

COORDINATION CENTRE FOR INTEGRATED COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT IN BELGIUM

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The need for coordination

Coastal zones are complex areas with a highly specific natural character. As a contact zone between land and sea they possess an exceptional diversity of environments, biotic communities, and animal- and plant species.

Coastal areas are, owing to their specific characteristics, also very attractive, commercially, for the development of coastal-related economic activities, e.g. port development, fishing, the abstraction of drinking water in the sand dunes, tourism and recreation.

All of these activities lead to a highly dynamic coastal region. Examples of these regional dynamics include mobility, construction activities, street furniture and signage, and other public infrastructure.

Because of the key role the coast fulfils of being a place to work, live and relax in, adequate standards of safety must be ensured as well. And that implies a well-conceived system of coastal protection.

Since numerous activities take place on that 65km-long coastline, disputes arise, inevitably, between the users of the seaboard. But precisely because of those multitudinous users, there are many unique opportunities out there too, which have to be seized in an acceptable way. To keep all this on the right track a well thought tuning is needed. Which is why three partners submitted a project proposal to establish and develop a coordination centre for a fully-integrated management of our coastal zone. The coordination centre is meant to be a neutral point of contact in the coastal zone. The partners are:

- ↳ the provincial government of West Flanders, acting as project leader;
- ↳ the Flemish government, for the account of the Flemish Minister for the Environment and in its role as chairman of an inter-ministerial steering committee on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM);
- ↳ the Flanders Marine Institute (VLIZ); as a data- and information centre.

Objectives of the coordination centre

In order to steer integrated management on the Belgian coast in the right direction, the coordination centre has, as its object, the following key tasks:

to promote the integration of planning and policy of the sectors and policy-making levels by monitoring new developments in planning and policy, and by playing a part, in an advisory capacity, during the realization thereof. The intended result is a better attunement of planning

and policy between the respective players on the coast and a sustainable approach to coastal development.

to foster cooperation between the policy-making levels and sectors via consultative meetings, and by citing, as much as possible, initiatives at other levels or in other sectors and by actively encouraging cooperation.

to act as an (international) point of contact for Integrated Coastal Zone Management

The aim of the coordination centre is to serve as a central point of contact for the various levels of government and other key players on the coast and to offer every private individual, agency or government body the opportunity, via a centralized forum, to ask coast-related questions.

to monitor international and European developments in Integrated Coastal Zone Management by participating in coastal forums or other consultative platforms on coastal zone management.

In addition to these four key tasks, the coordination centre will also:

- monitor significant activities that serve to develop the coast and try and shed light on the motives thereof within an overall strategy of sustainable development;
- keep a record of the data and then, out of that, distil a set of effective sustainability indicators for the coastal zone;
- keep an up-to-date inventory of ongoing and new projects and initiatives in the coastal zone;
- commission others to make goal-oriented studies;
- communicate about integrated management at the Belgian coast.

(The project comes under the scope of the European objective 2 programme Kustgebied-Westhoek, which has been instituted, on our coast, for the period 2000-2006).