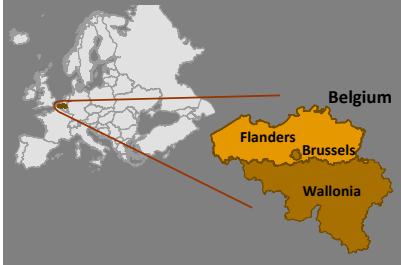

Biodiversity and Sustainability in Flanders: an indicator-based assessment

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FLANDERS AT A GLANCE

Flanders is tracking its progress towards the achievement of the 2010 target via 22 biodiversity indicators. They are in line with the focal areas and targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the EU biodiversity headline indicators. The indicators are available on www.biodiversityindicators.be.

Flanders is a densely populated and economically prosperous region in the northern part of Belgium. It is located in the Western European lowland and belongs almost entirely to the Atlantic biogeographic region. Nearly a quarter of the area is urbanised and about half of its surface is occupied by agriculture. The Flemish landscape is the most fragmented in Europe.

Very specific habitats degrade to more common, usually nutrient-rich habitats. As a consequence, many rare species, restricted to these specific habitats, are declining. Freshwater biodiversity declined sharply during the last century, although a significant recovery has been noticed during the last decade in the larger rivers. Woodland birds have also fared better in recent times.

	Flanders	Latvia
Terrestrial area (km²)	13.552	64.589
Population density (inh/km²)	459,4	36,5
GDP per capita (EU27 = 100)	116,2	55,7

Source: Eurostat

STATUS AND TRENDS OF COMPONENTS OF BIODIVERSITY

CBD goal 1: Promote the conservation of the biological diversity of ecosystems, habitats and biomes
CBD goal 2: Promote the conservation of species diversity

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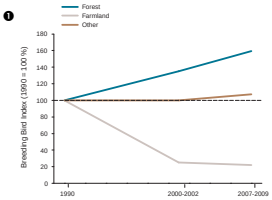

Breeding birds (1) of farmlands declined markedly in Flanders during the last two decades, due to intensification and scale consolidation of agriculture. The abundance of woodland birds has increased, due to the maturing of forests and their increasingly natural composition and structure.

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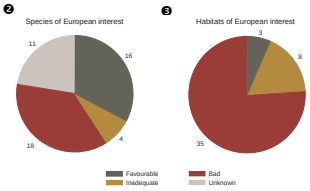

One third of the **species of European interest (2)** (Habitats Directive) has in 2006 a favourable conservation status. Of the aquatic species only one tenth has a favourable status.

Of the **habitats of European interest (3)** 93 % has an inadequate or bad conservation status. All aquatic habitats have a bad conservation status, mainly because of water pollution.

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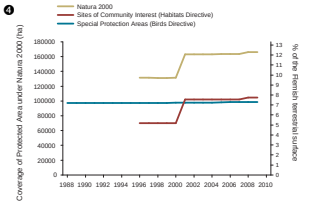

The **Natura 2000-network (4)** covers 12.3 % of Flanders' terrestrial area. This is less than the European average, but more than most of the surrounding economic top regions.

THREATS TO BIODIVERSITY

CBD goal 5: Reduce pressures from habitat loss, land use change, degradation and unsustainable water use
CBD goal 6: Control threats from invasive alien species

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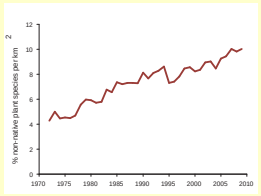

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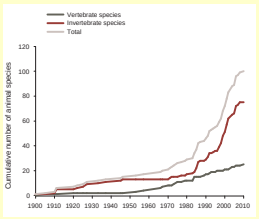

Since 1970 the proportion of **alien plant species (5)** has doubled. The Between 1900 and 2010 about 100 **alien animal species (6)** established permanent populations. The number of alien species increases exponentially. During the last five years the number alien plant and animal species has increased by more than 25 per year in Flanders.

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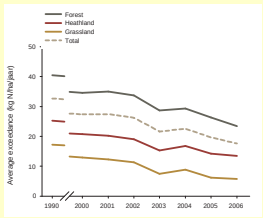

Atmospheric nitrogen deposition in Flanders decreased with 33 % between 1990 and 2006. The deposition however still exceeds the **critical load for eutrophication (7)** in 100 % of the Flemish forests and heathlands and in 91 % of the species rich grasslands.

SUSTAINABLE USE

CBD goal 4: Promote sustainable use and consumption

The average **ecological footprint (8)** in Flanders in 2006 is 6.3 global hectares per capita. This is almost five times higher than the regional biocapacity (1.3 gha/capita). More than half of this footprint relates to the consumption of energy. 90 % of the consumption of renewable materials is located abroad.

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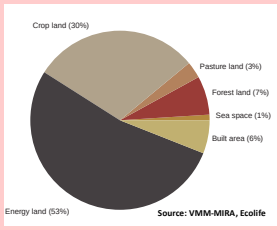

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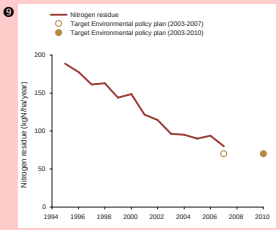

The **nitrogen residue in agricultural soils (9)** in Flanders is among the highest in Europe. Due to reduced livestock numbers, increased processing of animal manure and other policy measures the residue decreased by 58 % since the early 1990's. Decreasing N-residues in soils also leads to a decrease in transfer of nitrogen to surface and ground water.

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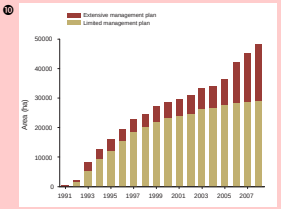

Between 1990 and 2008, 48.089 ha of **forest management plans (10)** (33 % of the 150.000 ha of Flemish forest area) were approved. Extensive forest management plans are based on criteria that are closely related to those from the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

ECOSYSTEM INTEGRITY, GOODS AND SERVICES

CBD goal 8: Maintain capacity of ecosystems to deliver goods and services and support livelihoods

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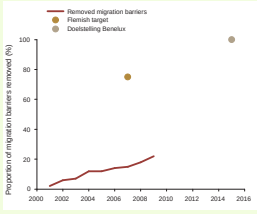

In 1996 the three Benelux countries announced their intention to achieve free fish migration in all water catchments by 2010. The **removal of migration barriers (11)** is in progress, but too slow to achieve the target. A new target is set at 2015. By the end of 2009, 22 % of the migration barriers had been dealt with. Meanwhile, migratory fish species are recovering slightly, probably as a result of improved water quality.

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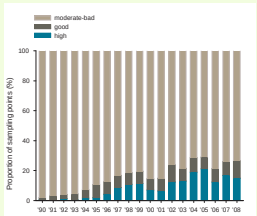

The phosphorus concentrations in Flemish rivers are among the highest in Europe. In the 1990s gradually more survey points achieved good or very good conditions with regard to **phosphorus concentration in rivers (12)**, due to an increase in the water purification capacity and the introduction of low-phosphate detergents. More recently the phosphorus concentration has stabilised. Unless additional policy measures are taken, the targets of the European Waterframework Directive will not be met by 2015.

PUBLIC AWARENESS & PARTICIPATION

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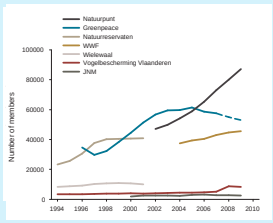

The **membership of nature organizations (13)** indicates public interest in nature and support for nature conservation. However, it also reflects the recruitment policy of these organizations. The indicator shows a mixed picture. Natuurpunt, the largest organisation, has over 87.000 members which represents 3,3 % of the Flemish households.

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