

48th Meeting of the Wadden Sea Board (WSB 48)

Meeting Document No. WSB 48/5.1

4 March 2026
Online

Agenda Item	5.1 Protect and Strengthen the Outstanding Universal Value (paras 1-16)
Document Title	WSB 48/5.1 TG-WH Progress Report
Submitted by	CWSS/ TG-WH
Submitted on	11 February 2026
Proposal	<p>The WSB is invited to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. note the information.2. note the information.3. support the proposal and to task TG-WH with drafting the terms of reference for the SEA technical subgroup and the SEA Advisory Council for approval at WSB 49.4. confirm the appointment of Jeroen Bootsma as chair of the Task Group World Heritage.

This progress report from the TG-WH provides 1) an update on the State of Conservation Report 2026, 2) a status update on the development of the SEA for the Wadden Sea, 3) a proposal for the steering structure for the SEA process, and 4) a nomination for the TG-WH chair position.

TG-WH Progress Report

1. State of Conservation (SOC) Report 2026 - Update

APPROVAL AND SUBMISSION

The three Wadden Sea Board Delegations approved the draft SOC 2026 on 29 January 2026 with minor amendments:

- Denmark: Correction of the Ministry of Green Transition's name;
- The Netherlands: Deletion of "currently" in the Executive Summary to clarify that shell extraction is not permitted in the Dutch part of the Wadden Sea;
- Germany: Amendments to the submission letter to avoid raising expectations regarding the establishment of a buffer zone.

The approved SOC 2026 was submitted to the Dutch Parliament for consideration during its 12 February session on the Wadden Sea. To ensure full political alignment and accuracy, the States Parties requested a short extension of the submission deadline. The World Heritage Centre (WHC) granted an exceptional extension to 15 February 2026, noting that any report received after this date will not be considered.

The final SOC 2026 will be submitted to the WHC on 13 February 2026.

BUFFER ZONE DISCUSSION

Regarding the encouragement by UNESCO to formalise a buffer zone for the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site, in addition to the SOC 2026 explanation (Section 2.2), the TG-WH will hold a strategic discussion on how best to communicate the existing high level of protection and the strengthened consideration of OUV to the World Heritage Centre. A follow-up meeting with WHC representatives will be sought.

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

2. Progress on SEA for the Wadden Sea

EXPERT REVIEW OF THE DRAFT SCOPING REPORT

The expert review carried out by the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) is ongoing. An expert meeting with NCEA representatives, members of the expert panel and the SEA Subgroup of TG-WH took place on 21 January to clarify questions.

The final review report and an in-person meeting with NCEA representatives, expert panel members, and members of the SEA Subgroup/TG-WH to present the results and address any questions are planned for late March or early April.

PROCUREMENT PROCESSES FOR THE SEA

The terms of reference for the trilateral joint SEA and the Dutch national components have been published in January. The terms of reference for the German national component are drafted and will be published by CWSS. The Danish terms of reference are under development and are planned to be published in February/March.

JOINT SEA SIDE EVENT AT THE TGC

A side event on the SEA is planned for the upcoming TGC; the format is still under development.

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

3. Proposed Steering Bodies for the SEA

To ensure a transparent, well communicated, and accountable process, the TG-WH proposes establishing an Advisory Council to accompany the development of the Joint SEA. The council could include academic experts, environmental NGOs, stakeholder board representatives, and representatives of the competent authorities responsible for the future implementation of the joint SEA recommendations and should not exceed approximately 15 persons. The Advisory Council would provide advice and would also support communication and stakeholder engagement to foster ownership and implementation of Joint SEA outcomes in future.

The SEA Subgroup will continue to act as the technical steering body and the platform for trilateral coordination throughout the SEA process. TG-WH will stay accountable for the project towards the WSB. CWSS will support and accompany the entire development process. The Wadden Sea Board will be regularly informed and involved in trilateral decision making. The whole TWSC will also be updated regularly and engaged as needed.

Proposal: *The WSB is invited to **support** the proposal and to **task** TG-WH with drafting the terms of reference for the SEA technical subgroup and the SEA Advisory Council for approval at WSB 49.*

4. TG-WH's Chair

Supported by the Dutch Delegation, the Dutch members of the TG-WH have nominated Jeroen Bootsma as the new chair of the group. He is the Focal Point for World Heritage at the Cultural Heritage Agency of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. All TG-WH members expressed unanimous support for his appointment. It would be very much welcomed if he were to continue his chairmanship into the Dutch presidency. Jeroen Bootsma would be pleased to take on this role.

Proposal: *The WSB is invited to **confirm** the appointment of Jeroen Bootsma as chair of the Task Group World Heritage.*