

H. E. Ms Monique Van Daalen
Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary
Permanent Delegate of the Kingdom of
the Netherlands to UNESCO
7 rue Eblé
75007 Paris

10 August 2023

Culture Sector
World Heritage Centre

Ref: CLT/WHC/EUR/23/14436

Dear Ambassador,

I am pleased to transmit hereby the IUCN Technical Review of the additional Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) documentation for the proposed Ternaard in relation to the transboundary World Heritage property '**Wadden Sea**', received from your authorities on 21 July 2022.

IUCN has concluded that the EIA documentation cannot be considered to fully assess the potential impact of the proposed Ternaard gas extraction project on the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV).

From the information received, it would appear that the project would have direct negative impacts on the OUV under criteria (viii) and (ix), as the planned additional subsidence would require artificial sand supplementation, and would therefore not comply with the 'No-go' policy for extractive industries to cause no damage to World Heritage properties. Moreover, it would be essential to understand the potential cumulative impacts of the many existing projects located within the property and its wider setting. This should be carried out through a Strategic Environmental Assessment, to determine the appropriateness of future projects which may have potential negative impacts on the property, including by adding to cumulative impacts on the OUV of the property.

I would be grateful if you could share the enclosed IUCN Technical Review (see **Annex**) with your relevant authorities for their consideration and keep the World Heritage Centre informed of the follow-up provided to it. As is customary, UNESCO and IUCN remain at their disposal for any further clarification or assistance they may require.

Although, at this stage, the World Heritage Centre would not be in a position to take into account your responses in the state of conservation report that will be brought to the attention of the World Heritage Committee at its upcoming 45th session (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 10 to 25 September 2023), I would like to encourage your competent authorities to continue to share relevant and up-to-date information with the World Heritage Centre in a timely manner.

I thank you for your continuous collaboration and support in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention and remain,

Yours sincerely,



Lazare Eloundou Assomo
Director

cc: Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Denmark to UNESCO
Permanent Delegation of Germany to UNESCO
The Danish National Commission for UNESCO
German Commission for UNESCO
Netherlands National Commission for UNESCO
National Focal Points for the implementation of the Convention
IUCN

IUCN Technical Review of the additional information received regarding the additional EIA documentation of the Ternaad project in vicinity of the transboundary World Heritage property 'Wadden Sea', received by the World Heritage Centre on 28 July 2023.

IUCN Technical Review of the EIA documentation for the Ternaad gas extraction project

July 2023

IUCN appreciates the submission by the State Party of the Netherlands on 21 July 2022 of additional documentation from the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of the proposed Ternaad gas extraction project.

Overall, the information provided in the submitted documents indicates that although further clarification is provided on a number of issues previously communicated to the State Party regarding the impact assessment, the EIA documentation cannot be considered to fully assess the potential impact of the project on the property's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). Moreover, from the information received, the project would appear to have direct negative impacts on the OUV, with the projected additional subsidence requiring artificial sand supplementation, and would therefore appear to not be in line with the 'No-go' policy for extractive industries to cause no damage to World Heritage sites. Further detail is presented below:

i. Consideration of OUV

In IUCN's technical review submitted to the States Parties on 30 March 2022, it was stated that although the four-page memorandum submitted by the State Party of the Netherlands concluded that there would be no impacts on the OUV of the property, it was unclear from the brief document on what scientific data and basis this conclusion was reached. The additional documentation contains further information and results from the assessment on the potential impacts of the proposed project on certain attributes of the property's OUV, as they are expressed in the Dutch component. This includes information on the impact or observable effects on sediment composition and the area of channels, tidal flats or salt marshes and on the types of habitat, the EU Habitats Directive species and the species of breeding and non-breeding birds. However, there is no explicit or comprehensive assessment of the potential impacts on the property as a highly dynamic uninterrupted geomorphological system containing large-scale intertidal ecosystems that are undisturbed, nor is there specific consideration of its protection and management. Furthermore, IUCN considered in its previous review that the assessment of potential impacts on the OUV should go beyond a somewhat simplistic geomorphological conclusion of ensuring a balance of overall water levels and that the site is not submerged, to also include an analysis of the potential ecological implications of extraction on the dynamics of the wider and interconnected aquatic ecosystem. It appears, from the documentation submitted, that the conclusion that there are no impacts to be expected on the ecology of the property is made largely on the basis of maintaining the area of tidal flats, rather than the impacts of the project on the natural state of the coastal depositional processes under which the property is inscribed under criterion (viii) and the undisturbed ecological processes through which the property is inscribed under criterion (ix). It therefore remains the case that the OUV of

the property as a whole cannot be considered to have been fully accounted for in the assessment.

ii. *Natural sedimentary processes and sand supplementation*

IUCN's previous technical review also called for a more elaborate analysis of the impact of sand supplementation on criterion (ix). Although the submitted documentation addresses sand supplementation, including potential impacts from nitrogen deposition, there is no explicit consideration of whether supplementation is appropriate in terms of the conservation of the property's OUV. The documents outline that the extent of deep subsurface subsidence that would be expected to result from the planned gas extraction of the project would lead to additional sedimentation of sand and silt in the property and require additional artificial sand replenishment in order to prevent a decline in the coastal foundation. Recalling that during the evaluation of the nomination of this property it was understood that subsidence of tidal flats from existing gas extraction was fully compensated by natural sedimentation, it is concerning that this project would cause an increased level of subsidence of the deep subsurface that would result in further disturbance to the natural processes under which the property is inscribed. Consequently, the proposed project appears to present direct negative impacts on the attributes of OUV and therefore appears not to be appropriate.

iii. *The hand on tap monitoring mechanism*

The 'hand on tap' (HotT) monitoring system is outlined in the submitted documents as the key mechanism through which impacts of subsidence on the OUV of the property resulting from the proposed project will be avoided. IUCN acknowledges that the mechanism entails that gas extraction will be limited or halted before the defined limit (the 'compensatory accumulation capacity') of the Wadden Sea is in danger of being exceeded, and that it was deemed appropriate at the time of inscription in relation to the existing gas extraction projects from underneath the property. However, IUCN stresses again that, in line with a precautionary approach, it is essential to determine whether this methodology should be reviewed, given the need to understand the effects of climate change on the property and long term uncertainties in sea level rise and the rate of natural sediment accretion, recalling the concern expressed in IUCN's previous review, around its application in other extractive industries, salt mining in particular, that have the potential to cause further seabed subsidence.

In addition to the above comments on the documentation submitted from the EIA of the proposed project, IUCN considers that it is essential to understand the potential cumulative impacts from the numerous existing projects located within the property and its wider setting. This should be carried out through a Strategic Environmental Assessment, in order to determine the appropriateness of future projects, such as the proposed Ternaard gas extraction project amongst other proposed extractive and infrastructure projects, which may have potential negative impacts on the property, including by contributing to any cumulative impacts on the OUV of the property.