

Title:	Current developments in marine conservation
Subtitle:	Welcome address
Speaker:	State Secretary Jochen Flasbarth
Subject:	4th International Conference: Progress in Marine Conservation in Europe 2015
Venue:	Stralsund; Ozeaneum

Welcome to VIPs:

- Director of the Ozeaneum, Dr Harald Benke
- President of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation, Professor Beate Jessel

Speech:

I am delighted to be here today and welcome so many marine conservationists from Germany and abroad to the 4th International Conference: Progress in Marine Conservation in Europe 2015 here in Stralsund. The oceanographic museum with its many exhibits showcasing marine life is the ideal setting for your discussions on a wide range of topics related to marine biodiversity in Europe. I would like to thank the Director of the museum, Dr Harald Benke, for hosting us once again this year.

It is always a special treat to visit Stralsund with its world cultural heritage, to experience the cultural heritage of the Hanse first hand, and to explore one of the nature conservation areas nearby, such as Jasmund National Park. I hope that your discussions will leave enough time for you to enjoy the cultural and natural gems of this region.

In 2006 the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation organised the first "Marine Nature Conservation in Europe" conference. I remember this meeting very well, as I had the pleasure of welcoming the participants in my then role as Director-General for nature conservation. Marine conservation is playing a much more prominent role today than it did at the time, and it has become firmly established on the political agenda. It is now on more of an equal footing with terrestrial nature conservation in terms of the political attention it receives. The fact that the Federal Environment Ministry has just established a division specifically dedicated to marine conservation and that the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation will soon have a Directorate-

General on marine conservation echoes this development. In my opinion, the "Marine Nature Conservation in Europe" conferences have played a key role in enhancing the visibility of marine conservation and awareness of its importance.

It is good that these events have become a regular item in our calendars, this being the fourth time we are meeting in Stralsund at the invitation of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation.

Whilst this is all very encouraging, there is no reason for us to sit back and relax. The latest report of the European Environment Agency (EEA) on the state of nature in the EU has shown that only a small number of marine species enjoy a good conservation status or good environmental status. Biological diversity of marine and coastal waters is declining, jeopardising vital ecosystem services. The reasons given in the report include overfishing, damage to the seabed, pollution caused by nutrients and harmful substances (and also by marine litter and underwater noise), invasive alien species and acidification.

This shows us that there is a strong need for action if we want to conserve marine biodiversity in the long term. This is why, for instance, we want to swiftly adopt regulations for fishing in Germany's Natura 2000 sites in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the North and Baltic Sea. In this context, it is particularly important for us to lay down restrictions on the use of bottom trawl nets and set gillnets in these protected areas and ensure effective enforcement. The Federal Environment Ministry and the Federal Agriculture Ministry have established a joint steering group to address this and agreed on an ambitious schedule.

The good news is that we are not starting from scratch: We have already reached an agreement with our colleagues from the agriculture ministry on the rules to be applied in the North Sea. The next steps will be formulating a joint declaration as a basis for consultations with neighbouring countries and the Commission and developing provisions for the protected areas in the Baltic Sea.

To effectively prevent by-catch of harbour porpoises and sea birds, set gillnets will be completely banned in certain areas whilst in other areas their use will be frozen at the current - very low - level. We also plan to set up cameras to monitor catches.

To protect reefs and sandbanks from damage caused by bottom trawls, fishers will not be allowed to use harmful fishing gear in vulnerable areas.

However, we have not yet reached a final agreement with the Federal Agriculture Ministry on the monitoring and control measures to be applied. We know that even a single incident of illegal bottom trawling has the potential to destroy years of protection efforts. This is why strict monitoring is so important.

Once we have agreed on a common approach at national level, we need to coordinate our proposal with our neighbours in the EU, whose fishing interests might be affected. This is a requirement under EU law. We expect strong resistance from our neighbouring countries, mainly for economic reasons. However, we will do everything we can to ensure that sound rules are adopted to enhance nature conservation.

In the Baltic Sea, harbour porpoises are the most endangered species, and fishing with set gillnets is still widely practiced. This makes it particularly difficult to find a solution that serves the interests of both nature and fishers. Aside from "classic" protective measures, I believe developing and promoting alternative, nature-friendly fishing techniques could be a very important approach and would also be helpful in achieving MSC certification for herring fisheries, which the fishing sector is striving to obtain. We want to cooperate very closely with the fishing community to make use of their practical experience.

We will also work on a noise protection scheme for the Baltic Sea over the coming months in order to protect harbour porpoises from excessive noise emissions from the construction of wind farms. In the North Sea, this kind of noise protection scheme has proven very effective.

In addition to this the BMUB is pressing ahead with the adoption of ordinances for the Natura 2000 sites in the EEZ that were reported as early as 2004. In early February this year we started the coordination process on the respective draft ordinances within the German Government. During this process, it was established that an amendment to the Federal Nature Conservation Act would be required to extend our authorisation to issue ordinances to be able to go beyond the immediate implementation of EU law. Implementing the provisions of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive MSFD alone will require us to protect additional assets and take more protective measures. So as to avoid delaying the adoption of the ordinances on protected areas in the EEZ for months, we decided to start by issuing those ordinances for which we are authorised under the currently applicable legal provisions. Our goal is to adopt the ordinances by the end of 2015. This is also necessary to avert the infringement procedure launched by the EU Commission for

the areas falling under the Federation's jurisdiction. As a next step, we will implement the requirements laid down in these ordinances by developing management plans for each area.

To meet our international obligations, especially those under the regional marine protection conventions for the North and Baltic Seas (OSPAR and HELCOM), and to make our contribution to the establishment of a coherent and representative network of marine protected areas as called for in the MSFD, we want to use the further MSFD implementation process to go beyond the assets protected under the Natura 2000 Directives and establish a protection regime comparable to that of the Habitats Directive for additional endangered species.

We are currently preparing the programme of measures under the MSFD to achieve a good environmental status in the German parts of the North and Baltic Seas by 2020, as the Commission must be notified soon. Many of you are probably doing the same and are well aware that the negotiations with the various stakeholders are not always easy. Broad public participation and intensive dialogues, as provided for in the MSFD, are very helpful and important to ensure that we end up with a programme of measures that is acceptable for all and can be put into practice. Having said this, it is also clear that the discussion partners, especially on the user side, will have to make significant concessions, and I hope they will use their good judgement.

Naturally we will be continuing our international activities!

Despite their vital role our seas still remain the least protected areas on Earth. As I am sure you all remember, in 2002 the sustainability summit in Johannesburg adopted the goal of establishing a global network of marine protected areas, including on the high seas, by 2012. This goal was included in the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, which provides for the designation of protected areas on at least ten percent of the world's marine area by 2020. We should do everything we can to make sure we at least come close to reaching this goal. Right now, we still have a very long way to go.

This is why we are supporting partner countries in achieving this goal through our International Climate Initiative (ICI). Over the past years including 2014, the BMUB funded 27 projects for the protection and sustainable use of ecosystems in coastal and marine areas with a total of over 100 million euros. Another eight projects with a volume of 30 million euros are currently undergoing the review and approval process.

We will also continue to actively advance the identification and description of ecologically or biologically significant marine areas under the Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD. We should all be proud of this successful process which is receiving widespread international attention. So far, more than 200 such ecologically and biologically significant areas have been recognised and included in the CBD Depository. This means that for 70% of the oceans we have identified those areas where protection is desirable. I hope that we will be able to add more areas at the next meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD in Mexico in December 2016. After all, there is a strong interest, regionally and internationally, to identify EBSAs in other marine regions. The CBD has already planned further workshops.

As you probably already know, the EBSA database will be made available to the UN General Assembly, UN organisations and regional organisations.

We consider this the right step, as we expect this sharing to give positive impetus to the establishment of an implementing agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). While the 1982 Convention does include some general provisions on the protection of the marine environment, there are still considerable gaps in its implementation. For example, it is not possible to designate marine protected areas on the high seas that are accepted by all countries. To close this implementation gap, Germany and the EU have been pushing, for many years, for negotiations on a binding implementing agreement to ensure the protection and sustainable use of biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction.

A breakthrough was finally achieved this year: The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has adopted a resolution on the development of a legally-binding instrument under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction. A preparatory committee will draft elements of the text and report to the General Assembly on its progress by the end of 2017. By August 2018 the UNGA will decide whether and when to convene an intergovernmental conference to negotiate the agreement. We see this as this an important step forward for global marine conservation.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is another key milestone for marine conservation worldwide. With this global agenda, we now, for the first time, have a roadmap for the development of all countries that encompasses environmental protection, social well-being and economic development in an overarching,

comprehensive approach, generating the necessary pressure for a change of course towards sustainable development worldwide.

The catalogue of 17 sustainable development goals and 169 specific targets has been approved. In our opinion, it is an excellent set of goals, in particular for marine conservation. These goals include reducing marine litter by 2025; ensuring the protection of marine ecosystems by 2020; minimising marine acidification, stopping overfishing by 2020 and expanding marine protected areas. If we succeed in putting these goals into practice, this will be a huge achievement for marine conservation.

If I may, I would like to briefly talk about our regional cooperation mechanisms for the protection of the Northeast Atlantic and the Baltic Sea, OSPAR and HELCOM. Some may think that the regional scope of these two organisations is too narrow to be truly effective in our increasingly globalised world. I am convinced, however, that they continue to be *the* focal points for marine conservation in Europe, despite or maybe precisely because of the fact that we now have a European Marine Strategy Framework Directive. Their work is followed with great interest internationally. Thanks to these conventions, the implementation of the MSFD does not have to start from scratch, but can draw on decades of experience in marine conservation. These regional instruments also provide platforms for the coherent implementation of the directive by countries in the same marine region. It is only by making use of the conventions that we can effectively comply with the directive and achieve the good environmental status of the marine environment by 2020, as called for in the MSFD.

These regional cooperation mechanisms are increasingly becoming key pillars of our work. To give you just one example: OSPAR's commitment has been instrumental in the designation of 10 marine protected areas to date which form the world's first network of marine protected areas on the high seas, beyond national jurisdiction.

The work of OSPAR for the designation of a protected area in the Arctic is still in its early stages, but is currently receiving a lot of attention from the media. Germany is campaigning for further progress in the designation of this protected area next year. Let us wish those colleagues involved in this important process - and some of them are in the audience today - every success in the negotiations!

Another focus of ours is addressing the drastic increase of marine litter, in particular plastic waste. The situation is deteriorating and the public has become aware of the problem as well, though I am certain the full scale of this problem has not yet been understood. I am thinking in particular of the threat posed to our marine ecosystems

by microplastics and larger plastic waste, e.g. from packaging or fishing nets. You will certainly remember that this was even a priority item on the agenda of the G7 meeting in Germany this June.

To combat the current trend, we need more research projects to enhance our data basis, but above all we need the willingness of all - governments and civil society - to exchange views, to learn from each other, share best practices and to identify and take effective action. I am therefore very pleased that OSPAR adopted a Regional Action Plan on marine litter in June 2014 that includes a range of regionally coordinated and voluntary national measures to combat marine litter (both from land- and sea-based sources) and is now in the implementation phase. The Baltic Sea cooperation is making equally good progress. HELCOM agreed on a Regional Action Plan on marine litter in June 2015. Germany is determined to continue its active support of these two regional processes.

The Baltic Sea with its particularly sensitive ecosystem is also suffering from very high concentrations of nutrients and organic material from the atmosphere, rivers and point sources. I strongly support HELCOM's continuous efforts for improving water quality.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

as you can see, the list of topics under the heading of marine conservation is almost endless, the issue is being discussed in many national, regional and international fora and the need for action is great. Please use this week here in Stralsund for open and bold discussions on the marine conservation challenges we are facing and give the political players the information and recommendations we need to take the right decisions for the sake of marine biodiversity.