

Aan het woord...Frank Ahlhorn

Who are you?

My name is Frank Ahlhorn. Since August 2020 I am the Managing Director of the Wadden Sea Forum (WSF), an independent multi-stakeholder forum for the trilateral Wadden Sea region. Various stakeholders are members of the WSF. These range from pleasure boat associations, energy companies, farmers, ports, green NGOs to representatives of different levels of government.

What is the Wadden Sea Forum working on?

The WSF works on trilateral topics and themes. Such as shipping, the energy transition and darkness. Currently, the WSF is organizing a Round Table on Shipping to restart the conversation on shipping and ports and the relationship with the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site. Furthermore, the WSF is also participating in the current discussion and activities around energy transition. Last month we organized an online conference on the activities in the trilateral Wadden Sea region regarding the transition from fossil fuels to cleaner and renewable energy.

It is important to exchange knowledge and information about the risks and opportunities on different topics. In this regard, the WSF offers to act as a neutral and independent discussion platform. Also, the WSF is working together with Program towards a Rich Wadden Sea (PRW) on the importance and strengthening of a dark sky in the trilateral Wadden area.

Can you tell us more about the Dark Sky initiative?

My predecessor started the Dark Sky initiative at the trilateral level in late 2019. We then started with about 5 to 6 interested parties at the first meeting. Now there are more than 20. Together with especially PRW'er Sonja van der Graaf I work on enabling and promoting the cooperation between different already existing activities in the Wadden Sea region.

With whom do you work together in this?

We work together with lay people, administrative organizations and companies along the trilateral Wadden Sea region. On Friday, April 23, 2021, the Dark Sky initiative organized the webinar Experience the darkness. Nearly 100 people participated in this. There were participants from companies from different sectors, such as energy, architecture and ports. In addition, astronomers, entrepreneurs and various other interested parties.

What do the approach and the results mean for the area?

Darkness is a value in itself. In the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site, the dark sky is a unique value, which we want to preserve and strengthen. There are already a number of Dark Sky parks, such as in the Netherlands the Bochspaat on Terschelling and National Park Lauwersmeer. And there are others in the Wadden Sea region on the way to becoming a Dark Sky park such as the islands of Spiekeroog and Pellworm in Germany and Mandø in Denmark.

With our approach we want to join forces and enable the exchange of experience and knowledge in that area. It is important that darkness is also recognized outside these parks. In the long term, moreover, the intention is that darkness, which has already been recognized in the latest Trilateral Declaration of the Trilateral Wadden Sea Cooperation, should become a relevant part of the World Heritage Site. This is already in the making, the EU Interreg project PROWADLink for example is also already concerned with darkness.



How did you get in touch with PRW?

This was through my predecessor. My predecessor came into contact with PRW because PRW was already working on darkness in the Dutch Wadden Sea and wanted to expand this to the trilateral level.

What do you expect from PRW in the near future?

Oh, this question is difficult to answer. For the future I hope for a continuation of our fruitful, inspiring and constructive cooperation. During my introduction to PRW I have already found further interesting approaches to the WSF. For example, the topic of mobility between the mainland and the islands and the questions around sediment management.

How do you see the Wadden Sea region of the future?

Wow, this is a big question. Therefore, I am now focusing first on the role that the WSF will play in this. In my opinion, the WSF is starting to find a way to develop the future picture for the trilateral Wadden Sea region. The idea here is to work towards a "Green Coastal Deal" by establishing Regional Round Tables that discuss local, regional and trilateral issues. Currently, the institutions willing to serve as Regional Roundtables are being identified. At the last plenary meeting in mid-March, an initial extensive discussion took place among WSF members about the working process and the possible outcomes of this process.

What would you like to give to the readers of this newsletter?

Appreciate and experience the beauty of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Site. Especially the dark sky with the stars.