“At the same time, Grenspark Groot Saeftinghe is also an agricultural region. In the picturesque polder villages, time seems to have stood still. But nothing could be further from the truth — in this border region, farmers work with passion on their products.” - A quote from www.grensparkgrootsaeftinghe.eu just 10 years ago

Demands and needs

This is our call to actions. We urge you, policymakers to break the silence and take the following actions:

- Implement large-scale drainage and water management improvements.
- Fund research and pilot projects for salt-resistant agriculture, do not pretend we are not here.
- Provide financial incentives for farmers transitioning to adaptive farming or alternatives, for instance full-scale grain farming or solar parks.
- Establish stronger collaboration between farmers, scientists, and policymakers.

Support and Funding

Several regional and national programs provide assistance to farmers transitioning to saline-resistant agriculture. We urge policymakers to expand and improve these programs to secure the future of farming in Zeeland.

Together, we can build a resilient and sustainable agricultural future! We need our food, we do not want to be dependent on others, do we?

Where to find us

Phone
+31 035 567 876 34

E-mail
info@farmersforsaeftinghe.nl

Website
www.farmersforsaeftinghe.com

Social Media
@farmersforsaeftinghe

Agricultural call

On what should be done

United and dissatisfied

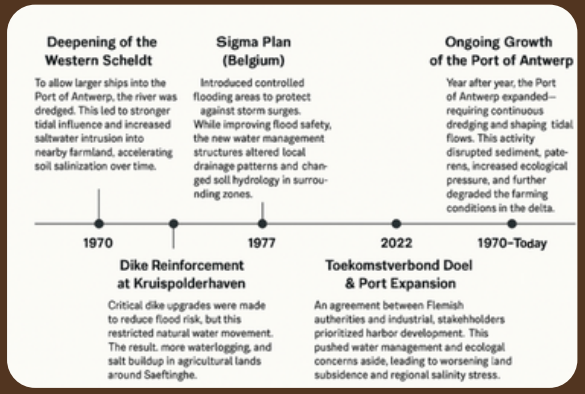
The reason for this brochure

Dear policymakers,

We are the farmers of Grenspark Groot Saeftinghe, we have been cultivating this land for generations. Our ancestors have gratefully made use of these very fertile soils. Throughout history, the marine soils of Grenspark Groot Saeftinghe have proved to be pivotal in the development of agriculture in the area. The high landscape and the nutrient-rich soil allowed the local community to cultivate the land for a long time, but those days have changed. We have witnessed the increasing drought of our soils for the past 10 years and have seen the authorities withdraw. The changing climate has been worsening the conditions heavily and rising sea levels pose growing challenges for agriculture in coastal areas. The farmers have united to hand over this brochure, where we will reflect on the last years, outline what we think went wrong and delve into the causes of salinization and increased drought. The impact of climate change on groundwater has had an enormous influence on farming. As experts in the field, we have seen that with the right adaptations, we can secure a sustainable future for agriculture and rural livelihoods.

Local Saeftinghe

As we all know, Saeftinghe is a unique coastal farming region, historically known for its fertile soil and strong agricultural community. However, increasing drought in our soil threaten our ability to farm as we always have. What exactly has climate change and salination meant for us farmers? Drought combined with the accumulation of salt in the fertile grounds has caused our crops, like unions and potato's to struggle and our yields to decline. Due to rising sea levels, the irrigation with brackish water, poor drainage systems causing salt to build up and a very uncertain weather pattern which worsened both droughts and floods. Series of historical interventions in water management, expansion in the surrounding industry and infrastructure have shaped the rural area deeply. The timeline beneath underlines the influence of these events on today's farming:



If no action is taken, the rural landscape of Saeftinghe will permanently be altered, with severe consequences for food production, local economies, and biodiversity.

What went wrong?

From our perspective as farmers, the past decade has shown a troubling lack of vision and commitment from governing bodies:
In the drought years of 2026 and 2029, we lost over 25% of our yields in certain polders. Our fields cracked, our crops withered, and support was minimal. How come the governing bodies have been so supportive and full of fancy visions until 2026, but then decided to drop out? This feeling grew among us farmers when in 2030, the Netherlands and Flanders launched renewed talks on water management in the Western Scheldt. But these talks focused on vague technicalities and grotesque policy solutions. We need, no, we demand real solutions for drought resilience and saltwater intrusion. Lastly, we have heard of the planned expansion of the port in 2038, to the east, increasing pressure on the Dutch side. The dredging of the Westerschelde, which will most likely follow, will deepen the channel further, worsening saltwater intrusion, drying out our soils, and depleting our sweetwater lenses.

Join us now!

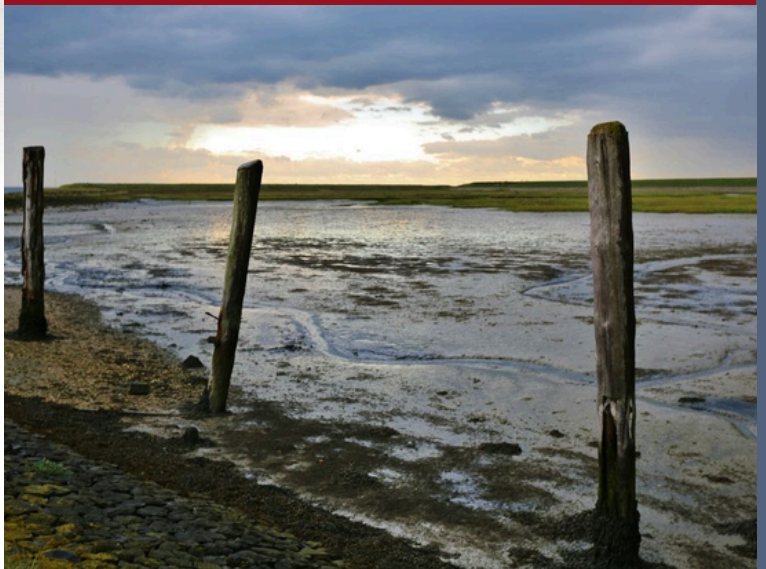
info@farmersforsaeftinghe.nl
www.farmersforsaeftinghe.nl

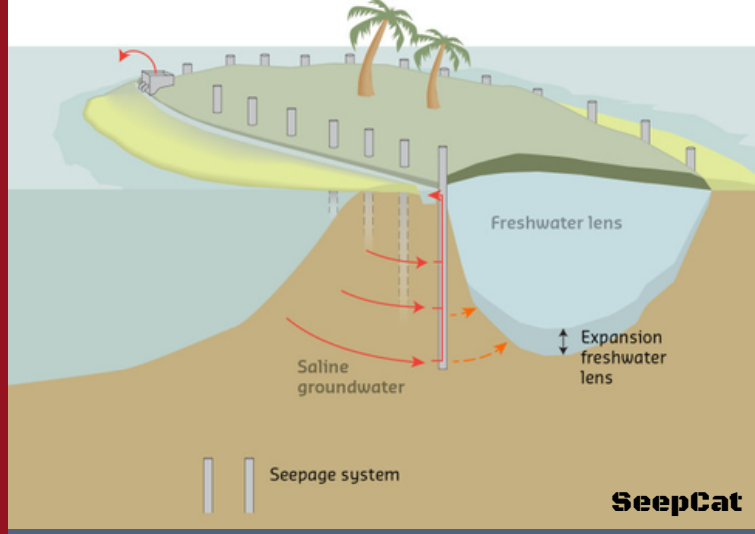
Drinkingwater in Zeeland 2035

Where Do We Stand and What Can You Expect for the Future?

Why This Brochure?

The province of Zeeland faces significant challenges regarding drinking water. Climate change, drought, increasing salinity, and a growing population make it crucial to manage our water resources in an innovative and sustainable way. In this brochure, we inform you about the changes in our drinking water supply, our vision for the future, and how you, as a resident, can contribute to sustainable water management.





What Is Changing?

In Zeeland, drinking water has traditionally been sourced from the Biesbosch and local water sources. However, due to increasing drought and salinization, this is becoming more difficult. New techniques, such as the SeepCat method, are helping to protect and optimize freshwater sources. Additionally, alternative water sources are being explored, such as using brackish water for household purposes. This means that in the future, your drinking water will be sourced and used in a different way.

Contact

By working together now, we ensure that Zeeland will have sufficient and clean drinking water in 2075. If you would like to learn more or share your thoughts, please contact the Province of Zeeland at

provincie@zeeland.nl
+31 118 651013

Drinkwater is a collaboration between: Provincie Zeeland, waterschap Scheldestromen, stichting Het Zeeuwse Landschap, Molecaten and de gemeente Sluis.

Future Vision 2075 – What Will Zeeland Look Like?

By 2075, Zeeland will be a leader in sustainable water management. Innovative measures, such as brackish water pipelines for household use and desalination plants, will be commonplace. The province will have made large-scale investments in SeepCat technology to protect underground freshwater reserves. New innovative drainage systems will also be tested to reduce the pressure from saltwater intrusion. Additionally, various monitoring projects will be in place, such as distributing EC meters to farmers and conducting electromagnetic measurements from helicopters to precisely track soil salinity. As a result, the drinking water supply will remain stable and affordable despite climate change.

What Can You Do?

To manage water sustainably, we ask for your cooperation:

- **Save Water at Home:** Use water-saving devices like showerheads and faucets.
- **Use Alternative Water Sources:** By 2040, we will encourage the use of brackish water for toilets and showers and the use of rainwater for gardening and cleaning. This will eventually reduce the demand for freshwater.
- **Be Conscious of Water Pollution**: Be mindful of your daily water use and adjust where possible. Avoid flushing pharmaceuticals and chemicals down the drain to make water treatment more efficient.

MINISTRY OF WATER, HOUSING AND PROSPERITY (WHP)

Directorate of Climate Resilience & Territorial Reprioritization
Turfmarkt 147
Den Haag
Postbus 10045

Reference:
WHP75-ZLD-GW001

Date: April 17th, 2075
Subject: Formal notice of Strategic Withdrawal & Vision for the Saeftinghe Reconfiguration Zone
To: People of Groot Saeftinghe and others it may concern

BEAUTIFUL, SUSTAINABLE, TOGETHER

Dear recipients,

Following years of increasingly unsustainable interventions to preserve the usability of the Greater Saeftinghe polder landscape, the Ministry of Water, Housing and Prosperity hereby declares a formal and official shift in policy direction. The region will no longer be maintained as agriculturally or residentially "stable" land. Instead, this government will do the unthinkable: our policy will reconfigure the Saeftinghe Zone – a flagship project in our national adaptation programme.

Why This Change?
The new cabinet Verbrugge admits, this degradation did not come overnight. It is the outcome of over forty years of accumulated ecological stress, rising costs, and persistent disagreement. The former governments have left their traces, the absence of certainty, proactive policy and a trustworthy government did do our country harm. Big change is needed, big actions will come.

Back in 2035, when the first residential protest waves started and regional brochures circulated, the voices and concerns of farmers, residents, and environmental groups were heard, the urgency was palpable. At the time, perspectives were clear: our land is drying, the saltwater is intruding on our soil, and everyone has a different motivation. But while the voices were diverse, the willingness to compromise was not. Every actor insisted on preserving their ground — literally and figuratively.

The expansion of the Port of Antwerp back in '38 was supposed to relieve pressure on the area due to economic growth and accumulation of knowledge, education and skills. The truth turned out to be different: tensions grew, stakeholders were placed opposite each other and polarisation rose. Despite dozens of working groups, pilot projects, and adaptation strategies, the pattern repeated itself: everyone agreed that something had to change, just not what. The result was forty years of piecemeal interventions, temporary subsidies, and incompatible agendas.

Meanwhile, the land changed on its own terms. Despite all refined and highly expertised future predicted scenarios, our predecessors were wrong. The severe, and underestimated sea level rise and the flooding of Terneuzen are symbolic of this. Long, dry seasons weakened the freshwater lenses, salt from deep underground began to rise and tides pushed in further with each passing year. Technological fixes, such as double drainage, artificial infiltration, salinity buffering, became increasingly expensive, and increasingly insufficient.

In the end, a choice had to be made. Not another compromise, but a decision. The region was no longer sustainable in its current form — environmentally, economically, or socially.This policy marks that decision. We must now conclude that the physical and metaphorical polder model has reached its limit. The time for tough choices has arrived.

What Will the New Saeftinghe Be?

After decades of misalignment, mismanagement, and mildly catastrophic indecision from previous cabinets, we are proud to unveil a bold new chapter: the Grootsaeftinghe Wisselpolder. A visionary leap forward in the form of a bold, adaptive landscape strategy. One that balances ecology, economy, and livability. At the core, the Wisselpolder system reimagines Saeftinghe as a living, dynamic estuary, divided into three functional zones that rotate in use every ten years. Rather than fight against the tides, we will work with them and use nature to our advantage.

The Three Zones of Groot Saeftinghe:

Wet Regeneration Zones (W1 & W2) - See Annex figure 1.

Two-thirds of the region will return to tidal rhythms. These intermittently overflowing landscapes will function as natural sedimentation basins, where saltwater flows in and slowly rebuilds the land. Over time, these zones will develop into biodiverse marshes and sediment-rich soils. These grounds will be future-ready for new agricultural and alternative uses.

- During their "wet decade", these zones will be off-limits for conventional farming, but open to nature development, aquaculture pilots, passive sediment accumulation, and flood-resilient freshwater storage. See Annex figure 2.
- One of these wet zones, equipped with raised infrastructure and modular pontoons, will support a compact stilted settlement, allowing for resilient human habitation alongside dynamic water levels.

The Dry Productive Zone (D1) - See Annex figure 3.

The third zone will be actively drained, managed, and cultivated. It is designated for saline-resilient agriculture, such as sea kale, sorghum, and rotational algae-vegetable systems. This area will also host mobile infrastructure to support seasonal farmers, researchers, and land stewards.

After ten years, D1 will switch places with one of the wet zones, beginning a new cycle of land regeneration and adaptation.

This cyclical movement, every ten years, invites residents, farmers, businesses, flora and fauna to adopt a nomadic, cooperative mindset, with incentives to co-manage shifting resources and infrastructures. Inhabitants will receive relocation support and logistical assistance through the Mobiele Grond & Woning Programma (MGWP), ensuring smooth transitions between zones.

To make the Grootsaeftinghe Wisselpolder function as more than a policy concept, a set of supporting measures will be introduced — innovations in living, building, and moving that enable life in a rotating landscape.

Extra measures:

Amphibious Housing Prototypes: Living in a shifting region demands structures that shift with it. Three new housing types will be rolled out:

- Stilted Homes: Elevated 3–5 meters above high tide, with flexible connections for power, greywater, and access walkways. See Annex figure 4.
- Floating Foundations: Designed to lift during seasonal flooding and rest on prepared basins, these homes remain anchored but mobile. See Annex figure 5.
- Hybrid Clusters: Micro-settlements that combine shared platforms, modular private units, and mobile amenities — compact, social, and designed to move every decade if necessary.These dwellings are not permanent in the traditional sense, but resilient in every way that now matters. See Annex figure 6.

The Sediment Motor: To regenerate marshland faster than natural tidal cycles allow, a Sediment Motor will be deployed in the wet zones. This system uses guided inflows, controlled breaches, and silt deflection structures to direct sediment where it's needed most. Instead of waiting decades for land to rise, we accelerate the process. See Annex figure 7.

Public Hovercraft Service: With roads compromised during the wet phase, a regional hovercraft line will connect key access points and settlements. Designed for shallow water, marshland, and flooded polders, this system ensures year-round access without damaging the soil or relying on fixed infrastructure. See Annex figure 8.

How Will This Affect You?

For Inhabitants:

Those residing in the region may remain, with some pre-set conditions. Habitation will be permitted in designated clusters or on approved elevated structures. A basic Water Competency Certification (formerly known as swimming diploma C) will be required, along with a willingness to participate in community stewardship over the wetzones. Your home will not be in one place: it will be moved occasionally and enjoyed by you and your loved ones. Relocation assistance will be provided every ten years, as the zones rotate. Recently relocated residents will have priority access to new housing units.

For Farmers:

Agricultural practice in the region will continue: but differently. The dry zone will be reserved for salt-tolerant crops, short-cycle polyculture production and mobile, state-of-the-art, high-end, innovative, tech-agricultural infrastructure. Farmers will be eligible for rotational land access, supported by transition training and shared equipment pools. Those unwilling or unable to adapt may exit the region via the Voluntary Withdrawal & Compensation Scheme. For those who remain: flexibility will become your most valuable crop.

For Nature Organizations:

With two-thirds of Saeftinghe designated for wet regeneration, ecological restoration becomes the dominant land use. This is not by preference, but out of utmost necessity. As traditional land management grew unsustainable, allowing the tide back-in was the only approach that made environmental and, more importantly, financial sense.

This shift opens space for expanding salt marshes, tidal floods, and sediment-driven natural habitats, supporting biodiversity and acting as a buffer against flood risk. But this is not hands-off conservation. Nature is now expected to work: stabilizing the region, supporting ecosystem services, and enabling low-impact forms of production like brackish aquaculture and grazing. Environmental organizations will take on a formal role in shaping and maintaining these systems. Restoration is no longer a side project: it's pivotal to the region’s future.

Our Vision

We do not see this as abandonment. We see it as a strategic retreat in the name of beauty and sustainability. Saeftinghe will become a flagship of adaptive design, a monument to rethinking control, and a living landscape of resilient surrender.

NB. This is a letter explaining the structure of the Wisselpolder. If you have any practical questions regarding your personal situation, thankyou in advance for your understanding and patience. Those directly affected by these measures, expect more information coming your way shortly. If you have any urgent questions, refer to your nearest chat-bot, more info on: whereismy-chatbot-saeftinghe.com.

The Bureau for Post-Polder Futures
Sub-department of Territorial Letting-Go
Email: info@minwhp.nl

Kind regards,
Dr. A.M.P. de Droogte
Chief Adaptation Strategist, WHP

Saeftinghe Exodus

A project for Building Green

TU Delft
BK Bouwkunde

Course supervisors - Alankrita Sarkar and David de Boer
Jaap Wittenburg - 6345158
Marthe Meijer - 6350887
Rembrandt Ajamlou - 6343139

Our Scenario

In this project, we explore the impact of climate change on groundwater in the greater Saeftinghe region, with a focus on trends of rising temperatures and sea level rise. These pressures lead to drier soils and deeper saltwater intrusion, gradually salinating the ground. Through a series of fictional deliverables, including brochures, letters, and newspaper articles, we illustrate how these shifts affect farmers, citizens, nature, and governments alike.

In our scenario, failed cooperation (especially with Belgium) forces the Dutch government to adopt an increasingly top-down stance. This culminates in a bold move: the introduction of large-scale Wisselpolders.

It’s a future shaped by mild adaptations, political indecision, and unexpected ecological feedback. Ultimately resulting in radical spatial choices for Zeeland.

Our Approach

We grounded our scenario in extensive desk research and interviews with three domain experts. These conversations helped us build an informed, if speculative, view of where current trends may lead. Our scenario remains a narrative exercise—bounded in scope but driven by real-world tensions in water management.

Our Message

This project is a cautionary tale. It warns of what happens when adaptation lags and climate realities outpace our politics. As students, we’ve seen how sustainability has become entangled in political gridlock where even the best ideas stall in endless Dutch “poldering.”

By offering multiple perspectives, we invite the viewer to engage not just with a future scenario, but with the urgency of action now.