



# 2<sup>nd</sup> IMMERSE

## Transnational Estuary Exchange Lab

24 November 2020, Online

### Workshop Report

### Breakout Session II: ‘Estuary Governance: Structures and Processes’

The IMMERSE Transnational Estuary Exchange Labs (TEEL) provide a platform to share practices and progress on the development of solutions for estuarine management issues. The purpose is to advance development and transfer of solutions across those involved in estuary management in the North Sea Region.

Drawing from the programme of the TEEL planned for April 2020 in the Netherlands, IMMERSE organized an online TEEL to share project activities and foster exchange on the topic of **sediment management in estuaries and estuary governance structures and processes**. The Estuary Exchange Lab featured the management context of the **Eems-Dollard estuary** and discussed the value, role and importance of sediments in estuarine ecosystems.

The following report presents a summary of the presentations and main discussion points from **Breakout Session II: ‘Estuary Governance: Structures and Processes’**. The Ems, Elbe and Scheldt estuaries have several elements in common, in terms of nature conservation (e.g. valuable Natura 2000 sites), economic uses (e.g. importance for the shipping industry and maritime transport) and the complex nature of their governance structures. They are situated at the intersection of different jurisdictions: international administrations at the Ems and Scheldt and three German federal states at the Elbe. These structures present challenges for the work of estuary managers, especially when they must find solutions for dealing with high amounts of sediment and related consequences for ecology and economy. Among others, this topic was recently explored in depth as part of [a study on how to improve estuary governance](#), prepared as part of the IMMERSE project. Within this session, governmental structures and processes from the estuaries were presented, as well as related challenges and how they are dealt with. Special emphasis was placed on the role of stakeholders. Similarities and differences became apparent.

The session was attended by 38 individuals, in addition to the presenters and session moderators. A list of participants is provided below. All materials from this session and the other two TEEL sessions can be found on the TEEL event page: <https://northsearegion.eu/immerse/transnational-exchange-labs/>



## Introduction to the Session (Henk Smit, WING Consultancy, the Netherlands)

Following a [video](#) introducing the IMMERSE project, the session moderator **Henk Smit** from **WING Consultancy** kicked off the session with a brief presentation of the session agenda and objectives:

- to explore what successful estuary governance means for NSR estuaries
- to learn more about similarities and differences in governance of three NSR estuaries and how they deal with the challenges
- to discuss what were successful elements of their governance approaches, and whether solutions that work at one estuary can be transferred to another
- to discuss what could have been done differently and any lessons learned from estuary governance experiences

Participants were then asked to provide their perspectives on the session topic. The following images show poll results from Mentimeter.com:

## WC: What does successful estuary governance mean to you?



Figure 1. Word Cloud response to opening question on successful estuary governance



## In your opinion, what is the main challenge to overcome for successful Estuary Governance? Choose max 2 options

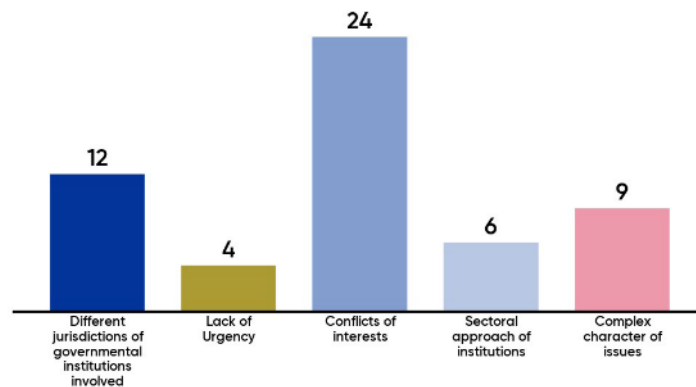


Figure 2. Multiple question response to opening question on estuary governance challenges

## Presentations

### I. *Introductory presentation on main governance characteristics and structures of the Elbe and Scheldt (Marcel Taal, Deltares)*

#### Summary

In 2019 [a study](#) was executed that compared the governance of Elbe, Humber and Scheldt by WING Consultancy and partners, as part of the IMMERSE project. The results of this study were combined with information on the Ems estuary and the environmental characteristics of the estuaries. Factors that were compared on governance comprise various aspects of institutional settings, involvement of stakeholders, the role of system knowledge and whether joint visions or perspectives are in place. Environmental factors compared contain among others geometry, tide and turbidity issues. The presentation showed the major characteristics and issues of Elbe, Ems, Humber and Scheldt and fed a discussion on best practices for debating and solving the conflicts between people, planet and profit in estuaries.

#### Materials

- [Presentation slides](#)

#### Questions & Answers

Q1. Due to the depressions for shipping, the Ems estuary has passed the tipping point. An estuary with a sandy bottom has become a fluid mud system without oxygen in summer. What have you learned for the other three estuaries?



A1. This is a situation that we don't want to be in: high turbidity can evolve. We learned from more in-depth studies that it is also a very delicate balance because the asymmetries in sediment transport are not the same in the estuaries. In the Scheldt, we can control the situation also because we are aware of it.

Q2. How did you reach the important treaty at the Scheldt?

A2. The presentation of Willem Vuylsteke answered this question as it explains the history of the Schelde treaty.

## *II. Joint cross-border policy making and management of an estuary: the story of the Flemish-Dutch Scheldt Commission (Willem Vuylsteke, Mobiliteit en Openbare Werken)*

### *Summary*

Over the centuries, the Scheldt estuary played an important role in the development of the cross-border Flemish-Dutch delta. The Scheldt estuary extends over parts of the Dutch and Flemish territory; the access of the Flemish ports of Antwerp and North Sea Port Flanders (Gent) runs through the Dutch part of the Scheldt estuary.

It is therefore not surprising that Flanders and the Netherlands decided to develop a common policy and management in order to develop the Scheldt estuary as a multifunctional estuary water system that is used in a sustainable way for human needs.

This joint policy and management of the Scheldt estuary has been shaped since 2008 in the Flemish Dutch Scheldt Commission (VNSC). The presentation described the VNSC works and how the cross-border governance of the management of the Scheldt estuary is run.

### *Materials*

- [Presentation slides](#)

### *Questions & Answers*

Q1. Does the treaty also involve non-governmental organisations?

A1. No, the Treaty concerning common policy and management has been concluded between Flanders and the Netherlands in 2005. In 2014 the ministers of Flanders and the Netherlands decided to create the Scheldt Council, the official advisory body to the VNSC. To be a member of the Schelde Council you have to apply for membership and you need to be a local/regional authority or representative civil society organizations.

Q2. Can you give an example of how you are using joint fact finding with local stakeholders? How do you get enough support for your strategies?



A2. Especially considering the long-term perspective on nature, there is joint fact finding with stakeholders. There is always conflict between agriculture and nature, so to do the system analysis together, helped to have a common understanding between different stakeholders.

Comment: One important issue in Germany: The different Federal states within Elbe estuary and Weser estuary have no common goal - concurrence of federal ports. And e. g. farmers don't like to support the ports, feeling that they have no use of the ports.

Reply: In the Scheldt the different stakeholders of Flanders and the Netherlands did not always have the same objectives. The developments of the Outline 2010 are a good example of how they tried to cope with it. They made a package deal: for the port it was important to have the deepening of the Scheldt. It was jointly decided to have a more vital estuary, also considering a nature perspective. At the same time, these projects also helped to protect against flooding: so, it was a package deal between different stakeholders and interests in the Scheldt estuary. It is also important to note that the Schelde Council is a permanent structure, while the communication platform "Forum Tideelbe" is/was a temporary one. At the moment there is an ongoing discussion on how the "Forum Tideelbe" can be continued, organized by the administration of the City of Hamburg.

### *III. Integrated management of the Elbe estuary – can it actually be achieved?* (Kirsten Wolfstein, Hamburg Port Authority)

#### *Summary*

The Elbe estuary functions as an important artery for the economic development of the region and beyond. At the same time it is a valuable habitat, protected by environmental legislation. The harmonization of ecological and economic demands is a joint objective – and challenge - for the three federal states of Schleswig-Holstein, Lower Saxony and Hamburg, the national Waterways Administration (WSV), the Hamburg Port Authority (HPA) and other stakeholders. Still, decision-making in regard to issues of the management of the Elbe is rather sectionalised and mainly focused on specific tasks or projects, often in very limited areas.

Although overall goals for the estuary, such as the implementation of the Natura 2000 management plan, the WFD or the cooperation in the estuary partnership "Forum Tideelbe" exists the federal split of responsibilities and singular interests prevent a truly coordinated management in the best interests of the estuary. Recent developments – obtained achievements and remaining issues – were presented.

#### *Materials*

- [Presentation slides](#)



### *Questions & Answers*

Q1. We learned that there were different levels of understanding within the Forum. Can you advise some tools that can facilitate and help closing the knowledge gap?

A1. There was experience from the Scheldt that joint fact finding is really important, so everyone has the same level of understanding. What was learned at the Elbe for instance was that coming together on a regular basis, with dedicated presentations and room for discussions, was crucial for a better understanding.

Q2. What challenges do the other states face? Is it possible to make an alliance in which a common solution is sought that solves the challenges of multiple actors?

A2. We are pointing out the aspects where there is still work to do for example on how to deal with pollution issues, but one administration or representative cannot speak for the other federal states in Germany.

Q3. I wonder if a president as the Benelux Secretariat-General, with a certain status and some power, would help in the Elbe situation? When you have a powerful or a person with a certain status – as president of your stakeholder panel, you may have more influence to get things going.

A3. The Benelux is an intergovernmental organization and, in most cases, they are former politicians. The current president of the Schelde Council is a former secretary of state, so he has some political weight. This helps him to play his role in the Schelde Council as an independent actor, not defending the interests of a single country. Sometimes external pressure is necessary – for instance at the Ems there was the threat of a juridical case that forced the setting-up of the Eems 2050 programme to reach the aims of the N2000 – so sometimes pressure is good to get people to work together.



## Discussion and Conclusions

Several questions were posed to the audience in Mentimeter to gather their reflections on the topic:

### What is your main personal concern in Estuary management?



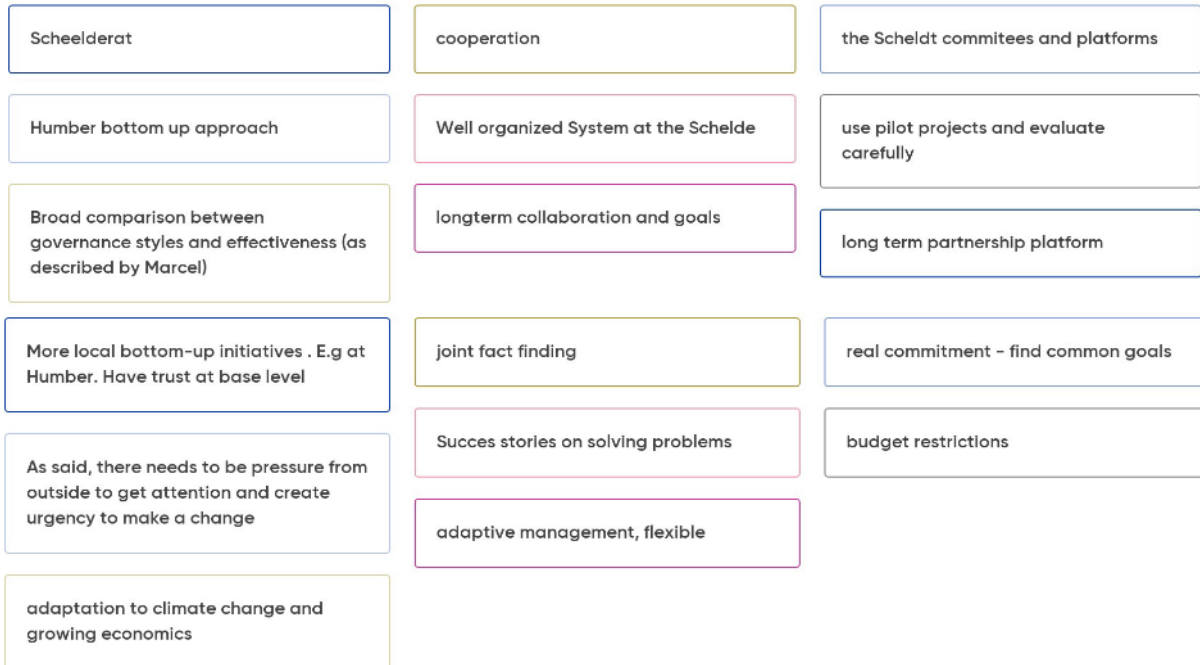
**Figure 3. Participant responses on personal concerns in estuary management**

#### Panellist reflections on responses to personal concerns in estuary management

There needs to be an institutional basis for cooperation, and it is normal that initially, no party wants to compromise. In addition, nature-based solutions are not often embedded in a governance structure.



## What elements of Governance in other estuaries are inspiring to explore further in your situation?



**Figure 4. Participant responses on inspiring governance elements**

### Panellist reflections on responses to inspiring governance elements

Sometimes (in Germany) we are impatient and are eagerly awaiting progress, but it must also be considered that the Scheldt is 10 years ahead of the Elbe.





## What are the main future challenges in governance of North Sea Region estuaries?



**Figure 5. Participant responses on future challenges in estuary governance**

### Panellist reflections on future challenges in estuary governance:

A formal treaty of cooperation is vital because otherwise you have no basis for further steps – and many of these are intense and involve a lot of interests. If we share knowledge, then we share understanding – and a lot of attention should also be paid to dissemination of knowledge.

Stakeholders are ‘managed’, partners are ‘involved’ – early and permanent stakeholder involvement is crucial and should preferably be led by someone with a good reputation and good networks.

### Concluding Remarks

Session Moderator Henk Smit provided the following concluding remarks to summarize the main points from the discussion:

- Building trust needs time and a consequent investment in building the cooperation. A formal treaty or cooperation agreement can be a basis for ongoing cooperation.
- Formal institutions like in the Elbe show that we could research a bit more the boundaries of what is possible instead of what is not.



- Pilots can help vitalize the process and gives energy to the way parties cooperate.
- Climate change should be on top of the agenda and the question is whether inland ports are now better off with higher water levels or actually suffer larger problems with dredging.
- The main challenges is to link complex knowledge to complex governance situations. The complex governance situation is more of a rule rather than an exception, considering that estuaries are situated at the boundaries between states. This requires that many parties are involved.

#### Audience reactions and panelist comments:

- Comment. Some years ago there has been a discussion about creating a federal "North-State" – but no chance to realise. Don't get too frustrated: We have good examples in Germany at inland waters: LIFE project "Living Lahn" and overall concept for the Elbe upstream of Geesthacht
- Panelist reaction: It is important to note that first attempts of trust have been developed and can also be built further – but it is crucial to be patient and trust the process. In the Scheldt they started with a vision in 2001 - so it was a long process, that eventually led to a programme development outline 2010, which is now in the final phase of contracting projects. At the Scheldt there is pressure from some stakeholders for implementing new projects and programmes, but - estuaries have developed over centuries and maybe our governance processes need some more time, too.

In conclusion, all participants were invited to join the North Sea Region Estuary Managers LinkedIn Group to continue discussion on this topic and others related to sustainable estuary management. Link here to join: <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8863566/>



## Participants

Last Name	First Name	Country	Organization
As	Dick	Netherlands	Ministry for Infrastructure and Watermanagement Rijkswaterstaat
Backx	Joost	Netherlands	Rijkswaterstaat
Benndorf	Julia	Germany	BAW
Boerema	Annelies	Belgium	IMDC
Brinke	Alexandra	Germany	German Federal Institute of Hydrology
Claus	Beatrice	Germany	Umweltstiftung WWF
Cox	Jana	Netherlands	Utrecht University
De Beukelaer-Dossche	Michaël	Belgium	De Vlaamse Waterweg NV
Dhondt	Jannie	Belgium	De Vlaamse Waterweg nv
Farwick	Ellen	Netherlands	Province of Groningen
Hakvoort	Emiel	Netherlands	Eems-dollard 2050
Inwards	Liz	United Kingdom	Environment Agency
Kaptein	Steven	Belgium	Flanders Hydraulics Research
Klocke	Elisabeth	Germany	Elbe Habitat Foundation
Kühl-Stenzel	Aline	Germany	NABU
Liek	Gert-Jan	Netherlands	Rijkswaterstaat
MEldgaard	Lotte	Denmark	sweco
Marx	Sarah	Netherlands	Rijkswaterstaat
McCarty	Clare	United Kingdom	Marine Management Organisation
Onwezen	Melissa	Netherlands	Province of Groningen/ ED2050
Ortiz	Victoria	Germany	Federal Waterways Engineering and Research Institute (BAW)
Page	Dean	United Kingdom	University of Hull
Pauwels	Cynthia	Belgium	Port of Antwerp
Pede	Annelies	Belgium	maritieme toegang
Plancke	Yves	Belgium	Flanders Hydraulics
Porschke	Alexander	Germany	NABU



Rahlf	Holger	Germany	Federal Waterways Engineering and Reseach Institute
Ravenscroft	Zahra	United Kingdom	Environment Agency
Roose	Frederik	Belgium	MOW - Maritime Access
Röper	Henrich	Germany	Hamburg Port Authority
Schaper	Jürgen	Germany	Helmholtz-Zentrum Geesthacht - Institute of Coastal Research
Sieben	Eline	Netherlands	Utrecht University
Sprenger	Judith	Germany	Hamburg Port Authority
Steege	Volker	Germany	Federal Ministry of Transport and Digital Infrastructure
Steenbergen	Jana	Netherlands	Sweco Netherlands B.V.
Strömvall	Ann-Margret	Sweden	Chalmers University of Technology
Van Malderen	Eline	Belgium	MOW
Wild-Metzko	Sonja	Germany	Hamburg Port Authority