

MEETING DOCUMENT

Wadden Sea Board (WSB 29)

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Agenda Item: 5.9 International Cooperation

Subject: Cooperation with Yellow Sea countries

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Submitted by: CWSS

The attached document concerns the cooperation between the Wadden Sea World Heritage and the Yellow Sea region, focussing on current developments concerning World Heritage nominations in China and Korea.

Proposal: The meeting is invited to offer guidance as to possible options for future cooperation with China and Korea

International Cooperation Yellow Sea

Background

Exchange with the Yellow Sea countries already exists over many years as the Wadden Sea and the Yellow Sea both have tidal flat ecosystems of global importance which are migratory bird flyways: the East Atlantic Flyway (EAF) and the East-Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF).

With the aim to enhance this exchange, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the TWSC and the Korean Ministry of Ocean and Fisheries (MOF) in 2009. Since then, almost 240 experts have participated in the exchange, which has involved in total over 2,100 persons at both sites.

World Heritage nomination of Yellow Sea tidal flats

Since 2014, Wadden Sea experts have also provided input to the work of the World Heritage Promotion Team of the Korean Tidal Flats in preparing a dossier for the nomination of the “Getbol - Korean Tidal Flat” which was finally submitted in January 2019. The field mission by IUCN is scheduled for end of May 2019, so that the WH Committee will take a decision on the nomination at its 44th meeting in 2020.

CWSS was approached by the Korean Ministry (KOEM/MOF) in the framework of the MoU to support a study visit of a North Korean delegation in the Wadden Sea in July/August 2019. Further details will be provided soon. The study visit will also support the Yellow Sea initiative of IUCN.

IUCN is currently promoting the cooperation between China, North Korea and South Korea to implement the IUCN World Conservation Congress Resolution 26 considering a future trilateral World Heritage nomination of the intertidal zone of the Yellow Sea. The organization conducted an international symposium in December 2017 to which CWSS was also invited in order to share knowledge and experience in transnational collaboration.

Meanwhile, China has started preparing a World Heritage nomination of 16 coastal sites in the Yellow and Bohai Sea in 2017 with a total size of 730,000 ha and subsequently submitted a nomination dossier in 2018 for two of 16 serial sites (188,000 ha), suggesting a second nomination phase for the other sites. IUCN compared the nominated property with the Wadden Sea because both sites are critically important especially as integral parts of major bird migration flyways. The IUCN assessment of the nomination dossier concluded that the criterion of integrity was not sufficiently covered and suggested to the 43rd Meeting of the World Heritage Committee (30 June – 10 July 2019) to defer the nomination. IUCN also strongly recommended enhancing collaboration in the EAAF in view of the potential for future transboundary serial nominations, and/or extensions that more fully reflect the habitat needs and patterns of use of migratory birds across the wider Yellow Sea region.

NGOs around the world have noted the deferral with concern, stating that the delay in renominating the site was not be in the interest of the conservation of the Yellow Sea-Bohai Gulf, and especially the migratory birds depending on these areas. In a letter to the responsible Chinese authorities 46 signatories, mostly from worldwide NGOs, asserted that the points raised by IUCN could still be addressed in such that the case for nomination could still be made to this year’s World Heritage Committee meeting in Baku, Azerbaijan. On May 23, 2019, the signatories requested that CWSS join them in signing the draft letter, noting that an immediate signature was required. For a number of reasons the Secretariat was not in a position follow that request.

The WSFI Steering Group will be informed and discuss the Yellow Sea WH nomination especially in view of the EAAF and in order to establish its position at its next meeting on October 2, 2019.

Future cooperation

The possible designation of intertidal ecosystems in the Yellow Sea as World Heritage sites similar to the Wadden Sea requires a strategic decision as to whether, to what extent and in what way a future cooperation between the Yellow Sea countries and the Wadden Sea should be developed. In this context, it should be borne in mind that UNESCO encourages the cooperation between World Heritage sites, respectively the granting of support in the context of the designation of future relevant sites. Given the limited capacity of CWSS, the Wadden Sea Parties have, however, on previous occasions pointed out the danger of overstretch, referring also to the need to engage in cooperation that is mutually beneficial and therefore provides added value not only to the partner site but also to the Wadden Sea World Heritage.

Proposal

To discuss whether and, if so, how the TWSC could support the protection of tidal flat ecosystems in the Yellow Sea.