

MEETING DOCUMENT

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Agenda Item: 5.9 International Cooperation

Subject: Yellow Sea Cooperation

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Submitted by: CWSS

Objective

The attached note has the aim:

- To assess whether a further engagement of the TWSC in the Yellow Sea is necessary and beneficial in addition to the already existing cooperation framework of the MoU Korea-Wadden Sea.
- To outline opportunities, challenges and risks of a closer collaboration between the Wadden Sea the Yellow Sea countries (PR China, DPRK North Korea, ROK South Korea).

Recommendation

The note concludes that knowledge exchange will be the main topic of potential collaboration with the Yellow Sea countries. It can provide scientific knowledge for management, strengthen the capacity for communication and education, and can also provide many valuable examples for practitioners which they can apply at their site. A possible collaboration between the globally very important flyways sites (EAF and EAAF) would promote a mutual exchange in improving flyway management and research. This could be done by participating in relevant international exchanges such as the IUCN symposia on trilateral Yellow Sea cooperation and other relevant World Heritage initiatives in China and Korea.

Proposal: It is proposed to instruct CWSS to

1. Seek a cooperation with the East-Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP) that aligns with the needs and wishes of the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative;
2. Support the work of the IUCN Yellow Sea Working Group by participating in the annual meetings functioning as an advisor.
3. Provide an annual report on activities performed in this context, including costs.

Yellow Sea Cooperation

1. Objective

Taking into account the new developments in the Yellow Sea (World Heritage nomination processes in Korea and World Heritage inscription in China), the objective of this note is to assess whether a further engagement of the TWSC in the Yellow Sea is necessary and beneficial in addition to the already existing cooperation framework of the MoU Korea-Wadden Sea. The note also aims to outline opportunities, challenges and risks of a closer collaboration between the Wadden Sea the Yellow Sea countries (PR China, DPRK North Korea, ROK South Korea).

2. Background

The Yellow Sea and Bohai Sea with its large tidal flat ecosystems is a mirror of the Wadden Sea with similar features and functions, most prominently its global importance for the East-Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF). It faces also similar challenges as the Wadden Sea when it comes to impacts from climate change and human development such as shipping, fisheries, tourism and coastal development.

Exchange with the Yellow Sea countries already exists over many years covering exchange of experiences in tidal flat management, monitoring, research and environmental education (e.g. EAAF-Partnership, scientific research on migratory birds).

With the aim to enhance this exchange, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between TWSC and the Korean Ministry of Ocean and Fisheries (MOF) in 2009. Since then, almost 240 experts have participated in the exchange which has involved in total over 2,100 persons at both sites (<http://www.waddensea-secretariat.org/about-us/international-partnerships/cooperation-with-the-republic-of-korea>).

Since 2014, Wadden Sea experts have also provided input to the work of the World Heritage Promotion Team of the Korean Tidal Flats in preparing a dossier for the nomination of the “Getbol - Korean Tidal Flat” which was finally submitted in January 2019 under the criteria viii, ix and x (same criteria as with the Wadden Sea). The field mission by IUCN was conducted October 2019, so that the WH Committee can take a decision on the nomination at its 44th meeting in 2020.

In parallel, China started with the preparation of World Heritage nomination of a number of coastal sites in the Yellow and Bohai Sea in 2017 with a total size of 730,000 ha (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/6189/>) and submitted a nomination dossier in 2018 for two of these sites (188,000 ha) with a suggestion of a second nomination phase of further 14 sites. The two sites were inscribed under criteria (x) by the World Heritage Committee in July 2019 with the request to prepare the nomination of further sites by 2022 (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1606>). The WHC also requested China working with other States Parties in the Flyway in relation to the potential for future transboundary serial nominations, and/or extensions that more fully reflect the habitat needs and patterns of use of migratory birds across the wider Yellow Sea region.

Following the inscription, an international conference was held in Yancheng (28-30 September 2019) to discuss the next steps for the second phase of the nomination. The conference was attended by some 300 people, including about 50 international guests from RSPB, BirdLife, Wetlands International, IUCN and scientists (a keynote speech was given by Theunis Piersma). The conference underlined the importance of international cooperation in the Yellow Sea, including the Korean tidal flat areas, and addressed a number of issues such as the establishment of a centre for wetland and flyway research and potential further serial WH

nominations along the flyway (EAAF). CWSS was invited at very short notice and therefore could not participate.

IUCN is promoting the cooperation between China, North Korea and South Korea to implement the IUCN World Conservation Congress Resolution 26 considering improved transboundary cooperation across the Yellow Sea including a future trilateral World Heritage nomination of the intertidal zone of the Yellow Sea. (https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/resrecfiles/WCC_2016_RES_026_EN.pdf). A Yellow Sea Trilateral Working Group has now been established by and under the chairmanship of the IUCN with representatives from the governments of the three states (PRC, DPRK, ROK) and representatives of NGOs such as the EAAFP. The former CWSS secretary is adviser to the group. It has met two times since its inauguration in December 2017.

Furthermore, international conferences were held in Yancheng (China) in 2016 and 2017 on the initiative of the regional government which initiated the nomination of the first phase of the above World Heritage inscription. The aim was to further the nomination internally in China, to obtain international support for the nomination and position China as the leading actor on this issue in the Yellow Sea context. CWSS was also invited to share the Wadden Sea knowledge and experiences in transnational collaboration but could not participate due to lacking resources, and therefore provided a 5-min video message to the 2017 conference.

A third meeting of the “Working Group on the Conservation of the Yellow Sea/West Sea Intertidal and Associated Coastal Wetlands” will be held from 11 – 13 November 2019 in Shinan, Korea, to which CWSS was invited by Shinan County.

Finally, it should be noted that CWSS was addressed by an official letter from the Korean Ministry (KOEM/MOF) in the framework of the MoU with Korea to support a study visit of a mixed delegation (about 20) from North- and South-Korean managers to the Wadden Sea in May 2020 (dates not yet confirmed). Further details were provided by the Korean organizers of the visit (KOEM, EcoHorizon) at a meeting on 1 July 2019 regarding objectives and indicative time schedule (10 days study visit, including 2-day workshop at CWSS), and finances (the costs for the study visit are fully covered by Korean organizations). In consultation with the states parties, CWSS will take the necessary steps to prepare the field visit (invitation, support programme preparation and overall organization).

3. Assessment

Enormous progress has been made in the last decade to enhance protection of tidal flats and coastal sites in the Yellow Sea. In many cases, TWSC and Wadden Sea World Heritage has been referred to as an example for transnational cooperation and integrated management, inspired the initiatives and also actively contributed to furthering such initiatives ¹:

- South Korea: the number of MPAs has increased from 1 site in 1998 to 28 sites in 2019 covering an area of almost 1,800 km², and extended its monitoring programme (also using experiences from the TMAP).
- North Korea has designated two Ramsar areas in May 2018, as well as more than 40 Marine Resources Protected Areas and 15 Bird Protected Areas, and joint into the EAAFP in April 2018.
- China declared in 2018 to stop large scale land reclamation in the Yellow Sea.
- The EAAF Partnership and the Yellow Sea Large Marine Ecosystem project (YSLME) are the most prominent transnational cooperation platforms in the Yellow Sea.
- The World Heritage nominations of China and South Korea are modelled according to the Wadden Sea example and the need to establish also World Heritage properties in the Yellow Sea context and

¹ To contribute to to international knowledge exchange and support other states parties is also an obligation from the World Heritage Convention, Article 7.

on the EAAF which so far, contrary to the East Atlantic Flyway, did not have any World Heritage properties.

However, the situation in the Yellow Sea is still complex which makes it challenging developing a strategic approach how to cooperate with the countries, and requires a careful analysis of what the potential areas of collaboration are including the advantages, opportunities and potential risks of a future collaboration.

3.1 Advantages:

1. Further development of the International profile of the Wadden Sea as a role model for transnational collaboration on tidal flat management and research.
2. Wadden Sea has benefitted from the international cooperation, for example the World Heritage inscription, which has provided broad support in terms of conservation and management and given it a profile from which all stakeholders have profited.

3.2 Opportunities:

1. Enhanced recognition of the TWSC as being globally leading on tidal area conservation, management and transboundary cooperation from which the TWSC and the Wadden Sea will benefit on all levels, also in terms of access to international resources.
2. With the Yellow Sea and the Wadden Sea as World Heritage site, the protection of other important mudflat areas could be enhanced internationally, also by collaboration within the flyway, as done in the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative and the MoU with the World Heritage Site Banc d'Arguin.
3. Protection and management of the East Atlantic Flyway cannot be seen separated from the status of other flyways, in particular the EAAF because they are part of the same global system. A closer collaboration will enhance the international profile of the Wadden Sea among States Parties, NGOs and site managers and contributes to a higher awareness for the protection of the, often neglected, intertidal mudflat areas.
4. The Wadden Sea will further benefit from international cooperation and profit from the knowledge, information and monitoring experience gained and vice versa, as done in the framework of the MoU with Korea (better understanding of the geophysical, biological and ecological processes governing a tidal areas which is also important in the context of the climate adaptation discussion).

3.3 Challenges and risks:

1. Cooperation should align with the Wadden Sea agenda to maximize the benefits for the cooperation, such as cooperation on the level of the flyways and the technical cooperation on overall tidal flat conservation, management and monitoring by participating in meetings and exchange programmes, not only for the government level but also on the level of NGOs.
2. There are political risks associated with a broader engagement in the Yellow Sea. As outlined above, the situation in the Yellow Sea is politically very complex and there are only few transnational platforms. Different political systems and also the issue of "competition" make it difficult to engage in further political cooperation beyond the already existing ones for the time being.

Therefore, knowledge exchange will be the main topic of potential collaboration with the Yellow Sea countries. It can provide scientific knowledge for management, strengthen the capacity for communication and education, and can also provide many valuable examples for practitioners which they can apply at their site. A possible collaboration between the globally very important flyways sites would promote a mutual exchange in improving flyway management and research. This could be done by participating in relevant international exchanges such as the IUCN symposia on trilateral Yellow Sea cooperation and other relevant World Heritage initiatives.

In summary, recognizing the political obligations and expectations and the benefits associated with collaboration with the cooperation's around the Yellow Sea, the cooperation, participation and engagement

should primarily and at this stage, take place in the context of the EAAFP flyway management and in the support of the IUCN Yellow Sea working group.

In terms of budget obligations for the CWSS, the limited engagement will be part of the regular work plan and amount to 5-10 working days annually. Costs for travelling and stay will normally be covered by the inviting organizations and will hence not substantially impact the CWSS budget.

4. Proposal

It is proposed to instruct CWSS to

1. Seek a cooperation with the EAAFP that aligns with the needs and wishes of the Wadden Sea Flyway Initiative;
2. Support the work of the IUCN Working Group by participating in the annual meetings functioning as an advisor.
3. Provide an annual report on activities performed in this context, including costs.

Extraordinary events and invitations in particular in the context of World Heritage will be dealt with on an individual basis.