

The recovery of fish communities in the Zeeschelde (1995-2015)

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The fish monitoring program in the Zeeschelde started in the early 1990's, when anoxic conditions in the pelagic system were still very common along the freshwater reaches. The monitoring program since then was intensified and diversified as the fish populations recolonized the estuary.

In the mesohaline zone water quality was always good enough to allow a diverse fish community. However, in the early 1990s, nearly no fish was caught in the oligohaline and freshwater part of the estuary. In the past two decades we observed a recovery of the habitat functions along the estuarine gradient for the different functional ecological guilds of the fish fauna: Marine stragglers, marine juveniles, estuarine residents, freshwater fish, and last but not least the diadromous fish species.

The effect of water quality and the function of restored tidal wetlands in this recovery process will be discussed as well as the distance to the conservation goals (N2000) and the good ecological status (WFD).