FISHING ON A SQUARE INCH

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Introduction

Fishing on a square inch

The sea is popular. Its space beckons from ashore. More shipping, the expansion of Rotterdam Harbour, electricity cables, telecom connections, oil rigs, pipes and some twenty wind parks. These are just some of the many (planned) activities on the 'Dutch Continal Shelf', where the coastal area is the busiest by far. Whoever thought the North Sea is a sea of tranquillity couldn't be more wrong.

The interests and benefits of all of these activities are weighed up separately and each and every one of them is supported by sound economic and geographic reasons. But what counts is the overall picture. Fishermen are finding themselves being boxed in on all sides. With this paper we want to set out and bring to the general attention the staggering amount of user functions at sea. Too little fishing grounds are left for the fishing industry. If developments continue at this rate, and everything points that way, our fishermen will have only a tiny fraction of the sea left at their disposal. And that's unacceptable, from an economic, social as well as cultural-historical point of view. An integral vision of the North Sea also involving other countries is lacking. And the fishing industry will be left holding the baby.
That is why we are sounding the alarm in this paper, demanding

Room for fishing!

Wind energy

The Dutch government aims to build wind parks with a (gross) capacity of 6,000 megawatts by the year 2020, possibly to be increased to 10,000 megawatts. The locations earmarked for the wind parks have been drawn out on the map. What the wind parks are to yield exactly is still unclear as this will depend on the electricity generated from the wind.

The construction of two wind parks, NSW and Q7, has been confirmed. The construction of the other parks is still unclear, pending further studies.

The areas earmarked for the construction of the wind parks all lie in important fishing grounds, outside the 12-mile zone. Due to its relative shallow bed (30 to 70 meter) and the fact that the grounds are within reach of most fishing boats from their home port, these grounds are vital for the fishing industry from an economic point of view.

The actual wind park will be surrounded by a 500 meter safety zone where fishing will not be permitted. The loss of these locations to the fishing industry will have far-reaching social and economic consequences.

Land reclamation

Because Dutch land is getting more and more crowded, the 'space' at sea beckons. Land reclamation is one of the options that has been discussed extensively. The first ‘Maasvlakte’ as part of Rotterdam Harbour has since been constructed.
The possible reclaiming of a second marine area (the 'Tweede Maasvlakte'), which is to cover 1,000 hectare of regional and coastal fishing grounds, is very topical. In the area many small-scale fishermen (shrimp fishing or boats out at sea for 1 day) are active, and because they tend to use boats that are unable to go out into sea very far, they do not have many alternatives. The area is also an important migrating route for baby flatfish (larvae flow) towards the Wadden Sea. The construction of the ‘Tweede Maasvlakte’ is therefore expected to affect the nursery areas in the northerly waters and thereby the overall fish stock in the North Sea. The start of the construction of the ‘Tweede Maasvlakte’ is scheduled for mid 2006.

In addition, the expansion of Rotterdam Harbour will also stimulate dynamics in the area. The number of local ship movements will increase manifold, making the area surrounding the ‘Maasvlakte’ less attractive for fishing, due to the risks involved.

Sand extraction

Sand extraction is currently taking place for raising coastal areas and land, involving a total of some 35 million m^3 sand per year. Recent sand extraction areas will need to recover. Sand extraction areas take six years on average to regain their natural level. Occasionally, they are not returned to their original condition. While these areas are open for fishing, they are rarely used as there is little life during the recovery period. During the actual sand-extraction activities fishing is not possible.

Sand extraction is an activity that has grown tremendously over the past few years. In the period 1974-2002 the amount has grown tenfold, from 3,5 million m^3 to 35 million m^3. On top of the 'regular' sand extraction, the construction of the 'Tweede Maasvlakte' will require 300 million m^3 sand to be extracted from sea, excluding sand needed for maintenance.

Gravel extraction is not yet taking place on the Dutch Continental Shelf, despite the presence of a number of gravel fields in the North Sea. The implications of gravel extraction are radically different from those of sand extraction activities. The seas tidal movements will eventually replenish former sand extraction areas. The removal of gravel, however, will lead to permanent changes to the environment. For some time there were plans to win gravel from the 'Klaverbank', the only gravel area in the Dutch part of the North Sea. These plans have been shelved for now. This is vital for the breeding of the North Sea herring, which prefers to spawn on gravel grounds.

Cables

The North Sea houses two types of cables. First there are the communication cables, usually telephone cables. We all know how much international communication traffic has grown over the past few years and there are numerous cables in the North Sea. All of the telecom cables have been drawn in on the map.
New and growing rapidly, are the power lines that are being laid as part of the liberalisation of the electricity network. There will be a power line connection between the UK and the Netherlands (BritNed) and there is the so-called NorNed, a power line that runs between Norway and the Netherlands. Contrary to what many people may think, power lines do not run through the sea, but are dug into the sea bed. They must be embedded to a depth of at least 1 meter. While fishing is permitted in areas where cables have been laid, there is a risk that the natural movement of the sea bed raises the cable, which may expose fishing boats to certain risks. It is not yet quite clear if electricity cables in particular are affecting fish stocks. This is being studied.
Cables that are no longer in use do not need to be cleared.

Pipes and platforms

The seabed of the North Sea is a generous donor of gas and, to a lesser extent, oil.
A total of 177 platforms are to be found on the Dutch Continental Shelf; 135 platforms are used for the purpose of winning gas and 42 for winning oil. In an area of 500 metres surrounding the platforms, a safety zone was established in which fishing is prohibited.

If we were to position all platforms next to each other, we would come to an area totalling 150 km^2. A total of three thousand kilometres of pipes is used.
The pipes do also not need to be cleared.

Marine reserves

Over the past few years protection of nature at sea has become an important issue. The wish for 'marine protected areas' at sea is heard frequently. Looking for ways to protect nature, people tend to lock it down. International arrangements (OSPAR and North Sea Ministerial Conference) have already been made about the set-up of marine reserve networks at sea.

The following areas on the Dutch Continental Shelf are listed as areas of a unique ecological value: 'Klaverbank', 'Centrale Oestergronden', 'Doggersbank', the 'Friese Front' and the Coastal Area, which together cover 17,992 km^2. A far-reaching protection regime will be put into place for the areas. The fishing industry fears that this could eventually lead to fishing bans in these areas.
In view of the resulting value depreciation for the fishing industry, the existence of a large part of the Dutch fleet is at stake.
The competitive position of the Dutch fishing clusters will also be seriously affected compared with other countries.
The fishing industry is not convinced at all of the need to close areas to protect nature. Fishermen's practical experience show that they often return to the same grounds that abound in fish. They conclude that responsible fishing actually ensures vital dynamics in a particular area. Take for example the Plaice Box, an area to the north of the Dutch, German an Danish Wadden islands. The box, an important area where young plaice mature, has been closed since 1994 to fishing vessels of over 300 HP. The purpose of the Plaice Box was to develop and increase the plaice stock. An evaluation of 10 years of Plaice Box has shown that closure has not led to the desired result. Areas should be closed off only after establishing that closure will indeed have the desired effect.

Plans are also being developed for another marine reserve to compensate for the construction of the expansion of Rotterdam Harbour. In line with the European Bird and Habitat Directive the Netherlands will need to compensate for the construction of this 'Tweede Maasvlakte'. That means that in addition to the loss of fishing grounds following the construction, the fishing industry may also be faced with nature compensation areas. The marine reserve proposed must be ten times (!) the size of the 'Tweede Maasvlakte'. That means that the land reclamation would hit fishermen four times - by the construction itself, the sand extraction for the construction, the blocking of the larvae flow and the establishment of a marine reserve ten times the size of the 'Tweede Maasvlakte'!
It is not yet known at this point if the fishing sector will be compensated in any way.

Shipping

The North Sea is not a quiet country lane. It is busy with oil tankers, container transportation and cargo ships. And this traffic will only increase following the expansion of Rotterdam Harbour and the expected increase in, particularly, coastal trade. In the near future, the coastal trade will be playing an important role in the flow of traffic on the European road network.

The sailing routes across which all of the route-bound shipping traffic is being directed are busy already. This will not get any less in future.

The routes are unattractive for fishing boats as they are simply too busy and therefore too dangerous. That means there is little fishing in these areas, particularly on the sailing routes close to shore.

Fishing on a square inch

Here you see what is left for the fishing industry. Before we know it we will be fishing on a square inch. And that's simply unacceptable.

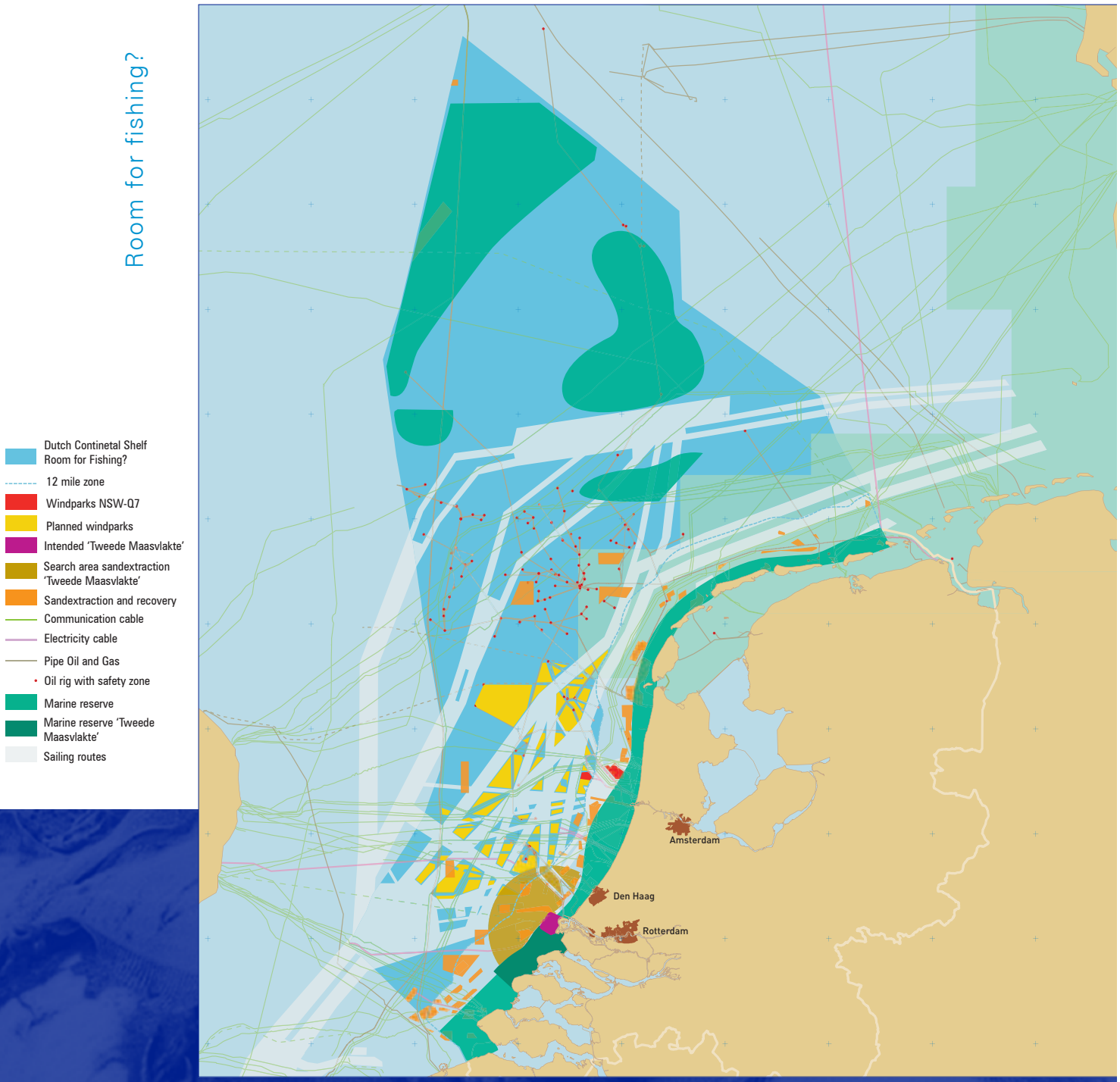
It isn't true that the amounts of fish in the North Sea are the same all over. Fishermen can't just change where they fish. There are fertile areas that have been a favourite with fishermen for years, there are areas that are being avoided, and there are areas that are too deep for fishing. While fishermen will keep their favourite fishing grounds a secret, it is clear that fishermen usually go to their 'own' familiar grounds. This also emerged from a study that was carried out between 1993-1999. It showed that of the overall North Sea (170,000 sea miles) only one third (50,000 sea miles) was being used for fishing. Moreover, 80% of all fishing activities was concentrated in 30% of the areas used by the Dutch beam trawl fleet. It is these grounds in particular that are so important for the fishing industry and the underlying sector. After all, our
flourishing trade in fish has a long tradition. The Netherlands are still one of the few net fish exporters in Europe. Some 80% of all fish is exported. This is a solid market position we need to cherish.

This paper discusses only the immediate effects of the user functions on the Dutch Continental Shelf. Similar activities are being developed in neighbouring countries that also use the North Sea. For the sake of legibility, the indirect effects of these foreign activities have not been discussed here. However, this does not mean that there are none and we would like to give you a few examples. Take the large-scale gravel winning activities in the UK, particularly in the English part of the Channel. This area is particularly important as a breeding ground for herring. Herring lays its eggs on so-called hard substrate, such as gravel. The disappearance of such gravel areas will therefore affect the Dutch herring industry. Closed-off areas directly on German and Belgian borders, too, restrict options for Dutch fishermen who are unable to fish there. Moreover, foreign fishermen are forced to move to Dutch waters.

There is no international and/or integral vision of the North Sea, let alone alignment of what seem to be individual activities. Instead, the North Sea is in the fickle hands of different policy makers, initiators and many other interested parties. This fragmentation is the North Sea's Achilles heel, leaving the fishing sector the victim of the cumulative effect of these activities.

That is why we demand
ROOM FOR FISHING
in this paper.

Room for fishing?



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