represent a milestone in the future management of our Wadden Sea area.

In March this year, ministers of the Danish, Dutch and German governments adopted the renewed Joint Declaration on the Protection of the Wadden Sea. This declaration raises awareness of the many present and future challenges to the protection, restoration and sustainable use of the Wadden Sea.

Ambitious goals were set, including preservation of the natural ecosystem, adaptation of the Wadden Sea to climate change, maintenance of its unique landscape and cultural heritage – and also sustainable economic use. All these management goals require solid scientific grounding. It is evident that scientific programmes have to be organised across national boundaries, and Denmark, Germany and The Netherlands have a long history of scientific cooperation.

May I remind you that forty years ago, the scientific community was already stating that the Wadden Sea is one coherent ecosystem, and that its management cannot be divided by national borders. At the first scientific symposium in 1975, initiated by one of the founding fathers of Wadden Sea action, professor Wim Wolff, politicians from the three Wadden Sea countries were called upon to work together for the protection and conservation of the area.

You scientists took an important step in establishing these facts then. It was also vital that the three governments paid heed to your message. Their first concrete and visible reaction was the establishment of trilateral governmental conferences. In 1978, the cooperation on the protection of the Wadden Sea was emphasised.

In 1980, political support for the coordination of scientific research was decided. And in 1982, the first Joint Declaration was agreed upon by the three countries.

Many more conferences have taken place since then – each and every one of them with specific topics and relevant policy themes, very often based on results of scientific investigations

If only for that reason, it is essential that the interplay between scientific research and trilateral policy-making be strengthened and extended.

We will promote - in any way we can - the inter-disciplinary and transnational Wadden Sea cooperation between research institutions in the three countries.

The most recent expression of this desire is to be found in the new Joint Declaration, where scientific efforts form the starting point for the fulfilment of several of the trilateral main objectives.

At the governmental conference on the island of Sylt, last spring, the ministers emphasised that a joint inter-disciplinary research agenda for the Wadden Sea is needed. And they support the establishment of a trilateral research platform – preferably directly connected with existing national networks.

The ministers invited the Platform to elaborate a trilateral agenda for policy-relevant research – in consultation with the WSB – based upon the Sylt Declaration, the QSR analysis and the outcome of the scientific symposium. ... And we are looking forward this relation- and partnership

In this respect, we find the Wadden Academy's document "Towards a trilateral research agenda of the Wadden Sea Area" both cogent and extremely relevant as a constructive starting point, because:

- It emphasises the need to define the gaps in our knowledge that have to be filled - in order to achieve the joint management goals
- It identifies the lack of an integrated inter-disciplinary approach – and
- It applies the concept of ICZM – and therefore entails an obligation to organise scientific work in a more integrated manner.

Our point of departure is a sound, well-designed Trilateral Monitoring Programme. This has been in place now for some 15 years, indeed, for some bird parameters, for around 30 years.

This has provided us with an in-valuable overall perspective on development tendencies in wetlands: On a global scale... impressive and unique!

Trilateral policy-making – in particular the Wadden Sea Plan – is another aspect that the three countries are agreed on. This to ensure the protection of the unique ecological character of the area and its natural development, its landscapes and the area's exceptional cultural heritage.

Based - as it is - on protection and monitoring, the latest QSR-report demonstrates a healthy development. But the report also reveals that there are still many unknowns:

such crucial issues as climate change impacts, effects of invasive alien species, flyway fluctuations and Natura 2000 objectives in the perspective of a changing ecosystem – to name but a few.

So far, ecosystem research has been carried out mainly within national boundaries. But what is needed - as a basis for managing the above challenges - is better knowledge of the Wadden Sea as one ecosystem. In particular to be able to differentiate natural from man-made induced changes.

With the exception of few trilateral research projects - among them the Joint Seal Project in the early 90s - there has been no trilateral research into ecosystem basics.

As the programme for this conference indicates, a full-scale inter-disciplinary approach and a total management conception of the entire Wadden Sea area are essential for the continued nurture of the Wadden Sea Area. At their recent conferences, the ministers have made decisive moves towards this development.

This is apparent, for instance, in the comprehensive cultural landscape analyses, which will be studied and evaluated in conjunction with other authorities, will find their political place within the framework of the Joint Declaration and the Wadden Sea Plan.

It is my sincere hope that this conference will make a valuable contribution to that very process.

In 2001 the trilateral cooperation initiated a Wadden Sea Forum to improve a structured dialogue with the stakeholders and to take account of their knowledge and viewpoints into the trilateral policy and management. Through the years, the forum has produced many constructive initiatives, among them socio-economic studies, such as guidelines for sustainable goose management, sustainability indicators, and an energy study which have provided important transnational knowledge.

From the trilateral cooperation we are pleased to support the further work with the Forum and we welcome very much its involvement and initiatives in the field of sustainable development studies.

Realising that the Wadden Sea Forum and the Wadden Academy share the same integrative concept, allow me to suggest that the Academy consider initiating a co-operation with the Forum within the framework socio-economic.

Let me finish my trilateral overview and perspectives by again underlining the importance of the activities of the Wadden Academy – and ending my speech – by concluding:

- you laid the cornerstone of the 'trilateral process' in the 1970s
- your message was then - and is still to this day - the fundamental concept underlying the transnational Wadden Sea cooperation.
- without a watchful and critical scientific community and focussed research, political credibility and the trilateral energies would be worthless.

With this in mind, I wish us all a constructive and rewarding conference

Thank you for your attention.