

Information Sheet on Ramsar Wetlands

1. Country: Belgium 2. Date: 15-06-92 3. Ref: 7BE001

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5. Name of wetland: The 'Vlaamse Banken'

6. Date of Ramsar designation: 27-09-1984

7. Geographical coordinates: 51°10'N, 2°33'-2°55'E

8. General location: Parts of the North Sea within Belgian territorial waters between Dunkerque and Ostend, where depth is less than 6 m at low tide.

9. Area: 1900 ha

10. Wetland type: A

11. Altitude: sea level

12. Overview: The site includes the lowest zone of the beach, extending up to several kilometres offshore; the Ramsar status only relies on the territorial waters, although the Vlaamse Banken extend up to ... km beyond that line.

13. Physical features:

14. Ecological features:

15. Land tenure/ownership of:

(a) site

(b) surroundings

16. Conservation measures taken:

All hunting is prohibited along the beach and up to 1852 m off shore.

17. Conservation measures proposed but not yet implemented:

none

18. Current land use: principal human activities in:

(a) site commercial fishery
water recreation
nature conservation
sand and gravel exploitation

(b) surroundings/catchment

recreation
military activities

19. Disturbance/threats, included changes in land use and major development projects:

(a) at the site:

- Disturbance.

Wintering birds (especially sea ducks and grebes) on the sea are regularly disturbed by boats, especially sailing boats during the week-ends (large yacht harbour in Nieuwpoort).
Foraging waders on the beach are heavily disturbed by tourists, especially during the summer season on sunny week-ends in the winter. Between Nieuwpoort and Lombardsijde, there are also military activities (shooting exercises).

- Pollution.

The water quality of the North Sea along the Belgian coast is not very good, due to the direct outlet of sewage pipes etc. Negative effects on birds have not yet been noted. Apart of chronic oil pollution as elsewhere along the north sea coasts there are sometimes more important but almost local oil spills.

- Sand and gravel extraction.

(b) surroundings:

Pollution from outside the Belgian territorial waters.

20. Hydrological and physical values:**21. Social and cultural values:****22. Noteworthy fauna:**

Important numbers of sea ducks and grebes are wintering in the Belgian territorial waters:
Winter populations in some recent winters are: Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra*: 10,000-20,000, Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca*: 400-600, Eider *Somateria molissima*: 1000-1500, exceptionally 3000-5000, Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*: 1000-3000.

The beach is important for wintering waders (foraging areas and some high tide roosts). Recent numbers for the coast between De Panne and Oostende are: Dunlin *Calidris alpina* (1000-1500), Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* (1500-2000), Sanderling *Calidris alba* (200-300) and Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* (500-700)

23. Noteworthy flora:

24. Current scientific research and facilities:

Wintering (sea) birds are counted regularly by plain or from the coast. (Institute of Nature Conservation)

25. Current conservation education:

26. Current recreation and tourism:

27. Management authority:

28. Jurisdiction.

BELGIUM. MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE.
Administration of Agricultural Research

29. Bibliographical references:

30. Reasons for inclusion:

- Ornithological value (1 % criterium)

31. Map of site: