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## **INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS**

### **“National policy on SCALDIT, a project embedded in the International Scheldt Commission with the financial support of Interreg IIIB NWO : 2003-2005”**

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Directive 2000/60/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy or shorter, the European Water Framework Directive (WFD), has been published on 22 December 2000 in the Official Journal of the European Commission and entered into force on that day.

Starting from the idea that water in the Community is under increasing pressure from the continuous growth in demand for sufficient quantities of good quality water for all purposes, the WFD introduces a river basin approach with relation to integrated water management on a European level. Because the WFD is a FRAMEWORK directive, a lot of provisions of the WFD still need to be concretised. Therefore, the European Commission (DG Environment), the EU Member States, Norway and the Candidate Countries agreed on a Common Implementation Strategy (CIS) for the implementation of the Water Framework Directive (WFD). Within this common implementation strategy, a number of guidance documents are developed in 2001 & 2002. Before putting these guidance documents into practice, the European Commission and



Member States want to test them on their practicability in a selected number of pilot river basins.

The riparian regions of the Scheldt river basin district introduced the Scheldt as a pilot for integrated testing of the guidance documents. The CIS Scheldt pilot project proposal is the only proposal in which an entire international River Basin District is involved. The purpose of this integrated testing is to perform the testing and the preparation of the characterisations in a shorter timeframe as provided by the WFD so that other member states and candidate countries can benefit from experiences gained in the Scheldt river basin district.

The international character of the Scheldt river basin district, which inevitably complicates the management and implementation of the tasks to be delivered, urges the partners to apply for financial support to deliver the results in due time so that all other NWE and European river basins can benefit from the results of this project to implement the WFD in their river basin districts within the timeframe of the WFD. This financial support is given by Interreg IIIB NWE, a EU programme for stronger transnational co-operation in the fields of urban development, transport, cultural heritage, and territorial integration across seas.

The overall objective of the project is to establish a transnational analysis of the characteristics of the Scheldt river basin district, a review of the impact of human activities on the status of surface water and groundwater and an economic analysis of water use in the international river basin district of the Scheldt as a basis for an international river basin management plan that will lead to a good water status in the international river basin district of the Scheldt. The project will



make an essential contribution to the implementation of the WFD in the Scheldt river basin district. Secondly it will figure as a pilot for all international river basin districts within the NWE Area, the EU and the Candidate Countries through the structure of the Common Implementation Strategy.

In the partnership all relevant competent authorities for the implementation of the WFD in France, the three Belgian regions and the Netherlands are represented. The creation of this partnership is the basis for a transnational co-operation for the implementation of the WFD within the Scheldt river basin district.

By embedding the link of the project in the International Scheldt Commission, the documents that will define these aspects are subject to a transnational political decision making process. These documents will be submitted to the political decision making bodies in the five riparian regions of the Scheldt river basin districts. This formal approval by the political authorities of the International Scheldt Commission will give the documents the status of terms of reference for all future actions related to integrated water management in the Scheldt river basin district. These documents will constitute a common base for the preparation of the programme of measures and the river basin management plan that need to ensure a good surface water and groundwater status in the international river basin district of the Scheldt



The action program is divided into 5 themes:

## **1. Characterisations of the river basin district**

The project partners engage themselves in an integrated water management of the Scheldt river basin district. The first step in this process is to develop a transnational characterisation of the Scheldt river basin district. This will start with the development of a common understanding, based on a harmonisation of the monitoring and assessment of data. Based on this common understanding a harmonised transnational characterisation of the river basin district, an assessment of the environmental impact of human activities on the status of surface water and groundwater and an economic analysis of the water use in the river basin district will be performed.

The characterisations and analysis will be based on the guidance documents prepared within the Common Implementation Strategy (CIS).

This means that different issues and their connection will be addressed such as: groundwater, surface water, coastal and transitional water, heavily modified waterbodies, reference conditions, economics, description of the river basin district in terms of the WFD, pressures and its impacts on the water ecosystem, monitoring.

The common developed characterisation will be used to elaborate scenarios. Based on these scenarios the likelihood that surface water bodies within the river basin district will (fail to) meet the environmental quality objectives will be assessed.

Although a lot of information is available on the Scheldt river basin district, very little of this information is in line with the prescriptions of the WFD and even less is comparable



throughout the entire river basin district. Therefore, a common understanding with regard to the harmonisation of the monitoring and assessment of data will be developed. This will be based on the prescriptions of the WFD and the information in the EU CIS guidance documents. Knowledge gaps will be stopped by carrying out the necessary research projects and organising workshops with experts of the different project partners. Based on the common understanding and the knowledge acquired by the research projects and the workshops, the partners will carry out the characterisations within their region. The information on the regional characterisations gathered by the partners will be used to draw up the transnational characterisations of the river basin district. These transnational characterisations based on a common understanding and knowledge of the river basin district are a condition sine qua non for the preparation of a transnational programme of measures and the international river basin management plan for the Scheldt river basin district which will contain the required measures to reach a good surface water status and a good groundwater status in the Scheldt river basin district.

## **2. Data and information management**

Data management is an important aspect in integrated water management of the Scheldt river basin district. Without access to real data an efficient implementation of the WFD is impossible as it constitutes the basis for reporting, the development of scenarios, cartography, and eventually the development of appropriate measures. Information management is dealing with exchange and compatibility of



data, reports, etc. All preparatory steps with relation to data management will be carried out while preparing the characterisations.

Based on these experiences data management tools in order to facilitate the testing activities will be developed.

Data management is also related to cartographic data. The different partners within the project use different co-ordinate systems. This makes the accessibility and comparability of cartographic data among the different partners very difficult as well as the drawing up of maps.

As a generic activity a sustainable solution for cartographic related data/information exchange between the different partners will be developed. An atlas with maps on the characterisations for the Scheldt river basin district will be produced.

### **3. Water management and spatial planning**

The scope of the project is to draw up the transnational characterisation (water bodies, typology, reference conditions and intercalibration) of the river basin district, perform the transnational review of the impact of human activities on the status of surface water and groundwater as well as a transnational economic analysis related to water uses by testing the EU CIS guidance documents.

The Scheldt river basin district is a highly urbanised and industrialised river basin district. These human activities are not strictly limited to emissions, discharges and losses of polluting substances. Human activities also cause pressures with relation to spatial impacts. In periods of high rainfall e.g.,



watercourses do not dispose of sufficient storing capacity to drain away the water which may eventually lead to a higher risk of accidental flooding.

Flooding can not always be avoided. An early warning system between the parties will progressively be developed. To overcome too big damage in the future, it is recommended to give water space where possible. In this regard, guidelines to establish a shared vision between water managers and spatial planners will be developed and workshops will be organised to bring together water managers and spatial planners.

#### **4. Communication and raising awareness**

Scaldit also focusses strongly on communication. First of all we will ensure that the project and its products are recognisable. To make the project more visible, a logo and a common style will be developed and used in the publications of the project, the writing paper, the web site, etc. In this way, all communication actions will show a direct link with the Scaldit project.

In the beginning of 2003, a seminar will be organised to officially present the project and the national, regional and local water managers, the spatial planners, the stakeholders, NGO's and the press of the Scheldt River Basin District will be invited.

During the project we will publish newsletters and brochures to inform the national, regional and local water managers, the spatial planners, the stakeholders and NGOs about the progress and the results of the project. Every newsletter will be written in Dutch and French, the two languages of the Scheldt river basin district. By means of regular press releases, the press will



be informed about the existence and the main results of the Scaldit project.

A Scaldit web site will be developed and linked to the web site of the International Scheldt Commission, to the NWE web site and the web sites of the partners. The web site will provide the national, regional and local water managers, spatial planners, stakeholders and NGOs with all the relevant information of the project. Therefore, the web site will be regularly updated with the latest news and developments. In a special section, the Scaldit partners will be able to download documents and reports. The general public will also have access to the Scaldit web site.

At the end of the project a closing event will be organised to present the results of the project to the target groups by a number of boat excursions on the Scheldt from source to estuary.

## **5. Up to the international river basin management plan**

Scaldit provides the first step in the implementation of the WFD in the international river basin district of the Scheldt by carrying out the characterisation of the Scheldt river basin district, the review on pressures and impacts and the economic analysis based on common understanding and agreement. The experience gained in this process will be used to inform the other river basin districts in the NWE Area, the other EU Member States and the Candidate Countries.

The characterisation of the Scheldt river basin district, the review on pressures and impacts and the economic analysis will be submitted to the political decision making bodies. After political approval, these documents will act as terms of





reference for the further steps that need to be taken to implement the WFD.

Based on the information gathered in the characterisation and the scenario-analysis, the work programme for the development of the international river basin management plan for the Scheldt river basin district will be drawn up as a recommendation for the execution of the next phase of the transnational co-operation for the implementation of the Water Framework Directive

### Description of the Scheldt river basin district

The river Scheldt rises in France, in the north of Saint Quentin, and flows then through the Walloon Region, the Flemish Region and the Netherlands before running into the North Sea. The length of the river is 350 kilometre. The Scheldt and its affluents, which constitute the Scheldt river basin, are lowland watercourses with low rates of flow and discharge. An important part of the river is canalised. More than 250 weirs and sluices constitute the artificial connections between parts of the river and between the river and its affluents and canals. Upstream of Ghent, the Scheldt is canalised for 138 kilometre.

The part of the Scheldt between Ghent and Vlissingen is a unique area, as it is considerably influenced by the tide. The estuary contains zones with freshwater, brackish water and saline water comprising channels, shallow water areas, tidal flats, salt pastures and their biotopes.

The scope of the Scaldit project is the entire Scheldt river basin district.



The Scheldt river basin has a surface of 21.863 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 10 million inhabitants. The entire Scheldt river basin district with all its joined small river basins has a surface of 37.170 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 12.686.000 inhabitants.

The population density varies strongly in the different parts of the river basin district: from less than 100 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in rural areas like in the upstream part of the Leie or in some villages of Zeeland, to more than 2.000 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> in urban parts like Antwerp, the Brussels Capital Region and Lille.

The river basin district of the Scheldt has a very dense network of waterways and motor ways. This has encouraged the creation of a considerable industrial and urban structure. The inland navigation network is strongly developed and is for the most part adapted to the European dimension of 1300 tons.

The land use of the Scheldt river basin district is varied. The river basin district is highly urbanised. It contains several industrial areas. The areas destined for agricultural purposes, are quite consistently spread over the whole territory. Woodlands take up only a restricted part of the total surface and are mostly situated in the north-east of the river basin district (Kempen), in the neighbourhood of some major cities (the Brussels Capital Region, Leuven and Valenciennes) and in the sub-basin of the Haine. Important wetland areas are situated along the Scheldt between Ghent and Vlissingen, like the largest brackish water pasture of Western Europe: the Verdrongen land van Saeftinge.