Rijkswaterstaat
Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management

Rules and regulations

Enjoying the nature of the Western Scheldt

Water. Wegen. Werken. Rijkswaterstaat.

The Western Scheldt is a busy river but the nature here is also exceptional. Seals swim alongside boats and you will see birds hunting for fish in the sea. The salt marshes, sandbanks, beaches and sparsely vegetated soils are enormously important for coastal breeding birds and migratory birds. At low tide, the sandbanks are exposed and you can see the birds scurrying around in search of food. Seals rest with their pups here. Enjoy the nature and these animals without disturbing them. You can see the protected areas on the map. Some areas are open at specific times; access to others is prohibited. In this way, we protect the special flora and fauna that live here.

The Western Scheldt has an open connection with the North Sea. Sandbanks and mudflats are exposed at low tide. The bed is home to many animals that are an important source of food for birds. Dozens of species of migratory birds use the Western Scheldt as a wintering area, as an area for moulting, as a stopover on their journey or for breeding. On land, bluethroats and marsh harriers breed in swamps and in The Drowned Land of Saeftinghe. Seals rest on the sandbanks and suckle their young there.

Restricted areas provide peace and quiet.

Birds can only look for food at low tide. They live off the worms, shrimps and crabs in the soil of the mudflats and sandbanks. If they are disturbed, they won't find enough food or rest to regain strength after their journey to or from the south. There is also a chance that their eggs won't hatch because they are forced to leave their nests time and again. Rest is important to allow seals and their young to save their energy.

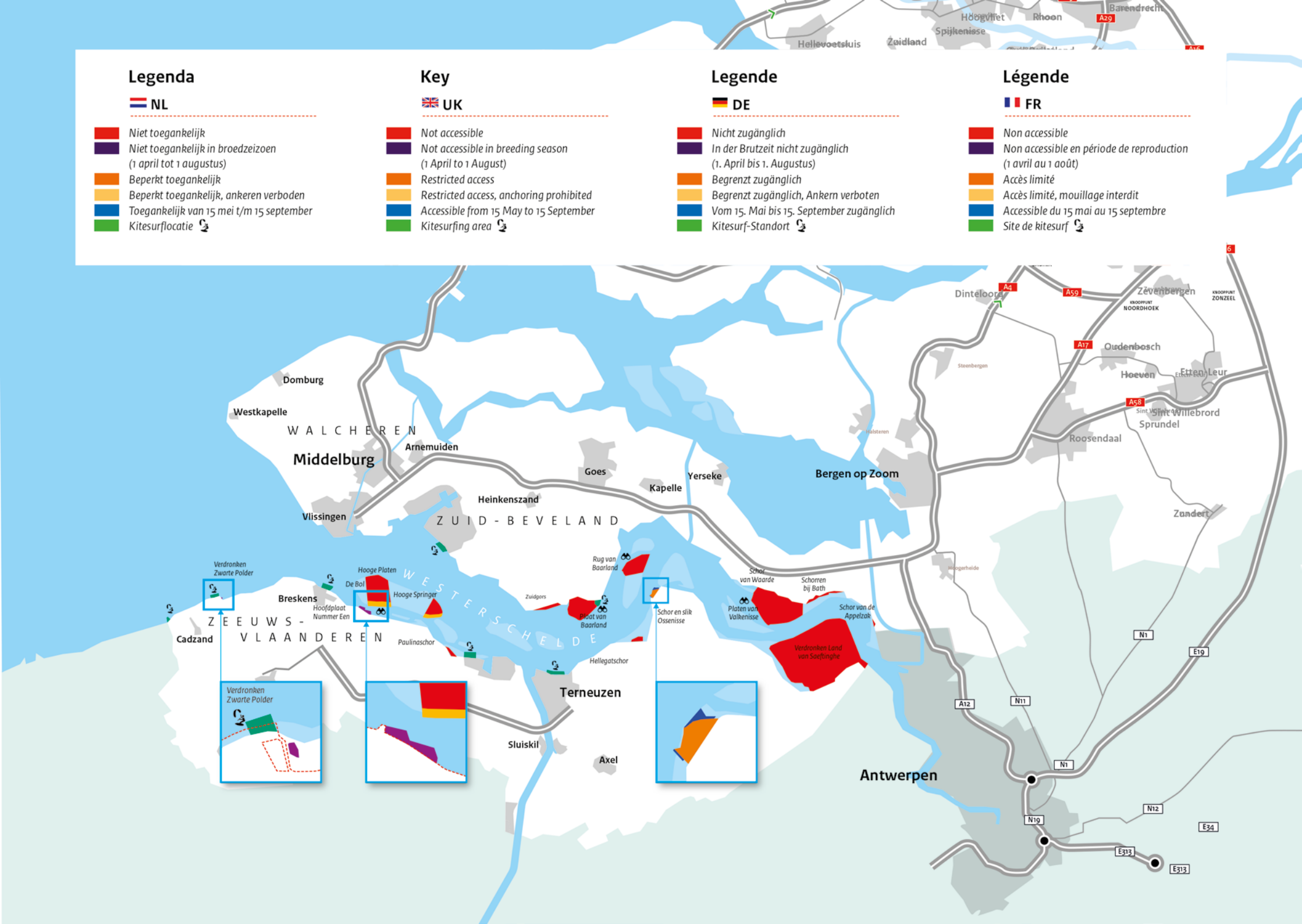
In order to protect these animals, access to certain areas is prohibited. Drones are prohibited because they frighten away the animals.

Seals on the sandbanks
There are two types of seal in the Western Scheldt: the common and grey seal. You will often see these beautiful animals at low tide on the sandbanks of Valkenisse, the Baarland Ridge, and the High Sandbanks. The sandbanks are an important location for the seals. This the only place where they can rest and suckle their pups. When people come near, the animals are quick to take flight into the water. So be careful not to disturb seals! You can tell whether you are disturbing them by their behaviour: as long as a seal is lying in a relaxed position, you are far enough away. If it lifts its head, you're too close. Move further away. Sometimes, pups will be lying alone on a sandbank. Don't worry, they haven't been abandoned.Their mother will be back soon.

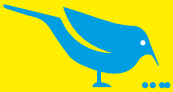
Enjoy everything from a distance
Seals and large groups of birds are wonderful to see. It is best to keep your distance so you don't disturb them. If you're lucky, curious seals will come and take a look at you themselves.

Safe nesting area
At low tide, an area of 1,800 hectares of mudflats and sandbanks emerges from the water off the coast near Breskens: the High Sandbanks. Large numbers of birds come here to feed. At high tide, this area disappears below the waves, with the exception of the 'Bol'. This is an important nesting area for a range of bird species. The Sandwich Tern, the Common Tern, the Kentish Plover and various seagull species breed here. That is why access to some of this area is prohibited all year round in order to allow birds to rest and to protect their eggs and nests. There is a ban on anchoring to the south of the area. Signs and buoys show where access is allowed.

Rest during the moulting season
In August, you will see large numbers of shelducks on the sandbanks in the Western Scheldt estuary: they come here to moult. During this period, their new feathers are growing and so the birds can't fly. They stay on the edges of the sandbanks so that they can escape into the water when danger threatens. At high tide, they float above the sandbanks until they fall dry again. It is important to keep a distance so that the birds are left in peace as they prepare to migrate. You can see the shelducks at various places in the Western Scheldt, such as the High Sandbanks and the Hooge Springer, the sandbanks of Valkenisse and the Drowned Land of Saeftinghe.


Legenda
NL
Niet toegankelijk
Niet toegankelijk in broedzeizoen
(1 april tot 1 augustus)
Beperkt toegankelijk
Beperkt toegankelijk, ankeren verboden
Toegankelijk van 15 mei t/m 15 september
Kitesurflocatie
Key
UK
Not accessible
Not accessible in breeding season
(1 April to 1 August)
Restricted access
Restricted access, anchoring prohibited
Accessible from 15 May to 15 September
Kitesurfing area
Legende
DE
Nicht zugänglich
In der Brutzeit nicht zugänglich
(1. April bis 1. Augustus)
Begrenzt zugänglich
Begrenzt zugänglich, Ankern verboten
Vom 15. Mai bis 15. September zugänglich
Kitesurf-Standort
Légende
FR
Non accessible
Non accessible en période de reproduction
(1 avril au 1 août)
Accès limité
Accès limité, mouillage interdit
Accessible du 15 mai au 15 septembre
Site de kitesurf
Hellevoetsluis
Zuidland
Spijkenisse
Hoogvliet
Rhoon
Barendrecht
A29
Dinteloord
A4
A59
Zevenbergen
KNOOPPUNT NOORDHOEK
KNOOPPUNT ZONZEEL
A17
Oudenbosch
Steenbergen
Hoeven
Etten-Leur
A58
Sint Willebrord
Sprundel
Roosendaal
Halsteren
Bergen op Zoom
Zundert
Hoogerheide
Domburg
Westkapelle
WALCHEREN
Middelburg
Arnemuiden
Vlissingen
Goes
Kapelle
Yerseke
Heinkenszand
ZUID-BEVELAND
WESTERSCHELDE
Verdronken Zwarte Polder
Hooge Platen
De Bol
Hooge Springer
Hoofdplaat Nummer Een
Breskens
ZEEUWS-VLAANDEREN
Cadzand
Paulinaschor
Zuidgors
Rug van Baarland
Plaat van Baarland
Schor en slik Ossenisse
Schor van Waarde
Schorren bij Bath
Platen van Valkenisse
Schor van de Appelzak
Verdronken Land van Saeftinghe
Hellegatschor
Terneuzen
Sluiskil
Axel
Antwerpen
A12
N11
N1
E19
N12
N19
E34
E313

Rules and regulations



Be aware of what is and what is not allowed. Enjoy groups of seals and birds from a distance. At low tide, the salt marshes, breakwaters and tidal flats are for the birds. These are their resting places and they find their food here. If you come too close, the birds will stay away and they lose their moment of rest and foraging. Keep your dog on a leash.

Cutting sea vegetables, digging sea bait and collecting shellfish is only permitted in designated areas.

At low tide, the sandbanks are the domain of the birds and the seals. If you anchor too close to the edge of a sandbank, the animals will stay away and their opportunity to rest will be lost.

The Western Scheldt is a coastal water area and you can fish with a maximum of two rods and three hooks on each rod. In the case of cod, you may not have more than 25 fish or 20 kg in your possession. You must not have any sea bass in your possession.

Kitesurfing is only allowed at the designated kitesurfing locations. These locations are designated so that the seals and birds in the area are not disturbed.

You should always take rubbish home with you. In that way, we can work together on keeping the nature in the Netherlands beautiful and clean.

Nature management organisations, the police and the Zeeland Regional Environment Office (RUD) conduct joint inspections in the nature areas. Infringements are subject to fines. You want to report an infringement? Call the Zeeland Regional Environment Office on +31 (0)118-412323.

Natura 2000
Westerschelde & Saeftinghe is a Natura 2000 area. Natura 2000 is a network of protected nature areas in Europe. For more information, see www.rwsnatura2000.nl.

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