

EU Ocean Pact

Belgian priorities and challenges



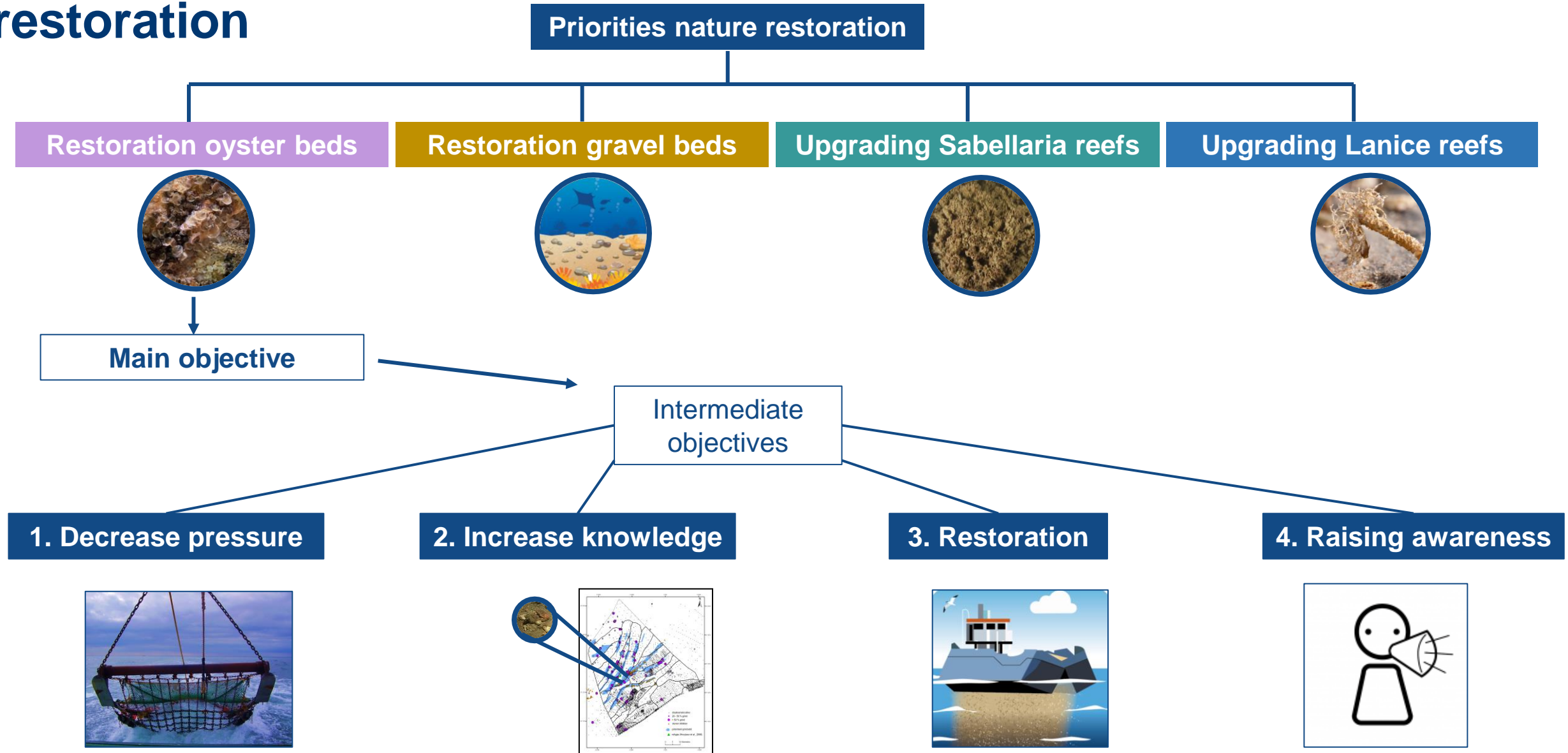
Health
Food Chain Safety
Environment

Marine Environment Unit
DG Environment
Wendy Bonne & team Marine Environment Unit
07/07/2025

1. Protecting and restoring ocean health – BE priorities

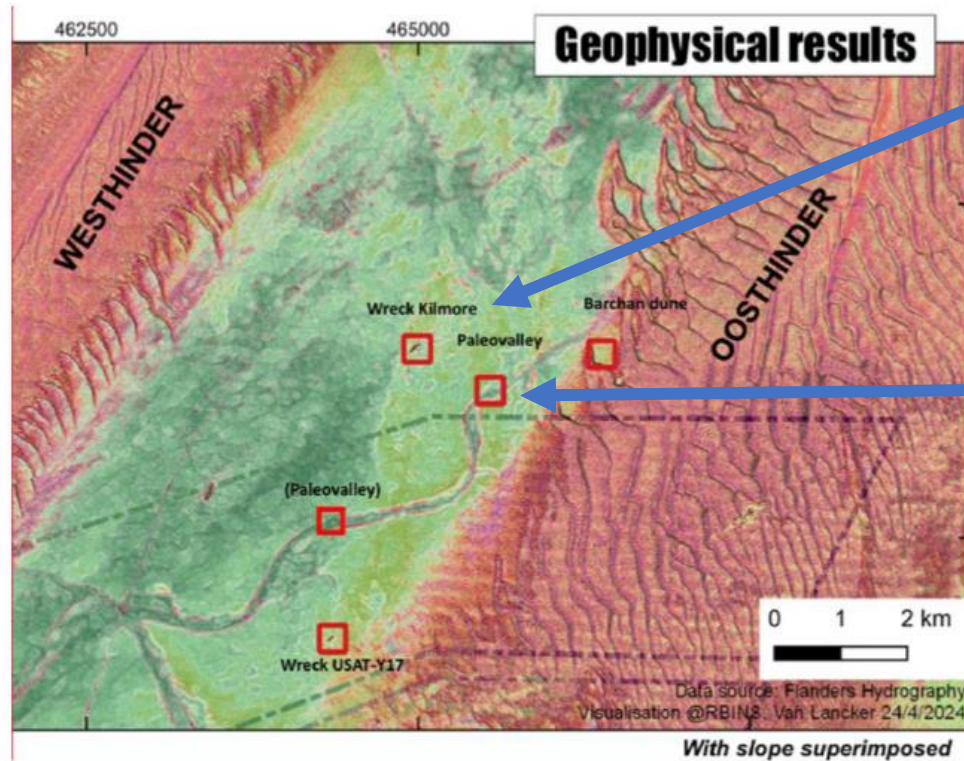
- Synergy with policy declaration for the North Sea - sustainably managed North Sea
- Ocean as important ally in our battle against climate change with strengthened synergies between the ocean, climate and biodiversity.
- Belgium's commitment for nature restoration and establishment of marine reserves:
 - European Nature Restoration Regulation - oyster bed restoration intensified efforts in Hinder Banks
 - Needs analysis for enforcement of nature restoration experiments and measures
 - Belgium as lead of the Greater North Sea Basin Initiative Nature track
 - Belgium's extra efforts for Marine Protected Areas and Protected Species and Habitats overview assessment and relational database, to support the work of the Intersessional Correspondence Groups on the Protection of Species and Habitats (ICG-POSH) and Marine Protected Areas (ICG-MPA)
 - Protection of marine areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Treaty) - Blue Leaders Initiative

Vision nature restoration



Nature restoration of oyster beds

- Suitable location concerning biological and physical setting
- Offshore Hinder Banks at Belgian Continental Shelf



BELREEFS pilot
LIFEB4B project
location

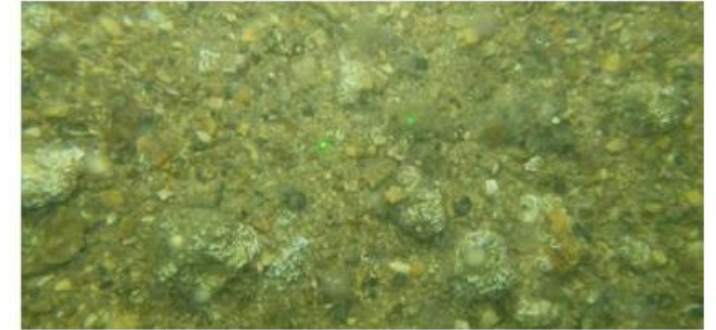
2nd pilot location

+

3rd pilot location
in BlueConnect
project

+ investment in monitoring infrastructure

Current gravel beds



Restored oyster beds on the long-term



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1. Protecting and restoring ocean health – BE priorities

- Revision of **European Marine Strategy Framework Directive**
 - Ambitious environmental objectives to be kept
 - Belgium's efforts on underwater noise
 - Belgium's effort through BELSPO for S4GES = Science for Good Environmental Status through JPI Oceans
 - Belgium's effort through Intervention Area "Managing sea uses" of the European Sustainable Blue Economy Partnership to define the next calls
 - Belgium's efforts on eDNA developments
- Revision of **Marine Spatial Planning Directive**
 - Belgium as pioneer in scientific evidence based marine spatial planning

1. Protecting and restoring ocean health - BE challenges

- Big challenge to find balance of activities on very limited space in Belgian's North Sea
 - Multi-use of maritime space
- Need for better alignment on ocean observation, to increase cost-efficiency as well as added value at Belgian and international level
- Restoration still in experimental phase
- Marine pollution challenge:
 - Eutrophication
 - Marine litter, microplastics, etc. - global Plastics Treaty
 - Pollutants from shipping and other industries, inland waterways and ports
- Concerted action at European/international level - ensuring no-one is left behind, also by EC to foresee complementary actions to achieve inclusivity

2. Boosting competitiveness of the sustainable blue economy - BE priorities

- Synergy with policy declaration for the North Sea - the North Sea as an engine for our prosperity
- EU Green Deal with its twin digital and green transition - Ocean as motor for the energy transition
- Belgium is a pioneer of the energy transition, investing in offshore wind energy in the North Sea
- Belgium has taken decisive steps to more than double offshore energy production by 2030 and to expand it even further in the years beyond.
- Using scientific evidence to guide the design of biodiversity friendly and biodiversity-enhancing measures through environmental permits and by involving all stakeholders in these actions
- New technologies (like floating solar, monitoring technologies) and multifunctional platforms
- Strengthened regional cooperation among North Sea countries is at the core of our efforts as we need to increase the scale of our ambition to ensure interconnections of our grids and increase storage capacities.

2. Boosting competitiveness of the sustainable blue economy - BE priorities & challenges

- Belgian ports and industries are taking the lead in making the shift to climate neutral technologies.
- The Belgian shipping sector is a frontrunner when it comes to investments in zero and near-zero emission technologies (the first oceangoing ships running on ammonia coming into service in 2025-2026). Belgium fully supports the adoption of IMO's net zero framework in October.
- Belgium equally supports the development of green shipping corridors to drive the energy transition in the shipping sector. This involves using fuel or energy with zero or near-zero emissions, developing technology and setting up suitable infrastructure in ports.
- Insufficient funding mechanisms.
- Strong action needed against illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing

3. Supporting coastal, island and outermost regions - BE challenges

- Synergy with policy declaration for the North Sea – sustainably managed North Sea as an engine for our prosperity
- Coastal defence against rising sea level
- Energy transition for fisheries lacks feasible and realistic framework
 - Differentiated and targeted approach needed
 - Upscaling needed of data compilation for fishery (DCR) and monitoring of fishery activities (fishery control)
- Vision 2040 for fisheries and aquaculture: need for stable framework and sufficient consideration of food production
- International agreements matching needs for transition in fishery and aquaculture
- More citizen science facilitation

4. Advancing ocean research, knowledge, skills and innovation - BE priorities & challenges

- BE priority = Importance of science as a foundation for good governance policy
- Belgium's excellent marine science profile recognised globally
- Fully embrace the Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development
- Active role in transnational cooperation, such as JPI Oceans and European co-funded Partnerships for research and innovation, UNESCO IOC

BE challenges

- Coherent science- and innovation policy, for which federal and regional resources are better aligned.
- Programmes like federal Science for Policy play a key role.
- Belgium as scientific hub for coastal and offshore experiments (Blue Accelerator + creation of offshore test platform)

5. Enhancing maritime security and defence

- Synergy with policy declaration for the North Sea - a safe North Sea
- Cooperation in Maritiem Informatiekruispunt (MIK)
- European Ports Alliance against drug crime and human trafficking, started during Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU
- Renewed Law on Maritime Security of 1 June 2024
- Renewed cooperation agreement Coast Guard partners
- Belgian lead for International Ship and Port Facility Security Code against international organised crime
- Belgium's efforts on UXO's

6. Strengthening EU ocean diplomacy and international governance

- Synergy with policy declaration for the North Sea - sustainably managed North Sea
- Belgium's long-standing commitment to multilateralism, international collaboration and our leadership in marine science excellence and ocean protection
- Protection of marine areas beyond national jurisdiction (BBNJ Treaty ratified by Belgium) = one of Belgium's priorities
 - Belgium's candidacy as host country for BBNJ secretariat
 - Strong involvement in the PrepComs to prepare the first conference of the parties
 - Science diplomacy and capacity building through eDNA Bioblitz campaign through RRF
- International cooperation for scientific research and innovation