



**Manifest  
Wadden March 2022  
Netherlands**

*"Balance in the Wadden Sea  
Region"*  
24 - 26 june



PROGRAMMA **NAAR EEN  
RIJKE WADDENZEE**



Ministerie  
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waddenacademie



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**ARCADIA**

# Introduction

A diverse group of 22 young people from all over the country immersed themselves in the Dutch Wadden Sea region for three days, engaging in hundreds of meetings with dozens of organisations, companies and projects. We had conversations with young and old, and with people with a range of perspectives who are involved with the Wadden Sea region in some way. The purpose of these conversations was to contemplate the future of the Wadden Sea: what dilemmas will we face and how do we, as young people, see the Wadden Sea in 2050?

This document is the result of the Wadden Sea March. It was jointly written in less than a day. We aim to provide direction based on the experiences and inspiration we have gained, without having an answer for every detail. One key aspect that came up over and over again is the importance of balance. In particular, balance between people in the region and nature. How can we strengthen each other? How can we achieve a healthy balance in the Wadden Sea region?

The sections that follow will consider the following themes in greater detail:

- Values and basic principles
- Stronger collaboration between stakeholders
- Exchanging knowledge and engagement
- Food supply
- Tourism, residents and the visitor experience
- Positioning the Wadden Sea region

To these topics, which were extensively addressed during the Wadden Sea March, we want to add two themes that are also important, but which we lack sufficient depth/expertise to deal with at this time. These themes are the energy transition and the housing crisis. Both are highly relevant to the Wadden Sea region. We would like to focus on these topics more in the future.



On behalf of all participants in the Wadden Sea March 2022, we hope you enjoy reading this report!

# Values and basic principles

The Wadden Sea region was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009, due to the intact geological processes, the biological and ecological processes and the enormous biodiversity. The Wadden Sea is recognised around the world as a unique natural area. It is a breeding ground for many fish. The area is also of international importance for migratory birds: as a nesting area, or simply as a place to spend the winter. Nature also has a lot to offer the humans who live in this region. The dunes and salt marshes provide coastal protection, filter drinking water and so on. Many people live in the midst of these natural spaces and depend on the area for their income. They work in many sectors, and it is worth noting that many people in the Wadden Sea region work in multiple sectors at the same time. This forms part of the culture of the region. The relative isolation compared to the rest of the Netherlands breeds enormous resilience and self-sufficiency.

## Basic principles

Focus on a long timeframe (50 years or more) and develop adaptive solutions. When it comes to future perspectives, the timeframe is an important first principle. As a precondition for this process, we focused on 2050, which is 28 years in the future. This is a good start, especially compared to political timeframes. But to truly future-proof the region, we need to look at even longer timeframes. In doing so, it's important that the solutions sought are flexible; will we be able to respond to unforeseen developments? This flexibility might relate to the materials used, but the types of policies we develop should also call for adaptability.

Actively look for connections and, above all, involve young people. Connections are the basis for all future-proof developments. Connections between young and old, between different sectors, between different landscapes and between fresh water and salt water. The Wadden Sea region is an extremely diverse area in which connections are self-evident, but can also be significantly improved. Young people have an essential role to play here. In the Wadden Sea region and elsewhere, young people are more committed to the future than anyone – because it's their future! They can ask the right questions to open up a conversation, they're willing to listen, they have a solution-oriented mindset and they're prepared to stand up for their rights.

Focus on developments with local support. The residents of the region are key stakeholders. They need to have a sense of ownership of the area, then you can focus on securing a good future. We saw examples of this among local business owners, who accept that 'the sea gives and it takes away', and at TESO, the Texel ferry service built on a large percentage of Texel shareholders. If you have a connection to the area, there's a higher chance you'll think about its future.

Standing still is going backwards – we have to change! Everything changes, clinging to the past is not an option, and standing still is going backwards. But as we change, we can look both at innovation and at using traditions well. Can we also learn from the past? The strength of the Wadden Sea region is in its dynamism. We argue that the dynamism of the Wadden Sea should be harnessed to restore balance, including between people and nature.

# Stronger collaboration between stakeholders

*united by a desire for a future-proof Wadden Sea region*

To achieve a future-proof Wadden Sea region, good collaboration between stakeholders is crucial. We must not forget that nature is perhaps the most important stakeholder in this region. Our dream for the Wadden Sea region is therefore to achieve a balance between the ecological, economic and social interests of the region and its inhabitants, with the starting point being a common recognition of the interests of the Wadden Sea region. To make this happen, collaboration will be an essential requirement. We would therefore argue that listening to, respecting and learning from each other's stories can be extremely valuable. For example, the needs of a young island resident may be different from those of a conservationist, and the desires of a fisherman may differ somewhat from those of a tourist, but all of these stakeholders are nothing without a future-proof Wadden Sea region. Recognition and acknowledgement of this fact should help to bridge the divide between the office and the nature reserve.

We are aiming to create a sense of joint responsibility where everyone treats the Wadden Sea as if it were their home. It's important to know and accept what you know and what you don't know. If you are aware of the limits of your knowledge, you can seek input from the right people. Conversations with residents and professionals can be valuable to extract this information. Experts may be young or old, with practical or theoretical training, and may come from within or outside of the Wadden Sea region. Using all of this available information should be guaranteed and included in decision-making.

In short, a complex and dynamic area such as the Wadden Sea region requires strong and dynamic collaboration. This will require time and energy, but we believe it will be worth the investment.

To achieve this vision, we are therefore making three recommendations in this manifesto. The first is the need to create a list of the tasks and responsibilities in the Wadden Sea region. Who does what, and who can you turn to if you have questions? This is a dynamic document, which should be constantly updated. We propose that a group of young people be appointed to update the document through asking questions with an open mind.

Secondly, we think that the phenomenon of the Wadden Sea ambassador programme deserves more attention. This is an initiative of the Wadden Sea World Heritage Organisation, under which businesses, representatives of nature and cultural organisations, municipal and provincial authorities, educational institutions and local residents can act as ambassadors for the Wadden Sea region. On 25 June 2022, twenty Wadden Sea ambassadors were honoured, including farm shop Bildts Genot in Sint Annaparochie. During the Wadden Sea March, we were able to visit this farm and talk to the couple who run it. We see this initiative – the Wadden Sea ambassador programme – as a good way of highlighting common values, sharing knowledge and promoting collaboration between different stakeholders ([www.werelderfgoed.visitwadden.nl](http://www.werelderfgoed.visitwadden.nl)).

Thirdly, we want to emphasise the power of experience. We think that politicians and public officials involved in matters relating to the Wadden Sea region should have a Wadden Sea experience at least twice a year. Walking in the mud with bare feet, visiting a farm or riding a bike around an island; all of these experiences can help narrow the gap between the office and the nature reserve. For example, we have noticed that the stories of people who live and work around the Wadden Sea can change our perspective. They help us understand, and allow us to feel. They can break a deadlock and open up possibilities. Talking can build bridges.



# Knowledge exchange and engagement

Our dream is to have a society in the Wadden Sea region in which exchanging knowledge is commonplace. Between locations (throughout the Wadden Sea region), generations (young and old) and sectors (various local businesses). In our vision of the future, young people occupy a key position. At present, many young people feel compelled to leave the Wadden Sea region, due to a lack of education and suitable employment opportunities in the sectors present in the region. We believe that an augmentation of primary and secondary education (including through nature education and local entrepreneurship), the provision of higher education in the region and an exchange of knowledge between the different areas in the Wadden Sea region would make it more attractive for young people to remain. We also think it is crucial to engage and inform older generations with regard to innovations and reforms, because they are currently in a position to lay a sustainable foundation for future generations, including in relation to the energy transition and climate change.

Our knowledge exchange and engagement action plan includes a number of recommendations:

- After primary or secondary education, young people leave the Wadden Sea region because it can offer little to match their educational interests. More teachers are needed to provide education at all levels on the islands. Setting aside housing for teachers would make the prospect of moving to the islands more attractive.
- The curricula in local schools should include field trips to local businesses and other areas in the Wadden Sea region. This would give young people a general idea of developments in the region and the roles they can play in those developments.
- Nature education should be included in the curricula of local schools. Students are being taught inside a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and it's important for them to be conscious of that fact so they feel more engaged in the region.
- There are too few higher education programmes offered on the Wadden Islands. This needs to change to stimulate employment opportunities (in knowledge-intensive sectors). Existing universities and knowledge institutions could respond to this need. It would also promote the sustainability transition.
- Nature education should be offered to anyone who is interested, from any generation. This would ultimately lead to greater engagement in the region.
- Local businesses should be given information and opportunities to operate in a sustainable way, and this knowledge should be shared between businesses at a local and regional level.
- To make connections between generations, the local community (knowledge institutions, schools, local businesses, etc.) should organise an annual event to share their knowledge, visions, dreams and desires.
- Organisers of festivals and similar events on the islands should give consideration to social, economic and landscape-related issues in the Wadden Sea region. This could include selling local food or providing information about the UNESCO World Heritage status of the region (experiencing dark skies / birdwatching).

‘A cranberry here, a sheep here, come on Minister:  
let’s work together to make the Wadden Sea more beautiful than ever!’

# Food supply

Food supply is a key sector in the Wadden Sea region. This includes both agriculture and fishing. By 2050, we see the role that the region will play in the food supply as follows.

There will be collaboration between the three areas into which the Wadden Sea region is divided – mainland, sea and islands – which complement each other: integrated cooperation between arable farming, livestock farming, fishing, pick-your-own gardens and the region's residents. At the moment, there is fragmentation between these three areas, characterised by monocultures, hard boundaries between fields and between the three sub-areas, and intensive and depleting production methods, resulting in a non-future-proof system with poor biodiversity that is maintained through pesticide use, scaling up and production requirements.

To achieve the desired collaboration, the boundaries between the three sub-areas must literally be broken at the economic, ecological and social level. Economically, through cooperative and seasonal collaboration between fishing, agriculture and citizens: fishermen catch fish in the autumn and winter, farmers sow and harvest in spring and summer; food production follows the natural course of the possibilities that nature offers. Adaptation of food production is essential to ensure cost-effective, sustainable production and to achieve a robust, flexible and food-secure food production sector in the Wadden Sea region.

At the ecological level, food production for humans also means food production for all other living creatures in the region. The sea and the tide will be given more room behind the dyke, while the management of the landscape will take account of natural processes: fishing, mowing, design, natural barriers, sowing and harvesting methods, and the application of fertiliser will take into consideration the interests of flowers, insects, birds, mammals, fish and shellfish. Water levels, fishing areas and mowing schemes will no longer be fragmented. Instead, the entire Wadden Sea region will be considered as a whole; as a dynamic and all-encompassing area.

At the social level, a significant change in mindset will be required. The value of the Wadden Sea will be recognised, and result in a shift to eating seasonal food. Farmers, fishermen and residents will be responsible for the potential and preservation of the Wadden Sea, and will be dependent on each other in terms of food production and the ecological resilience of their environment.

# Tourism, residents and the visitor experience

## *the conscious tourist*

By 2050, every tourist will be a conscious tourist. Conscious tourists don't just take something away, they also bring something to the region. For tourists, a visit to the Wadden Sea region will offer relaxation, tranquillity, information, a nature experience and something that fills them with wonder. For residents, tourism will be a source of income; tourists will be major purchasers of local, sustainable products. With their curiosity and enthusiasm, tourists will also give residents a renewed appreciation for the place where they live. In addition, tourists will be conscious of the fact that they are guests in the Wadden Sea region and will have respect for nature and residents.

Our action plan is as follows:

- Tourists will be encouraged to adopt a conscious mindset from the moment they book their trip. A clear story will be displayed on every tourist website (campgrounds / accommodation providers / ferry services / activities). Specifically, it will explain that tourists are guests, and the nature and residents of the Wadden Sea region deserve respect. Through good marketing, they will be given ample opportunities to have the ultimate Wadden Sea experience.
- The boat to the Wadden Islands will serve as a transition point to create peace and tranquillity. It will provide tourists with an opportunity to be open to what the Wadden Sea region has to offer and curious to learn new things. One way this could be done is through mini-exhibitions at the ports or on the boat about life in the Wadden Sea region. These could include residents' stories and information about nature.
- Tourists can cross from the islands to the mainland on fishing boats. This would allow tourists to have contact with people who work in the region.
- Tourists will pick up their rubbish and leave the area clean and tidy. If they see litter, they will feel a responsibility to pick it up. The more people know about the region and the creatures that live there, the more this feeling of collective responsibility will grow.
- Local products will be affordable and accessible for tourists. The proceeds will provide enough income for residents to live on. Being introduced to local products will inspire tourists to be more conscious in their consumption at home as well, and to buy local.
- Campgrounds will work with guides and be familiar with the range of sustainable tours on offer. Enabling residents and tourists to meet will create connections and foster an understanding of the importance of a liveable Wadden Sea region.
- Local young people will act as guides to the island and tell stories about their lives. This will provide an additional experience from a future perspective and will be more appealing to young travellers.
- The islands will all be low-traffic areas, so that tourists will move around more slowly, using a good network of public transport connections and bicycles. This will help tourists slow down and really unwind in nature, and will provoke a sense of wonder for the environment. This will benefit residents, too: no more traffic jams on busy days.
- Conscious tourism can only exist if it is in balance with living in the Wadden Sea region. To achieve this, firm measures will have to be taken to reduce visitor numbers, particularly on the islands, with fewer houses set aside for tourists, and more homes for residents. After all, tourism is dependent on there being enough residents to keep the hospitality businesses, nature organisations, ferry services, entertainment venues and campgrounds running.

# Positioning the Wadden Sea region

Connecting the Wadden Sea countries and reframing the Wadden Sea region as a whole. Blurring the hard boundaries, including beyond the Dutch border. We zoom in and out, and include Denmark and Germany in our aims. We also want to link economic, ecological and social themes and developments, and stop considering them separately.

It is our dream that people from the mainland will rediscover and re-evaluate the relationship and connection with the Wadden Islands and the Wadden Sea region. Harnessing and promoting infrastructure, local movements and strength, both in terms of what is there now and in terms of future potential. Reorganising economic sectors such as fishing and agriculture to accommodate experiential tourism, thus promoting the dynamism of the region.

The interactions between all of the functions and 'residents' of the Wadden Sea region are what set it apart. Many contrasts and functions unite to form a larger whole. We have written a poem to describe it:

Thinking about the mudflats,  
I see a body of water breathing above wide sheets of silt,  
relentless yet friendly and calm,  
and in the magnificent space sunken islands,  
scattered across the horizon, clusters of dunes, dykes,  
and wide salt marshes, churches and ancient mounds,  
in a home for everyone,  
the air smells salty in the light reflected from the mudflats,  
where the horizon fades into the sky, where water comes and goes,  
and throughout my consciousness the voice of the mudflats in their timeless beauty,  
heard and embraced.  
*Wannes Lely*

In the past, the dance with the sea was familiar. The struggle with the water, which comes back time and again, has been a part of our daily lives and is still present today. Because of climate change, this theme will continue to be important and present in the years ahead. The end of this dance, and the creation of hard lines across the landscape, between land and sea, has brought us many benefits: safety, a food supply and space to live. Today, for example, you can still see churches standing on the artificial mounds built long ago. Can we use these features and strengths to build the future, without compromising the identity of the region?

We have described a future where hard boundaries become blurred, but what do we mean by that? The hard boundaries between land and sea, geology and provinces, but also the hard boundaries between occupations, will be different from what we've known. Mechanisms to protect people from the relentless rising of the tide could be redesigned, but traditional occupations might also begin to look different in the near future. Tourist destinations throughout the Wadden Sea region are logistically linked and intertwined, and to experience the mudflats you no longer have to start by crossing the sea.

We have a number of recommendations that are in line with the vision described above and that aim to reposition the Wadden Sea region. The recommendations focus on the ecological, economic and social development of the Wadden Sea region.

Ecology:



- Building with nature: The hard dykes on the mainland will be transitioned into the dykes of the future.
- Space for the mudflats: Space for freshwater and saltwater reservoirs.
- Make ecological systems more robust and therefore more resilient, consider fish migration.

#### Economy:

- Experiential tourism: Farmers are the managers of the land.
- Local food and information: Sharing knowledge, making connections, eating local food.
- Promoting a circular economy.
- Logistical systems should go back to being more focused on local needs.

#### Society:

- Inclusive participation by the residents of the Wadden Sea region.
- Strong social cohesion through a shared language and values.
- The government should play a facilitating role by ensuring residents participate in consultation.
- Pride in the region converted into gratitude and ACTION.

In particular, we would like to see citizens' initiatives being encouraged and receiving support, especially financial support. This applies to current residents, but also to new entrepreneurs and residents who want to move to the repositioned Wadden Sea region. New zoning plans should consider what is really needed in the future and what will benefit people, occupations and nature.

## Closing words

Finally, we'd like to share our inspiration in another form. The image below shows the most commonly-used terms in the manifesto (in Dutch). It shows where the main focus lies, in terms of the themes relating to the Wadden Sea region (the balance between tourists and residents, young and old) and the importance of connections, engagement and collaboration in spite of sizeable differences.



We will take all of the inspiration we gained from the Wadden Sea March as we head into the future, and we look forward to staying involved with all of the developments in the region. Above all, let's make sure we stay in touch. Young people are the future!