

# British approach to organizing plans for Natura 2000 area example to the Netherlands

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Why is it that plans for organising a stretch of the British coast at Thanet for Natura 2000 have been implemented successfully, while in the Weerribben-Wieden area of Overijssel, Netherlands, scepticism and mistrust about Natura 2000 are growing? Researchers from Wageningen University, part of Wageningen UR, compared the way that the plans for these two areas were compiled. Forging good working relationships with all concerned is crucial to heightening the chances of protecting the value of the nature in these areas.

The European Union wants to protect biodiversity in Europe by setting up a network of natural areas; the Natura 2000 areas. [Plants and animals](#), after all, do not observe national borders. Every national government must set up management plans. In the Netherlands, these plans have already caused much conflict. In fact, the way they are being devised may even damage the nature targets and in the long term, erode support for nature policy. A bad procedure causes delay and sows doubt about the results and the need to protect nature. Raoul Beunen and Jasper de Vries from the Land Use Planning Group at Wageningen University reached these conclusions on after making a comparative study of the implementation of Natura 2000 in the Netherlands and Great Britain. Their findings have been published in the *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*.

Natura 2000 is being implemented throughout the European Union. Many local governments, businesses and residents have daily dealings with the policy. The research, whereby the strategy taken in the Thanet

Coast project (involving the cliffs along the coast to the north of Dover in Great Britain) was compared with the ambitions of the management plan implemented in the Weerribben-Wieden, shows that the way the process is organised is crucial to forging ties with the various parties involved and therefore to the ultimate success of the project. The Thanet Coast project enjoys wide support and is already proving successful, while those involved in the Weerribben-Wieden process are steadily becoming more sceptical about realising the Natura 2000 targets.

The research shows that building up good relationships between all concerned is an important condition when it comes to protecting the long-term value of nature. These relationships will not evolve if the process is badly thought-out and disorganised, and in the long term, support for nature policy will be seriously damaged.

The wide support for the Thanet Coast project was largely the result of direct personal contact between the various parties (including farmers and companies in the tourism sector), the chance given to all those involved to provide input and the way the organisers used this input and took note of the expectations of all parties. Input from parties and individuals did not meet with a simple ‘Thank you’ before being brushed aside. The organizers tried to slot people’s ideas into the plans for ‘Our Coast’, as the area was called. During the design phase of the process, the focus was on forging and maintaining local ties.

The Dutch approach, which involved consultations with a select group of representatives from government organizations and special interests groups gave little opportunity for contact between residents, businesses and local government. In fact, radio silence reigned for a considerable length of time. As a result, residents, businesses and local politicians became more sceptical and lost faith. Confidence in success even dwindled among the representatives involved from the start.

**More information:** Raoul Beunen and Jasper R. de Vries (2011): The governance of Natura 2000. sites: the importance of initial choices in the organisation of planning processes, *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*. Online on: [www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09640568.2010.549034](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09640568.2010.549034).

Provided by Wageningen University

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