

Building Resilience Where Water Actually Happens - Transforming the Basin Perspective in Flanders

Climate adaptation at basin level in Flanders

INBO World Basin Summit 2026

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Context in Flanders: challenges and solutions

- Basin situation : water system under pressure + on the verge of water bankruptcy
- Drivers and pressures:
 - densely populated
 - in combination with high industrial and agricultural demand
 - Limited natural buffering: modified rivers and sealed soils



First shock : water scarcity summer after summer (starting in 2017)

- Groundwater decline
- Pressure on drinking water
- Economic vulnerability

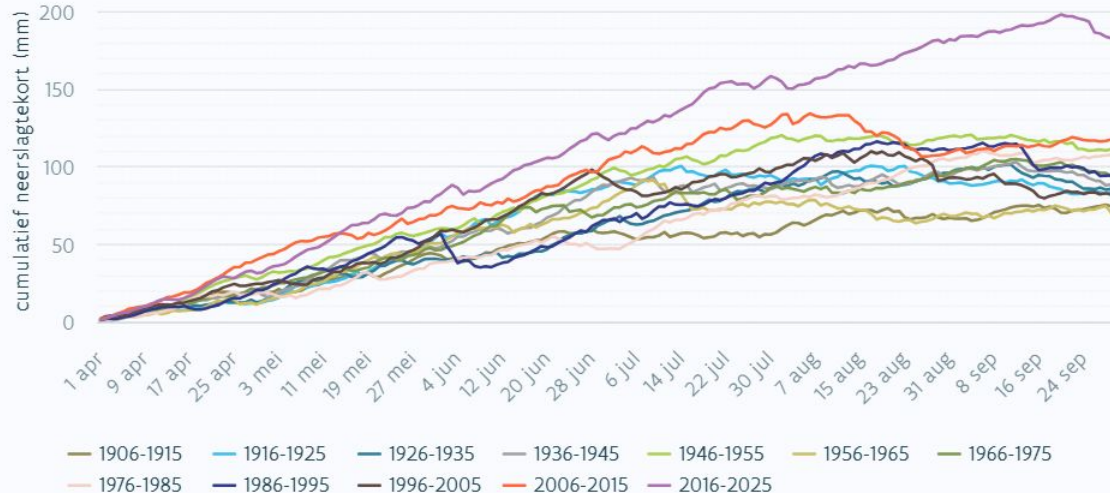


Blue Deal

- Comprehensive programme to tackle growing water scarcity and drought following consecutive dry summers
70 measures and 400+ project: water retention, reuse, infiltration, and smarter water management across sectors
- Area-based approach, engaging local authorities, farmers, industries, and nature managers
- Shift towards integrating water into spatial planning and climate adaptation policies

$$\text{Cumulative Deficit}_t = \sum_{i=\text{April 1}}^t (\text{Evapotranspiration}_i - \text{Precipitation}_i)$$

opbouw cumulatief neerslagtekort



Next shock : Waterbomb 2021



- Not just an event but a system failure

- Infrastructure
- Spatial planning
- Water system

- Transformation needed

- From sectoral → systemic
- From reaction → risk management
- From control → adaptation

**Weerbaar
Waterland**

Ons voorbereiden op wat al gebeurt

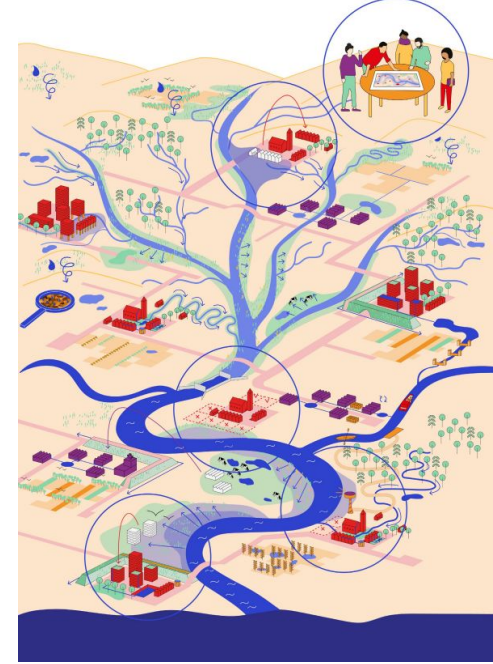


Advies van het expertenpanel
hoogwaterbeveiliging
aan de Vlaamse Regering

Juli 2022

Towards a new mindset for water – Blue Deal

- Vesder floods (2021 – Waterbomb) + water scarcity
- New vision : Weerbaar Waterland :
 - Our landscape is determined by its watercourses but our 2020 landscape should be redesigned for water security, biodiversity and climate resilience
- Recommendations at basin level
 - We can no longer manage water in silos
 - We need integrated objectives & adaptive programmes
 - We need a transition towards a true system approach linking water, soil, climate adaptation, and spatial planning.
 - We need a shift in the mindset of our politicians, farmers, industry leaders and citizens
 - 4 pilot areas implementing the recommendations: from watercourses to sponge landscapes

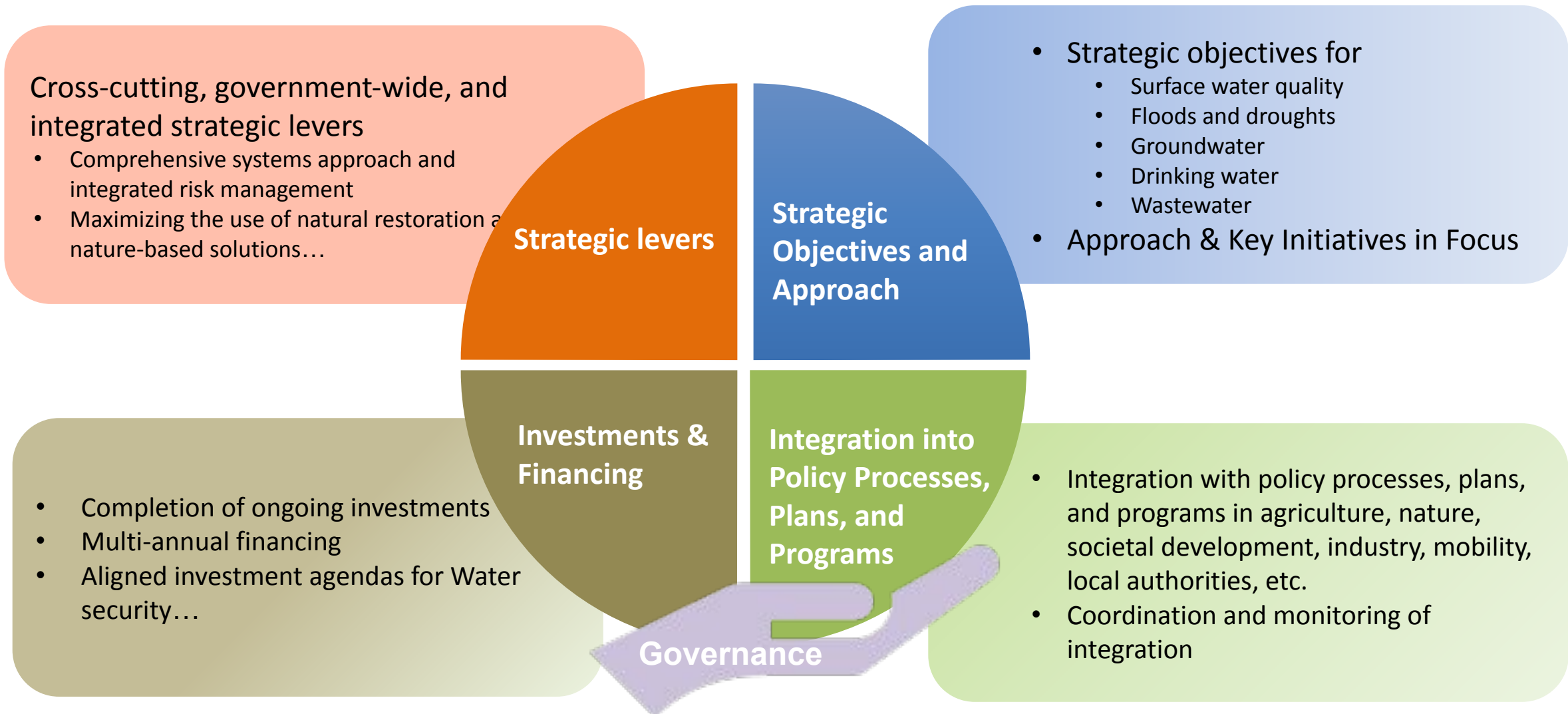


Reactive Crisis Management



Proactive Risk Management.

Blue Deal 2.0 – towards a long term vision & policy



Blue Deal 2.0 – towards a long term vision & policy



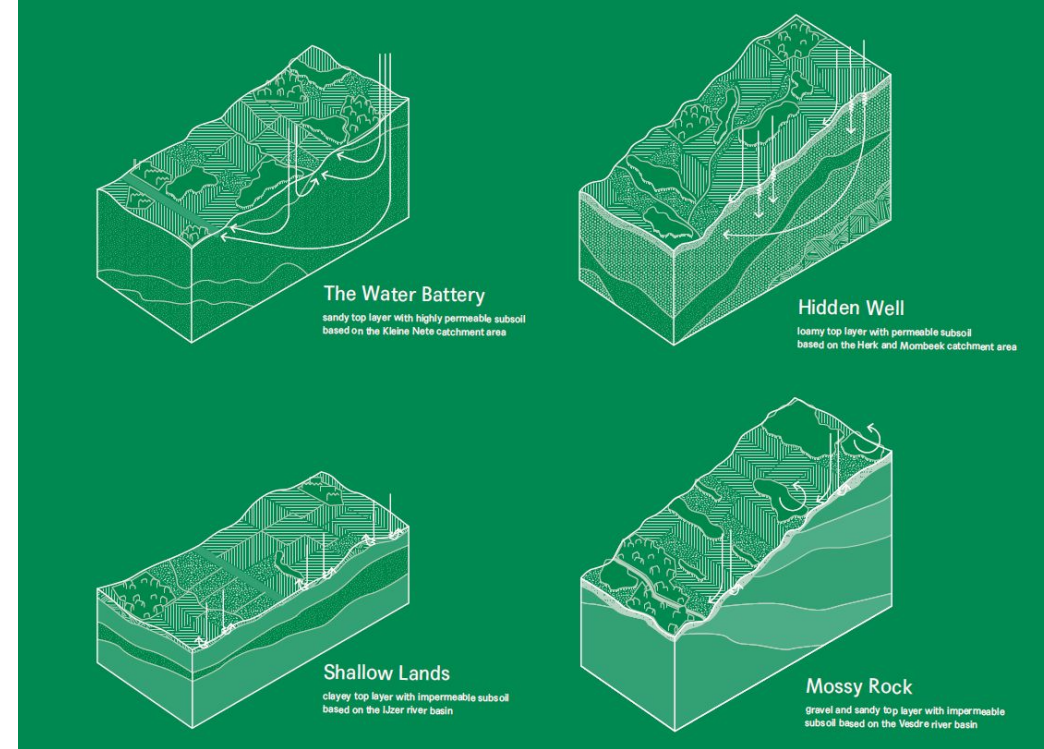
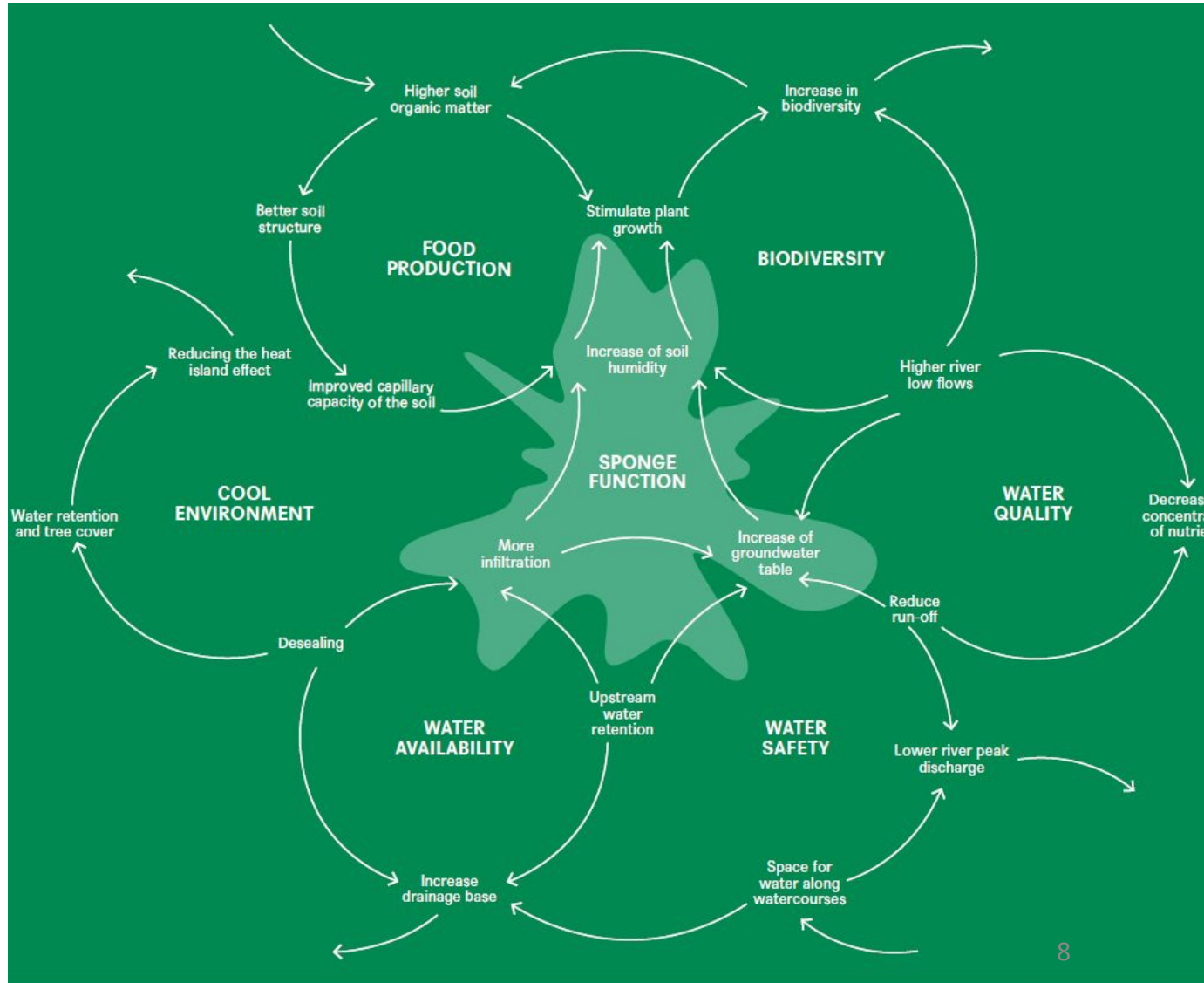
- Legally obliged : new Flemish Government is required to approve a Blue Deal within one year of taking office.
- Policy and legislative agreement for a coherent, cross-policy vision for the Flemish government.
- Implementation of existing frameworks (EU water legislation, initial Blue Deal, Flemish adaptation plan).
- Steering towards RBMP and other water-related plans & programs.

Local Blue Deals as policy instruments for resilience objectives:

- Water security
 - Water quality
 - Nutrients
 - Agriculture
 - Nature restoration
 - Carbon storage
 - Soil
 - Sediment transport
- Supported:
- From regional vision to implementation
 - Implementation budget
 - Monitoring the impact of implemented measures



Towards an EU Sponge Facility?



ENVISIONING AN “EU SPONGE FACILITY”

Enabling the long-term practice, value chains and constellations for Re-sponging Europe

A Build and further develop an inter-sectoral narrative, scientific underpinning (targets), and reservoir of practices
= **STRENGTHEN SPONGE ARGUMENT/PRACTICE**

B Build a geography of Sponge Landscapes in EU, to identify priorities and opportunities, partner and activate
= **IMPLEMENTATION (SUPPORT) PROGRAMME**

C Establish a valuation system to consider sponge measures/qualities as assets instead of costs
= **TILT THE VALUE SYSTEM**

D Build instruments & funding streams for multi-target measures (integrating CAP & other EU funding streams)
= **DEVELOP MISSION-ORIENTED INSTRUMENTS**

E Exchange & learn-by-doing on organizational & policy approaches for basin-led sponge implementation
= **PROVIDE ORGANISATIONAL MODELS**

