



A PSSA – what does it mean?

A Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) is an area that needs special protection through action by the IMO because of its significance for recognized ecological or socio-economic or scientific reasons. It must also be vulnerable to impacts from international shipping activities.

Guidelines on designating a "Particularly Sensitive Sea Area" (PSSA) are contained in IMO resolution A.927(22) Guidelines for the Designation of Special Areas under MARPOL73/78 and Guidelines for the Identification and Designation of Particularly Sensitive Sea Areas. They include further requirements, which have to be met by the area concerned:

- The fulfillment of at least one of the following criteria:
 - ecological, such as unique or rare ecosystem, diversity of the ecosystem, or vulnerability to degradation by natural events or human activities;
 - social, cultural and economic criteria, such as significance of the area for recreation or tourism; and,
 - scientific and educational criteria, such as biological research or historical value.
- Assessment of the risk to international shipping.
- A proposal of associated protective measures, such as routing measures, the installation of Vessel Traffic Services (VTS) or other measures within the purview of IMO. If no such measures are proposed, then the application should show how the area is already being protected by such measures, which is the case for the Wadden Sea.

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Why Wadden Sea as a PSSA?

A PSSA is an area that needs special protection through action by the IMO based on two aspects. The first is the area's significance for key ecological, socio-economic or scientific reasons. Secondly, the area should be at risk from international shipping activities. The Wadden Sea is considered to be an exceptional, highly dynamic tidal ecosystem of global importance, which is vulnerable to the impact of human activities and especially international shipping. The adjacent North Sea is one of the world's busiest international shipping areas.

The PSSA designation is a recognition of the Wadden Sea as a unique natural area and presents the latest measure taken by the Wadden Sea states to protect the area. The Wadden Sea PSSA will be indicated on the relevant nautical charts. The designation will send a strong signal to the international shipping community and increase awareness of the particular sensitivity of the area to impacts from shipping. It will thus assist the bordering countries in further protecting and using the area in a sustainable way.



The Wadden Sea – A unique natural area

The Wadden Sea is an exceptional, highly dynamic tidal ecosystem of global importance, the responsibility for which is shared by the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark. The Wadden Sea ecosystem consists of dunes, beaches, estuaries, bays, salt marshes, sands and tidal flats, tidal channels and barrier islands that separate it from the offshore area. The importance of the Wadden Sea as habitat for birds, seals, shellfish and fish species stems from its high productivity.

The Wadden Sea represents a system interconnected with the adjacent North Sea that is unique in ecological, socio-economic, scientific and cultural characteristics. The North Sea, up to the 20 metre isobath (depth contour) and the Wadden Sea itself, form one system. Sediments are transported back and forth between the Wadden Sea and this North Sea transition zone in a virtually closed system. This integrity of the Wadden Sea makes it vulnerable to the impact of international maritime and other activities.



Shipping in the North Sea

Directly adjacent to the Wadden Sea, there are several major ports of international significance, which have considerable economic relevance for the entire region. Besides these, a number of smaller ports with ferry and supply traffic in the Wadden Sea, are relevant to tourism, the supply of islands and maritime installations. The economic importance of the seaports is demonstrated by a high shipping volume. Access to the ports in connection with transit traffic to Scandinavia or the Baltic Sea has resulted in the sea area off the Netherlands, Danish and German coast being one of the regions with the highest traffic concentrations in the world. Furthermore, this region is characterized by changing, sometimes adverse weather systems such as strong winds, heavy seas and restricted visibility. Despite the considerable progress made in the improvement of shipping safety and the environmental protection measures intended to minimize maritime pollution, shipping will continue to be a potential source of risk for damaging the Wadden Sea and its adjacent coastline.

Protective Measures around the PSSA Wadden Sea

The Wadden Sea and the adjacent North Sea are already subject to an extensive regime of protective measures, consisting of both international, EU and national regulations aimed at reducing the impacts from and risks related to shipping. Relevant international measures include the North Sea as a Special Area according to the International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships, 1973/78 (MARPOL, Annexes I and V), designated to protect against the discharge of oil and garbage; routing systems that make certain shipping routes compulsory for ships carrying hazardous goods; and compulsory reporting for ships.

The designation of the PSSA Wadden Sea is seen as a recognition of the extensive regime of protective measures already in place, via national, EU and IMO measures. This meant that it was not necessary to propose additional associated protective IMO measures linked to the PSSA designation at the present time.

The Wadden Sea (PSSA)

A Particularly Sensitive Sea Area



