THE NETHERLANDS

The draft RBMP for the Rhine[28] was assessed in April 2021. The Netherlands is one of the EU countries that makes most extensive use of exemptions. Overall, only about 25% of all water bodies were in good chemical condition in 2020. For ecological condition, (including 'river basin specific' chemical substances), the figure is less than 1% (figure 14). Nearly all 515 water bodies are subject to article 4(4) exemptions, with many of them referring briefly to 'disproportionality of costs' and 'technical infeasibility'. Exemptions due to 'natural circumstances' have vastly increased from 297 to 396 between the previous and draft RBMPs. No exemptions are claimed under article 4(5) less stringent objectives or 4(7) new sustainable developments, but article 4(6) exemptions have increased alarmingly and are used in an abusive way. This is based on the improper use of 'drought' as a 'natural circumstance' while the main pressure lies in water scarcity caused by insufficient water retention measures and excessive discharges and abstractions which aggravate the effects of droughts. In the water body factsheets which are part of the draft RBMP, information is provided on measures from the previous PoM which are not yet implemented. The text of the draft RBMP summarizes this (p. 56 of the draft RBMP), showing that 28% of the PoM has not been carried out by 2021 (unweighted average). The main challenges in the RBD are detailed below:

River and wetland restoration: The draft RBMP only contains very short summarizing phrases about protected areas. Brief references and "tick boxes" in factsheets are provided in Nature 2000 Management Plans but without explaining the relationship with the RBMP. In the factsheets, the relationship between groundwater bodies and protected terrestrial ecosystems is much better and explicitly outlined. 208 assessments and research projects are planned to provide further evidence of the benefits of ecosystem restoration in surface water bodies including outside protected nature reserves. Quantitative targets are set for restoration and explained in factsheets, but for major rivers – the Rhine, Waal, Maas, Haringvliet, Volkerkak, Oosterschelde, etc. –, the Natura 2000 plans still contain gaps for example on hydromorphological conditions and dynamics, resulting in a poor uptake in the draft RBMP. Despite the vast experience and case studies (e.g. the Room for the River programme) in the Netherlands, nature-based solutions and natural water retention measures are not promoted by the plan, which only contains a generic statement on "climate buffers".

28. Reference: NLRN

Water allocation and abstraction control: The national droughts policy allocates surface water use to different users in periods of water shortage (with drinking water and 'vulnerable' nature of highest priority) and it is one of the 'general measures' of the PoM. Permits are required for significant water abstractions and they are recorded, however they are heavily underestimated for groundwater, and no quantified information at all is available about surface water abstractions for agriculture. A national effort for better abstraction registration and control has recently been announced, but its implementation, beyond the policy roundtable on droughts, remains unclear. At present, agricultural (ground and surface) water abstractions are free from tax or levies in all river basin districts, one of the reasons why farmers massively installed irrigation pumps in the dry years 2018-2020.

Flood and drought management and climate proofing: Strictly speaking the draft RBMP does not include a sensitivity analysis of the proposed measures under changing climatic conditions. One page in chapter 4.4 on 'climate change' briefly refers to the possible impact of climate change on water quality and water supply and demand. It disregards the impact climate change could have on achieving good status by 2027 and beyond. The draft Flood Risk Management Plan, published in parallel to the RBMP, refers to the risk analyses and sensitivity analyses of the Delta Programme concerning sea level rise and changes in precipitation patterns. The draft RBMP states that the implementation of the WFD and Floods Directive should align, and the PoM explicitly take into account flood-protection measures that can positively impact the ecological potential of HMWBs. The draft RBMP does not refer clearly to measures to address land use and its impact on flood protection.

Agriculture: The draft RBMP includes a robust assessment of the main pressures from agriculture but it is presented at RBD level. Water body factsheets are limited to "tick boxes" and they contain a general ex-ante assessment of whether supplementary measures are needed to achieve the environmental objectives. Diffuse pollution from nutrients and pesticides and the poor groundwater balance is primarily addressed by voluntary measures, involving just a few farmers with an uncertain and likely insufficient impact.

Economic instruments and budget adequacy: Overall data for the Netherlands indicate that the PoM for 2022-2027 will cost €1.2 bn, with 73% recovered from water users. However, it does not contain further details on the sector contributions, and inland professional and recreational shipping is exempt. Investments in the purchase and reconstruction of land towards ecological restoration are likely not included in the figures. Such investments are mostly covered from general taxes and subsidies so not recovered from users or polluters. Environmental costs are considered, although there are gaps such as excessive groundwater abstractions and pesticides. The distribution of the budget is unclear.

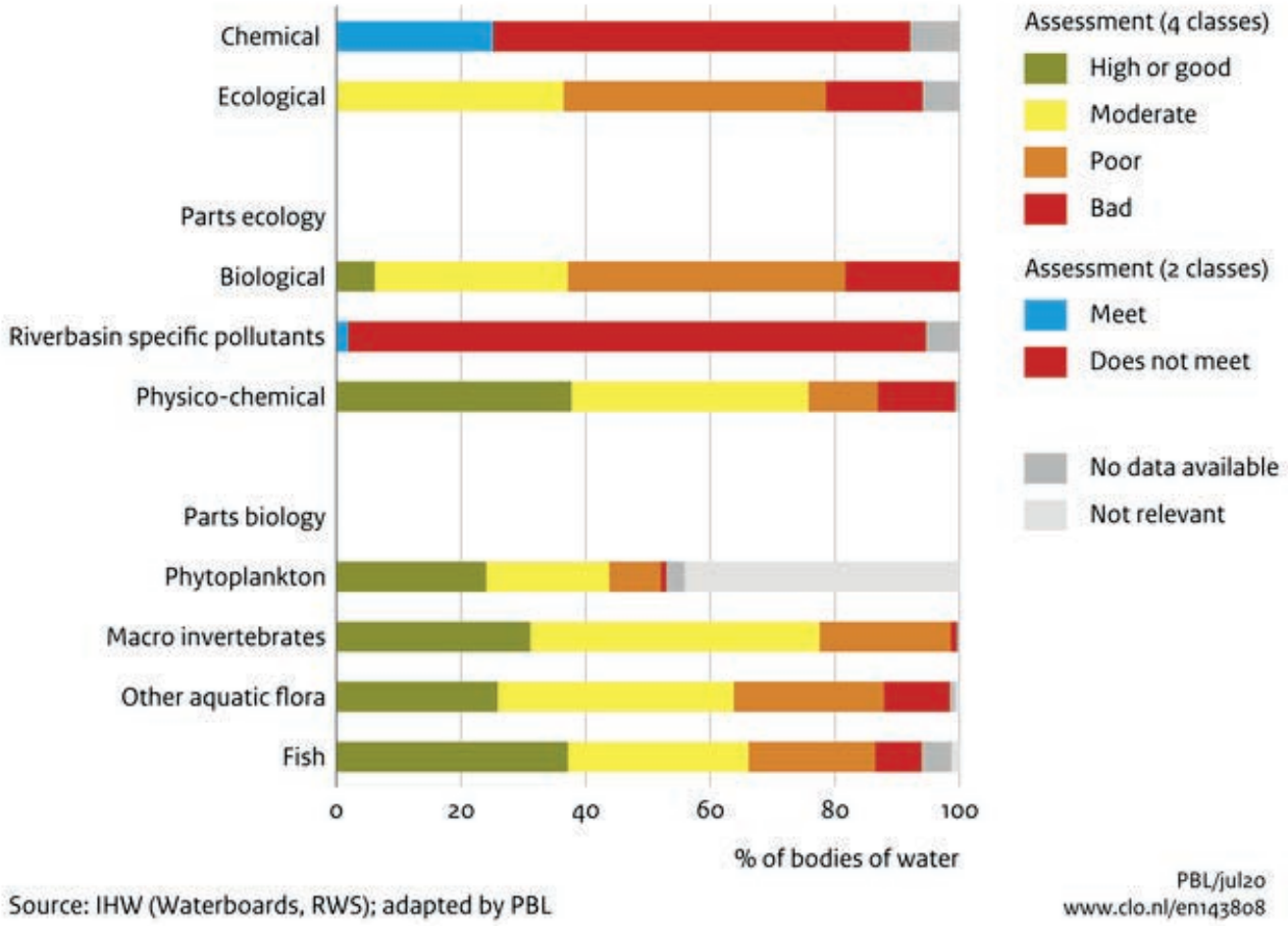
Assessment of water quality in 2027: The PoM will not allow the 2027 target to be reached. The draft RBMP does not present assessments per water body for all objectives and criteria at the same time ('one-out-all-out' principle). The draft RBMP and the referred National Quality Assessment[29] are not able to assess the percentage of water bodies in bad chemical status in 2027, but both state that this still will be the case concerning several substances in many water bodies. For individual biological groups (algae, macrofauna, aquatic plants, fish) and nutrients, it has been calculated that with the proposed PoM, 35-60% of the water bodies will score 'good' by 2027. With additional measures in the agricultural sector, this can increase to 40-70% for biology and 85% for nutrients. However, the Netherlands has not committed to this in the draft RBMP.

29. PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, Quality Surface Water 2019, 2020.

OVERALL, ONLY 25% OF ALL WATER BODIES WERE IN GOOD CHEMICAL CONDITION IN 2020.

Agricultural land in the Dwingelderveld National Park. © Paul Vertegaal, Natuurmonumenten.

Figure 11: All quality elements for Dutch surface water bodies, judged with 2019 data.
Source: PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, Quality Surface Water 2019, 2020.



	Topic	NL Rhine
1	**Removal and adaptation of barriers**	
	1. Identification of the problem	
	2. Prioritisation	
	3. Cost-benefit analysis and monitoring plan	
	4. Ambition	
2	**Hydropower**	
	1. Pressures and sectors	
	2. Inventory of planned projects	
	3. Justification and exemptions	
	4. Criteria and thresholds	
	5. Plans for refurbishment and decommissioning	
3	**Inland navigation**	
	1. Pressures and sectors	
	2. Inventory of planned projects	
	3. Justification and exemptions	
	4. Criteria and thresholds	
	5. 'Working with nature'	
4	**Freshwater ecosystem protection and restoration and NBS**	
	1. Protected areas and their status	
	2. Prioritisation	
	3. Restoration targets	
	4. Nature-based solutions (NBS)	
	5. Natural Water Retention Measures (NWRM)	
	6. Sound financial mechanism	
5	**Water allocation and abstraction control**	
	1. Identification of significant water abstractions	
	2. Prospects of new water abstractions, related infrastructure and land uses	
	3. Review of abstraction permits	
	4. Abstraction control	
6a	**Drought management**	
	1. PoM "climate checks"	
	2. Drought management plans	
6b	**Flood management**	
	1. PoM "climate checks"	
	3. Link with the Floods Directive	
	4. Land use and flood management	
7	**Agriculture**	
	1. Assessment of pressures	
	2. Gap analysis and measures	
	3. Diffuse pollution	
8	**Coal mines (and combustion)**	
	1. Assessment of the problem	
	2. Priority hazardous substances	
	3. Climate change	
	4. Justification and exemptions	
	5. Cost recovery	
	6. Liabilities	
9	**Economic instruments and adequacy of budget**	
	1. Cost recovery calculation for sectors	
	2. Cost recovery rates and exemptions	
	3. Budget	
10	**Exemptions**	
	1. Number of exemptions	
	2. Gap analysis	
	3. Art. 4(4) and 4(5) exemption justifications	
	4. Article 4(6) exemption justifications	
	5. Article 4(7) exemption justifications	
11	**Review and update on the implementation of the previous RBMP**	
	1. Implementation of measures	
	2. Effectiveness of measures	

Legend		LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE				
		high	good	moderate	poor	N/A
RELEVANCE	Not applicable or relevant for the RBD					
	This problem/ challenge has already been solved in the second RBMP					
	One of the many problems/challenges in this RBD					
	One of the Significant Water Management Issues (SWMI)					
	The main problem/challenge in this RBD					

Table 20: Overview of the performance of the draft 2022-2027 RBMP Rhine (Netherlands) on key topics by indicator.