MEETING DOCUMENT

**Ad hoc Working Group Swimway (WG-Swimway 21-1)**

03 February 2021

Online meeting

**Agenda Item: 7. Roadmap, Terms of Reference and future constituency**

**Subject: Draft final report**

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**Submitted by: Adi Kellermann**

This document contains a draft final report for the Working Group Swimway, following Deliverable 3 of the groups Terms of Reference:

(3) A final report from the group on the overall status of the implementation of the Swimway Vision, as a possible transition to the formation of a subsequent Expert Group Fish.

**Proposal:** The group is invited to note the information and comment as appropriate.

Report on the work of the ad-hoc Trilateral Ad hoc Working Group Swimway 2019-2020

By Adi Kellermann, Chair (20210125)

**Background and meetings**

The work was initiated with the first meeting of the group in January 2019 while the new Chair was introduced at the second meeting. In 2019 a total of four meetings were held. In 2020, continuation of the work was hampered by the absence of the Dutch RWS due to a governmental order (for all meetings under the trilateral cooperation). As a second restriction, the Covid-19 pandemic did not allow for physical meetings, therefore five virtual meetings were held via Zoom and Teams, respectively. In addition, a virtual workshop on trilateral projects and a virtual meeting of a subgroup on monitoring were held.

The mandate of the group had been issued by the 2018 Leeuwarden Ministerial Conference and was in accordance with Article 13 of the Leeuwarden Declaration to “*further develop and contribute to implementing the SWIMWAY vision as an integrated approach to achieving the Trilateral Fish Targets by investigating, monitoring, managing and communicating topics concerning the ecology of fish in the Wadden Sea Area*”. In particular, the group had to fill the pillars of the SWIMWAY action programme with life.

This report represents the final report from the group on the overall status of the implementation of the Swimway Vision, as a possible transition to the formation of a subsequent Expert Group Fish (Terms of Reference WG-Swimway, deliverable 3).

The following achievements were made:

**The SWIMWAY Conference:**

much of the work in 2019 was devoted to organizing the international SWIMWAY Conference “Understanding connectivity within the life cycles of coastal fish”, carried out 24.-26. September in Hamburg, Germany. Main topics of the scientific deliberations were on drivers of fish populations utilizing coastal marine environments during their ontogeny, identifying potential bottlenecks throughout the life cycle and, eventually, evaluating current management measures. The conference aimed at facilitating exchange and connecting knowledge and expertise between diverse experts and stakeholders, at identifying fields of collaboration, expanding and organizing knowledge and at ensuring long-term engagement of relevant stakeholders. The conference was organized in four thematic sessions with a total of 24 expert talks, as well as poster presentations and a workshop on education. In addition, foresight exercises were held in four break-out sessions. The sessions were followed by wrap-up exercises and so was the final conclusive event on the last day. The conference had a very successful turn-out of 82 participants. The main scientific results of the events were summarized during and immediately after the conference and covered quite a few recommendations for the future of the SWIMWAY group and the trilateral efforts for the protection of Wadden Sea fish.

**A policy review on existing legislation:**

there was funding available for the SWIMWAY activities provided by the trilateral budget. Some of that was used to support an analysis of existing national and international policy regulations relevant to the implementation of the trilateral fish targets and protection of migrating and other Wadden Sea fish. A first draft of the report was presented and discussed at the conference in September 2019. During the further production and review by the SWIMWAY group, it became clear that the level of detail of policy reviews on the national level differed substantially. This shortcoming could naturally only be cured by additional work to be invested by participants from the regions itself. Another deficit caused by the complexity of the topic and the limited time available was fisheries. This was mostly due to the discrepancy between the validity of the Common Fisheries Policy of the EU and the actual fishery activities in the regions. In spite of these deficits, it was possible to draw priority recommendations resulting from the main policy document which have been submitted to TG-M. These are available as a summary document while the main document will still be under revision by the follow-up work in 2021.

**Preparation of a trilateral research proposal under SWIMWAY:**

in 2018, the Netherlands had funded Waddentools, a major multi-year research project in the Dutch Wadden Sea including field work as well as literature evaluation. Waddentools was designed to be open for external input during the course of the project so SWIMWAY decided that also in Denmark and Germany initiatives could be launched to develop complementary projects in these parts of the Wadden Sea. Plans were developed and coordinated by SWIMWAY ad-hoc group members. This resulted in a Danish proposal submitted by a consortium of governmental agencies and a University to a private foundation which was unfortunately turned down. However, the substance of the proposal will provide the basis for the development of new proposals in the near future. In Germany, a project sketch is still under development which will aim at the bottleneck topic identified during the 2019 conference as one of the main research topic to be tackled. Connectivity between the Wadden Sea and upstream habitats as well as communication and environmental education are focus of the sketch and following proposal to a public foundation. What is more, a trilateral research proposal is under development, the preparation of which is supported by the available trilateral funds.

**A SWIMWAY website:**

It was noted that the term SWIMWAY was used by several initiatives regionally and globally. Therefore the ad-hoc group decided to develop a website to ensure that the trilateral SWIMWAY activities have a “unique identifier” which will be associated with the trilateral entity. The site will also serve for communication of milestones and main events of SWIMWAY under the trilateral cooperation. The website will be established as microsite, with the template provided by the WSFI microsite. The CWSS will be the guardian of the site.

**A revised monitoring programme for Wadden Sea fish under the TMAP**:

so far, the internationally coordinated Demersal Young Fish Survey (DYFS) is the only fish component of the TMAP. However, Wadden Sea fish are not sampled in a representative fashion by the DYFS and require a differential approach in order to be adequately represented in a monitoring programme. SWIMWAY produced an overview document of relevant monitoring and relevant research activities in the regions along with first candidates and recommendations towards a common, revised programmes. Further, a temporary subgroup of experts was established to develop a proposal for a common fish monitoring programme in the Wadden Sea regions under the TMAP. Such a proposal was also requested by the Task Group Monitoring and Assessment (TG-MA). A first meeting of this group is planned for February 2021. The overview document was published in late 2020: [Walker, P.A. (2020) Trilateral fish monitoring: overview of monitoring and research for SWIMWAY. Common Wadden Sea Secretariat, Wilhelmshaven, Germany](https://www.waddensea-worldheritage.org/resources/trilateral-fish-monitoring-overview-monitoring-and-research-swimway);

**Risk analysis and risk assessment**:

The group performed a SWOT analysis including the strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats. Selected strengths identified were the common understanding of the issue, SWIMWAY being embedded in trilateral cooperation and the timely topic, matching other activities and frameworks, while some recognized weaknesses were the largely invisible topic (subject fish), the lack of fish as research priority for the Wadden Sea and the differences between priorities in the three countries (DK, D, NL). Opportunities were seen in the Flyway as inspiration to tell our story and the increasing awareness, while threats were insufficient funding for SWIMWAY (projects and overall coordination), economic interests that may block initiatives, and opposing trends in future high water coastal protection which may generate new opposition. In summary, there are a considerable number of strengths, about the same amount of weaknesses, a lot of opportunities and only few threats. Risk assessment will be carried out in 2021.

**Terms of Reference and constituency of a future Trilateral Working Group:**

The ToRs elaborated by the ad-hoc group are currently under review by TG-M, the future constituency comprises all stakeholders and actors relevant for the further implementation of the SWIMWAY vision.

**Conclusion**

All tasks and deliverables of the Terms of Reference WG-Swimway (Annex 1) were fulfilled. On basis of the achievements of the WG-Swimway, a transformation to an Expert Group Swimway is the next logic step for further implementation of the Swimway Vision and Action Programme.