

**Minimisation of the impact of sand extraction on the Belgian part of the North Sea by the introduction of a newly defined reference surface.**

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The impact of the overall sand extraction on the seabed is monitored by the Continental Shelf department through successive MBES high resolution surveys. The long time series of detailed terrain models of multiple areas have revealed and established the non-sustainable character of this important economic activity, the very clear linear relation between the extracted volumes and the change in topography, and the local character of the impact on the seafloor. Up to now, the national legislation limits the extraction to an arbitrary depth of 5 meters under a reference surface, in this case the global surface model of the entire extraction areas, established during extensive MBES surveys in the first half of the previous decade. The department is currently working on a project to define a new depth limitation surface, based on the nature of the seabed, the geological structure and the differences in marine ecology. This new surface should limit the negative impact by the extraction in areas with fine and easily redistributed sediments and the most sensitive habitats, while meeting as much as possible the MFSD requirements. Naturally, this has to be balanced with the economic importance and social value of this activity.

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