

North Sea Ministers Conference and Oiled Seabirds: from a Nature Policy point of view

Wim Lammers,

*Directorate Nature, Environment and Fauna,
Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries,
postbus 20401, 2500 EK 's-Gravenhage, the Netherlands*

In Washington in 1926, at the invitation of the United States of America, an international conference was held to discuss the oil problem. A few months before the meeting, large numbers of oiled seabirds washed ashore on the Netherlands coast. To many people's surprise, oiled seabirds were not even mentioned in the final declaration of the conference. In 1990, nearly 65 years after the Washington conference, recommendations for future policy are included in the final declaration of the 3rd North Sea Ministers' Conference in The Hague. Apparently, the oil problem is still there. From a recent analysis of data collected in the Netherlands it was demonstrated that the proportion of oiled birds has not changed during the last 15 years. Without minimizing the effort to improve this situation through shipping regulations and offshore planning, it must be concluded that seabird mortality due to oil pollution remains an unsolved problem. With all respect for the enthusiasm and energy of people working in rehabilitation centres and their efforts to clean oiled seabirds, this 'end-of-pipe' measure is just a demonstration of how it should not be done. When we put today's practise to the test of the 'precautionary principle' and of the principle that the 'polluter should pay', it appears that we have a lot to do for the next North Sea Ministers' Conference. Nature policy, working from the 'ecosystem approach', is not aiming at the reduction of numbers of oiled seabirds in the first place. More important is, that these casualties are used as indicators of the effectiveness of measures against illegal oil spills in the marine environment. Besides the obligation to follow lessons in 'nature and environment' in training programmes for the offshore and shipping sectors, the best measure will be to increase the financial risk for an illegal spill at sea.

Samenvatting 'De Noordzee Ministers Conferentie en olieslachtoffers: vanuit het natuurbeleid gezien'

In 1926 werd in Washington een internationale conferentie gehouden over het olievraagstuk, maar pas in 1990 werden in de slotverklaring van de derde Noordzee ministersconferentie enkele aanbevelingen geformuleerd over olieslachtoffers onder vogels. Uit recent onderzoek blijkt dat het oliebesmeuringspercentage van de in Nederland aangespoelde vogels de afgelopen 15 jaar onveranderd is gebleven. Het tot dusver gevoerde beleid is voor de oplossing van dit probleem ineffectief geweest. Wanneer we de huidige praktijk toetsen aan het voorzorgprincipe en het uitgangspunt dat de vervuiler betaalt, lijkt er nog veel te regelen voor de volgende

Noordzee ministersconferentie. Vanuit de ecosysteembenadering in het natuurbeleid gaat het niet zozeer om het verminderen van het aantal olieslachtoffers, maar meer om deze vogels te gebruiken als meetsysteem van de effectiviteit van maatregelen tegen illegale lozingen. Naast educatie zijn zware financiële maatregelen de beste methode om olieozingen terug te dringen. ■