

Wadden Sea Forum Secretariat

Sustainable Development  
Strategy for the Wadden Sea  
Region

Final

March 2004

## Summary

### Background

The Wadden Sea Forum (WSF) is an independent platform of stakeholder groups in the trilateral Wadden Sea area (The Netherlands, Germany and Denmark). The Forum was established pursuant to a decision at the 9th Governmental Wadden Sea Conference in Esbjerg 2001. The Forum was asked to develop a Sustainable Development Strategy for the Wadden Sea Region for the 10th Governmental Wadden Sea Conference in 2005.

### Purpose

With regard to this, the Forum has launched the present study with the overall aim of:

- **Presenting background information and suggestions which will contribute to the process of elaborating a sustainability strategy for the Wadden Sea region.**

More specifically, the report:

- analyses the concept of sustainability and how it has evolved over time;
- presents three theoretical sustainability "schools";
- compares the German, Danish and Dutch sustainable strategies;
- analyses the impact sustainability has had on public decision-making and the business sector; and
- provides a review of various sustainability methods.

Based hereon, the report presents main elements of the Wadden Sea Region Sustainability Strategy.

### The Concept of Sustainability

The concept of sustainability entered into political parlance when the Brundtland Report was launched in 1987. It defined sustainability as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The content of the concept has changed over the last decade parallel to attempts by many organisations and countries to operationalise and implement the concept. It used to be associated with environmental protection but, nowadays, represents an attempt to balance and integrate economic, social, and environmental concerns. It was primarily a substantial concept which stated a desired destination (something achieved) but is increasingly seen as a procedural concept: a learning process and rules for how we make decisions.

The table below presents what can be called a "modern" understanding of sustainability.

*A "modern" understanding of sustainability: Substantial and procedural elements*

Substantial elements of sustainability	Procedural elements of sustainability
Defined as encompassing <b>three dimensions</b> and the relative weight attached to these	<b>Decision-making basis:</b> All three dimensions should be analysed and incorporated into decision-making
<b>Social</b> dimension: unemployment, local/regional development, health, social cohesion, distributional aspects, etc.	<b>Trade-offs</b> between the three dimensions should be made explicit to actors and the public
<b>Economic</b> dimension: macro economic development, competitiveness, economic growth, innovation and industrial development, etc	<b>Alternative</b> solutions should be considered
<b>Environment:</b> Biodiversity, landscape integrity & wildlife, water quality, air quality, soil quality, climate change, etc.	Public <b>participation</b> and consultation should be encouraged
<b>Inter-generational fairness</b>	Impact <b>assessment</b> tools should be applied in decision-making

#### Theories of Sustainability

There are a number of theoretical "schools" advocating different definitions of sustainability and how to achieve a sustainable development. *Environmental economics* is a "liberal" approach to sustainability. It defines sustainability as constant or increasing capital stocks. The capital forms are, to a large degree, substitutable but critical natural capital needs to be preserved. Market-based solutions, some command-and-control regulations, plus focus on the total capital stocks of societies are key elements in a strategy for sustainability. *Ecological economics* argues for a stronger version of sustainability where broader segments of natural capital are labelled as "critical". According to *political ecology*, a systematic greening of capitalistic economies will be met with resistance from powerful private interests. Long-term sustainability therefore necessitates a radical new political and economic order.

#### National Sustainability Strategies

It will be easier to implement the Wadden Sea Region Sustainability Strategy if the three countries perceive sustainability similarly. The comparison of the countries' national sustainability strategies shows that there is a quite high degree of consensus across the countries at the overall level. Examples of common objectives are energy efficiency, high level of environmental protection, health, innovation and modernisation, population issues, and participation. There are other similar features in the approach to sustainability, cf. the following table.

	Perspectives for Germany	The Action Plan The Netherlands	A balanced future Denmark
Definition of sustainability	Reference to Brundtland  Defined as three dimensions	Reference to Brundtland  Defined as three dimensions	Reference to Brundtland Defined as three dimensions. The plan is most elaborated on the environmental dimension
Trade-offs between three dimensions	It is acknowledged that conflicts over goals are inevitable  No mechanism is proposed to weigh the three dimensions against each other	No mechanism is proposed to weigh the three dimensions against each other	No mechanism is proposed to weigh the three dimensions against each other
Use of indicators	A set of 21 indicators is presented as an important component of the strategy	36 preliminary indicators.  A set of indicators is under preparation	14 key indicators plus sectoral and horizontal indicators

#### The impact of sustainability

Sustainability is more than a "nice concept" that everybody can embrace. It has had a significant impact on public decision-making, therein that sustainability is becoming an overriding national objective; new decision-making practices are introduced (such as EU's Impact Assessment methodology); it has addressed the need for better coordination between sector bureaucracies, and sustainability has sparked an interest in new ways of measuring societal development (via sustainability indicators). It is more difficult to assess the impact on the private sector but it is likely that the concept has stimulated a new perception of the role of environmental, social and other ethical concern for business.

#### Sustainability Assessment

As mentioned, sustainability has motivated the introduction of new procedures to integrate policies and to reveal the broader impacts of a given policy. In the EU system, the Impact Assessment has recently been developed as a decision-aiding tool, which aims to provide transparency to the decision-makers and the public. It is conducted in two stages: a preliminary assessment and, if necessary, an extended impact assessment. In the UK, local and regional sustainability assessments have seen their first light.

#### Towards a sustainability strategy

The main elements of the Sustainability Strategy for the Wadden Sea region are outlined. It is suggested that the strategy focuses on five elements:

- **Framework.** The strategy must be *realistic*. Understanding and describing the framework conditions should be an integrated part of the strategy.
- **Principles.** The strategy must be *forward-looking*. It is necessary to set forth principles that can guide the path towards sustainability.
- **Themes.** The strategy must be *focused*. It is therefore necessary to select relevant themes to focus on; themes that the key stakeholders in the Region can relate to and perceive as meaningful.

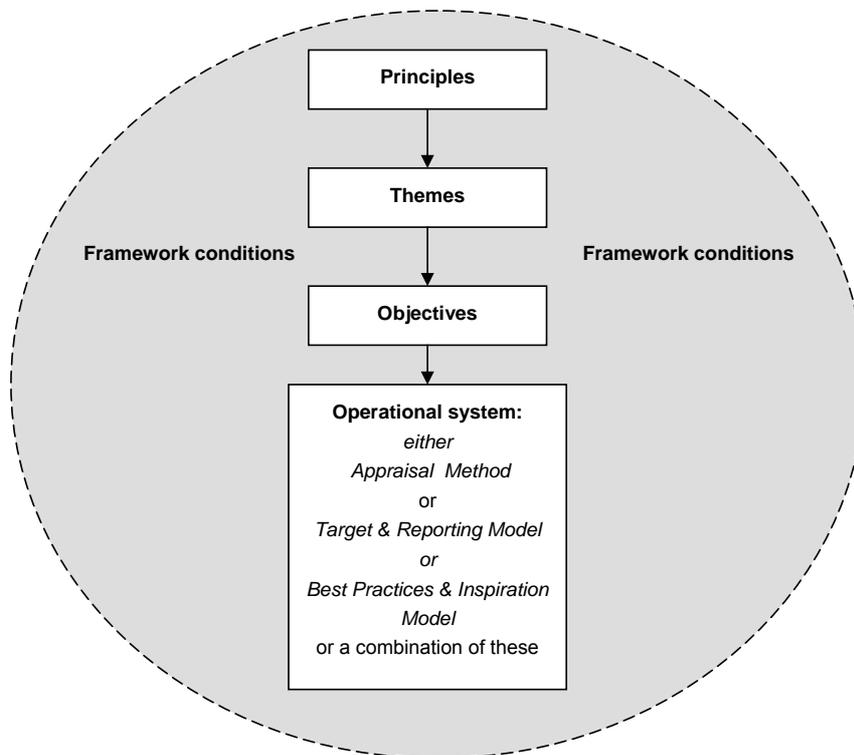
- **Objectives.** The strategy should put some *obligations* on the key stakeholders (in a political sense, as a minimum). Specific and measurable objectives shall be developed.
- **Operational system(s).** The strategy must be *implementable*. It is therefore imperative that the Wadden Sea Forum determines a proper operational system for implementing the strategy.

Regional based strategy

The strategy is to be developed from the "inside"; for that reason the strategy is to be based on a genuine stakeholder approach. It is the regional stakeholders' opportunity and responsibility to develop and define the strategy, which can be based on the suggested main elements.

From framework and principles to an operational system

The process for the Wadden Sea Forum of determining the main elements of the strategy is iterative and several "loops" will most likely be necessary before the Forum eventually can submit its recommendation to the Wadden Sea Governmental Conference in 2005. The process of going back and forth between the main elements is constructive and necessary to reach a proper strategy. It is therefore, primarily for the sake of clarity, that we have presented the main elements as progressing in one direction: from principles to operational system. The relations between these main elements are illustrated in the figure below.



## Framework conditions

*The strategy must be realistic.* It shall not only maintain the relevant principles and objectives but also provide advice on how the objectives can be achieved. It is therefore important to critically consider the framework conditions cf. the table below.

Contextual factors
Presumable low enforcement capacity because the realisation of the strategy will involve three countries and several public administrations
The key actors in the region may disagree as to the content of the strategy
Are the actors in the region willing to accept that the sustainability strategy may restrict their room of manoeuvre? (problem of collective action)
Who are demanding the strategy? There is a potential lack of ownership and commitment

It is recommended:

- that the Wadden Sea Forum, prior to completing the strategy, thoroughly discusses (and therefore "tests") the willingness of authorities and actors in the region to attach importance to a Wadden Sea region sustainability strategy;
- that the strategy is drafted with a clear focus on its implementation;
- that the strategy therefore presents the institutional set-up needed to implement the strategy and identifies the key actors.

## Principles

*The strategy must be forward-looking.* Based upon the existing framework conditions and the challenges for setting up a useful sustainability strategy, the overarching principles for the Region should be defined. A "Shared Vision" of trilateral co-operation is laid down in the Wadden Sea Plan from the State Declaration of 1997. It contains five principles (healthy environment, sustainable use, maintenance of values, integrated management and involvement of the community). Based at the discussion at the latest meeting of the Wadden Sea Forum (in Oldenburg, Germany, October 2003) it is suggested that the existing five principles are supplemented with two additional principles, namely:

- "Balanced and equitable economic development decoupled from the environmental pressure"
- "High levels of employment, social cohesion and inclusiveness"

## Themes

*The strategy must be focused.* It is therefore necessary that it covers the issues that are of particular relevance for the Region.

It is suggested to include the five themes already covered by the so-called Thematic Groups under the Forum, together with the themes Tourism and recreation, Coastal Defence, Infrastructure, Spatial planning and Shipping safety as identified by the Forum as priority themes.

It is also recommended to consider the additional themes that were suggested at the latest meeting of the Wadden Sea Forum (in Oldenburg, Germany, October 2003). It is therefore recommended that the final selection of themes should be based on the following gross list of themes:

- Policy and Management
- Industry and Harbour
- Energy
- Agriculture
- Fisheries
- Rural development (education, demography)
- Protection of Wadden Sea, landscape integrity, and biodiversity
- Regional identity
- Tourism and recreation
- Coastal protection
- Infrastructure
- Spatial Planning
- Shipping safety.

## Objectives

*The strategy should put some obligations on the key stakeholders* (in a political sense, as a minimum). Hence, specific objectives, for each of the themes, shall be determined. It is recommended that determination of objectives will be a subject for discussion at the next Wadden Sea Forum meeting (April 2004).

## Operational systems

*The strategy must be implementable.* It is of utmost importance that the Wadden Sea Forum focuses on the practical implementation of the strategy. In order to facilitate this discussion, three operational systems have been developed - ranging from a very ambitious to a less ambitious model, cf. the table below.