LIFE Platform meeting
FOCUS ON WATER RESILIENCE STRATEGY

LIFE Strategic Integrated Projects implementing River Basin Management Plans practices

PLENARY presentations

Lindsay Geerts &
Sophie D'hondt (VMM)

14-15 October 2025

Brussels

This meeting is organised by

Co-funded by the European Union

LIFE Belini

Belgian initiative for making a leap forward towards good status in the river basin district of the Scheldt

belini

Co-funded by
the European Union

Project title: LIFE Belini

RBMP targeted: 2nd RBMP of the Scheldt (2016-2021), incl. the FRMP, for the three regions involved (Flanders, Brussels & the Walloon Region)

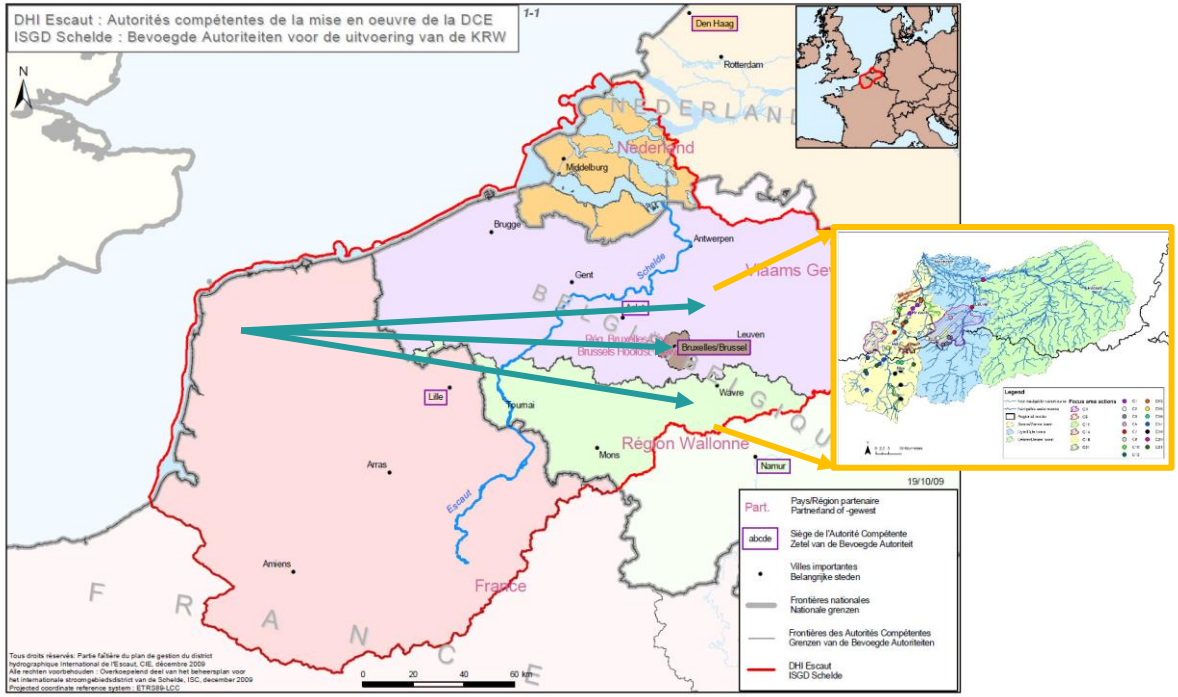
Beneficiary/ies: 8 partners
(VMM, LB-BE, SPW, VBR, VLM,
Vivaqua, DVW, De Watergroep)

Total Budget: € 18.111.366

Start and end dates:
2016-2026

Presented by:
Lindsay Geerts & Sophie D'hondt

Beneficiary
Flanders Environment Agency (VMM)



belini

Co-funded by
the European Union

Project title: LIFE Belini

RBMP targeted: 2nd RBMP of the Scheldt (2016-2021), incl. the FRMP, for the three regions involved (Flanders, Brussels & the Walloon Region)

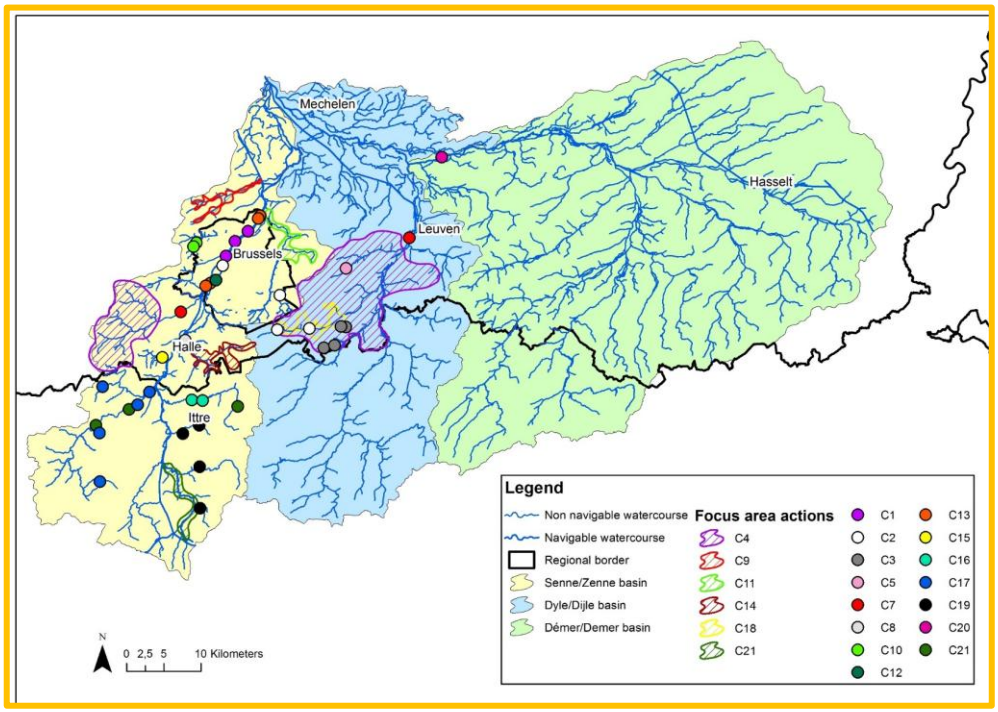
Beneficiary/ies: 8 partners
(VMM, LB-BE, SPW, VBR, VLM, Vivaqua, DVW, De Watergroep)

Total Budget: € 18.111.366

Start and end dates:
2016-2026

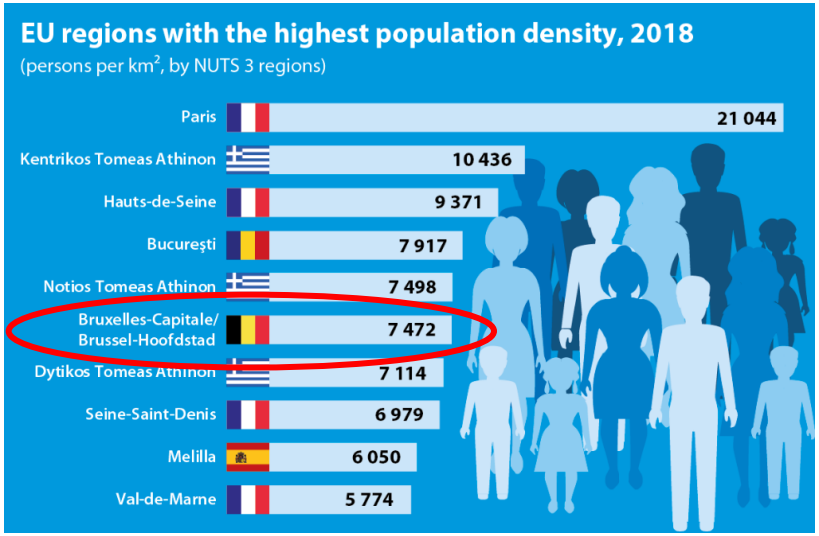
Presented by:
Lindsay Geerts & Sophie D'hondt

Beneficiary
Flanders Environment Agency (VMM)

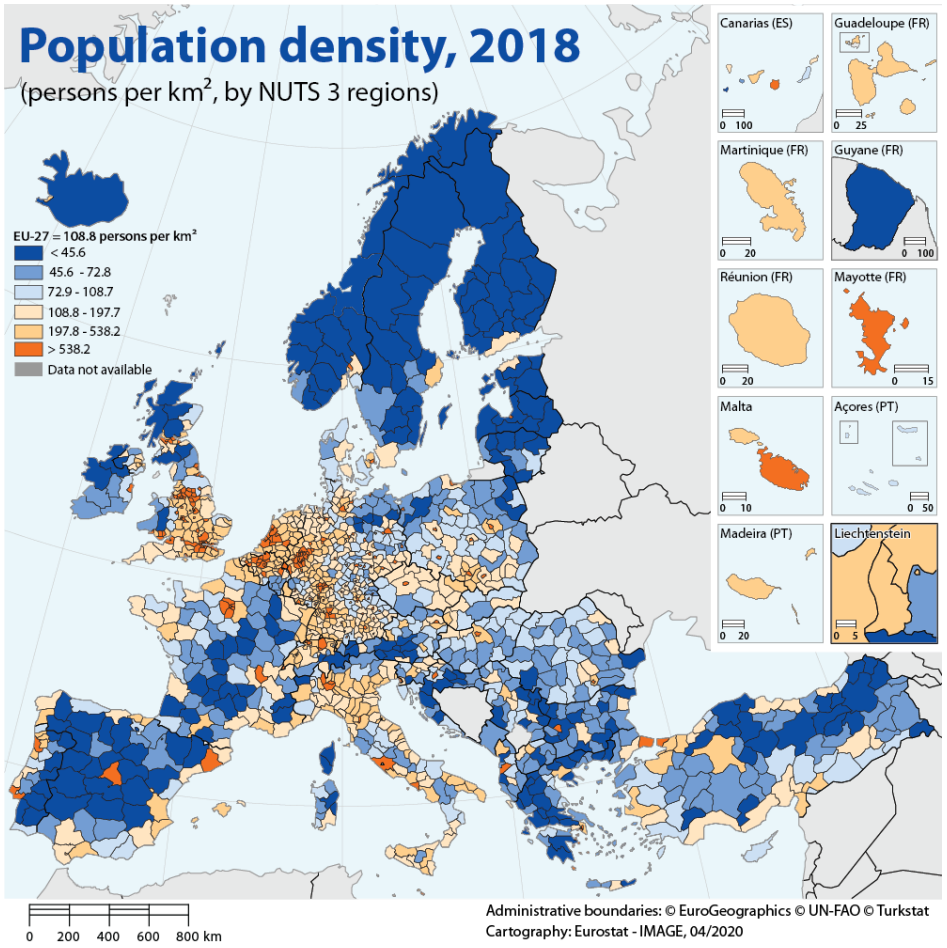


Co-funded by the European Union

Why LIFE BELINI is needed for Belgium



Belgian 385 inh/km²
Flanders 504 inh/km²
Walloon Region 219 inh/km²



ec.europa.eu/eurostat

Ref.: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20200430-1

belini
Co-funded by the European Union

High pressures

Reference picture: https://www.ion.be/nl/projecten/wol-u

Co-funded by
the European Union

High pressures

Reference picture: © Tom De Bie

belini
Co-funded by
the European Union

High pressures

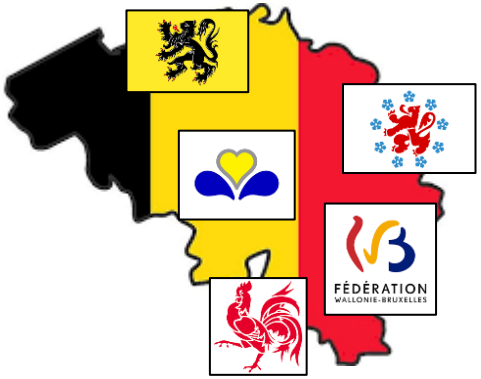
Reference picture: © VMM (in house drone pictures)

Co-funded by
the European Union

Interregional cooperation

- **Three River Basin Management Plans for the Scheldt (Flanders, Brussels, Walloon Region); incl. Flood Risk Management Plans**
- **In execution of the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC)**

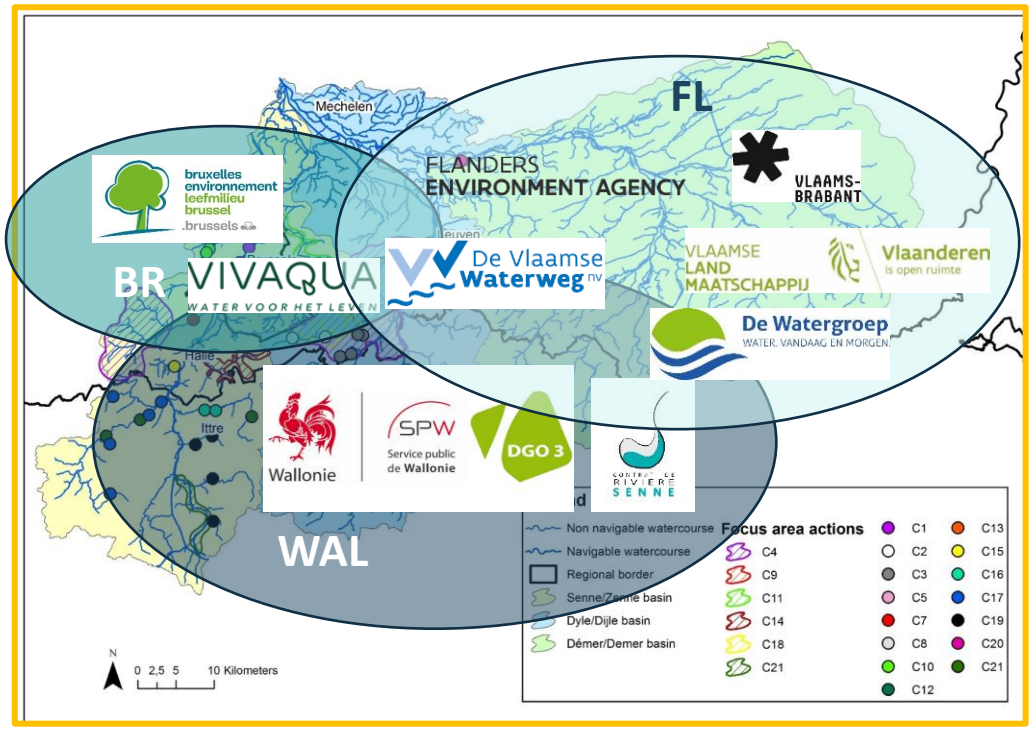
- **Water not bound by administrative boundaries**



Co-funded by
the European Union

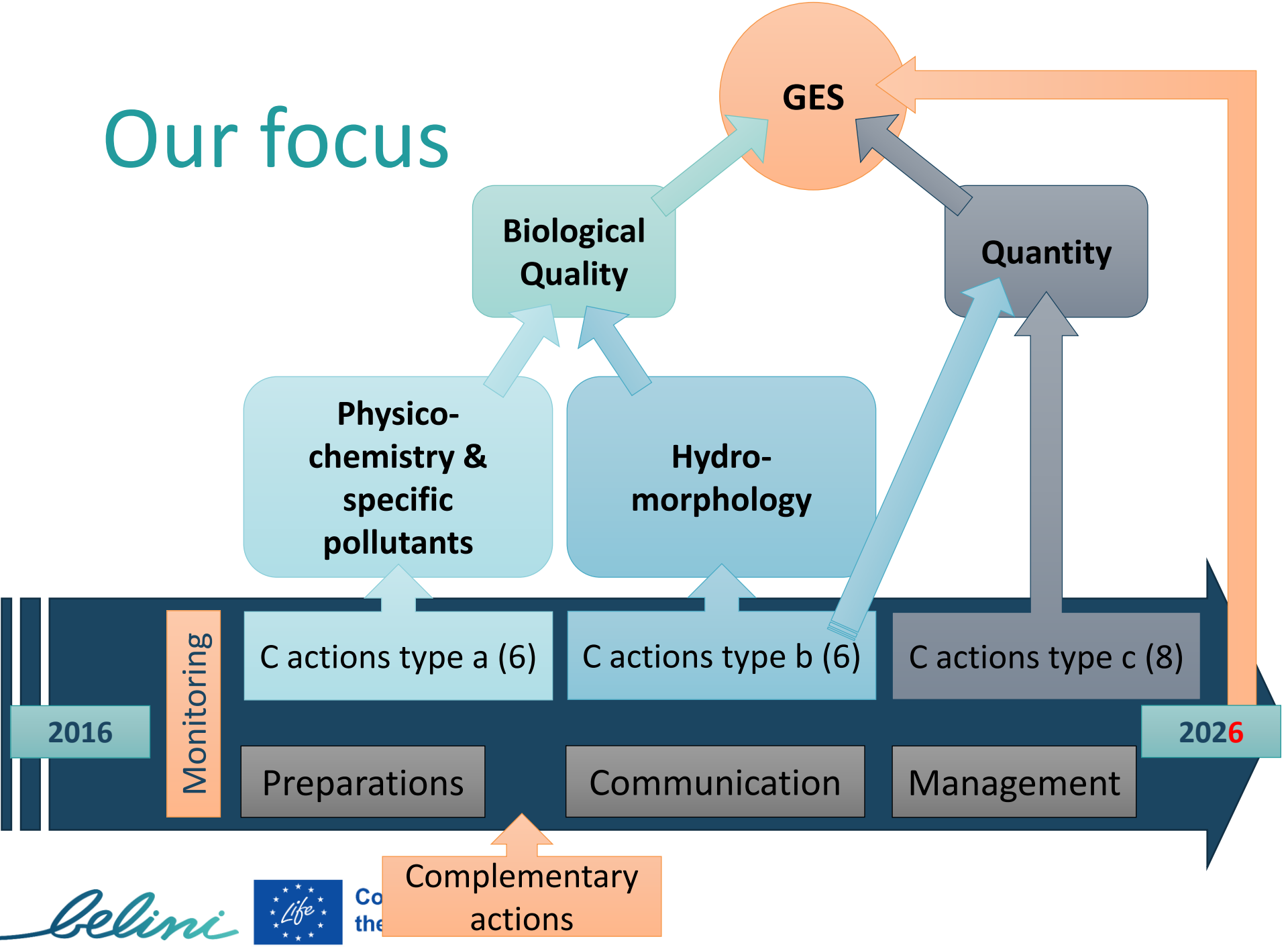
Dyle-Senne-Demer as pilot

- **8 partners, distributed among the three regions working for a good ecological status together**



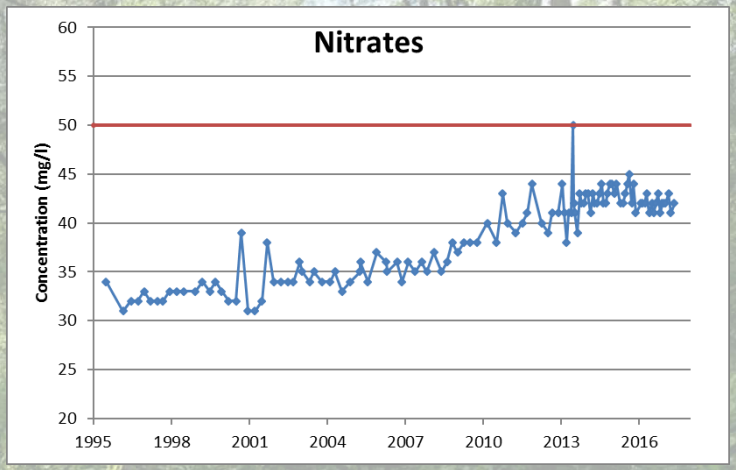
belini
Co-funded by the European Union

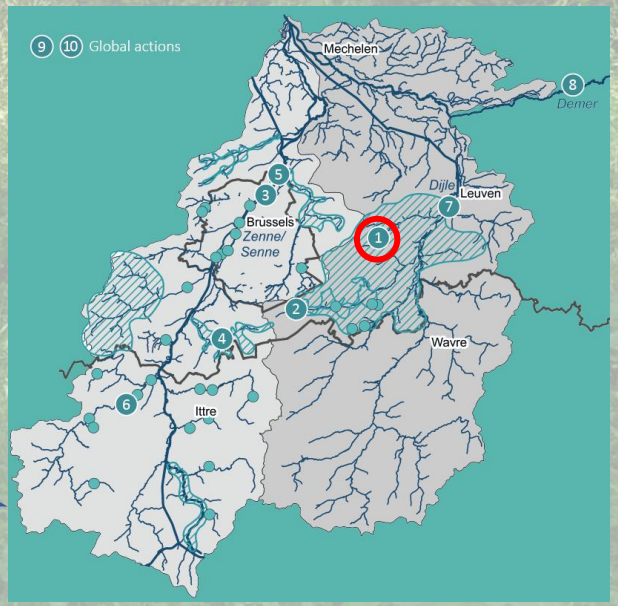
Our focus


GES
Biological Quality
Quantity
Physico-chemistry & specific pollutants
Hydro-morphology
2016
Monitoring
C actions type a (6)
C actions type b (6)
C actions type c (8)
2026
Preparations
Communication
Management
Complementary actions

Water quality: nitrate pollution

- **Nitrate too high in groundwater and drinking water**
- **Istopic study revealed comlex situation**
- No clear spatial variation
- Manure (younger water) + sewage (older water)
- **Groundwater model will not have added value**
- **Stakeholder consultation -> action plan**





Co-funded by the European Union

Water quality: pollutants

- Heavy metals, PAH, oil together with SS end up in rivers and nature areas by runoff from roads
- Revised UWWTD – 2033 !
- Impact for the IJse valley from highways shown
- Implementing a solution in Belini (pilot)
- Works started in August 2025
- Related action by Leefmilieu Brussel (study – urban runoff roofs)
- Networking: RRR, Aquatuur, StopUP

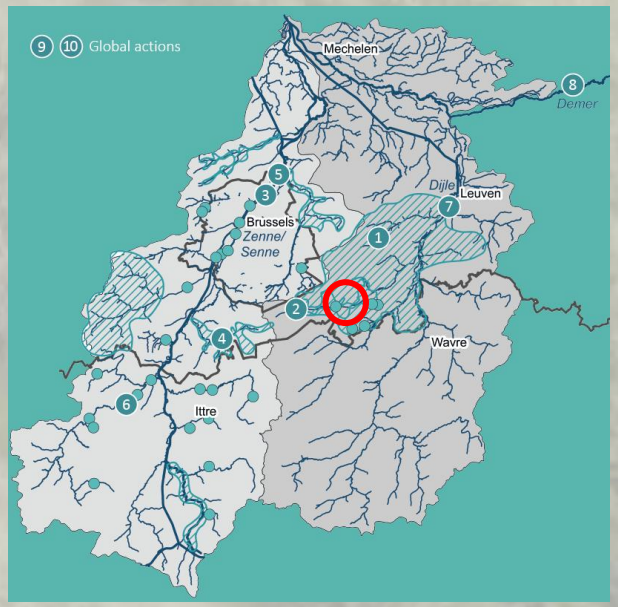
belini

Co-funded by the European Union

Hydromorphology: restoring rivers'natural character

- Solve fish migration barriers
- Restore river banks
- Create extra river lenght
- Increase suitable habitats for fish and vegetation

- Good ecological status despite "lower" phys-chem (Work Session Innovation/digitalization - day 2, ELMO)
- Increase buffer capacity
- Example pic.: Molenbeek (Senne)
- Integrated approach (Work Session Finances - day 2, Land Development)



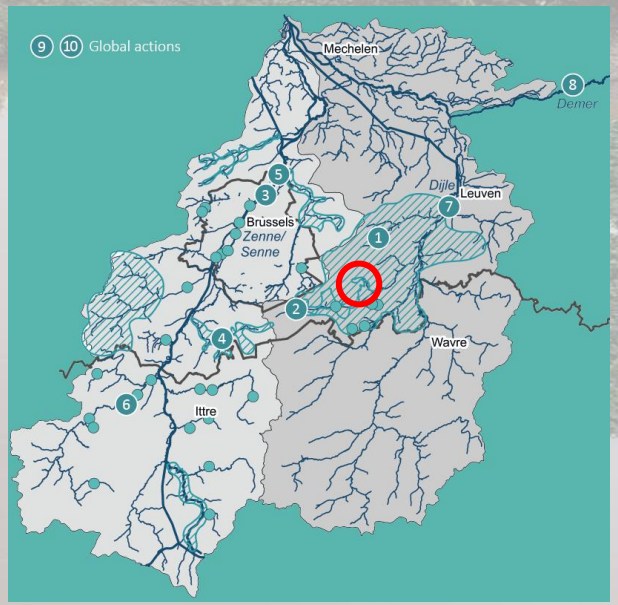
Co-funded by the European Union

Hydromorphology: restoring rivers'natural character

- **Solve fish migration barriers**

FLANDERS
ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

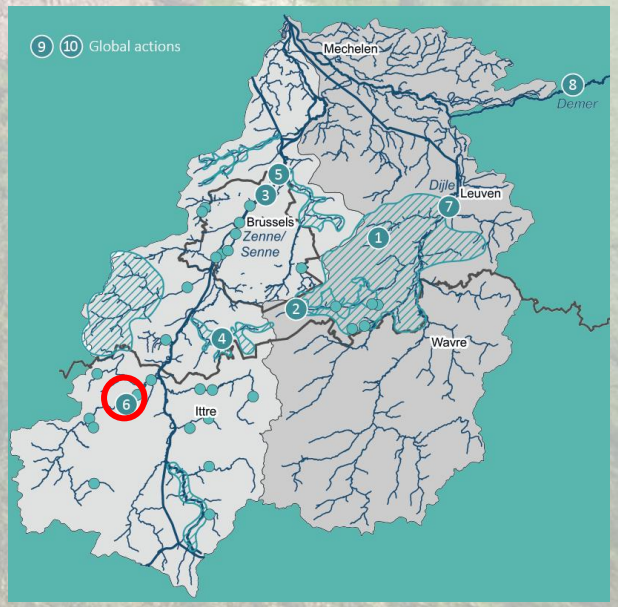
- **Dyle 4th arm - > 1,60 cm height difference (weir) is now bypassed by 23 steps of 7 cm**



Co-funded by
the European Union

Quantity: NWRA's

- **NWRA's Coeuq, Brancart, Gaesbecq, Cafeniere →**
- **Work with LIFE BNIP near Val du Coeurq**
- **Natural flood plains with more than 350.000 m³ of water storage in the Senne valley**
- **Restore ecology, biodiversity, recreational value (ecosystem service based approach)**



Co-funded by the European Union

Quantity: NWRA's

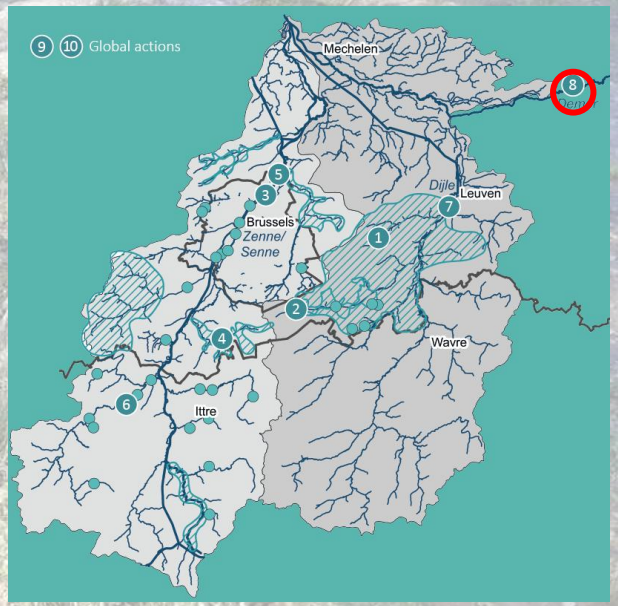
- **NWRA's Cafeniere →**

- **After flooding 2021 (Vesder); NWRA's outside of Belini emerged across the WR**

belini
Co-funded by the European Union

Quantity: remeandering

- Diest, Demer, Vinkenberg
- 1st meander of 30 meanders along a 33 km stretch
- By spring 2025, seven additional meanders will be created between Betekom and Werchter (Sigma-works)



De Vlaamse Waterweg nv

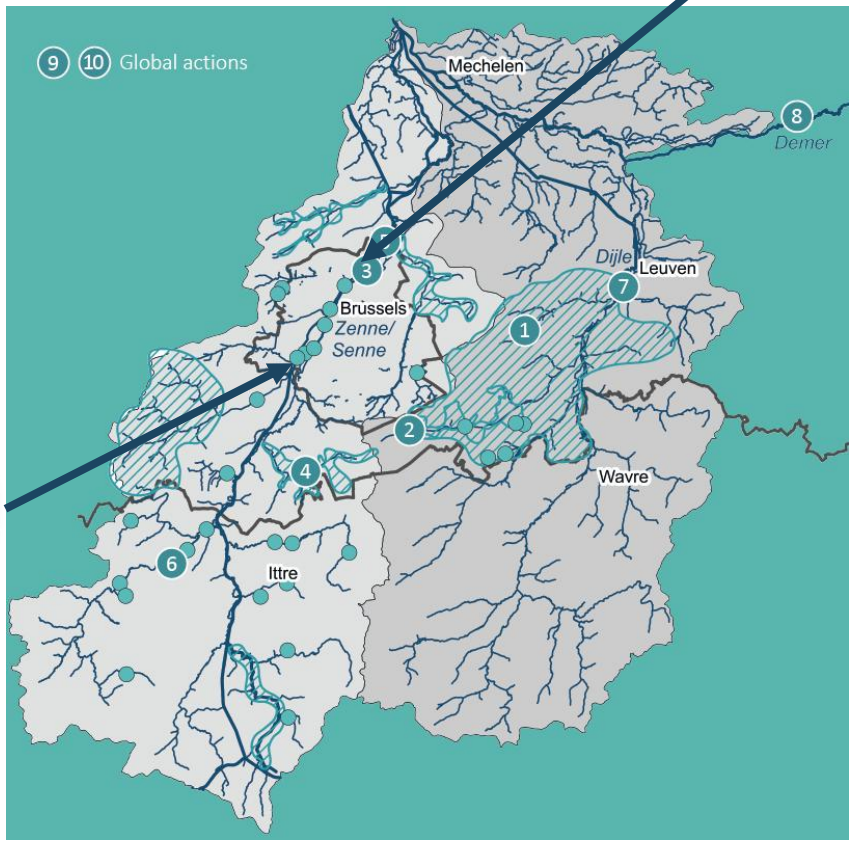
belini

Co-funded by the European Union

Many more…

Fieldtrip Senne !!!

bruxelles environnement leefmilieu brussel .brussels



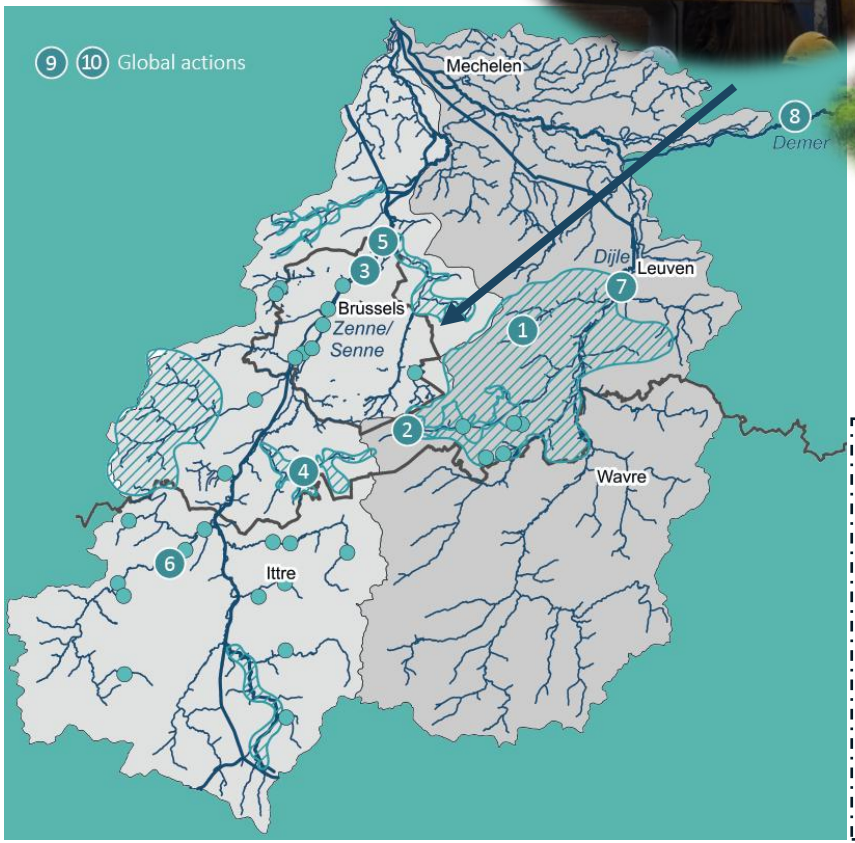
bruxelles environnement leefmilieu brussel .brussels

belini

Co-funded by the European Union

Many more…

Fieldtrip Woluwe!!!



FLANDERS
ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

BRABANTSE KOUTERS
REGIONAAL LANDSCHAP

DE WERKVENNOOTSCHAP

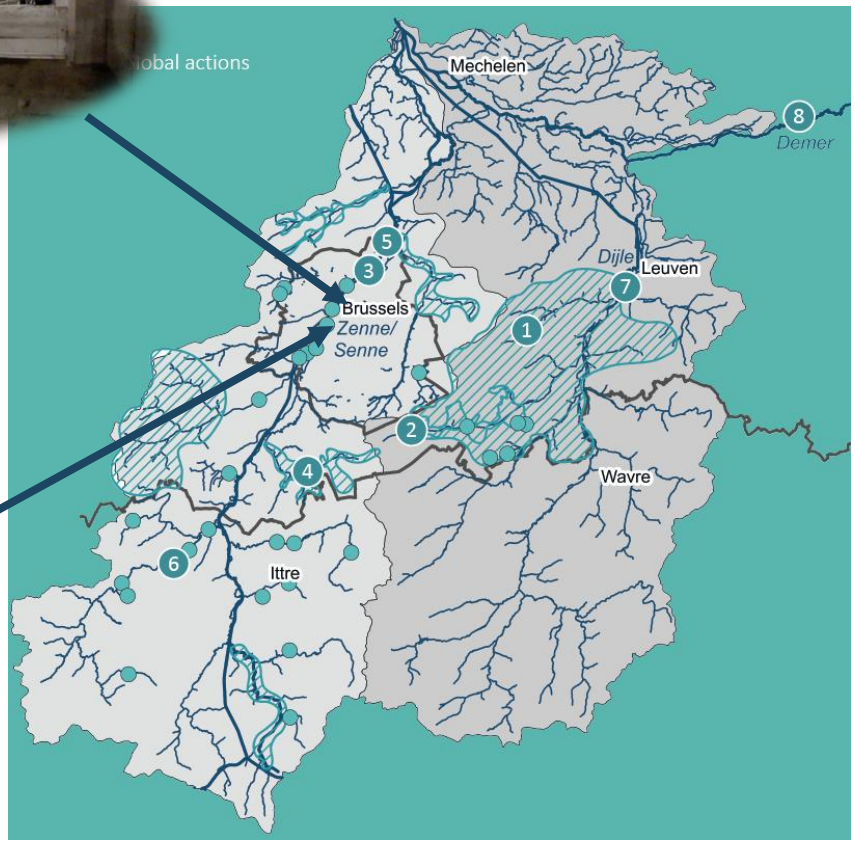
Outside Belini

belini
Life
Co-funded by
the European Union

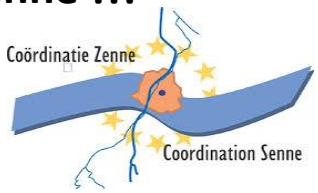
Many more…

VIVAQUA
WATER VOOR HET LEVEN

bruxelles environnement leefmilieu brussel .brussels

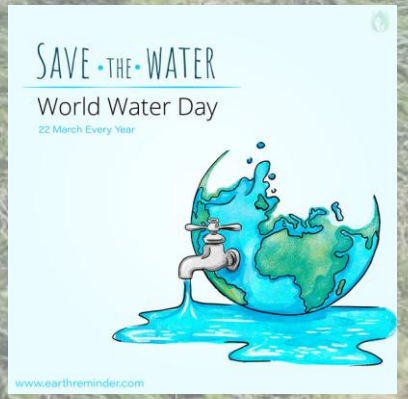


Fieldtrip walk Senne !!!



belini
Co-funded by the European Union

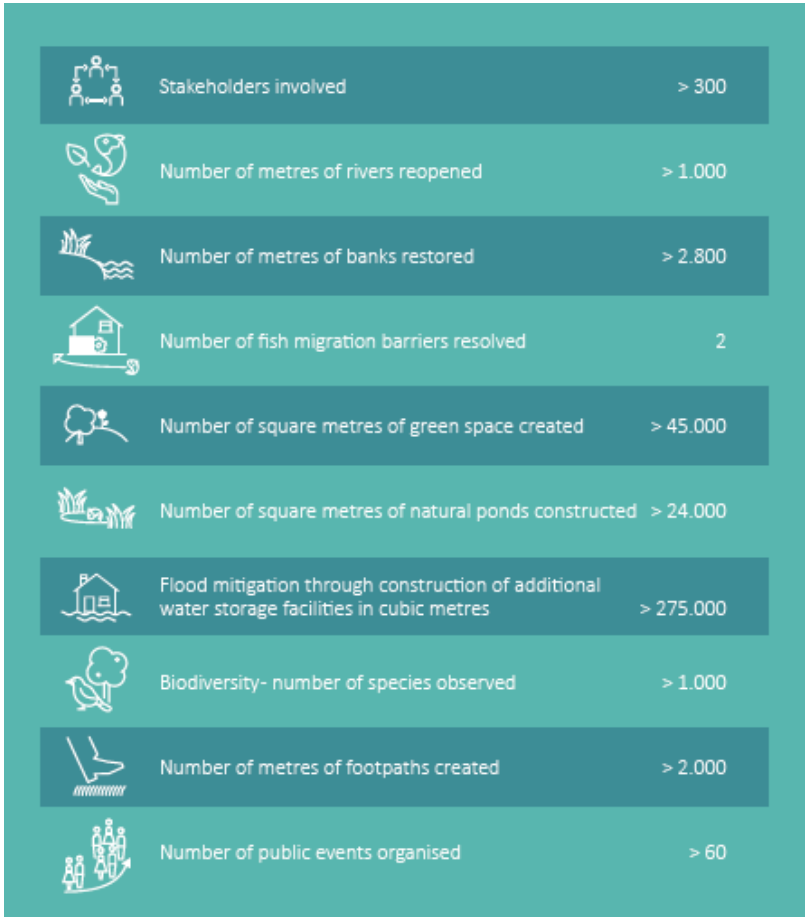
Creating public support



Fiere Rivieren
Rivières Fières

Co-funded by
the European Union

Impact by monitoring and indicators



Co-funded by the European Union

Some LIFE challenges

- **Changes during the long lifetime of an integrated project which surpass political terms**
- **Changed framework of “working”**
- **Changes in stakeholders interest**
- **Difficulties/strong delays in procedures related to permits**
- **Increase in budget: Covid, war -> caused an overall increase in 20% costs**
- **Overall budget deficit -> risk of reduce to day-to-day work**

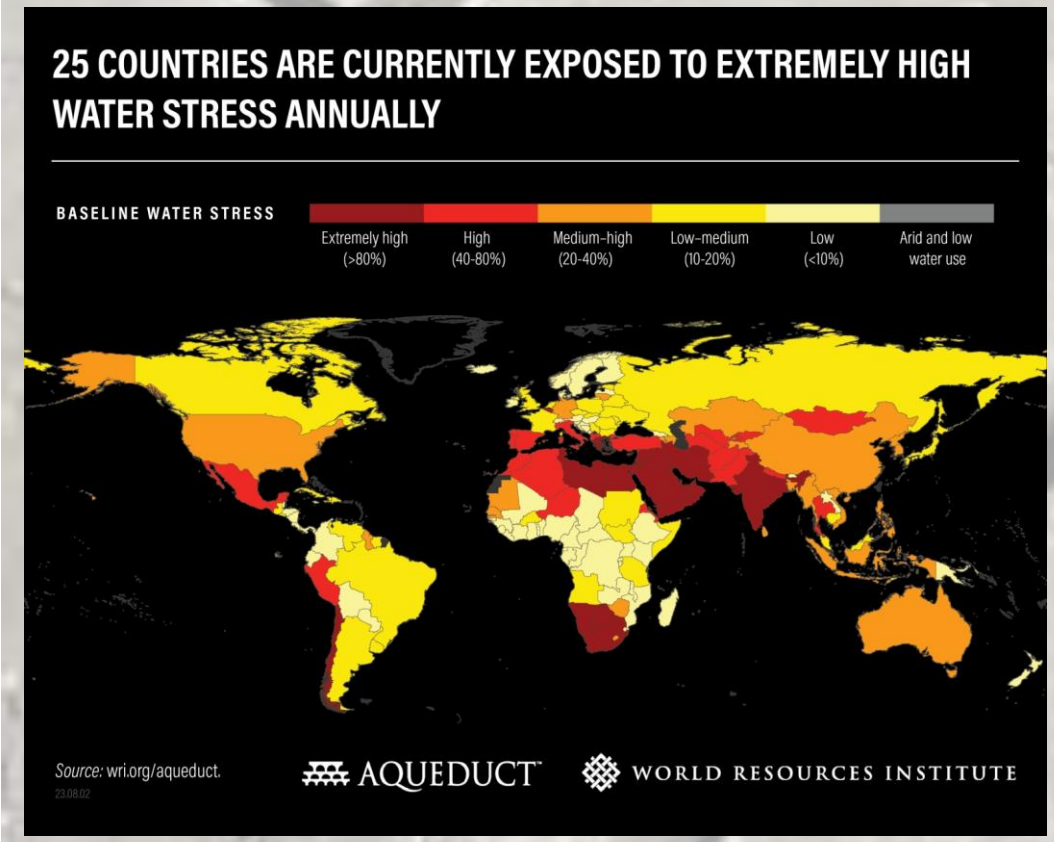
Co-funded by
the European Union

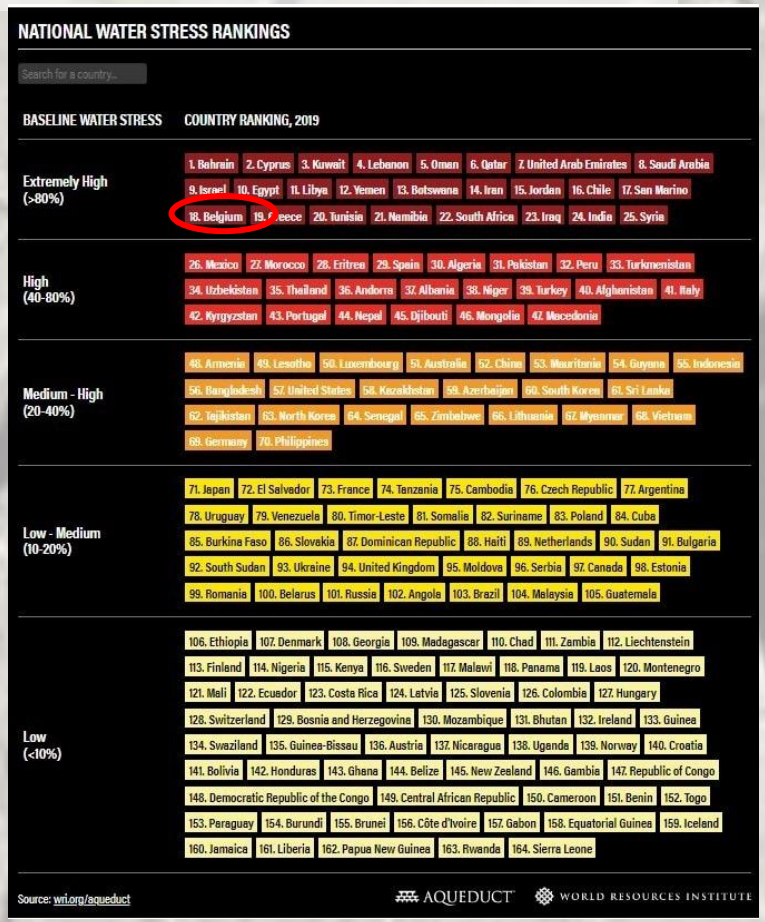
But many necessary opportunities

- **The LIFE integrated program allows to work on larger investment projects that often take 6 to 8 years**
- **LIFE projects offer a platform to develop best practices**
- **LIFE allows to work both horizontally and vertically between and within organisations (cross-sectoral, bottom-up and top-down)**
- **LIFE allows to innovate by pilots that go beyond the regular day-to-day work of organisations, taking into account future challenges**
- **LIFE IP supports and accelerates the formation of new coalitions in larger scale and local stakeholder networks**
- **LIFE IP succeeds in setting a clear objectives within the framework directives that surpass political mandates , which than again may be challenging**
- **LIFE IP delivers oxygen to organisations working on water, nature and climate objectives in times of budget deficits**
- **LIFE IP allows to respond to changes (20% flexibility) + amendment possibility within the objectives of the legislational framework of implementation**

Co-funded by the European Union

Future considerations

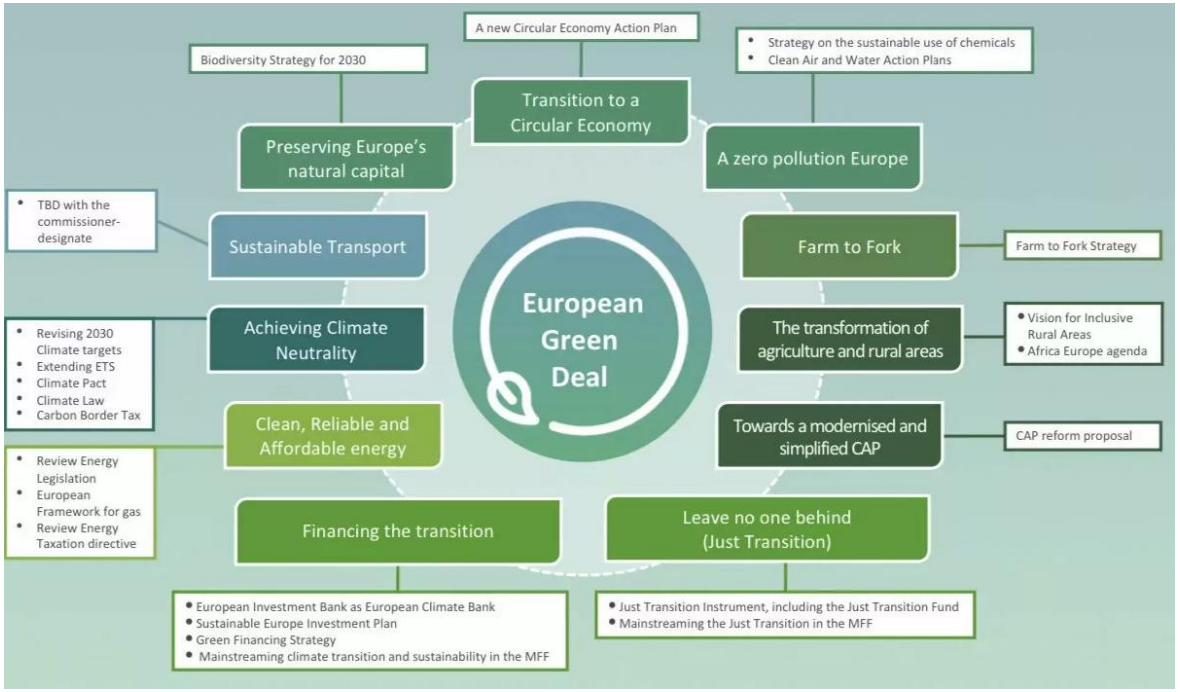




https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/08/countries-extremely-high-water-stress/

belini
Life
Co-funded by the European Union

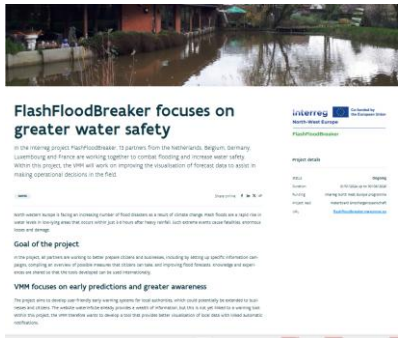
Future considerations

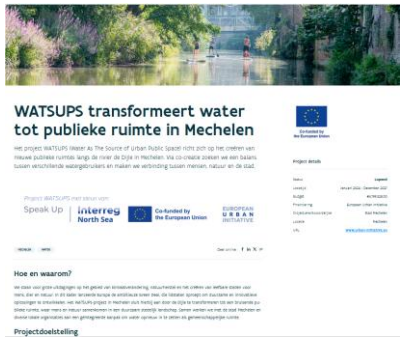


- **Zero pollution objectives**
- **Building a water-smart circular economy**
- **Anticipate water-related climate risks**
- **Support disruptive research & innovation activities**
- **Leverage digital water opportunities**

After LIFE: always looking for new opportunities

- **Building further on the LIFE Belini consortium**
  - Projects with Brussels environment, the Service public de Wallonie, The Flemish Waterway and the Flemish Land Agency





belini
Co-funded by the European Union

After LIFE: always looking for new opportunities

- **Building further on the LIFE Belini consortium**
  - Example: Aquatuur – Interreg Vlaanderen Nederland
    - Increasing water storage in a nature-based way
    - Construction, monitoring and evaluation of a constructed wetland

belini
Co-funded by the European Union

After LIFE: always looking for new opportunities

- **Building further on the LIFE Belini consortium**
  - Example: LIFE RIPARIAS
    - 11 project partners, measures against invasive alien species, across regional boundaries

Co-funded by the European Union

After LIFE: always looking for new opportunities

- **Current funding programmes**
  - LIFE
  - Horizon
  - ERDF
  - Interreg France-Wallonia-Flanders
  - Interreg Flanders-Netherlands
  - Interreg North Sea
  - Interreg North West Europe
  - Interreg Europe
  - Interreg Meuse-Rhine
  - European Urban Initiative

- **See website:**
  - https://vmm.vlaanderen.be/projecten/internationaal

Co-funded by the European Union

Interreg Vlaanderen-Nederland

Gefinancierd door de Europese Unie

Interreg North Sea

Co-funded by the European Union

CLANCY: beheer van uitheemse invasieve Chinese wolhandkrabben

Het Europese CLANCY-project vergroot de grensoverschrijdende capaciteit om klimaatadaptieve, biodiverse ecosystemen in stand te houden door middel van het beheer van de Chinese wolhandkrab.

BEHEER WATERLOPEN

DISCO: Digitale oplossingen voor klimaatadaptatie

Het Interreg North Sea-project DISCO wilt klimaatadaptatie in de Noordzeeregio versnellen door de ontwikkeling en implementatie van digitale oplossingen.

KLIMAATADAPTATIE

WIJ-WATER project maakt watersystemen klimaatadaptiever

We willen het afwateringslandschap transformeren tot een systeem dat zoetwater kan vasthouden en bufferen, om watertekorten te verminderen, grondwaterstanden te verhogen en verzilting tegen te gaan.

KLIMAATADAPTATIE BEHEER WATERLOPEN KWALITEIT WATERLOPEN

Topsoil brengt verzilting in kust- en poldergebied in kaart

De VMM onderzocht in de zomer van 2017 de verzilting van het grondwater in het kust- en poldergebied. Dat onderzoek gebeurde per helikopter en kadert in het Europese Topsoil-project en leverde nieuwe verziltingskaarten op.

CARE+ werkt samen met landbouwers aan betere waterkwaliteit

Binnen het grensoverschrijdende Care+-project werken we samen met diverse partners om duurzaam waterbeheer te bevorderen. We richten ons niet alleen op het verbeteren van de waterkwaliteit, maar ook op het betrekken van landbouwers bij de ontwikkeling en uitvoering van effectieve oplossingen.

Wetlands als natuurlijke klimaatbuffer

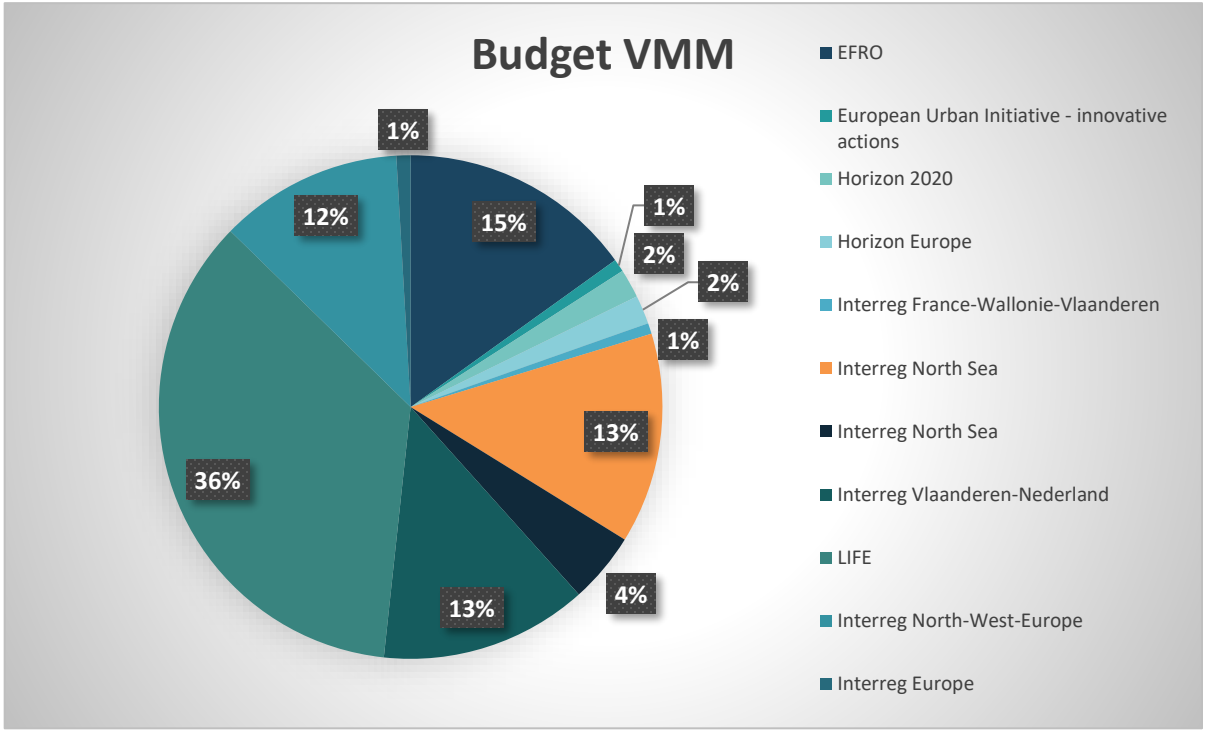
In het LIFE-project Wetlands4Cities werkt de VMM samen met 6 projectpartners aan het herstel en de versterking van wetlands als natuurlijke klimaatbuffers.

belini

Co-funded by the European Union

After LIFE: always looking for new opportunities

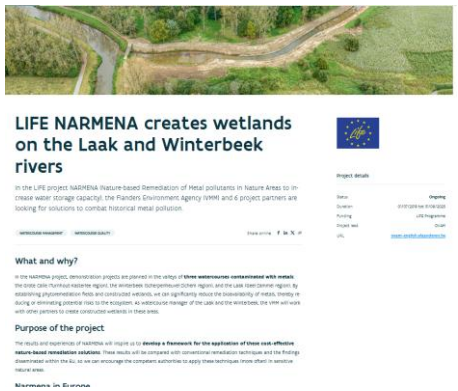
- **Current portfolio VMM: distribution across programmes**
  - ➔ **36% LIFE!**

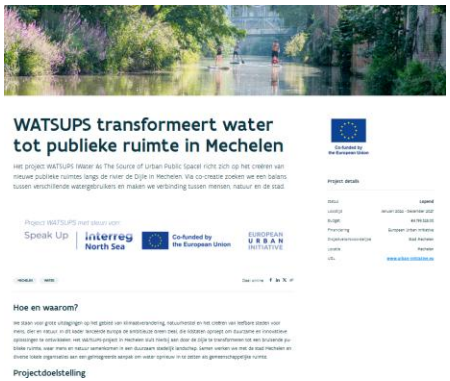


Co-funded by the European Union

After LIFE: always looking for new opportunities

- **Examples of LIFE projects in which VMM participates or leads**





Co-funded by the European Union

After LIFE: always looking for new opportunities

- **LIFE Wetlands4cities**
  - Vrouwvliet - Naturalising banks of watercourses
  - Restore and strengthen wetlands as natural climate buffers

Co-funded by the European Union

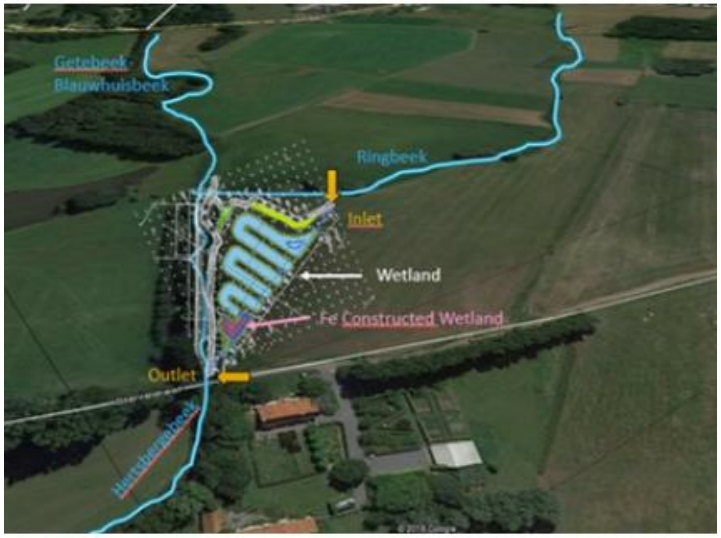
After LIFE: always looking for new opportunities

- **Building a resilient future for the next generation**
- LIFE Wetlands4cities

Co-funded by
the European Union

After LIFE: always looking for new opportunities

- **VMM wants to work together!**
- **Themes: air, water and climate (adaptation)**
  - Water quality and quantity
  - Wastewater and drinking water
  - Groundwater and surface water
  - Air quality
  - Climate adaptation
  - ….
- **Active in:**
  - Monitoring and modelling
  - Field actions incl. work on unnavigable waterways: re-meandering, daylighting waterways, combating exotic species, creating wetlands, etc.
  - Studies, planning, policy
  - Digitalization, data spaces, AI
  - ...



Schets constructed wetland

Co-funded by the European Union

After LIFE: always looking for new opportunities

- **Interested in working together?**
- **Please contact us at**
  - → projectsupport@vmm.be
  - → s.dhondt@vmm.be

Co-funded by the European Union

Thank you

visit www.life-belini.be

Belini project coordinator l.geerts@vmm.be

international cooperation VMM s.dhondt@vmm.be

Co-funded by
the European Union