



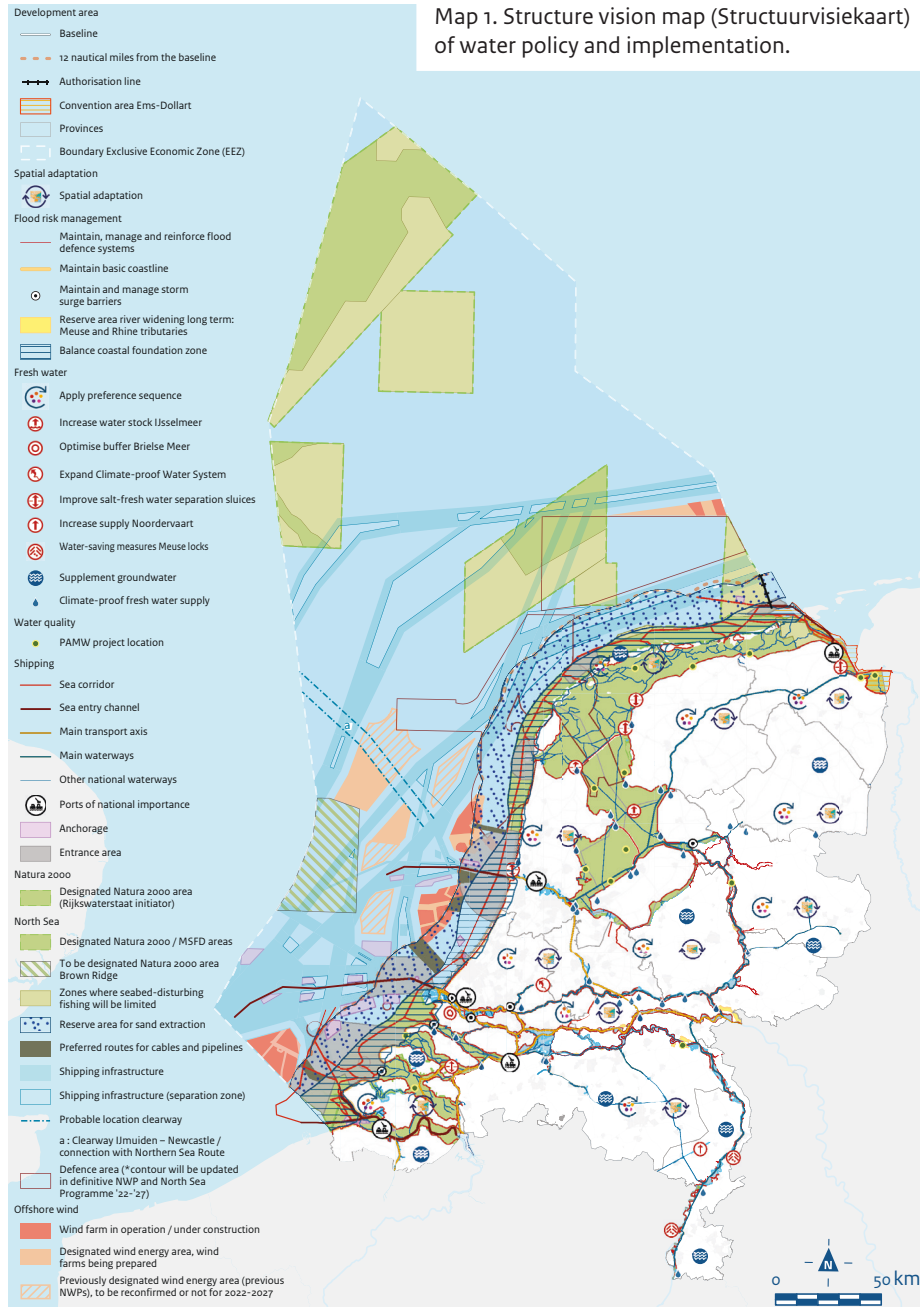
Government of the Netherlands

The national water policy and implementation in national waters

# Summary Draft National Water Programme 2022–2027



Map 1. Structure vision map (Structuurvisiekaart) of water policy and implementation.



# Summary

The Netherlands is a land of water. The challenges relating to water are extensive and will only become greater in the future. To keep our country safe, attractive and viable for our future generations, the National Water Programme 2022-2027 (NWP) was developed. This NWP describes the general national water policy and management of the national waters and waterways. Regarding water policy, the NWP is an elaboration of the new National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (NOVI). Important parts of the NWP are the river basin management plans, the flood risk management plans and the North Sea Programme 2022-2027, which are included as legal appendices.

## Considerable challenges require integrated approach

The Netherlands is facing great water challenges, which will become even more extensive and complex in the future. This is due to several interrelated challenges: climate change, soil subsidence, environmental pollution and spatial pressure. In the implementation, a major challenge involves maintaining outdated infrastructure, such as bridges and sluices, and where necessary replacing or refurbishing them.

The water issues which the Netherlands is facing, the challenges for the future and the need for an integrated approach form the basis for the 3 main aims of this NWP:

- A safe and climate-proof delta
- A competitive, sustainable and circular delta
- A clean and healthy delta with high-quality nature

The water issues are not isolated; an integrated approach with other issues in the physical living environment, such as the energy transition, housing and agriculture, is essential. Furthermore, it is important that 'aligning with the characteristics of the water system' and 'moving with water' continue to be leading principles for the integrated approach to spatial developments in our country.

In the Netherlands, many issues relating to the living environment come together in a small area of land. Not everything is possible; sometimes choices are necessary. In the NWP, several principles for water policy and management are therefore included, see Figure 1.

### More knowledge required for long-term decisions

Several important national choices that are necessary for the long term require more knowledge. Knowledge development and innovation are therefore important for achieving the main ambitions. For this, there are various research programmes, such as the Sea Level Rise Knowledge Programme.

The government will also be carrying out a national water system analysis in the coming years. This analysis will help decision-making in several years (in the run-up to the reassessment of the delta decisions in 2026 and the next NWP 2028-2033) about the related water issues at national and regional level.

### Collaboration is essential

The government cannot achieve the ambitions of this NWP alone: for an integrated approach to national and regional challenges, good collaboration and an area-based approach are essential. This involves collaboration with other government authorities (also international), civic organisations, (drinking water) companies and the public.

## Elaboration of main ambitions for policy and implementation

The 3 main ambitions for water policy are elaborated in the NWP for various themes - climate adaptation, flood risk management, freshwater distribution and drought, water quality, groundwater, shipping and for the associated management and implementation tasks of Rijkswaterstaat [executive agency of the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management]. The relationship of water policy to other subjects is addressed as well: nature, agriculture, soil and substrate, landscape, urbanisation, energy transition and industry. For each main ambition, the policy goals and choices and the management and implementation tasks of Rijkswaterstaat are then summarised for the planning period of this NWP.

### A safe and climate-proof delta

The Netherlands is vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. This requires measures to mitigate further climate change. In addition, steps are required to help us adapt to the consequences of climate change. This is called climate adaptation. Climate adaptation is not an isolated policy field, but a challenge that affects and crosses many policy areas. A lot of policy and measures in this NWP contribute to climate adaptation.

Climate adaptation is an important part of flood risk policy. The Netherlands is the best protected delta in the world and wants to maintain this position. To do so, the government is building on existing strategies, such as the flood risk approach and multilayered safety. By 2050, the primary flood defence systems must fulfil the tightened statutory norms. In the planning period of the NWP, measures are taken in the Flood Protection Programme and to ensure the safety of the river area and the coast, such as vegetation management and coast replenishment. Regional flood defences systems are also being reinforced. The Sea Level Rise Knowledge Programme is exploring how long the current strategies can be maintained and what alternative solutions may be possible for the Netherlands in the (distant) future. In 2026, this will form the basis for deciding whether the strategies need to be adapted.

Besides flood protection, the ambition is to ensure that the Netherlands is climate proof with a water robust spatial design in 2050. In the Delta Programme, it was agreed that all government authorities will perform stress tests to analyse the risks and create an adaptation strategy with an implementation programme. The national government does this for national vital and vulnerable functions (such as the drinking water supply) and for its own infrastructure networks. In the planning cycle of the NWP, the measures from these implementation programmes will be executed. From 2021, the incentive regulation climate adaptation financially supports other government authorities in the climate-proof organisation of the public space. In addition, the (policy) measures for freshwater, water quality, nature, agriculture and urbanisation contribute to a climate-proof and water robust spatial design. In the regional urbanisation strategies, water goals and climate adaptation are included.

Furthermore, the National Adaptation Strategy (NAS) will be evaluated. This forms the basis for possible additional policy in the coming years. The national government is also launching a research programme with the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (PBL) about the impact and monitoring of climate risks.

# Assessment principles for design and use of physical habitat




## NOVI assessment principles:

**1.**  
*Combination of functions preferred to single functions*

**2.**  
*Features and identity of an area are key*

**3.**  
*Shifts are prevented*

## Elaboration for water:

 <b>A. Integrate</b>	 <b>B. Multiple use</b>	 <b>C. Prevent</b>
<p><i>When rearranging an area or implementing a measure, during the design phase it is considered how one design for an area or measure can serve multiple goals and enhance the natural processes in an area.</i></p>	<p><i>Even if there is no area development, several functions can often use the same space if new initiatives fulfil the preconditions.</i></p>	<p><i>If multiple functions cannot be combined in the available space, functions must be prioritised.</i></p>

<p><b>1. In spatial organisation, take water into account</b></p>	<p><i>Regional water system in the event of water problems and flooding</i></p>	<p><b>5. Accept residual risk</b></p>			
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2. Clean	3. Separate	4. Clean			

Figure 1. Infographic principles (see appendices)

Rijkswaterstaat is continuing the current management of flood defence systems, riverbed and basic coastline and coastal foundation. The focus here is on assessing the primary flood defence systems and the riverbed, testing the regional flood defence systems, implementing reinforcement measures and developing new methods to maintain the basic coastline and the coastal foundation. Special attention is devoted to the movable flood barriers, which must meet high reliability requirements. As a result of the rising sea levels, the number of closures needed each year will increase. This challenge demands intensification of knowledge and skills.

Climate-proof spatial planning for the Netherlands is essential for Rijkswaterstaat to achieve management goals for flood risk management and for sufficient, clean and healthy water. For its own networks, Rijkswaterstaat has carried out stress tests for the main water system, the main waterway network and the main road network. In the planning cycle of the NWP, risk dialogues will be conducted and implementation agendas created. These will affect the work processes of Rijkswaterstaat for construction, replacement and renovation and for management and maintenance.

### **A competitive, sustainable and circular delta**

A good freshwater supply is vitally important for the economy. In 2050, the Netherlands must be resilient against freshwater shortages. For that reason, in the planning period of the NWP, the national government is working with the freshwater regions and the users on measures to ensure that the Netherlands has enough freshwater in dry periods for e.g. agriculture, nature, industry and shipping. This is addressed in the Delta Plan on Freshwater Supply and with the measures resulting from the Drought Policy Table.

Future-proof freshwater supply is based on the preferential sequence for water management (economic use - retention - smarter distribution) and the strategy for 'Climate-proof freshwater supply of the main water system' and other policy measures. With that strategy, the water buffers in the IJsselmeer and the lower river area become more robust. The government also wants to achieve future-proof groundwater management to ensure good quality groundwater stocks. On the elevated sandy soils, the aim is active groundwater stock management to raise the (shallow) groundwater level. These freshwater measures also contribute to a climate-proof and water robust spatial planning of the Netherlands.

The government wants to sustainably strengthen the international competitive strength of the mainports and of the Dutch maritime sector. In the planning period of the NWP, it will therefore continue working on a smooth, safe, robust and sustainable freight transport system over water. For this purpose, various construction projects have been included in the Multi-Annual Programme for Infrastructure, Spatial Planning and Transport (MIRT). In addition, maritime



shipping, inland shipping and the ports will be made more sustainable in accordance with the Green Deal with the maritime sector.

Water plays an important role in the transition to renewable energy. Therefore, large areas in the North Sea are being designated for wind farms. In the Regional Energy Strategies (RES), the objectives for the generation of renewable energy specified in greater detail, among others for the inland waterways.

In the coming planning period, Rijkswaterstaat will be focusing on measures to tackle salinisation and exploring possible system interventions for a climate-proof freshwater supply. In addition, Rijkswaterstaat is implementing the relevant recommendations from the Drought Policy Committee. This includes continuing Smart Water Management to further improve operational water management, together with regional water authorities.

Rijkswaterstaat is also working on smart, safe, robust, sustainable shipping traffic on water by constructing, managing and maintaining national waters and waterways. Here, a great deal of attention is being devoted to making the network climate proof and improving the sustainability of construction, management and maintenance. With innovations in the field of technology, data and digitisation, transport on water is becoming safer, cleaner and more efficient.

Rijkswaterstaat is reducing its own energy consumption and focusing on energy-neutral working methods. An ongoing investigation will show if the share of property assets of Rijkswaterstaat being used to generate sustainable energy for and by third parties can be extended. Conditions for this are that its own responsibilities and core tasks are not compromised and that it is not in violation of the law.

### **A clean and healthy delta with high-quality nature**

The national government is working on clean and ecologically healthy (ground)water for sustainable use and a high-quality living environment. In the NWP planning cycle, the focus will be on the structural reduction of discharges and spread of emerging substances, for example through the Action Programme PFAS in water. The policy for groundwater quality aims at preventing pollution of soil and groundwater wherever possible. From July 2021, the cabinet will extend the deposit system to include small bottles to reduce the volume of plastic in the environment.

In the planning period of this NWP, the government will be taking numerous measures for a more natural design of the major waters to achieve the goals of the European Water Framework Directive (WFD). These measures are included in the river basin management plans 2022-2027.

In the recent period, additional funding has been allocated for the Delta Approach to Water Quality, the Delta Plan Agricultural Water Management and the Programmatic Approach to Major Waters (PAMW). All these measures mean a big step towards achieving the goals for water quality and nature. In 2021, the government is adopting the Drinking Water Policy Document 2021-2027 to safeguard clean, healthy and sufficient (drinking) water for everyone.

The Nature programme and the Biodiversity Reinforcement programme contain measures to reinforce water nature. The vision for circular agriculture will contribute to improving the quality of ground and surface water. The approach to soil subsidence is also vitally important for water management. The Development National Strategy (ONS) Landscape supports a landscape-inclusive approach to the water challenges.

In the planning period of the NWP, Rijkswaterstaat is focusing on implementing the 3rd phase of WFD measures, drawing up and implementing Natura 2000 management plans and exploring and implementing PAMW measures in the national waterways. In addition, more attention will be devoted to litter and to emerging substances and substances of very high concern, both with respect to licensing and to knowledge development.

For the groundwater system, Rijkswaterstaat will work with regional managers to explore where the national waterways can make a positive contribution to the desired groundwater situation of the regional groundwater system. This aims to tackle groundwater depletion, to mitigate climate effects and to contribute to the policy intentions concerning groundwater stock management.

## **Area-based elaboration**

An integrated approach of coherent national and regional challenges requires an area-based approach. Therefore, area-based approaches for the national waterways are elaborated in this NWP. These pertain to the North Sea, the Southwest Delta, the Rhine-Meuse Delta, the major rivers, the IJsselmeer region, the Wadden Sea and Ems-Dollart and the canals managed by the government. These are related to the various area-based programmes and approaches elaborated in the NWP, such as the Area Agendas Major Waters. For the other waterways in the Netherlands, the area-based elaboration of water policy is included in other programmes. Initially, in the environment agendas under the NOVI.

For the North Sea, the national government sets the frameworks for spatial planning with the North Sea Region Programme. The programme combines, among others, the extra task for wind energy on the North Sea, with nature development (increasing biodiversity), sustainable fishery

and space for shipping. Under the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive (MSFD), measures are included to improve the environmental condition of the North Sea.

With the area agendas Southwest Delta, Wadden region and IJsselmeer region, the national government gives an integrated long-term perspective for the major waters. In the Integrated River Management programme (IRM), an integrated approach to interdependent challenges in the river area is being developed for: flood risk management, navigability for shipping, improvement of the water quality and nature, and sustainable freshwater supply. The aim is to adopt the programme in 2022. In many areas, measures are being taken under the EWFD and PAMW to improve water quality and nature.

Besides the generic roles and tasks, in the management of the major waters there is room for an area-specific interpretation of the roles and tasks of Rijkswaterstaat. Rijkswaterstaat often determines the collaboration with the surrounding areas in area agendas or big projects (IRM, PAMW, WFD).

Implementing the core tasks is the main responsibility of Rijkswaterstaat. The national waterways are used for many social and economic functions, such as drinking water, shellfish water, shipping and bathing water. By implementing the core tasks, Rijkswaterstaat contributes to creating the right conditions for these uses. In principle, any use is welcome, so long as this is not contrary to the core tasks of Rijkswaterstaat. It is important to realise that not everything is possible everywhere. In some cases, choices must be made about which uses are given priority. In doing so, a customised area-specific decision is made.

At the same time, in many areas Rijkswaterstaat experiences the consequences of increasing spatial pressure in daily management. This pressure on or around the waterways managed by Rijkswaterstaat is considerable, particularly in urbanised areas and around the canals. A robust water system requires spatial developments to pay attention to the importance of water. The water test is an important instrument for this. In this planning period, Rijkswaterstaat monitors spatial pressure and performs mid-term evaluations to establish whether further action is necessary.

## Towards a definitive NWP

This Draft NWP is the result of a wide-ranging participation process, involving local government authorities and social parties at an early stage in the development. Area-based and theme-based sessions were organised, and the Physical Environment Consultative Council consulted social target groups. The government, the Association of Provincial Authorities, the Dutch Water Authorities, the Association of Netherlands Municipalities and Vewin, the national association of water companies, discussed the concept at political level in the Water Steering Committee.

The Draft NWP and associated programmes will be available to consult for 6 months, together with the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). Reactions will be included in the definitive NWP, which will be adopted in March 2022.





# Colophon

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*Disclaimer: This English translation is suitable for international consultation. However slight differences in the contents between the original Dutch text and this translation might occur, apart from grammatical imperfections. Therefore the only valid document is the Dutch version of the Ontwerp Nationaal Water Programma 2022-2027*

The following plans are part of the draft National Water Programme 2022-2027:

- River Basin Management Plans Rhine, Maas, Scheldt and Ems 2022-2027 (Summary available in English)
- Flood Risk Management Plan 2022-2027 (Available in English, German and French)
- North Sea Programme 2022-2027 (available in English), including:
  - Marine Strategy part 3 (available in English)
- Strategic Environmental Assessment (Summary available in English, German and French), including:
  - Appropriate Assessment

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