

ANTWERP PORT AUTHORITY

ALFAPORT ANTWERPEN

Antwerp port community welcomes Dutch go-ahead for Scheldt deepening

Antwerp Port Authority and Alfaport Antwerpen have expressed their satisfaction with the decision by the Dutch Council of State (taken today) overturning the stay of deepening work in the Western Scheldt. The decision means that dredging will be able to start in the shortest possible time.

Work on deepening the navigation channel in the Western Scheldt will now be able to actually start on the Dutch side. Flanders has already completed the work on its side of the border within the agreed time limit. The Netherlands has until now remained in default, since under the terms of the Scheldt Treaties the work should have been finished by the end of 2009. Our northern neighbours should have issued the necessary permits some time ago, so that the dredging work being carried out by Flanders could also have been completed on the Dutch side.

According to the Antwerp port community this deepening of the navigation channel will enable Antwerp to defend its position as Europe's second-largest port, in the face of competition from Rotterdam and Hamburg. The benefits of the deeper channel will be reinforced by the new upstream and downstream navigation regulations for the Western Scheldt, introduced by the Permanent Commission for Supervision of Scheldt Navigation in December 2009. The new regulations permit the largest container ships to reach the port of Antwerp in a safe manner even more easily. This easier access is one of the key elements of the Total Plan for a more competitive port being developed by the Antwerp public and private port community.

The port of Antwerp has long pleaded for deepening of the Scheldt, so as to permit tide-independent navigation by ships with a draught of up to 13.10 metres (43 ft). Once the deepening work has been completed, seven out of ten ships that are currently tide-dependent will be able to reach the port of Antwerp without tide constraints.

The decision by the Dutch Council of State confirms the view of the Port Authority that deepening of the navigation channel can be done without damage to the environment. In particular, the deepening work does not mean that reclaimed land will have to revert to flooding, contrary to what is frequently (but incorrectly) asserted. Accessibility, nature conservation and flood protection are the three foundations of the long-term vision for the Scheldt estuary developed jointly by Flanders and the Netherlands.

The most advanced methods for dredging and spoil disposal will be used, so that the dredging work can go hand-in-hand with nature restoration.

The Antwerp port community hopes that the good neighbourliness and mutual trust that until now were tested by the attitude of the Netherlands will once more be fully restored. The port community will seek in the first place to restore relations with the Province of Zeeland and the towns in the Zeeland flood protection region, and to maintain dialogue with them in an open and permanent manner. Specifically, the Port Authorities will start by inviting Queen's commissioner Karla Peijs and chairman of the flood protection region Jan Lonink for discussions in the next few weeks.

In the meantime, the Antwerp port community continues to support the long-term vision for the Scheldt estuary aimed at balanced, sustainable development. One of the key elements of the target scenario for 2030 is "optimum accessibility of the Scheldt ports as the engines of prosperity."

The Port Authority would like to thank all those who have worked towards this decision, especially Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters, Flemish minister of ports Hilde Crevits and Wivina Demeester, chair of the Western Scheldt taskforce and Belgian prime-minister Yves Leterme. Our gratitude also goes to two people who alas are now deceased, namely H.E. Hannie Pollmann-Zaal, Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and Thijs Kramer, representative of the Province of Zeeland. We further acknowledge the contributions of chairmen Eddy Baldewijns and Jan Hendrickx and the members of the Advisory Parties Consultative Body.

Antwerp, 13 January 2010

Port of Antwerp: key figures

Total N° of people employed:	183,000
Regional employment:	The proportion of the regional working population employed in the port of Antwerp is 12.8% on average in the surrounding communities
Direct added value:	9.9 billion euros
Freight volume in 2009:	158 million tonnes
Container volume in 2009:	7.3 million TEU

The port of Antwerp is among other things ...

- the second-largest port in Europe and N° 7 in the world
- the largest petrochemical cluster in Europe
- winner of the "Best Dry Bulk Port" award
- the largest fruit port in Europe
- the largest European handler of forest products
- the largest breakbulk port in Europe
- the second largest rail port in Europe