

To the European Commissioner for EU Green Deal

Mr. Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice President
European Green Deal
Rue de la Loi/Wetstraat 200
1049 Bruxelles/Brussel

Belgium

URGENT

Harlingen, October 30, 2020

Re: The Wadden Sea; a jewel in the Green Deal Crown

Dear Mr. Timmermans,

May we briefly draw your attention to the trilateral UNESCO World Heritage Site Wadden Sea as a potential jewel in the Green Deal Crown.

The Netherlands' government is well on track in realizing off-shore windfarms along the Dutch shore including ambitions for multiple windfarms north of Wadden Sea. Cables connecting wind park to the existing infrastructure on shore will inevitably need to cross Worldheritage Site Wadden Sea. This is where the need for clean energy and the need to protect and preserve Europe's largest wetland appear to collide.

We have a deep interest in preventing such a collision and with this in mind we would like to call upon you for support in bringing the EU Green Agenda forward in ways that will help protecting and preserving the integrity of UNESCO World Heritage Wadden Sea.

At present the Wadden Sea is at risk. The latest annual report on the implementation of the Bird- and Habitat Guidelines sent by The Netherlands' government shows a clear and worrying picture. Adequately described by the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality when she informed our national Parliament that *"on average things are not good with nature in The Netherlands."*¹ When looking more closely on the current status of The Wadden Sea several habitats types as well as bird species are no way near their natural status.

Notwithstanding this worrying state of The Wadden Sea the pressure from extractive industries such as salt mining, fossil fuel mining and fishery is increasing. And on top of that growing pressure we identify the need to connect North Sea wind parks to the on-shore infrastructure. We feel that it is time that The Netherlands' government acknowledges that enough is enough. There is only so much external pressure that a vulnerable ecosystem can

¹ Letter by Minister Carola Schouten informing Parliament about implementation of the Bird- and Habitat Directives, December 17, 2019.

https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/brieven_regering/detail?id=2019Z25402&did=2019D52291

handle. Green energy is the way forward in Europe and deserves all the support it can get from Member States as well as the Commission.

This is why we call for your help.

Firstly to help us in clarifying the need for the Dutch government to connect this Wind Park in the least damaging option available. So far the Dutch government has not chosen to do so as there appears to be a lack of resources, innovation or political will to integrate nature protection with the needed wind park connection. There three potential trajectories have been identified which could safely connect Wind Park Wadden Sea to the onshore infrastructure. Local and regional authorities, farming associations as well as nature- and environmental NGO's have a clear preference in this. And their preference ("Eemshaven oost") is quite frankly the best possible alternative for the Wadden Sea ecosystem. Is it the least invasive in this fragile and unique ecosystem and just as safe.

Secondly we understand that more wind parks need to be, and will be, developed on The North Sea to generate renewable electricity for future generations. Hence, we call for wisdom and foresight when planning both the trajectory as well capacity of a cable through The Wadden Sea. It appears common sense to us that should a cable be laid underneath the fragile sea bed this needs to be a 'one time measure' that will be able to transport renewable electricity for this wind park, but also for future wind parks. Hence, it would be silly to discover ten years from now that another new cable needs to be laid through the same vulnerable ecosystem. Perhaps you will be able to forward this suggestion to the Netherlands' government knowing that apparently we have not been able to get our insights on this across due perhaps to a lack of resources, innovation or political will.

Thirdly, we would like to suggest to you that should a connection for the Wind Park be found through The Wadden Sea at least one of the other external pressures on this vulnerable ecosystem should be neutralized or minimized as a matter of urgency by the relevant Minister in the The Netherlands. Fishery and extractive mining of salt and fossil fuels appear to us as the most logical candidates. Especially given the large impact of all three activities on the protected habitats and bird species.

Last but not least you might wonder why we turn to you at this stage. The answer to that is hidden in your own at the Bruegel Annual Meeting earlier this month about the urgent need for implementation of the Green Deal.²At the same time we feel there is a certain lack of responsiveness by the Dutch authorities to our position on this matter.

In dealing with our interest in protecting and preserving the unique Wadden Sea we recognized our very own worries and the challenges ahead of us in your words. Like you we feel the need to resist the temptation to throw money at a carbon economy that will soon peter out. Like you we acknowledge that backsliding into business as usual because it is faster, it is easier, and it is what we know, just isn't an option. And yes , of course it is more

² <https://europeansting.com/2020/09/02/frans-timmermans-on-the-european-green-deal-as-a-growth-strategy-at-the-bruegel-annual-meetings/>

difficult to do something we don't know yet, but it would be wrong and a disservice to next generations if we just did what we knew out of convenience.

To us it seems that the particular issue of a Wind Park in need of a connection and a World Heritage in need of protection have all the characteristics of what may become a pearl in the Green Deal crown. But at this stage, things may just need that little nudge from you.

We hope, and trust, that you will find a way to give just that little nudge in the right direction.

Yours Sincerely,

Lutz Jacobi, director Waddenvereniging

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'L. Jacobi', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Also on behalf of:

It Fryske Gea

Het Groninger Landschap

Natuurmonumenten

Stichting WAD

Stichting Duinbehoud

de Friese Milieu Federatie

Natuur en Milieufederatie Groningen