6.12 Transboundary effects

Any assessment of possible transboundary effects of the National Programme for Rural Areas (NPLG) should take account of the following principles:
1. The NPLG is focused on the rural areas
2. The NPLG is a national programme that applies only to the Netherlands
3. The NPLG comprises foundational choices that will have implications for the agriculture sector in particular.

The NPLG is a policy programme that falls under the National Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment (NOVI). The Netherlands is committed to achieving various European and international objectives in the areas of nature, water and climate change. The NPLG converts these objectives into national and provincial goals for nature, water and climate, describes the linkages between them and measures to achieve them. To promote a coherent approach to all the spatial developments required in the rural areas, the NPLG presents foundational choices that are designed with a view to securing a sustainable future for rural areas in the Netherlands. By 2050, the Netherlands will have a robust spatial structure for agriculture and nature, in keeping with area-specific qualities and the characteristics of the water and soil systems.

The strategic environmental assessment (SEA) describes the possible effects of the foundational choices. These may include transboundary effects, depending on where, how and to what degree a foundational choice is implemented. For each foundational choice we indicate, below, whether there may be cross-border effects or whether implementing that choice at national level will have implications for its effectiveness.

Transitional areas around Natura 2000 sites will generally be designed to accommodate more extensive forms of agricultural production. The resulting reduction of emissions could, in border areas, have positive effects that could extend beyond the border. On the other hand, problems in Dutch Natura 2000 sites in border areas may, at least in part, originate across the border. In such cases, agreement will need to be reached internationally on implementing transboundary measures, otherwise it will be difficult or impossible to achieve positive effects in terms of biodiversity and abiotic and hydrological conditions in the Dutch Natura 2000 sites.

Incorporating nature and nature-inclusive agriculture will generally result in lower emissions. There may be positive effects in terms of, for instance, lower nitrogen deposition both in the immediate vicinity of the border and at somewhat greater distances. The transboundary effects are however expected to be marginal.

The development of blue-green networks in 10% of the rural area is mainly intended to link up nature areas. It would be a shame if this network ends at the border. International agreements also ensure that protected areas outside the Netherlands will be linked up with our own nature areas, which will enhance the effectiveness of this foundational choice. In other words, this choice mainly opens up opportunities – including in a cultural-historical context, for improving the spatial quality of border areas.

Raising the water table in peatland pastures reduces greenhouse gas emissions and soil subsidence. This will also have a positive effect internationally.

Availability of water in salt-affected areas and adapting land use to saline conditions is another foundational choice that will only have effects in the Netherlands. This mainly concerns coastal areas along the North Sea in the west and north of the country. This foundational choice will have limited effects across the border.

Space for water retention, storage and drainage around flood defences, rivers and large bodies of water will mainly benefit the Netherlands. At national level in particular, retaining freshwater and more capacity to deal with peak flows will prevent rivers from overflowing in the future. In the case of transboundary waters, the scale of water storage solutions required in the Netherlands is partly determined by water storage measures taken by countries upstream, which fall outside the scope of this SEA.

Retaining water and reducing the drainage rate in elevated sandy soil areas are intended to restore the soil's absorptive capacity and achieve a robust groundwater system. This foundational choice concerns elevated sandy soil areas in the east and south of the Netherlands, in the vicinity of the German and Belgium borders. The measures will therefore have transboundary effects, generally neutral to positive, in these countries. In the short term there is a risk to chemical water quality due to possible leaching of agricultural pollutants. Temporary measures will need to be put in place to address this. Such negative effects will gradually disappear in the long term.

Raising the water table in elevated sandy soil areas will reduce the drying out of soils during droughts. As with greater water retention and slower drainage, this foundational choice will have transboundary effects. Temporary measures will need to be put in place particularly to prevent negative short-term effects on chemical water quality.

Large-scale restoration of lowland stream systems in elevated sandy soil areas will enhance water quality and groundwater infiltration. Streams generally do not flow from the Netherlands to Germany or Belgium, but the other way around. This foundational choice is therefore largely or wholly irrelevant in terms of transboundary effects. Conversely, measures in Germany or Belgium could influence the quality of lowland streams in the Netherlands, but this falls outside the scope of this SEA.

Restricting groundwater extraction near Natura 2000 sites in elevated sandy soil areas will prevent these protected areas from drying out. There are several Natura 2000 sites near our national borders. Implementing this foundational choice would have no negative effects, so no precautionary measures would be necessary.

Prudent use of the agricultural area refers to making well-considered decisions on changes to agricultural zoning and land use. This should be done on the basis of a decision-making framework developed specifically to ensure a prudent use of the agricultural area. Applying this framework shows that certain agricultural parcels in border areas are less suitable (i.e. certain issues are at play there to a

greater or lesser degree). Implementing the foundational choice ‘prudent use of the agricultural area’ would result in more nature development here. This could also enhance biodiversity and abiotic conditions immediately across the border.

The general conclusion is that the foundational choices are somewhat likely to have positive transboundary effects, primarily at local level in border areas. The size of such effects cannot be estimated at this time. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions would also have cross-border benefits.