

Windmills

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Windmills and Wadden Sea Area: Portrait of a Dilemma

Introduction

In general, nature preservation and environmental movements in the Netherlands are explicit advocates of wind energy. This principle also holds true for the Dutch Wadden Society, the national society for the preservation of the Wadden Sea Area. Yet, at an early stage, this Society realized that large-scale generating of wind energy might be at the expense of the birds and the large open landscape of the northern coastal area. Therefore the Society started several legal procedures against windmill parks in the Wadden Sea Area. These procedures led to a chaotic and tumultuous discussion during a general meeting in May 1997. The point of discussion was a dilemma. Should the Dutch Wadden Society, from its objectives as a nature preservation movement, give priority to the protection of the open landscape and the birds? Or should concessions be made to this ideal of protection because of the great importance of generating long-lasting energy?

In the end, the meeting carried a motion, which, as was found out later on, left many policy questions unanswered. Moreover, the board of the Society wondered which point of view concerning wind energy the majority of the members would support. In order to overcome the deadlock, the board decided to carry out a consultation of the members concerning this subject. This consultation was to be prepared by a study group, consisting of members with different opinions on windmills in the Wadden Sea Area. In January 1998, the study group presented an informative memorandum on wind energy. With it, the study group formulated a number of questions to serve as a starting point for an investigation to be held among a cross selection of the members. Advice of this study group was accepted by the board. Two research workers of the University of Groningen, who had been employed to carry out research projects for the Dutch Wadden Society, were requested to do so again.

Research Design

From the file of 46,000 members of the Dutch Wadden Society, a random sample was made of 750 persons. The research team decided to have them interviewed on the phone. This way of interviewing was chosen because it has the advantage of a personal approach resulting in a much



higher response than written polls. Moreover, compared with face-to-face interviews, telephone polls are less time-consuming.

During the fixed period of data collecting, between 9 and 23 March 1998, a total of 635 calls were made. 130 persons were not able, or not willing, to cooperate with the investigation. The reasons for refusal were, in particular, that one was too old, had no time or knew too little about the subject. The 505 persons (306 men and 199 women) who actually wished to cooperate were together 80% of those who were reached over the telephone. When the discussion permitted to do so, the interviewer asked the respondent - in spite of the respondent's refusal to cooperate - if the interviewer was allowed to ask one short question:

"Do you think that the Dutch Wadden Society should stop or stimulate the building of windmills?" 96 persons (74% of refusers) answered this question. 46% of them took the view that the Dutch Wadden Society should stop the building of windmills, 23% answered "yes" and 31% "don't know".

A few weeks before the telephone interview took place, an informative memorandum, written by the

study group wind energy, was sent out together with the Wadden Bulletin, the Society's magazine. In this memorandum, positive and negative effects of windmills in the Wadden Sea Area were dealt with extensively. Every addressee of the Wadden Bulletin could have read it and formed an opinion on the problem, based on the information provided. Because not all members of the Society received the magazine, the people who took part in the random check were sent the memorandum once again in the week before the telephone poll took place. Moreover, they received a questionnaire about which they would be asked on the phone, the week after. This questionnaire consisted of closed questions about points of view concerning windmills in the Wadden Sea Area, about possible results of windmills and about opinions on places for windmills, positions, numbers and heights.

Results

The interviewees were given six points of view about the desirability of building windmills in the Wadden Sea Area. These six viewpoints reflected an increasing stage of tolerance. About each point of view an opinion was asked, and after that the interviewee had to indicate which point of view the board of the Dutch Wadden Society should adopt in this matter. The results of this last question are shown in the following chart:

Advice concerning the point of view of the Wadden Society in building windmills:

building windmills is <i>undesirable</i>	20%
<i>don't build unless</i> in places with little environmental value	26%
<i>building, provided</i> this takes place only in special areas	35%
<i>building, but proportionally</i> and not in disproportional numbers	12%
building windmills is <i>desirable</i>	4%
it is <i>necessary</i> that as many windmills as possible be built	2%

So, more than 80 % of interviewees think that the board of the Dutch Wadden Society should take a reserved point of view concerning building windmills. Strong opponents of building windmills think that windmills in the open landscape are not beautiful, and seem to be in favor of practicing more energy *conservation*. For that matter, a large majority thinks that building windmills will affect the landscape (88%) and that windmills will have negative effects on birds (86%)

As far as the locations for windmills are concerned, interviewees are almost unanimously of

the opinion that windmills should not be built in the dunes. According to the majority, windmills must not be situated

in natural areas	88%
in and around the Wadden Sea	86 resp. 64%
in recreation areas	71%
in Wadden island polders and Wieringen	62%
in the Lauwersmeer	62%
in the terp-landscapes of North- Friesland and Noord-Groningen	60%
near build-up areas	59%

If windmills must be built, the most desirable place turns out to be industrial areas and ports. Generating wind energy is clearly considered an industrial activity. According to a majority, the following locations should also be considered for building windmills:

Ministry of Defense areas	74%
along the Afsluitdijk	67%
along waterways and railways	59%
and in agricultural areas	52%

Windmills may be placed in groups or solitary. Interviewees prefer a line or park arrangement of max. 20 windmills together and clearly turn down solitary mills and groups of more than 20 mills. Opinions differ on the desired height of windmills. When members of the Dutch Wadden Society were to choose between a larger number of smaller mills and a smaller number of bigger mills, they seem to prefer the latter alternative.

After the Research

In April 1998, the final report of the investigation appeared. Among other things, based on the results of the investigation, the Board formulated a point of view, in which - mainly - the following was put forward:

- Building windmills in the Wadden Sea, on the Wadden islands, in the Lauwersmeer area and in the dunes along the North Sea was turned down;
- building windturbines in the northern coastal area should be restricted to port- and industrial-areas;
- windturbines on the Afsluitdijk were not turned down from the start. Further investigations into the technical feasibility, the effects on the landscape and the appearance of damage to birds should reveal in how far it is well considered to build windturbines here.

The last item was politically a hot one. The central government and the provinces have taken a decision to install 1000 MW extra windenergy facilities, and within the framework of this arrangement, the provinces of Friesland and North Holland plan to realize windmills on, or along, the Afsluitdijk. How would the general meeting of the Dutch Wadden Society react to -in particular - the final element in the Board's standpoint?

When this agenda item was dealt with during the general meeting in June 1998, three resolutions were tabled. In one resolution the Board's standpoint was narrowed with the important consideration that the Dutch Wadden Society should be busy with the preservation and restoration of the Wadden landscape and not with promoting the production of clean energy. The second resolution pleaded for a broadening: building windmills in the open landscape should also be optional if this fit in well the surroundings. Both resolutions were turned down with a substantial majority. In a third resolution, the Board's standpoint was partly extended: an investigation into building windturbines *on* the Afsluitdijk was extended to building *on or along* this dike, and because of this the original Board's standpoint was, in fact, modified into the direction of the policy plan of the two provinces involved. The

latter modified standpoint was supported by a large majority at the meeting.

Which role did the report by the study group and the investigation among members in the decision process play? In fact, a new investigation would be necessary to find an answer to this question, but the procedure causes the following suppositions.

First of all, the installation of a study group with a concrete assignment and the announcement of a members consultation brought some peace: anyway, it was prevented that the stormy discussion in 1997 would lead immediately to a trench-warfare between the strict and the moderate members.

Secondly, the discussion was rationalized in so far as all (potential) participants in the discussion started well informed with a second discussion during the general meeting. Important facts had been listed and there was less room for speculation than in the past.

Finally, careful information to, and an opinion poll among, members of the Society made it clear that the Board believed their opinion of importance. The dilemma, as pointed out in the beginning of this article, was not taken away by that, but it might have become somewhat easier to handle.

Translation: A.P.M. de Boer, Wassenaar

Reference

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