

Annual report 2024 summary



Photo: Ronald de Graaf



Photo: Pieter Donkers



Photo: Udo van Dongen

The North Sea
Foundation

Introduction

Many of us know the feeling — that sense of relaxation that washes over you when walking along the North Sea coast. Wind on your face, the crashing waves, and the sound of seagulls in the background. The sea is a source of peace and joy, provides us with food, ensures oxygen supply, and regulates our climate. But amidst the waves and the cries of seagulls, do we also hear the voice of the North Sea itself?

It is becoming increasingly urgent: the voice of the North Sea's natural environment must be heard clearer, because this unique ecosystem is under growing pressure. The ambitions for offshore wind energy expand each year. Shipping and the oil and gas sectors lay major claims on the North Sea. There is underground CO2 storage and sand extraction. And intensive bottom trawling causes damage to the seabed and marine life. These pressures mean that the largest natural area in the Netherlands is under severe strain: loss of habitat, declining bird and fish populations, loss of biodiversity, and still far too much visible and invisible waste.

That's why in 2024, all our work was focused on giving a voice to the North Sea's natural world. Thankfully, there were many beautiful and hopeful achievements to celebrate. The European Nature Restoration Law was adopted after a nerve-racking political process. The new national project 'Nature Reinforcement North Sea' will lead to significant progress in restoring lost underwater nature

in the years to come. Amsterdam became the first Dutch port to ban the discharge of scrubber water — a toxic ship emission that contributes to acidification. And the way Dutch people from all walks of life helped clean up litter on the beach (during the Beach Clean-up Tour) and conduct research (during 'Join in for a Clean North Sea') makes me incredibly optimistic. And let's not forget the overwhelming success of the stunning documentary The Wild North Sea. We collectively enjoyed the breathtaking footage of the rich underwater life in the North Sea. The Netherlands loves the North Sea!

Another highly encouraging development was the emerging collaboration among nine North Sea countries in the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative. In 2024, these countries committed to a series of ambitious measures, including efforts to strengthen the North Sea's natural ecosystems. We will closely monitor this in the coming years and contribute wherever we can. Because a thriving natural environment in the North Sea transcends all national borders.

You can read about all of this — and much more — in this annual report. I am incredibly proud of the work done by our fantastic team and volunteers, people who dedicate themselves day in and day out to the North Sea and to reversing the tide of ecological degradation. Of course, we don't do this alone, but together with all our partners who hold the North Sea close in their hearts. I thank everyone for your interest and commitment to the North Sea, enjoy our 2024 annual report.



Ewout van Galen
Director of
The North Sea Foundation

Summary

In 2024, the North Sea Foundation was once again the voice of the North Sea.

Here, you'll find a selection of highlights from our work:



Clean Sea

In 2024, we once again worked towards a clean sea, clean beaches, and clean shipping. During the Boskalis Beach Clean-up Tour, 1,977 volunteers removed 5,103 kilos of litter. Cigarette butts remained the most common pollutant. In March, the citizen science project *Join in for a Clean North Sea (or Meet Mee in Dutch)* was launched. In addition, the discharge of scrubber water was banned in the Port of Amsterdam. To help combat the increasing underwater noise in the North Sea, the European project DEMASK was launched, with The North Sea Foundation as one of the partners.



Sustainable Fisheries

We responded to the long-awaited government vision on sustainable food from the sea, in which we felt decisive choices were lacking. Together with the fishing sector, we also spoke out against the overfishing of mackerel.

Through the CIBBRiNA project, European countries are working together to reduce unwanted bycatch of vulnerable species. This year, our project leader Merel den Held was elected vice-chair of the Pelagic Advisory Council. This vice-chair position gives The North Sea Foundation more direct access to the European Commission.



Nature-friendly Energy

In February, the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality launched the *Nature Reinforcement North Sea* programme. *The Rich North Sea* – our joint initiative with Natuur & Milieu – is one of the programme's long-term partners.

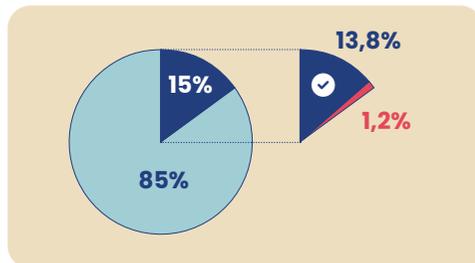
In March, we co-published a position paper on the shared use of offshore wind farms. In October, *The Rich North Sea* published the *Toolbox*, the go-to knowledge platform on nature enhancement in offshore wind farms including tools, tips and inspiration. The *Toolbox* is continuously updated with insights, experiments, and scientific knowledge.



Nature Conservation

In 2024, after strong international lobbying, the EU Nature Restoration Law was finally adopted! We contributed to national restoration plans under this law and worked to protect the Dutch seabed.

Our programme *Steady Course for Mature North Sea Management* was continued — we remain fully committed to protecting marine protected areas and ensuring sound management of the North Sea. 2024 also saw the launch of the nature-based solutions consortium NL2120, in which we will further develop the landscape type “Coast.”



North Sea Advisory Council

In 2024, the North Sea Foundation took part in the North Sea advisory council, a platform where key stakeholders come together to shape the implementation of the 2021 North Sea Agreement.

Key topics in 2024 included: the protection of 15% of the Dutch seabed from bottom-disturbing fisheries; the revision of the North Sea Programme 2022–2027; and the Dutch government’s “vision for food from the sea.” Intensive discussions were also held on limiting gas extraction in the North Sea.



Public Affairs and Communication

In May, we co-published *North Sea 2040 – A Vision for a Healthy Sea with Nature-Friendly Use*. This document presents our vision of a resilient ecosystem and outlines what is needed to achieve it. In November, nine North Sea countries, including the Netherlands, signed a declaration for closer cooperation within the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative. The North Sea Foundation is spearheading an NGO coalition that aims to influence international North Sea governance with a shared policy agenda. 2024 also saw the release of the documentary *The Wild North Sea*, in which diver and cameraman Peter van Rodijnen beautifully captured the largest natural area of the Netherlands. For the North Sea Foundation, it was a fantastic way to bring the sea’s nature to life.



Partnerships and Fundraising

Once again, in 2024, the Dutch Postcode Lottery made a significant contribution to our work. We also closely collaborated with institutional and philanthropic funds. Contributions were received from, among others, the Nationale Growth Fund (Groeifonds), the Dutch Research Council (NWO), the Gieskes-Stribis Fund, and the TAUW Foundation.

Besides the financial support from our partners, we aim to collaborate on programme and project level where possible. In 2024, we also participated in several international consortia. From the EU’s Horizon Europe programme, we received funding for a project focused on biodiversity in offshore wind farms. The EU Interreg North Sea Region programme co-finances DEMASK, and the EU LIFE programme co-finances CIBBRINA.

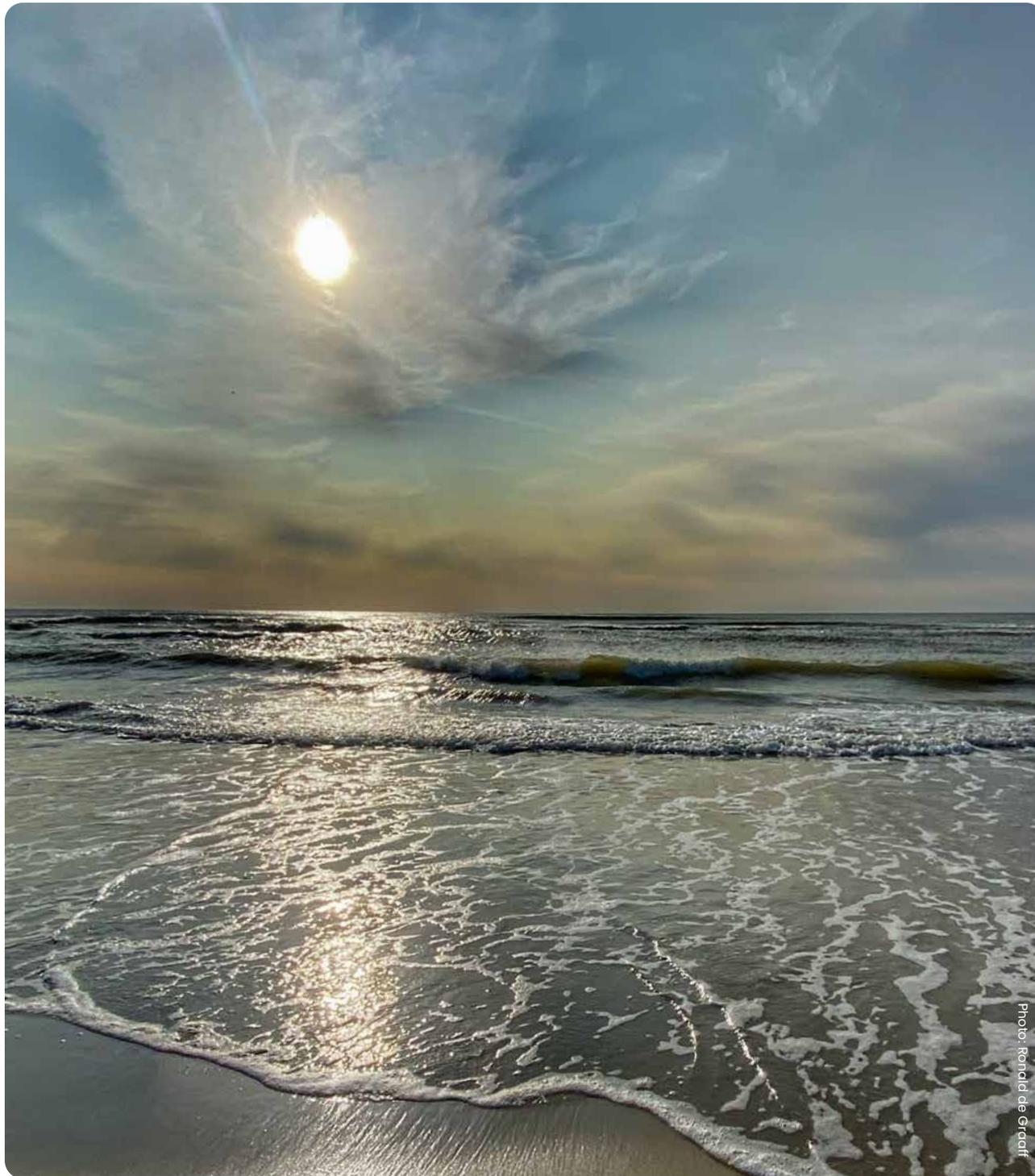


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