

Belgium

Audit on the protection and recovery of groundwater supplies in the Flemish Region

In the course of 2014, the Belgian Court of Audit examined the way the Flemish authorities used the legal instruments aimed at improving the groundwater such as permits, taxation and the Greywater Decree.

Policy

The Flemish region is not richly endowed with groundwater supplies. In 2010, groundwater shortages were noticed in 14 out of 42 Flemish groundwater bodies. By the end of 2010, the Flemish Government adopted River Basin Management Plans as well as a Programme of measures 2010-2015 in line with the European Framework Directive and the Decree on Integral Water Policy. However, Flanders requested a postponement until 2021. Flanders implemented the 2010-2015 programme at a rather slow pace. For the Sokkel system alone, the most endangered of all six groundwater systems, it drew up a water extraction run-down scenario. The draft new River Basin Management Plans 2016-2021 conclude that 8 out of 42 groundwater bodies are in poor condition. As from 2016 Flanders will draw up area-specific policies for these groundwater bodies. It will request a further European postponement until 2027.

Instruments

According to the River Basin Management Plan 2010-2015 the most important measures to improve the groundwater were differentiated permits and taxation along with measures for a rational use of groundwater such as greywater subsidies. The permit policy seems to be fruitful, but it does not cover all groundwater extractions, nor does it provide sufficient legal certainty. The taxation has since 2010 gradually brought about better attuning to groundwater body quantity. Greywater policy on the other hand was far less successful. All three instruments decreased the use of groundwater, especially in the most vulnerable Sokkel system.

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