

Working together on a vital Scheldt estuary

The Scheldt is indispensable to the economy of Flanders and the Netherlands. It is also home to precious European protected nature reserves. But the Scheldt also brings risks such as flooding. Reasons enough for Flanders and the Netherlands to jointly work on policy for and management of the Scheldt estuary, and to jointly address the opportunities and challenges in the Flemish-Dutch Scheldt Commission. Because water knows no borders.



What is the Scheldt estuary?

An estuary is a river mouth subject to the influence of tides, containing a mix of fresh and salt water. The Scheldt estuary is the part of the Scheldt subject to tides. This part of the river extends to Ghent via Antwerp.



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What is the VNSC?

The Flemish-Dutch Scheldt Commission [Vlaams-Nederlandse Scheldecommissie, VNSC] is a partnership between the Netherlands and Flanders for jointly managing the Scheldt estuary. The conditions for this were established in 2005 in several Scheldt Treaties. The VNSC started when these treaties entered into force in 2008.



Flemish-Dutch Scheldt Commission

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Organisation

The Flemish and Dutch governments are represented in the VNSC. The Scheldt Council is the formal advisory body.

- + The Policy Board is formed of the ministers of the Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, and the Flemish Ministry of Mobility and Public Works.
- + The Administrative Board executes the decisions of the Policy Board.
- + The Executive Secretariat provides organisational and administrative support to the Policy and Administrative Boards.

The Administrative Board may set up working groups to carry out specific tasks. There are currently five active working groups within the VNSC, including Research & Monitoring, and Policy & Management.



What does the VNSC do?

In the VNSC, Flanders and the Netherlands work together on a strong and dynamic Scheldt estuary. Joint policy and management focuses primarily on:

- + maximum protection against floods;
- + optimum accessibility of the Scheldt ports;
- + maintenance of a healthy and dynamic ecosystem;
- + proactive collaboration with all stakeholders in the Scheldt estuary.

The VNSC also focuses on freshwater management and coastal security. In addition, it takes into account interests in areas such as agriculture, recreation, fishing and sand extraction.

Scope

The VNSC is active in the Scheldt estuary: the portion of the Scheldt stretching from the Sea Scheldt [from Ghent via Antwerp to the Belgian-Dutch border] to the Western Scheldt [from the border to the river's mouth in the North Sea].

Also included are the major waterways in the immediate vicinity of the Scheldt. This includes the Ghent-Terneuzen Canal, which connects Ghent to the Western Scheldt via locks, as well as the Scheldt-Rhine Canal that starts in Antwerp, is joined with the Scheldt via two locks, and is part of the Scheldt-Rhine connection.



Area of the SCHELDT ESTUARY



All stakeholders have a voice

The VNSC aims to involve all stakeholders in the preparation of its policy. That is why the commission included structured consultation with local and regional authorities, businesses and social organisations in the Scheldt Council, its official advisory body. This collaboration contributes to the quality of estuary policy and management and ensures widespread support.

Research and monitoring

One of the VNSC's key tasks is establishing and guiding joint research and monitoring. This is important because the Scheldt region is a complex physical and ecological system. Research institutes and universities in the Netherlands and Flanders engage in scientific research in order to more precisely identify the numerous aspects of this system and understand how it operates. Greater insight should contribute to better management of the Scheldt in the future.

VNSC projects

The VNSC is working on a safer, more natural and more accessible Scheldt estuary via dozens of projects, both large and small. Examples include expansion of The Zwin, the Nieuwe Sluis lock in Terneuzen and the construction of flood control areas in the context of the Sigma Plan.



AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE

To achieve its goals in the coming years, the VNSC drew up an Agenda for the Future. The aim is to further optimise the balance between a safe, environmentally resilient and economically vital Scheldt estuary. The VNSC has three priorities for the coming years:

- + an integrated research and monitoring programme;
- + a study to determine whether the capacity of the existing waterway is sufficient;
- + a new lock in Terneuzen to improve accessibility to the Ghent-Terneuzen Canal Zone.