

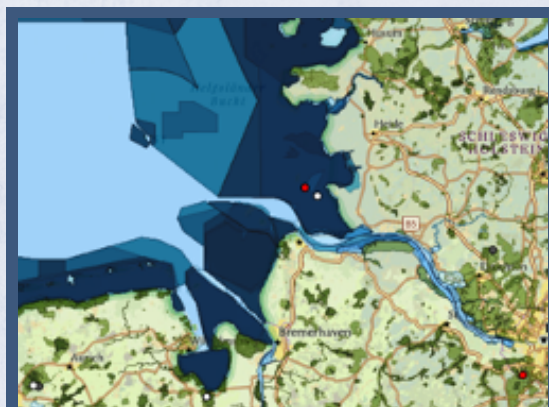
# Wadden Sea National Parks and the Mittelplate Oil Field

Germany

**M**ittelplate is Germany's largest oil field, located 7 km offshore in the German state of Schleswig-Holstein. The field is currently undergoing extraction and has been since 1987,<sup>1</sup> with permits lasting until 2041. Extraction is taking place in the Southern part of the Wadden Sea National Park, which is part of a complex belonging to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of the Wadden Sea. The field is operated by Wintershall Dea.<sup>2</sup>

## Importance of the national parks

The Wadden Sea National Parks are divided by administrative borders, belonging to Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands, but are considered a single ecological entity. The Wadden Sea holds a wide variety of ecosystems, making it extremely rich in biodiversity.<sup>3</sup> It is an essential stopover site for the East Atlantic and African-Eurasian migratory flyways, with an average of 10-12 million migratory birds passing through it every year. If these flyways were to be disturbed, there would be negative repercussions to biodiversity on a global scale.



The Wadden Sea National Parks (dark blue), and Mittelplate (centre of the image)  
Image: LINGO Map

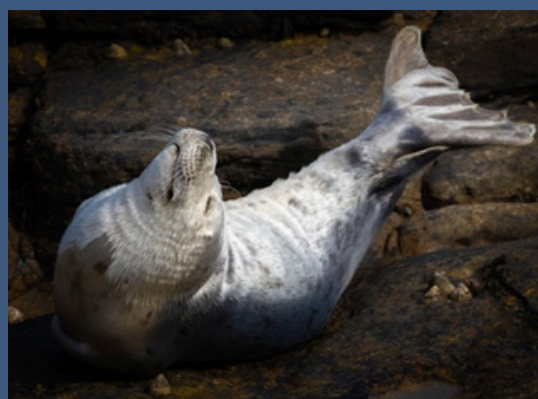
There are around 2,300 species of flora and fauna in its salt marshes, and an estimated 2,700 more in the marine and brackish areas. Among the native species of marine mammals present in the area are the endangered grey seal (*Halichoerus grypus*), the harbour porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*), and the common harbour seal (*Phoca vitulina*).<sup>4</sup> The Wadden Sea is reported to be home to 20% of the Northeast-Atlantic population of harbour seals, which has grown considerably since parts of their habitats have been protected, and hunting practices reduced.



## Threats from fossil fuels

The Mittelplate oil field extracts roughly 55% of all of the oil extracted in Germany. It originally held approximately 882 million barrels of oil, and still contains 90 million barrels of oil.

If this quantity of oil were extracted, it would result in 36.7 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the climate damages from these emissions, operations are also a threat to the health of the surrounding ecosystems. A report from Naturschutzbund Deutschland (NABU) in 2015 found that within the previous 20 years, 19 out of 33 migratory bird species populations had declined, in part due to the ineffective management of the conservation areas.<sup>6</sup> This ineffective management is linked to economic activities in the area, such as oil extraction. More directly, the possibility of an oil spill is a looming threat to the sensitive local environments. Pollution from an accident would negatively affect the lives of millions of the protected species of the Wadden Sea.



Grey Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)  
Image: Ben Wicks



Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), an endangered bird species that breeds in the Wadden Sea and has greatly benefited from its protection  
Image: Frans Vandewalle

Recently, Wintershall Dea has applied for a permit for new oil wells in the Wadden Sea, with proposed extraction until 2069. The German environmental organization Deutsche Umwelthilfe (DUH) has voiced their concerns against this expansion, because these plans contradict climate goals and are not relevant to Germany's energy security. DUH has called on Wintershall Dea to immediately put these plans on hold and to develop strategies to phase out fossil fuels.<sup>7</sup>

Alongside DUH, the Wadden Sea Conservation Station and WWF are also calling for an end to the plans, and demanding an end to existing extraction by 2030.<sup>8</sup> In May 2022, the organizations protested against Wintershall Dea during an action within sight of Mittelplate oil facilities.



*The Leave it in the Ground Initiative (LINGO) is a German-based non-profit, working on accelerating the transition to a world with 100% renewable energy.*

## References

1. Mittelplate Crude Oil Production Factsheet. Wintershall DEA. (2019)
2. Mittelplate Conventional Oil Field. Offshore Technology. (2021)
3. The Wadden Sea. UNESCO. (2009)
4. The Wadden Sea - Our World Heritage. Common Wadden Sea Secretariat. (2018)
5. KING Metrics. LINGO (2021)
6. New Report on the Status of Birds in the German Wadden Sea. NABU. (2015)
7. New oil wells in the Wadden Sea National Park: German environmental aid calls on Wintershall Dea to stop the production plans immediately. Deutsche Umwelthilfe. (2022)
8. Organizations demonstrate in front of the Mittelplate drilling platform in the Wadden Sea. WWF Germany. (2022)

## More information

• [Deutsche Umwelthilfe - Campaign Information](#)

• [Wadden Sea - UNESCO World Heritage Centre](#)