

This country profile was compiled by the OECD Secretariat and reflects information available as of March 2015. Further information and analysis can be found in the publication: OECD (2015) [Water Resources Allocation: Sharing Risks and Opportunities](#), OECD Studies on Water, OECD Publishing. Country profiles for all of the 37 allocation regimes in 27 OECD and key partner countries surveyed for this project are available for download at: <http://www.oecd.org/fr/publications/water-resources-allocation-9789264229631-en.htm>.

THE NETHERLANDS

Overview and highlights

The Netherlands is a water abundant country, where safety from floods has long been a focus of water management. However there is a growing risk of water shortage due to a lack of water and increasing salinity as sea water intrudes into the delta and saline groundwater rises. As a result, reforms to the allocation regime are currently under consideration.¹

Key characteristics of the prevailing allocation regime in the Dutch Polder System in the western part of the Netherlands include:

- Both surface and ground water are publicly owned;
- The system consists of various polders, which are manmade structures, and artificial water bodies in an area below sea level. Precise regulation of water tables is possible;
- Currently, water resources are considered neither over-allocated nor over-used;
- There is no explicit limit on water abstraction;
- Environmental flows aim to ensure that enough water available is for vulnerable ecosystems;
- Water users are not required to hold a water entitlement to abstract water;
- There are no abstraction charges;
- A system of priority uses is invoked during periods of extended drought. The first priority use relates to ensuring safety and preventing irreversible damage. Specifically, this concerns ensuring the stability of flood defence structures, the settling and subsidence of peat bogs and moorland, and nature dependent on soil conditions at risk of irreversible damage.

Legal and institutional setting for water allocation

Institution	Scale	Main Responsibilities
Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment	National	Policy planning, issuing entitlements, monitoring and enforcement.
Provinces	Provincial/State/Regional	Groundwater permits, levy, monitoring
Regional Water Authorities	Provincial/State/Regional	Surface water permits, levy, monitoring

Legal context for water allocation: Roman/ Statutory Law

Legal definition of ownership of water resources: Ground and surface water are publicly owned.

Tracking water scarcity

A mapping exercise has been undertaken to identify areas where the scarcity of ground water and surface water is becoming a problem: [River Basin management plans for the EU Water Framework Directive](#) and the [Delta Programme Freshwater](#) (in Dutch).

¹ The recent OECD report (2014) *Water Governance in the Netherlands: Fit for the Future?* provides an overview of the issues related to allocation and the possible policy responses.

Allocation Regime Example: The Dutch Polder System in the western part of the Netherlands

Physical features of the water resource	
<p>The Dutch polder system in the western part of the country consists of various polders. There are manmade structures and artificial water bodies, below sea level. Precise regulation of water tables is possible. Regional water storage helps to regulate water table levels and flushing is used to combat seepage of/and saltwater intrusion.</p> <p>The flow rate is fully managed or controlled, as water systems are fully regulated.</p> <p>There are not any significant non-consumptive uses.</p>	<p>Mean annual inflow/ recharge consumed per use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Agriculture ■ Domestic ■ Industrial ■ Energy production

Defining the available resource pool

Are limits defined on consumptive use? No.

- Even though there is no explicit limit on water abstraction, the amount of water available for consumptive use is indicated in a planning document (called the *Peil besluit*), which is a statutory instrument that must be followed.

Are environmental flows clearly defined? Yes.

- There should be enough water available for vulnerable ecosystems (*verdringingsreeks*).
- Freshwater and terrestrial biodiversity needs are taken into account in the definition of environmental flows.

Are there arrangements to deal with impacts of climate change? No.

What is the status of resource pool? Neither over-allocated nor over-used.

Factors taken into account in the definition of the available resource pool

Factor	Taken into account?	If taken into account, how?
Non-consumptive uses (e.g. navigation, hydroelectricity)		
Base flow requirements	✓	Ensuring adequate flows for vulnerable ecosystems
Return flows (how much water should be returned to the resource pool, after use)		
Inter-annual and inter-seasonal variability	✓	Retention and regulation of the water table, depending on expected rainfall and water demand.
Connectivity with other water bodies		
Climate change		

Entitlements to use water

Definition of entitlements	Characteristics of entitlements
<p>Are entitlements legally defined? No.</p> <p>Are private entitlements defined? No.</p> <p>Nature of entitlement: n/a.</p> <p>Period granted for: n/a.</p> <p>Return flow obligations: n/a.</p>	<p>If the entitlement is not used in a given period: n/a.</p> <p>Are entitlements differentiated based on the level of security of supply (or risk of shortage)? n/a.</p> <p>Is there a possibility to trade, lease or transfer entitlements? n/a.</p>
<p>Type of users not required to hold a water entitlement to abstract water: Water users are not required to hold a water entitlement to abstract water.</p> <p>Requirements to obtain a new entitlement or to increase the size of an existing entitlement: n/a.</p>	

Abstraction charges

Water users do not pay abstraction charges.

Dealing with exceptional circumstances

Distinction between the allocation regimes used in “normal” and extreme/severe water shortage times? Yes.

How is the amount of water made available for allocation adjusted: The allocation is based on the planning document (*Peil beheer*) and the needs of vulnerable ecosystems (*verdrinkingsreeks*).

Definition of “exceptional” circumstances: Extended drought. This triggers water use restrictions, reduction in allocations according to a pre-defined sequence of priority uses, and suspension of the allocation regime plan.

Legal bodies declaring the onset of “exceptional” circumstances: National and regional water authorities are responsible. Stakeholders are not involved in this process.

Pre-defined priority classes



Within each general category, the sequence of priorities is as follows:

1. Safety and preventing irreversible damage
 - Stability of flood defence structures
 - Settling and subsidence of peat bogs and moorland
 - Nature dependent on soil conditions

2. Utilities
 - Drinking water supply
 - Power supply
3. Small-scale, high quality uses
 - Temporary spraying of capital-intensive crops
 - Process water
4. Others (economic and nature)
 - Shipping
 - Agriculture
 - Nature, as long as no irreversible damage occurs
 - Industry
 - Water recreation
 - Lake fishing

Monitoring and enforcement

Responsible authority: Rijkswaterstaat (the National Water Authority within the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment) and Regional Water Authorities.

Withdrawals Monitored? Yes, in the case of transfers to the sea or another water system this is done by metering. In the case of ensuring adequate water for the protection of flood defenses, surveillance is undertaken. Withdrawals for other types of water uses are not monitored.

Conflict resolution mechanisms? No.