



VAN Willemien Roenhorst (WGEA Team Netherlands Court of Audit)
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BETREFT Summary NCA audit report *The Wadden Sea Area: nature protection, nature management and spatial planning*

The Wadden Sea Area: nature protection, nature management and spatial planning

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The full report is available in Dutch and English

1 Conclusions

The recent decentralisation of nature policy and the funds mobilised to improve the ecology and economy of the Wadden area has not yet led to management of the area being streamlined.

Nature and landscape under pressure

On paper, nature in the Wadden area is well protected. But this does not mean that it is actually in good health. Many species of flora and fauna are present in far fewer numbers than they would be if there were no human activity. Nature quality has remained stable since the 1980s. One of the main objectives of central government's policy for the Wadden area (sustainable protection of the nature area) has therefore been achieved. Another objective, however, is the development of the Wadden as a nature area. There has been no development since the 1980s. Preservation of the unique open landscape of the Wadden area, also a central government objective, is under pressure. The installation of wind turbines and the construction of power stations have degraded the open horizon.

Bureaucratic hoops for initiative takers

In comparison with other protected nature areas, a lot of human activity takes place in the Wadden area. Many permits have to be obtained to carry them out. This is an expensive process and the outcome is not always certain. Applicants



have to deal with different permit issuers that work with different assessment criteria.

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Many managers

The absence of nature development in the Wadden area and the hoops initiative takers have to go through are due to one and the same problem: there are no fewer than 13 managing authorities in the area and they do not always work well with each other. As a result, coordination and the exchange of information are poor and the authorities work inefficiently. As there is not a single nature manager for the area, moreover, implementation of the Wadden policy is not monitored and evaluated consistently and to the same degree. The extent to which central government targets are being achieved is therefore uncertain.

Inefficient use of the Wadden Fund

The financial resources available from the Wadden Fund in 2007-2011 were not spent consistently with central government policy for the Wadden area. A range of highly diverse projects were funded. Only a small proportion of the millions of euros that were earmarked for the Wadden area in 2007-2011 actually benefited nature. More targeted use of the funds could have achieved more. It is important that there is clear agreement between the funds provided for the Wadden area on the one hand and the objectives of Wadden policy on the other.

Lack of coordination and steering in Wadden policy

The new administrative organisation introduced by the recent partial decentralisation of nature policy does not clarify which tier of government (central government, provincial or municipal authority) is 'really' responsible for the Wadden area. Problems with the management and monitoring of the area have not yet been resolved. The Minister of Infrastructure and the Environment (I&M) must set more specific and consistent targets to steer and coordinate central government policy for the Wadden area.

2 Recommendations

We recommend that the Minister of I&M and the Minister of Economic Affairs (EZ) 'mark time' and consider what precisely central government's remaining ambitions for the Wadden area are and what central government instruments will be used to achieve them.

The next step is to simplify the organisation of management and accountability. This will entail the improvement of policy monitoring, which is currently fragmented and incomplete. Our report presents four pathways to resolve these problems. What they have in common is that a single party directs nature management. Our solutions range from centralised management by a central government body (for example Rijkswaterstaat or the State Forest Service) to



local management by the provinces. We do not have a preference for one of the four pathways. They can all be implemented without requiring radical changes in the current administrative constellation.

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3 Response of the minister of I&M

The Minister of I&M and the State Secretary for EZ have given priority to improving management in the Wadden area. The minister will present an action plan in early 2014. The minister did not respond to our recommend that she mark time. In our afterword, we therefore repeated our recommendation that central government's ambitions and the policy instruments for the entire Wadden area be included in an overview of central government ambitions before 2015. The minister also noted that several projects had been launched to improve the Wadden area and the initial results were promising. According to the minister, though, the ultimate effect will not be seen until the longer term. In our afterword we ask the minister to coordinate research and monitoring programmes in the Wadden area. The results should then be published so that everyone can see whether the instruments used have really improved nature in the Wadden area.