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Tourism and recreation



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According to a [study \(2013\)](#), coastal and maritime tourism (including the cruise sector) is the biggest maritime sector in Europe with regard to the added value and employment. European coastal tourism generates 183 billion euro of added value and creates jobs for 3.2 million people. Moreover, about half of the tourist overnight stays are booked in coastal areas ([Eurostat Regional Yearbook 2014](#) and COM (2014) 86).

The Belgian coast is a popular holiday destination as well. Residential tourism accounted for 5.0 million arrivals and 28.4 million overnight stays in 2013. The number of day trippers varies between 16 and 19 million annually. The total spending of coastal tourists amounts to approximately 2.7 billion euro ([Strategisch beleidsplan voor toerisme en recreatie aan de kust 2015-2020](#)).

Besides coastal tourism, tourism in the hinterland accounts for a considerable number of arrivals and overnight stays as well. The tourist and recreational regions of Bruges Woodland and the Westhoek area accounted for about 500,000 arrivals and almost 1.3 million overnight stays in 2013 ([Westtoer, Trendrapport Brugse Ommeland 2012-2013](#), [Westtoer, Trendrapport Westhoek 2012-2013](#)). World War I tourism in the Westhoek area has led to a significant increase in 2014 of nearly 800,000 memorial tourists (numbers [Westtoer](#)). It should be mentioned that the borders of these regions extend further than the hinterland communities (the strategic policy plans for tourism and recreation: [Bruges Woodland \(2013-2018\)](#) and [Westhoek \(2008-2013\)](#)).

11.1 Policy context

At the European level, the policy relating to tourism is stipulated by [DG Growth](#) of the European commission. However, maritime and coastal tourism is included in the so-called Blue Growth-policy (COM (2012) 0494) established by [DG MARE](#). In this context, a strategy was developed to increase growth and employment in coastal and maritime tourism (COM (2014) 86).

Considering that the coast constitutes a ‘macro product’ within Flemish tourism but is completely located in the province of West Flanders, it has been decided to have a policy plan ([Strategisch beleidsplan voor toerisme en recreatie aan de kust 2015-2020](#)) drafted jointly by ‘Tourism Flanders’ ([Toerisme Vlaanderen](#)), under the supervision of the Flemish minister of Tourism (Flemish level, [beleidsnota toerisme 2009-2014](#)), and ‘Westtoer’ (provincial level). The policy of the Westhoek area and the Bruges Woodland region has been defined on a provincial level by [Westtoer](#) in the strategic policy plans for tourism and recreation of Bruges Woodland ([Bruges Woodland \(2013-2018\)](#)) and the Westhoek area ([de Westhoek \(2008-2013\)](#)).

In the past, the Flemish government and the minister of tourism provided funding in the framework of the Coastal Action Plan I ([Kustactieplan](#)) (1997-2002), II (2000-2004) and III (2005-2009)) and the ‘Coastal Impulse Programme’ ([Impulsprogramma Kust](#)) (2010), to invest in certain coastal-related projects. Since 2015, tourism leverage projects ([toeristische hefboomprojecten](#)) have been incorporated within the impulse programmes which apply for Flanders (and not only for the coastal region). Furthermore, a permanent measurement and monitoring system has been developed (KiTS, Coastal-Indicators-Tourist-Statistical) that publishes numbers with respect to the tourist activities along the coast biannually. These statistics are annually bundled in a trend report ([Westtoer, Trendrapport Kust 2012-2013](#)). More information on the sectoral legislation with regard to tourism can be found on the website of Tourism Flanders ([Toerisme Vlaanderen](#)) and in the [coastal codex, theme tourism and recreation](#).

For water recreation on the coast, the royal decree of August 4, 1981 regarding the Police and Shipping Regulations for the Belgian territorial sea, coastal ports and beaches is of interest (more information: [website FOD Mobiliteit oplijsting vaarregels](#)). Furthermore, the law of 20 January 1999 and the associated royal decrees stipulate a number of restrictions for recreational activities in marine protected areas. The regulation with regard to boating and water recreation on the fairways has been developed by the DG Maritime Transport ([DG Maritiem Vervoer](#), FPS Mobility and Transport) and is discussed in the following documents: [Vademecum van de pleziervaart in België \(2014\)](#), [De pleziervaart op de bevaarbare waterwegen in Vlaanderen \(2011\)](#) and [Wijzer op het water \(2010\)](#).

With regard to bathing along the coast, the European directive concerning the management of bathing water quality (2006/7/EC) is of importance as it stipulates the bathing water quality standards (more information: [De nieuwe zwemwaterrichtlijn, VMM 2006](#) and [website kwaliteit zwemwater](#)).

The policy concerning outdoor recreation is described in the strategic policy plan for outdoor recreation for the province of West Flanders 2009-2018 ([Strategisch beleidsplan openlucht recreatie voor de provincie West-Vlaanderen 2009-2018](#)). The legislative framework of recreation and sport activities along the coast has been extensively

elaborated in the coastal codex, themes [tourism and recreation](#), [coastal zone management](#) and [local legislation](#) and is also discussed by [Deraus \(2005\)](#) and [De Wachter & Volckaert \(2005\)](#) ([GAUFRE project BELSPO](#)).

11.2 Spatial use

The areas for tourism and recreation are primarily steered by spatial planning (see also theme **Social and economic environment**). Instruments such as the spatial structure plans, spatial implementation plans (RUP) and regulations, on a Flemish, provincial and municipal level, indicate the possibilities for the future tourist-recreational developments of a specific area.

In the Flemish spatial structure plan ([RSV](#)), the coast is identified as an urban network which is a defining structure on the Flemish level. Because of its tourist-recreational facilities, the coast is also recognized as a tourist-recreational network which requires a policy on a Flemish level. This policy was *inter alia* developed in the framework of initiatives and studies such as the Masterplan Coastal Safety ([Masterplan Kustveiligheid](#)), Flemish Bays ([Masterplan Vlaamse Baaieren 2014](#)) and [Metropolitaan Kustlandschap 2100 \(fase 1 / fase 2 / fase 3 part 1, 2 and 3\)](#). Furthermore, the designation of Ostend and Bruges as regional urban areas (*regionaal stedelijke gebieden*) and Blankenberge and Knokke-Heist as local urban areas (*kleinstedelijke gebieden*) in the [RSV](#) is important for the tourism sector as this designation has consequences for the potential 'highly dynamic functions' that may be developed in the coastal region. Tourism Flanders drafted a study on the spatial use of tourism and recreation in Flanders ([Ruimte voor Toerisme en Recreatie in Vlaanderen \(WES, 2007\)](#)) where the question concerning space for the different aspects of tourism was raised in order to provide input for the large reconsideration of the [RSV](#) of 2011. In addition to the [RSV](#), the regional spatial implementation plans (GRUPs) can be consulted on: www.ruimtelijkeordening.be. Besides the further implementation of the Flemish spatial structure plan, the Flemish government is preparing a new spatial policy plan ([Beleidsplan Ruimte](#)) (see [Groenboek. Vlaanderen in 2050: mensenmaat in een metropool? Beleidsplan ruimte Vlaanderen \(2012\)](#)).

The Flemish government is the owner of almost all beaches along the coast. The Coastal division grants concessions for the development, maintenance and exploitation of the marinas for water recreation and sports along the Flemish Coast ([website Coastal division](#)). The Coastal division also distributes the concessions for the beach and seawall in consultation with the municipalities, other public councils, contractors, etc. ([website Coastal division](#)).

Important regional policies for the coast have been formulated in the spatial structure plan of the province of West Flanders ([PRS-WV](#)). In the [PRS-WV](#), several coastal municipalities have been selected as population centres (*woonkernen*) with opportunities for development under specific conditions. Furthermore, an action plan for the 'Koninklijke Baan (N34)' road has been discussed in the provincial spatial structure plan (more information: [Waarheen met de Koninklijke Baan? 2008](#)). The [PRS-WV](#) also demarcates outdoor recreational green domains, amusement parks and tourist-recreational linear elements (watercourses, railway track, seawall and road infrastructure). Furthermore, a number of strategic project areas have been selected with important touristic and recreational aspects ([PRS-WV, strategisch beleidsplan voor toerisme aan de kust 2009-2014](#)): the mouth of the river Yser in Nieuwpoort, the area east of Blankenberge, the area south of the railway station of Knokke, the military base in Koksijde and the east bank of Ostend. In addition, the [provincial spatial implementation plans](#) (in particular the provincial RUPs for beach and seawall) are of significant importance for the planning of the tourist-recreational functioning of the coastal zone.

At the municipal level, processes are under development that create new possibilities for tourism and recreation within the municipal structure plans. These possibilities are elaborated in more detail for the possible spatial developments for tourism and recreation on a local level in the implementation plans.

11.3 Societal interest

11.3.1 Coastal tourism

The tourist-recreational sector is of crucial importance for the coastal economy. In 2013, the coast accounted for 4,950,446 arrivals and a total of 28,356,924 overnight stays (table 1 and figure 1). Commercial accommodation constitutes 44.0% of these stays and second home tourism 56.0%. In addition, 16,930,000 day trippers arrived at the coast in 2013 ([Westtoer, Trendrapport Kust 2012-2013](#), more information, [Vakantieganger in commercieel logies aan de Kust in 2011, Westtoer 2010](#)). Furthermore, the presence of an airport in Ostend and the harbors of Ostend and

Table 1. Arrivals and overnight stays (excl. marinas) on the coast in 2013 (Westtoer, Trendrapport Kust 2012-2013).

	ARRIVALS (2013)		OVERNIGHT STAYS (2013)	
Commercial accommodation (holiday houses, hotels, camping grounds, holiday centers and holiday parks)	2,402,175	48.5%	12,489,687	44.0%
Second home tourism (holiday houses)	1,944,291	39.3%	12,347,824	43.5%
Second home tourism (on camping grounds)	603,980	12.2%	3,519,413	12.4%
Total	4,950,446		28,356,924	



Figure 1. Evolution of the arrivals in commercial accommodation, second home tourism and overnight stays at the coast (Westtoer, Trendrapport Kust 2012-2013).

Zeebrugge are important for the inflow of foreign tourists towards the Belgian coastal area. In Merckx & Neyts (2015) figures on the arrival of passengers in the coastal harbours are mentioned. The traffic figures for Ostend Airport are available on the following web page: <http://www.ost.aero/passagiers/voorstelling-luchthaven/trafielcijfers>.

The total direct spending generated by residential tourism (commercial accommodation, second home tourism and mooring in marinas) and day trippers amounted to more than 2.7 billion euros in 2013 (table 2 and figure 2). In this context, residential tourism represents 2.1 billion euros in direct spending whereas the day trippers account for 629.0 million euros (Westtoer, Trendrapport Kust 2012-2013, more information: Westtoer, Vakantieganger in commercieel logies aan de Kust in 2011, Westtoer 2010). The direct turnover of the construction sector as a result of the construction of second homes amounted to 367 million euros in 2007 (IDEA consult 2009). Recent research on the meeting industry at the coast reveals that this sector has a turnover of 60 million euro (Westtoer, onderzoek Meeting aan Zee 2015).

The activities of the Belgians during day trips (*inter alia* to the coast) have been examined in detail in the following study: *pilootonderzoek naar daguitstappen van de Belg (2010-2011)*. This report shows that the majority of day trips to the coastal region are focused on visiting the sea, beach and dunes (76.6%), followed by amusement parks (7.8%), sightseeing (2%) and other activities such as hiking, gastronomy, shopping, events, museums, etc. According to the trend report (Westtoer, Trendrapport Kust 2012-2013), 26 water sport clubs and 13 yacht clubs (3,553 moorages) were active along the coast in 2013. The spending at the yacht clubs amounted to 21.1 million euros. The economic benefits of these recreation and sport activities on the coast (without indirect effects) are also discussed in *De Wachter*

& Volckaert (2005) (GAUFRE project BELSPO). In the *Seaconomics project* (2011-2014) the economic importance of yacht clubs was further investigated (*Westtoer – Onderzoek gebruikers kustjachthavens 2013*). Based on this research, the average annual turnover generated by all users of the Flemish yacht clubs is estimated at 25.3 million euros.

According to statistics of the research department of the Flemish government (based on data from the National Social Security Office (NSSO) and the National Institute for the Social Security of the Self-employed (NISSE)), the total employment of employees in the tourism industry on the coast in 2010 amounted to 11,253 jobs. The employment of the self-employed and helpers at the coast totaled 2,286 jobs (*Weekers 2013*). According to another study (Westtoer), the direct employment related to coastal tourism in 2013 was estimated at more than 27,000 fulltime equivalents (assuming 1 fulltime equivalent of direct employment for every 100,000 euros of direct spending) (*Westtoer, Trendrapport Kust 2012-2013*). Employment in the construction sector related to second home tourism was estimated at 1,814 jobs in 2007 (*IDEA consult 2009*).

11.3.2 Hinterland tourism

In addition to coastal tourism, tourism in the Westhoek area, Bruges Woodland and Bruges is of significant importance. Bruges Woodland accounted for 133,861 visitors and 322,934 overnight stays in 2013 (*Westtoer, Trendrapport Brugse Ommeland 2012-2013*). The arrivals and overnight stays in the Westhoek area amounted to 368,413 and 945,869 respectively (*Westtoer, Trendrapport Westhoek 2012-2013*). Bruges accounted for 1.03 million arrivals and 1.87 million overnight stays in 2013. These are arrivals and overnight stays in commercial accommodations (excl. second home tourism) (Source: *Westtoer, Kerncijfers West-Vlaanderen 2013*). In these trend reports, spending and employment are discussed as well.

Table 2. The direct spending of coastal tourism per type of tourism in 2013 (*Westtoer, Trendrapport Kust 2012-2013*).

TYPE OF TOURISM	DIRECT SPENDING OF TOURISTS IN MILLION EUROS	PERCENTAGE OF DIRECT SPENDING
Commercial accommodation	766.4	28.1
Second home tourism	1,251.2	45.9
Mooring in marinas	21.1	0.8
Day trippers	629.0	23.1
Meeting industry	60.0	2.2
Total	2,727.7	100

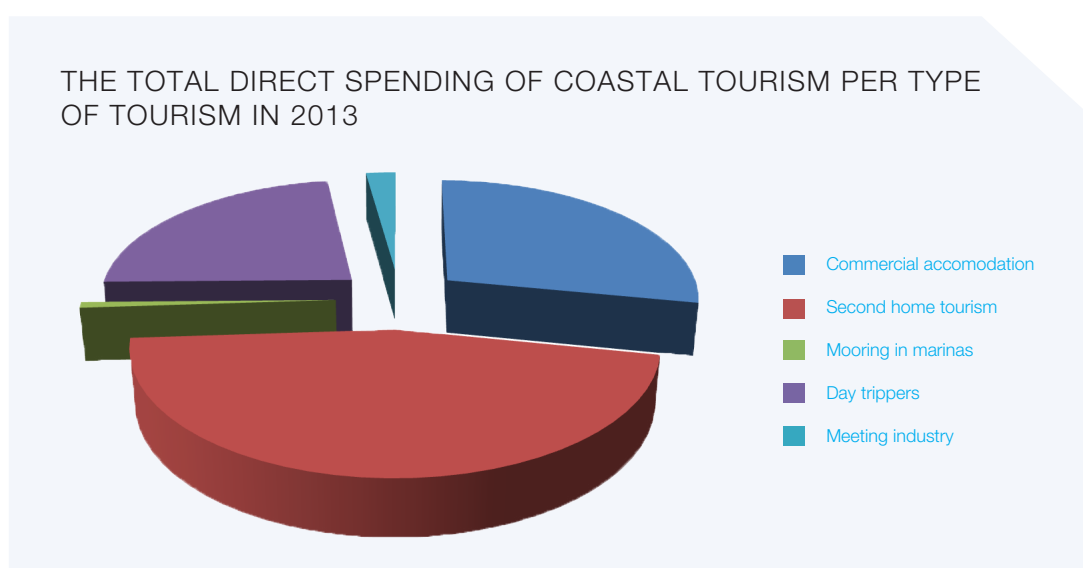


Figure 2. The total direct spending of coastal tourism per type of tourism in 2013 (*Westtoer, Trendrapport Kust 2012-2013*).

11.4 Impact

As mentioned above, coastal tourism has a significant economic and societal value and creates a number of facilities such as the coastal tram. However, tourism in the coastal area also has a number of effects on the social and ecological environment. On the social level, the amount of second homes has an impact on the quality of life along the coast: higher real estate prices, weakened social fabric, mobility problems, etc. (Coudenys 2012 and Keunen & Hoornaert 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#), [Meire & Bracke 2005](#), [Goffin et al. 2007](#) (see also theme **Social and economic environment**)).

The large amount of second homes also affects the cultural heritage at the coast ([IDEA consult 2009](#)) (see theme **Maritime and coastal heritage**), although clear synergies between tourism and the coastal heritage are present, such as the tourism function of cultural-historical buildings along the coast ([De Baerdemaeker et al. 2011](#)).

On an ecological level, the rise of mass tourism towards the coast since the 1930s with the massive construction of tourist-recreational accommodation (holiday homes, camping grounds, holiday parks, second homes, etc.), has played an important role in the urbanization of coastal areas, fragmentation of valuable open space and the disappearance of habitats ([PRS-WV](#), [Goffin et al. 2007](#), Boone 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#), [Provoost et al. 2014](#)). Especially the dune area underwent a strong fragmentation, *inter alia* caused by spatial planning ([Welkom in de duinen 2008](#)) (see theme **Nature and environment**). Furthermore, the high concentration of tourists and residents in the coastal zone during the high season has some direct and indirect ecological effects (see table 3).

Also, recreation and sport activities on the beach and in the dunes have direct and indirect ecological effects (table 4).

Table 3. An overview of the ecological effects caused by the high concentration of tourists and residents in the coastal area.

IMPACT	LITERATURE
Increased consumption of energy and water	Vanlerberghe & Vanhoutte 2001 , Goffin et al. 2007 (see theme Agriculture , salinisation)
Problems with waste processing	Goffin et al. 2007 , De Groof in Maelfait et al. 2012 , kustactieplan OVAM
Contribution of coastal tourism to the eutrophication of the coastal waters	Maes et al. 2004 (MARE-DASM project BELSPO) (see theme Agriculture , eutrophication)
Pollution caused by traffic	Goffin et al. 2007

Table 4. An overview of the ecological effects caused by recreation and sport activities on the beach and in the dunes.

IMPACT	LITERATURE
Trampling and disruption of the beach and dune ecosystem	Vincx et al. 2001 , Maes et al. 2004 (MARE-DASM project BELSPO), Goffin et al. 2007 , Deraus 2005 (GAUFRE project BELSPO), Welkom in de duinen 2008 (see theme Nature and environment)
Litter on the beach	Lescrauwaet et al. 2006 , Goffin et al. 2007 , Maelfait 2008 , Doomen et al. 2009 , André et al. 2010 (see theme Nature and environment)
Mechanical cleaning of the beaches and its associated ecological effects	Belpaeme 2003 , Goffin et al. 2007 , Doomen et al. 2009 (marine litter, see theme Maritime transport, shipping and ports)
Pollution by recreational boating	Maes et al. 2004 (MARE-DASM project BELSPO), De Wachter & Volckaert 2005 (GAUFRE project BELSPO), Lescrauwaet et al. 2006 , Goffin et al. 2007
Sport fisheries	see theme Fisheries

11.5 Sustainable use

11.5.1 Sustainable development of coastal tourism

The sustainable co-existence of the various users and sectors of the coastal areas (*inter alia* tourism and recreation) is discussed in the European recommendation on integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) in Europe (2002/413/EC). In [Maelfait et al. \(2012\)](#), published in the context of ICZM, a number of indicators and measures have been proposed that promote the sustainable development of tourism and recreation on the coast. The relation between tourism and the social and economic aspects of the coast is discussed in more detail in the theme **Social and economic environment**. More recently, a communication concerning European maritime and coastal tourism (COM (2014) 86) proposed 14 actions that can contribute to a sustainable growth in the sector and can provide an extra boost to the European coastal areas.

In the strategic policy plan for coastal tourism ([Strategisch beleidsplan voor toerisme en recreatie aan de kust 2015-2020](#)), [Tourism Flanders](#) and [Westtoer](#) have formulated 12 strategic objectives in order to further develop tourism at the Belgian coast:

- Strategic projects in light of the international potential (leverage projects and strategic project areas);
- Further investment in basic infrastructure and public space
- Weather-independent facilities in view of a four-season destination;
- Space for recreation
- An accessible coast
- The development of tailor-made vacations with integrated customer service
- Innovation and differentiation in the accommodation sector
- Enforcement and competitiveness in the hospitality industry
- A modern welcoming policy in the context of a broad hospitality
- An integrated marketing policy
- Knowledge-driven coastal tourism
- Policy and organisation

For the implementation of some of the above mentioned strategic objectives, tourism leverage projects ([toeristische hefboomprojecten](#)) can be used within the impulse programmes. It should be mentioned that these projects apply to Flanders (and not only the coastal region). The further development of tourism at the coast is also strongly steered by spatial planning (see **Spatial use**).

Furthermore, there are several visions and policy initiatives (e.g. [Metropolitaan Kustlandschap 2100 fase 1 / fase 2 / fase 3 part 1, 2 and 3](#), [Masterplan Vlaamse Baaieren 2014](#), [Masterplan Kustveiligheid](#), etc.) and studies (eg. [Kindvriendelijkheid aan de Vlaamse kust 2008](#), [De Waegemaeker 2012](#), an [analysis of the accessibility along the coast by npo Westkans](#) with an [interactive map](#), the project 120 km coastal quality with studies such as [van Meenen 2009](#), [Pijpers 2009](#), [kansen aan de kust 2009](#), etc.) (indirectly) discussing the (sustainable) development of coastal tourism. Besides, several labels (such as [Blauwe vlag](#) of [Bond Beter Leefmilieu](#), the [Q-label](#) for tourism entrepreneurs, [Groene Sleutel](#), [het toegankelijkheidslabel](#) of the [npo Westkans](#), etc. (more information: [website Toerisme Vlaanderen](#))) and awards ([De Kust Kijkt Verder 2012](#)) contribute to a sustainable (coastal) tourism.

11.5.2 Tourism and nature

In [Goffin et al. \(2007\)](#), [Maelfait et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Strategisch beleidsplan voor toerisme en recreatie aan de kust 2015-2020](#) measures have been formulated in order to achieve a balance between the maintenance of the natural system and the needs of recreationists and tourists. In this regard, policy instruments such as the Decree of the Dunes and spatial planning play an important role and are discussed in more detail in the theme **Nature and environment**. The compatibility of recreation and nature is also discussed in publications such as [Belpaeme \(2003\)](#), [Zwaenepoel et al. \(2005\)](#), [Uitkerkse polder, een recreatieve meerwaarde voor de Vlaamse kust \(2007\)](#), [Welkom in de duinen \(2008\)](#) and [Doomen et al. \(2009\)](#).

The (bathing) water quality of the coastal zone is managed on the European level by directive 91/271/EC concerning urban waste-water treatment, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) (2000/60/EC) and directive 2006/7/EC concerning

the bathing water quality. On the federal level, these European measures are implemented by the royal decree of 23 June 2010 concerning the status of surface waters. On the Flemish level, the following decrees are important: the decree of 18 July 2003 (integrated water policy) (more information: [website Coordination Committee on Integrated Water Policy \(CIW\)](#)) and the decree of 8 December 1998 concerning the bathing water quality.

The quality of the bathing water of the coast is frequently sampled by the Flemish Environment Agency ([VMM](#) and the [website kwaliteit zwemwater](#)) ([Goffin et al. 2007](#), Pelicaen 2012 in [Maelfait et al. 2012](#), [Rapport Kwaliteit van het Zwemwater 2014](#)). The [Flemish agency for Care and Health](#) is competent for the health aspect of the bathing water quality. The eutrophication of the coastal waters and the problem of salinisation are discussed in more detail in the theme **Agriculture**.

Legislation reference list

Table with European legislation. The consolidated version of this legislation is available on [Eurlax](#).

EUROPEAN LEGISLATION			
Abbreviations (if available)	Title	Year	Number
Directives			
	<i>Council Directive concerning urban waste-water treatment</i>	1991	271
<i>Water Framework Directive</i>	Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy	2000	60
<i>Bathing Water Directive</i>	Directive concerning the management of bathing water quality and repealing Directive 76/160/EEC	2006	7
Other (Decisions, Communications, White Papers, etc.)			
	<i>Recommendation concerning the implementation of Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Europe</i>	2002	413
	<i>Communication from the Commission (COM): Blue Growth opportunities for marine and maritime sustainable growth</i>	2012	494
	<i>Communication from the Commission (COM): A European Strategy for more Growth and Jobs in Coastal and Maritime Tourism</i>	2014	86

Table with Belgian and Flemish legislation. The consolidated version of this legislation is available on [Belgisch staatsblad](#) and the [Justel-databases](#).

BELGIAN AND FLEMISH LEGISLATION		
Date	Title	File number
Laws		
Wet van 20 januari 1999	Wet ter bescherming van het mariene milieu en ter organisatie van de mariene ruimtelijke planning in de zeegebieden onder de rechtsbevoegdheid van België	1999-01-20/33
Royal Decrees		
KB van 4 augustus 1981	Koninklijk besluit houdende politie- en scheepvaartreglement voor de Belgische territoriale zee, de havens en de stranden van de Belgische kust	1981-08-04/31
KB van 23 juni 2010	Koninklijk besluit betreffende de vaststelling van een kader voor het bereiken van een goede oppervlaktewatertoestand	2010-06-23/04
Decrees		
Decreet van 18 juli 2003	Decreet betreffende het integraal waterbeleid	2003-07-18/72
Other		
Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering van 8 december 1998	Besluit van de Vlaamse Regering tot aanduiding van de oppervlaktewateren bestemd voor de productie van drinkwater categorieën A1, A2 en A3, zwemwater, viswater en schelpdierwater, ter omzetting van Richtlijn 2006/7/EG van het Europees Parlement en de Raad van 15 februari 2006 betreffende het beheer van de zwemwaterkwaliteit en tot intrekking van Richtlijn 76/160/EEG	1998-12-08/51

