

MEETING DOCUMENT

Wadden Sea Board (WSB 45)

28 May 2025
Hamburg, Germany



Agenda Item:	5.1 Protect and strengthen the Outstanding Universal Value (paras 1-16)
Subject:	TG-WH progress report
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Submitted by:	TG-WH and CWSS

Since the WSB 44 meeting, the Task Group World Heritage (TG-WH) has held six meetings (December 2024 - April 2025). The meetings have focused on preparing the 2025 State of Conservation (SOC) Report, developing the draft Scoping Report as the basis for the Joint Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), and discussing the engagement of experts and consultants to review the draft Scoping Report.

This progress report from the TG-WH contains a 1) summary of the steps taken to submit the State of Conservation report 2025 and upcoming steps and gives 2) an update on the progress of the joint Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Proposal: The meeting is invited to:

- 1) note** the information
- 2) adopt** the timeline and the way forward and to **advise** on the expert review of the draft scoping report.

TG-WH progress report

1) State of Conservation Report 2025

The 2025 State of Conservation Report for the Wadden Sea (Denmark, Germany, Netherlands) responds to World Heritage Committee Decision 46 COM 7B.51 and updates the 2024 SOC report where relevant. It confirms continued political commitment to protecting the property.

Prior to submission, the draft 2025 SOC report underwent national consultations and trilateral consultation with WSB advisors from environmental NGOs, although the consultation period (20 December 2024 to 10 January 2025) coincided with the holiday season.

The final SOC report was endorsed by the WSB members and submitted to the World Heritage Centre (WHC) on 14 February by the UNESCO Focal Point in Denmark on behalf of the three States. Following review, the WHC will issue a draft Decision for consideration by the States, typically six weeks before the upcoming 47th session of the World Heritage Committee, scheduled for 6–16 July 2025 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris.

On 06 March 2025, the Waddenvereniging, also on behalf of Deutsche Umwelthilfe and Stichting de Noordzee, sent a letter to UNESCO WHC concerning the 2025 SOC report. LVVN shared the letter with TG-WH. The TG-WH suggests not to respond to this letter unless the WHC asks for a reaction. In the letter, the concerned NGOs complain that the NGOs were not included in the consultation. This is not correct. The draft 2025 SOC went through the national and trilateral stakeholder participation processes. The fact that the Waddenvereniging chose not to be part of the "Omgevingsberaad" is their responsibility. Furthermore, the letter clearly shows that they do not agree with some of the reactions/statements in the 2025 SOC report.

Proposal: The WSB is invited to **note** the information.

2) Progress on the Joint Strategic Environmental Assessment

Draft Scoping Report

The draft Scoping Report is part of the joint Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) development process. It sets out the main issues, the approach and methodology to be used in the assessment of potential impacts and impacts from cumulative effects on the Wadden Sea’s Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), the OUV key values, attributes, and other relevant related values.

The World Heritage Committee Decision 46 COM 7B.51, Wadden Sea (Denmark, Germany, Netherlands) (N 1314ter) requested the States to “14 b) Submit the scoping report of the SEA to the World Heritage Centre for review”.

Consultation phase of the draft Scoping Report

The draft Scoping Report undergoes national stakeholder consultations and trilateral consultations with WSB-advisors from the environmental NGOs between April 2025 and 30 June 2025. Suggestions from consultations as well as from the WHC and the advisory body IUCN will be considered in the review process of the Scoping Report.

The draft Scoping Report has been submitted to the World Heritage Centre and IUCN, for parallel review. However, due to their workload ahead of the annual Committee meetings, their input may be delayed.

Once reviewed and refined, the Scoping Report will set the framework/guideline for the joint SEA including national components and therefore forms an important part of the terms of reference for the joint SEA.

Parallel expert review of the draft Scoping Report

In line with principle 6 of the UNESCO Guidelines and toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context, experts/specialists are being sought to review the scoping report as a base to the SEA and to conduct the SEAs.

Preliminary timeline on the Joint SEA development process (*may be subject to changes*)

For developing the joint SEA, including both national components and trilateral integration, a time frame of around 30 months is calculated. As a result, the joint SEA will not be completed in time for the 2026 TGC as initially planned. Instead, the SEA’s progress and initial conclusions could be presented at the 2026 TGC. The goal is to begin the national components of the SEA by the end of this year (2025), following national consultations and expert reviews, with finalisation planned for 2027.

The following timeline should be considered as a guideline, in which adjustments may be necessary. There is a shared commitment to maintain momentum and adhere to the planned schedule as closely as possible.

Date	Activity
31 March 2025	Draft Scoping Report, backed by WSB submitted to WHC and IUCN for review.
April - 30 June 2025	National consultations and trilateral consultation with WSB advisors from the environmental NGOs.
July 2025	Processing of comments from consultation phase and hand over to expert.
May – August 2025	Procurement and expert review of the draft Scoping Report.
September- 2025	Refine ToR for SEA
Mid-September- November 2025	Procurement process for expert(s) to conduct SEA study (national components and integration into joint SEA)

December 2025- August 2026	Development of SEA study (national components) including three meetings to align scope and trilateral integration during national component development.
September- December 2026	Integration into draft joint SEA
January-March 2027	Review of the draft joint SEA (including stakeholder engagement with WHC and IUCN).
Summer/Autumn 2027	Integration of feedback from stakeholder engagement, WHC and IUCN review, and NCEA advice, leading to the final joint SEA.

Differences in national implementation of the EU Directives on impact assessments

An important challenge in assessing the impacts and cumulative impacts on the Wadden Sea's OUV lies in differing implementations of EU Directives on impact assessments by national legislation and administrative practice across the three Wadden Sea States. While the joint SEA assessment will be based on the common framework provided by EU legislation, national differences in interpretation and implementation could influence the outcomes.

- **Denmark** explicitly integrates trilateral agreements and plans (based on the OUV) into national policies such as the Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD) action plan. SEAs for projects in the Wadden Sea region are submitted to UNESCO, and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are encouraged to include a section on the OUV. In some cases, Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) are conducted on demand and submitted to UNESCO.
- **Germany** provides a robust legal framework, especially by National Parks, which also include Natura 2000 conservation objectives in their legally established protection purposes. Existing regulations are sufficient to fully implement the key values of the OUV, though there is recognition of the need for greater transparency in the inclusion of the OUV and improvements at the implementation level in SEA/EIA practice.
- **The Netherlands**, while supportive of the World Heritage Convention through various legal instruments, particularly the Environment and Planning Act (effective January 2024), which explicitly addresses the OUV, as well as through on demand Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) and the integration of the OUV in relevant SEAs, recent analyses highlighted the need to improve the implementation of international agreements (including the World Heritage Convention) within the Dutch legal framework.

This divergence creates a policy-relevant issue, that has both administrative and political dimensions. The TG-WH acknowledged this issue in the draft Scoping Report, which was shared with the WSB members via email for written approval prior to stakeholder consultation. The draft Scoping Report includes this issue and a proposes an approach to explore it, and it is now subject to consultation, expert review, and evaluation by the WHC and IUCN.

Scenario-based assessment

TG-WH proposed a comparative analysis of future scenarios (perspective 2050) to assess cumulative impacts which is included in further detail in the draft Scoping Report (4.3.2 Cumulative impacts analysis and assessment). Each Wadden Sea State is expected to conduct the analysis on a minimum of three future scenarios (2050) to ensure comparable results for the joint SEA.

The future scenarios for 2050 building on the baseline are:

Scenario	Description
Scenario 1: Reference	No new human use activities are introduced, existing pressures and trends from the baseline continue unchanged.
Scenario 2: Projected Development	All reasonably foreseeable future human use activities (incl. PPPs) are implemented without foreseeable conservation measures (WFD, MSFD, Natura 2000, NRR).
Scenario 3: Regulated Development	All reasonably foreseeable future human use activities (incl. PPPs) are implemented, along with foreseeable conservation measures (WFD, MSFD, Natura 2000, NRR).

These scenarios assume that current conservation measures, including EU Directives, national legislation, and international agreements, are legally sufficient to maintain or enhance the OUV. The scenario analysis will help explore whether current nature conservation, restoration, and mitigation measures can prevent significant impairment of OUV, the combined impact of future human uses, and priority areas where further action is needed.

Climate change considerations are integrated into all scenarios.

Consideration of a Fourth Scenario

Considering that the implementation of international agreements, need better implementation within the Dutch legal framework, and the broader question of whether the current legal frameworks sufficiently integrate the OUV, a **fourth scenario** is under consideration. A fourth scenario would build on Scenario 3 by explicitly incorporating the OUV, including enhanced conservation, restoration, and innovative environmental measures.

While in Germany and Denmark, the OUV is already embedded within existing legal frameworks (e.g., MSFD, Birds and Habitats Directives, and National Park laws), which may render three scenarios sufficient, further exploration of a fourth scenario remains relevant, especially in the Dutch context.

Proposal: The WSB is invited to **adopt** the timeline and the way forward and to **advise** on the expert review of the draft scoping report.