

'DE ZEE VAN TOEN' (YESTERDAY'S SEA), AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT ON THE HISTORICAL ECOLOGY OF THE SOUTHERN NORTH SEA 1930-1980, AS TOLD BY FLEMISH PROFESSIONAL FISHERMEN (BELGIUM)

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The title says it all. This is only to inform you on the existence of this project, started January 1st, 2007. It does not present any results at this stage.

The basic aim is to add to a better understanding of this part of the North Sea, the Belgian Continental Shelf and to an extent the Southern Bight, by means of interviewing retired former professional fishermen in Flanders (Belgium). The interviews are taken according to present-day rules of good conduct in 'oral history' projects. The period is set at between 1930 and 1980. The former limit is derived from realism in finding 90+-year-old people with a reliable memory, the latter is set to keep a reasonable distance from present-day fisheries practice.

The interviews ideally yield many biologically and ecologically relevant data. The themes and questions are chosen accordingly but leave room for the unexpected.

The main bulk of information is expected to be related to commercial species. Since early data on fisheries landings are lacking or incomplete as concerns amount, species composition and origin, additional oral information is welcomed. Especially the eldest spokesmen, whose experience goes back to before WWII, will prove extremely useful.

Selected fishermen are queried on target species, used appropriate fishing techniques, seasonal or temporal shifts in availability of target species, shifts in target species composition, shifts in fishing grounds, but also on their knowledge of non-commercial fish species, sea mammals, non-target invertebrates, any interesting biological or ecological oddity...

The project touches many other fields such as coastal heritage and local history, social history, linguistics, wellness of seniors,...

Results will be used to produce a scientific report. In addition educational products can and will be developed in the realms of nature education, environmental education and coastal/maritime/fisheries heritage.