



# Summary of Strategic Environmental Assessment for the Management & Development Plan for National Waters 2016-2021

Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, Rijkswaterstaat

This Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was drawn up to support decision-making on the 2016-2021 Management & Development Plan for National Waters (*Beheer- en ontwikkelplan voor de rijkswateren*, Bprw). The document assesses the environmental impact of activities proposed in the Bprw for 2016-2021.

## **Why a new Bprw?**

In its capacity as the manager of national waters, the Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management (*Rijkswaterstaat*, RWS) drew up this Bprw to set out the measures that it will take in the plan period for the development, operation and protection of national waters. The plan deals with construction, management and maintenance measures, both in normal circumstances and if calamities occur.

Every water manager has a statutory duty to produce a management plan (under Section 4.6 of the Water Act). These plans must be revised every six years. The present Bprw expires at year-end 2015.

## **Why a Strategic Environmental Assessment?**

A Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) was drawn up for the draft Bprw for the following reasons:

- One of the measures (i.e. activities) is included in Part D of the appendix to the Environmental Assessment Decree, namely the measure 'Increasing the flexibility of water level management in the IJsselmeer lake area (20 cm)' (category D49.2).
- Measures included in the Bprw will require an appropriate assessment under the Nature Conservancy Act 1998.

The Strategic Environmental Assessment seeks to give the environment a fully-fledged place in decision-making on the Bprw 2016-2021, and thus to comply with the environmental assessment regulations laid down in Chapter 7 of the Environmental Management Act. Given the Bprw's level of abstraction, it is possible to achieve this objective by giving the Strategic Environmental Assessment mainly an identifying function.

## **Proposed activities: on which measures does the Strategic Environmental Assessment focus?**

Some of the measures in the Bprw 2016-2021 are new, while others stem (largely) from other plans, programmes and statutory regulations and related decrees<sup>1</sup>, or concern management measures in the current Bprw that will be continued in the next one.

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<sup>1</sup> These include the Management & Development Plan for National Waters 2010-2015, the Water Framework Directive, the Flood Risks Directive, the Delta Programme 2015 and the Multi-year Infrastructure, Spatial Planning & Transport Programme (*Meerjarenprogramma, Infrastructuur, Ruimte en Transport*, MIRT).

Not all of these measures will have a physical impact and the likely environmental effects of some of them have already been examined. A filtering technique was applied to select the measures that are 'new' in this Bprw and that could have a physical impact.

This filtering technique revealed the following:

- Many of the Bprw measures are of an administrative nature (such as planning studies, research, pilot projects and exploratory studies). These measures are unlikely to give rise to any physical effects in the water system in the 2016-2021 plan period.
- A large number of measures are already being carried out and/or have an environmental impact that has already been integrally considered under a different framework, in some cases accompanied by an environmental assessment.
- The proposed activities (i.e. the 'new' measures with a physical impact) stem from the following programmes:
  - Fresh Water Investing Programme (Delta Programme 2015)
  - Water Quality Improvement Programme (Water Framework Directive)
  - Management and Maintenance of Ecological Facilities
- The Bprw includes one measure directly subject to a mandatory Strategic Environmental Assessment, namely 'Increasing the flexibility of water level management in the IJsselmeer lake area (20 cm)'.
- Some measures included in the Bprw require an appropriate assessment, which makes them subject to a mandatory Strategic Environmental Assessment.
- Other proposed 'new' measures are being examined as a cluster.

### **Summary of impacts in this Strategic Environmental Assessment**

This Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) provides a full general picture of the likely impact on each water system as a result of implementation of the 'filtered' package of measures in the Bprw 2016-2021 (proposed activities).

#### Impact in general terms

Generally speaking it may be concluded that implementation of the measures in the Bprw will have a positive impact on the assessed criteria. In accordance with the objective of the measures (in terms of the Water Framework Directive), this positive impact will be visible mainly in matters related to water quality and nature.

As regards the other tested criteria, the Strategic Environmental Assessment similarly concludes that the Bprw does not include any new measures that will cause negative environmental effects, either on their own or in conjunction with the effects of other measures in the plan. Most of the measures that will be taken will have a neutral or positive impact on nature and the environment.

The reference situation has been assessed as predominantly neutral to positive in terms of 'reaping the fruits' of the policy conducted and the efforts made over the past decade. However, some elements still display a negative development. The environmental burden remains too high for the sustainable preservation of water-dependent biodiversity. At the same time an ecological improvement is sometimes observable in specific water systems, albeit not always in relation to the defined goals.

#### Appropriate assessment (impact on Natura 2000 areas)

The preliminary assessment shows that specifically in Natura 2000 areas there might be locally conflicting nature objectives (Water Framework Directive vs. Natura 2000). Significant negative effects caused by some of the (clustered) measures cannot be ruled out. This concerns mainly the potential surface area loss of habitat types and the impairment of the habitats of a few species. An appropriate assessment has been made of these measures. The appropriate assessment shows that by means of targeted mitigating measures it will be possible to rule out significant negative effects on habitat

types and the habitats of species. This will avoid an adverse effect on the Natura 2000 preservation goals. Mitigation will be assured through licensing under the Nature Conservancy Act 1998. Therefore, the impact on Natura 2000 areas has been assessed as neutral. The Bprw 2016-2021 seems practicable on this basis.

#### Impact on each water system

The likely impact on each assessed water system may be summarised as follows:

- South-west Delta: the measures included for this water system will have a neutral to positive impact on nature and the environment. Targeted mitigating measures may be needed for 'lowering of river forelands' and 'nature-friendly foreshores and shores', to rule out a significant negative impact on habitat types and the habitats of species.
- Rivers: the measures included for this water system will have a neutral to positive impact on nature and the environment. Targeted mitigating measures may be needed for the measures of 'connection of old river branches', 'side channels', 'lowering of river forelands' and 'nature-friendly foreshores and shores', in order to rule out significant negative effects on habitat types and the habitats of species.
- Canals: the measures included for this water system will have a neutral to positive impact on nature and the environment.
- IJsselmeer lake area: the measures included for this water system will have a neutral to positive impact on nature and the environment. There might be a need for targeted mitigating measures for 'Increasing the flexibility of water level management in the IJsselmeer lake area (20 cm)' and 'Nature-friendly foreshores and shores', in order to rule out significant negative effects on habitat types and the habitats of species.
- North Sea and coast: the proposed activities for this water system do not include any 'new' measures. An impact assessment was not performed for that reason.
- Wadden Sea: the measures included for this water system will have a neutral to positive impact on nature and the environment.

#### **Matters requiring attention in the next steps**

The objective of the impact assessment in this report is to ensure that when selecting locations and carrying out projects, proper allowance is made for the prevailing (sectoral) legislation and for the values and characteristics of the (nature) areas where measures must be taken. Some situations will require performance of an Environmental Impact Assessment to support decision-making.

The following important matters will require attention in further planning:

- When selecting locations and elaborating measures for specific projects, it is necessary to make allowance for the preservation objectives and a possible licensing obligation in the event of an actual or potential impact on protected nature values.
- By carefully embedding defined measures, an attempt must be made to minimise the impairment of values and where possible to improve quality.
- Specifically when connecting old seeping rivers, it is essential to give careful consideration to the desirability of connecting the location concerned, if this will or might reduce seepage water quality and the associated nature values.
- Specifically for fish passages, it is necessary to prevent an exchange of water of different quality levels by factoring this aspect into the plan.
- To limit the negative impact on the bullhead pike (and thus avoid a significant negative impact on Natura 2000 areas), it is recommended to use fine gravel when constructing foreshores.

Given the level of abstraction in the Strategic Environmental Assessment, there is sufficient information available to adopt the Bprw 2016-2021. Furthermore, the working method of the Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management is characterised by the careful elaboration of plans, which is assured by various codes of conduct, guidance documents and directives, including the MIRT guidance that contains appendices on how to determine impact meaningfully.