

EXCLUSIVE ECONOMIC ZONE

How the Netherlands protects its coral

How should the Netherlands treat its recently acquired scenic marine beauty, with its hundred of kilometres of coral where fishermen earn a living? The Exclusive Economic Zone serves as both an economic tool and a way of protecting biodiversity. **BY BAUD SCHOENMAECKERS**

There was never an EEZ, an Exclusive Economic Zone (see insert, page 21) in the area of the former Netherlands Antilles. “But this is both necessary and a wish voiced by the islands”, says Ton Akkerman of the Ministry of Economics, Agriculture and Innovation. The EEZ has been set up to guarantee the sustainable development of the marine areas around the new Dutch municipalities of Bonaire, Saba and St Eustatius (Statia). This is necessary because these islands have given the Netherlands the task of managing some of the world’s most beautiful but vulnerable nature areas; marine parks where thousands of species of fish, crabs and crustaceans find their food amid colourfully swaying coral. Activities clash in this area (see map, page 21) with its rich biodiversity: people fish, recreational activities take place, the corals are the spawning grounds for various kinds

of fish and oil tankers anchor here. The results are pollution, destruction and wildlife extinction.

Together with policy officer Hayo Haanstra of the Ministry of Economics, Agriculture and Innovation, Akkerman visited the islands in August to present the EEZ’s management plan and to receive input for the next version. Haanstra: “We explain, talk to those directly involved, to the authorities, the fishermen, the managers and nature managers.” Akkerman adds: “And most importantly, we listen. We take back the inhabitants’ remarks, ideas, concerns and uncertainties.” The definitive management plan is one in which all parties are in agreement. “We’re always talking about it, but I think that here we’re actually creating a broad basis of support for this plan,” Akkerman continues. “You have to see this as a

process that will give the Saba Bank the status of Particularly Sensitive Sea Area (PSSA) in the short run – a specially protected vulnerable marine area.” (See insert, page 21.)

Saba Bank and the year of biodiversity

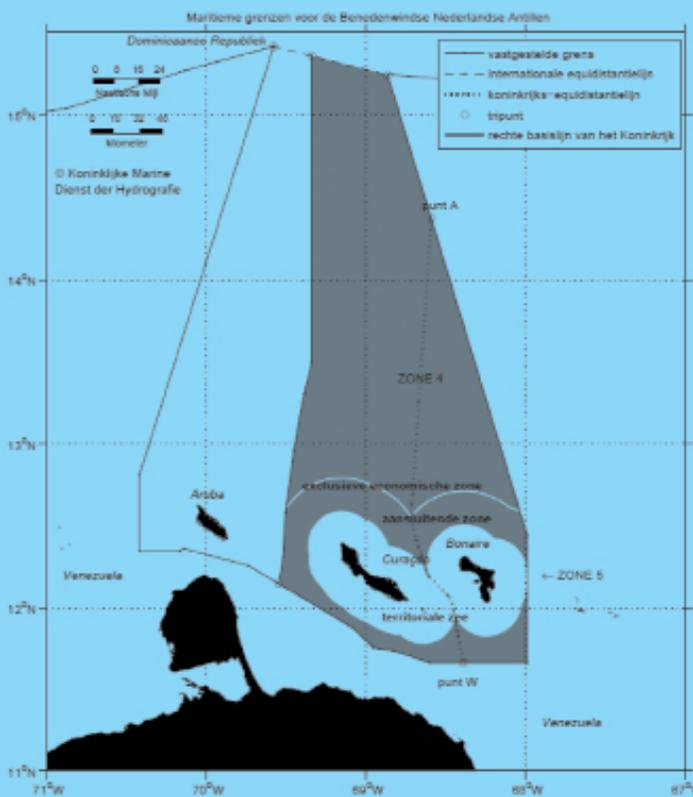
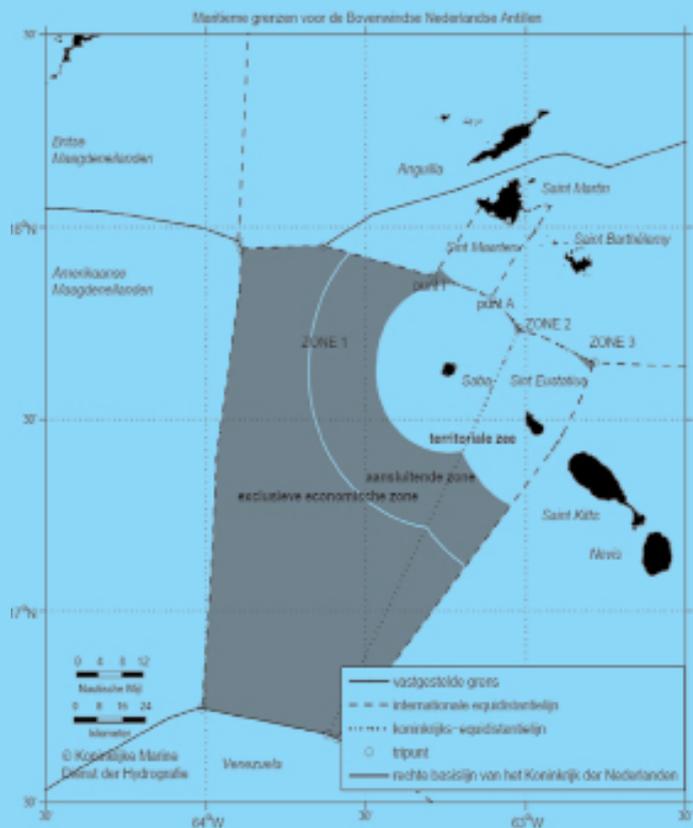
The management plan sets the framework, the goals, the policy priorities and the strategies to sustainably manage the Saba Bank and the areas around Statia and Bonaire. It also serves as an avenue for administration, personnel and finances and it offers concrete points of action. Haanstra: “The plan perfectly matches our biodiversity policy, our role as a party in the Convention on Biodiversity and our contribution to the United Nations’ year of biodiversity, which is this year. This gives us an instrument to fight against the global decline and destruction of biodiversity, at least at this location.”



Saba Bank

The main player in the EEZ is the Saba Bank, an undersea atoll. The Bank lies six kilometres south of Saba (see map). The total surface area of this underwater plateau is 2200 km². The water is only 20 to 40 metres deep and the abundant coral is the spawning ground for thousands of kinds of fish – and thus a fisherman’s paradise. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the waters have been fished mostly by fishermen from Saba. The area received international attention only in the 1970s when many of the countries in the Caribbean began to set up an EEZ and inspect their waters. Because the Saba Bank didn’t fall under an EEZ, unlimited fishing remained possible. In 1993 the Netherlands Antilles signed an Exclusive Fishing Zone (EFZ) that gave them jurisdiction over the territorial waters up to twelve sea miles from the coast. This protected

only twenty percent of the Saba Bank. Since 1 September of this year, the EEZ applies to the three islands, and an area of up to two hundred sea miles offshore is now inspected. This was necessary, since by early 1994 it had become evident that too much fishing was being done at the Bank. From that moment on, fishermen were not allowed to catch more than 200,000 kilotons of queen conch, the sea snail. This had been agreed upon in the CITES convention (the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species). But the fishing continued, also by large foreign trawlers with dragnets, and the queen conch is now an endangered species. The limited number of studies done have shown that no new fishing permits should be issued until a good system of monitoring has been set up and there is more capacity to enforce the existing regulations.



The BES municipalities sign the EEZ

The Netherlands Antilles ceased to exist on 10 October 2010 (see page 6). Each island now has another political status, and Bonaire, Statia and Saba have become Dutch municipalities with a Special Island Status (BES). On 10 October they signed various agreements with the Netherlands. One of them is the management plan for an Exclusive Economic Zone, an EEZ. An EEZ is an area of up to 200 sea miles (370.4 km) from the coast of a country. Within this zone, the country in question has a number of rights, such as the right to exploit the raw materials, the right to fish and the right to do scientific research. A country that sets up an EEZ is responsible for managing nature in this area. The EEZ falls under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The EEZ is an expansion of the Exclusive Fishery Zone (EFZ) dating from 1993 and is an initiative of the Antilles, Aruba and the Netherlands. The Ministry of Economics, Agriculture and Innovation supports and finances the plan and has devoted a large amount of time and money to gaining support for the plan. An important aspect of the EEZ is the zoning, which are illustrated on the maps on this page.

The management plan can be downloaded via www.changemagazine.nl/BES/EEZ

Part of the plan and an important topic of discussion during the visit made by Haanstra and Akkerman is the creation of a Marine Resources Committee, the MRC, that will supervise the process, ensure the implementation of the management plan and allocate funds. Fishermen are also on the committee, those of Statia have appointed their own representative, on Bonaire three fishermen were elected, and the fishermen of Saba are still in discussion.



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Is it typically Dutch to set up a committee? Akkerman: “The answer would be yes if you put together a social club. But as the authorities on Saba made clear, ‘that’s not what we want’. There is a need for regulation and that’s going to happen. But then together with the parties concerned and not top-down.” Haanstra adds: “You can’t do everything with the financial means which are available now. The committee will draw up priorities. The first of these is getting the PSSA status for the Saba Bank, and this is immediately followed by monitoring and research, further developing fishing and educating the fishermen. This committee is the link between the plans on paper and their implementation.” ■



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