

# Cross border policy co-operation for sustainable development of an estuary – the Scheldt estuary – BE & NL

## 1. Policy Objective & Theme

- ADAPTATION TO RISK: Integrating coherent strategies covering the risk-dimension (prevention to response) into planning and investment
- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment
- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Improving competitiveness

## 2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Knowledge-based
- Ecosystems based approach
- Socio-economic
- Technical

## 3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The development of a sustainable, healthy and multi-functional water system that supports human needs in a shared estuary. The approach takes into account safety against flooding, accessibility, healthy & dynamic ecosystems and water quality.

## 4. Overview of the case

The Dutch and Flemish governments are jointly cooperating to develop policies, measures and approaches towards an integrated management of the Schelde estuary. A special project organisation, ProSes, was created in order to draw up a 2010 Development Outline which aims at a more sustainable development in the Scheldt estuary. This is being done in close consultation with all stakeholders and under the supervision of a Technical Scheldt Commission.

## 5. Context and Objectives

### a) Context

The Scheldt estuary is situated in northwest Belgium and southwest Netherlands basin. The Scheldt river has a length of 355 km and the total basin area is 21,863 km<sup>2</sup>, divided over France, Belgium and the Netherlands. The Scheldt estuary region is both an important agricultural and industrial area but also of high ecological importance.

The main functions of the Scheldt estuary are navigation, recreation and fisheries. The estuary forms the maritime access to the port of Antwerp which is one of the largest ports in the world. It is one of the few remaining European estuaries that include the entire gradient from fresh to salt water tidal areas. The brackish tidal water areas and marshlands in the upper estuary are unique and belong to the largest brackish marshes of Western Europe. All of the remaining salt marshes and mud flats in the Scheldt estuary fall under the protection of the European Habitats Directive. Recreation in the Scheldt basin mainly concerns riverside recreation: in the Dutch part, recreation is concentrated around the river mouth. Recreational and commercial fishery activities take place in the relatively clean areas in the river catchment.

The key issues are:

1. safety against flooding: In 1953, there was a disastrous flooding of the south-west part of the Netherlands, in which more than 1800 people drowned. This disaster formed the stimulus for a large-scale flood protection project called the Delta Plan which isolated most estuaries in the Netherlands from the sea by barrages and flood barriers. Major floods occurred again along the Scheldt in Flanders in 1976; shortly after this, Flanders instigated the Sigma Plan which has so far seen the reinforcement of 80% of all dykes along the Scheldt and the establishment of controlled flood areas.
2. accessibility: large-scale dredging activities have taken place to deepen the navigation channel such that vessels with a draught of up to 11.85 meters can now sail as far as Antwerp regardless of the tide.
3. healthy and dynamic ecosystems: In order to compensate for loss of habitat due to losses caused by the widening of the shipping channel, mud-flats and salt-marshes are being created in flood control areas along the river; 600 ha of estuarine nature along the Western Scheldt in the Netherlands and 1,100 ha of estuarine nature and wetlands along the Sea Scheldt in Flanders.

## **b) Objectives**

The development of a joint, Dutch-Flemish, cross-border, long term vision called the 2010 Development Outline was drawn up for the Scheldt estuary. It's aims were to improve still further the safety against flooding, the accessibility to Antwerp port and to compensate and conserve Natura 2000 areas in the estuary.

## **6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)**

### **a) Management**

Coordination of policies, measures and approaches is essential, therefore the Dutch and Flemish governments cooperate in the administrative-political and operational fields. The Technical Scheldt Commission (TSC), directed by a Flemish and Dutch chairman, has as its primary task to implement various treaties between the Netherlands and Flanders relating to shipping, pilotage and the deepening of the waterway and to advise Flemish and Dutch politicians on technical issues such as water infrastructure and general management. It took the lead in drawing up an integral vision and presented it to the competent government representatives in January 2001. A special project organisation, ProSes, was created in order to draw up a Development Outline, which aims at a more sustainable development in the Scheldt estuary, in close consultation with all stakeholders and under the supervision of the Technical Scheldt Commission. Both countries will jointly monitor the evolution of the estuary and the effects of the implemented projects in order to extend the knowledge of the estuary and to facilitate possible corrections.

### **b) ICZM tools**

The governments of both countries adopted the overall targets in the integral vision and in 2002, the 2010 Development Outline for the Scheldt estuary was started. The aim of the 2010 Development Outline was to define those projects and measures which, in a first stage, must be started up no later than 2010 to ensure the realisation of the long term vision for 2030. Several studies were carried out including a strategic environmental impact study, a social cost-benefit analysis and measures for developing the natural environment. In December 2004 the official version was presented to the government representatives, after intensive communication with the stakeholders and a consultation into the general public's views on the outline. Already in March 2005, the execution of the full 2010 Development Outline was decided upon.

## **7. Cost and resources**

No information is available.

## **8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)**

The ProSes organisation and the Development Outline were the result of a new way of looking at the cooperation between

countries and stakeholders, “From conflict to cooperation, towards common policy and management”. The making of the Development Outline was successful with, for example, a higher knowledge and understanding of the estuary of the Scheldt, bilateral networks on all levels, a legal framework for future cooperation and growing awareness of the public. Antwerp will be accessible to larger ships, safety against flooding will be enhanced and Nature will improve.

## 9. Success and Fail factors

The establishment of the Technical Scheldt Committee was a first important step in cooperative relationship between Flanders and the Netherlands with respect to water control and management of the Scheldt estuary. Members (19) of the Committee are from the relevant Dutch and Flemish governments. The triangle formed by ProSes, the Technical Scheldt Committee and the multi-stakeholders’ platform also proved to be a successful concept for process directed decision making. ‘Joint fact finding’ plays a prominent role in this. In this way commitment of the different participants can be obtained, helping to keep the decision-making process under way.

There were tensions, particularly with respect to participation and communication and different stakeholders had differing expectations e.g. the interests of the port of Antwerp do not coincide with those of nature conservation organisations or those of agriculture, the Dutch province of Zeeland felt that the advantages of the Development Outline 2010 did not outweigh the disadvantages for the province and, therefore, had objections to the Outline.

## 10. Unforeseen outcomes

The coherent execution of the Development Outline is still not guaranteed since difficulties concerning any one of the separate projects could jeopardize others.

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## 13. Sources

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- The Scheldt Estuary Case: From conflict to cooperation. Peeters H, van Hove B, Verhallen A & Cofino W. Wageningen Univ.
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- [www.ontwikkelingsschets2010.nl/](http://www.ontwikkelingsschets2010.nl/)
- [www.sigmaplan.be/](http://www.sigmaplan.be/)



Sigmaplan Maatschappelijke Kosten-BateAnalyse (1.38 MB) 



The Scheldt Estuary Case - from conflict to cooperation (242.76 KB) 



Verdrag tussen het Vlaams Gewest en Het Koninkrijk (265.6 KB) 