

Environmental and Social Data Sheet

Overview

Project Name: Flanders Sustainable Wastewater Treatment (AQF)
Project Number: 2019-0250
Country: Belgium
Project Description: The project comprises the construction of sewage collectors, storm water overflow systems and small and medium-size wastewater treatment plants, as well as the upgrade of existing wastewater treatment plants for tertiary treatment in the Flemish Region. The implementation of the project is foreseen during 2019-2022.

EIA required: yes

This is an investment programme made up of multiple schemes. Some of them might require an EIA under Annex II of the EIA directive 2011/92/EC as amended by Directive 2014/52/EU.

Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise: no

Environmental and Social Assessment

Environmental Assessment

The project will finance the upgrading and expansion of the capacity of sewers and wastewater treatment plants (WWTP) throughout the Region of Flanders, to meet increasing wastewater flows resulting from higher connection rates to the sewerage network. The project will also finance the replacement of combined sewers with separate sewers, the upgrading of storm water systems and an increase of the hydraulic capacity of pumping stations and WWTPs. These measures would reduce discharges of untreated wastewater in receiving bodies during heavy rain, thereby contributing to achieving the environmental objective of the Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EC (WFD), whilst reducing flood risks.

Schemes to be financed by the project are part of Aquafin's 5-year rolling Investment and Optimization Programme (IOP), which is reviewed and approved by the Flemish Region on an annual basis. The IOP is also subject to consultations of Flemish river basin committees. The Promoter's activities are supervised by the Competent Authority, the Flemish Environmental Agency (the *Vlaamse Milieu Maatschappij* or VMM), an independent body in the Flemish Ministry of Environment.

The project will ensure continued compliance with the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive 91/271/EEC, and improve the quality of water bodies as required by the River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs), implementing the requirements of the WFD. Flanders is part of the international Scheldt and Meuse river basin districts. In December 2015, the Flemish Government approved the RBMPs for 2016-2021, which also incorporate the Flood Risk Management Plans (FRMPs). The RBMPs and FRMPs were subject to a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), in accordance with Directive 2001/42/EC.

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Pressures related to demographics, urbanisation, industrialisation and agriculture, have affected the quantity and quality of available water bodies throughout the region. As a result, no Flemish water body had achieved the “good status” according to the WFD by the end of 2015. Pressures are expected to intensify with changing precipitation patterns and higher occurrence of extreme weather events. Regional authorities have thus identified three main objectives in the 2016-2021 RBMPs: (i) achieve “good status”, (ii) improve protection against flooding, and (iii) counter the adverse impacts of climate change.

The project is deemed fully consistent with the objectives of the RBMPs, and is expected to bring about important substantial health advantages and lasting environmental benefits in the form of increased service coverage and quality, higher quality of surface and groundwater resources, and increased resilience of urban infrastructure. The benefits are expected to outweigh the negative impacts, which occur mainly during construction (traffic, noise and dust) and can be easily mitigated.

Some schemes might fall under Annex II of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2011/92/EC) as amended by Directive 2014/52/EC. Should an EIA be required, the Promoter will be obliged to make the Non-technical Summary (“NTS”) and the full copies of the EIAs available to the Bank, for publication on its website. None of the schemes is expected to have an impact on nature conservation sites. The programme is not subject to an SEA.

On 20 July 2018, the Flemish government adopted the draft Flemish Climate policy plan 2021-2030, which focusses on the strategy for climate adaptation and mitigation in the next decade. The project area is mainly vulnerable to higher intensities and frequencies of extreme rainfall events that are projected to increase due to climate change and have an impact on the sustainability and design of wastewater and drainage infrastructure. With this respect, the project contributes significantly to adaptation to climate change through investments in sewerage and drainage systems as well as pumping stations and WWTPs.

The purpose of the Flemish Climate policy plan 2021-2030 is to reduce the emissions of GHG by 2030 with 35% as compared to 2005. The 35% reduction is in line with the national obligations. The draft Flemish Climate policy plan, together with the draft Flemish Energy policy plan 2021-2030, represent the Flemish contribution to the draft Belgian Energy and Climate policy plan that will have to result in a final approval by end of 2019. The investment programme contributes also to climate mitigation through the construction of wastewater related infrastructure (sewage network and/or new WWTPs) reducing the GHG emissions due to the wastewater treatment. Hence, the project demonstrates appropriate context, intent and response through both adaptation and mitigation to climate change, and therefore contributes to the Bank’s objective of Climate Action.

Social Assessment, where applicable

Temporary adverse social impacts may include the following: disruption of services and traffic, noise, temporary occupation of public and private space, and health and safety hazards during construction. Such impacts are common for this type of project, and the mitigation of expected adverse social impacts will be addressed as part of the planning for each scheme.

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Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement

The Promoter must ensure compliance with national and European environmental legislation and facilitate access by the public to environmentally relevant information in accordance with the Aarhus Convention. All projects, related reports and progress details will be made available on the Promoter's website. Consultations with affected communities and interested parties will take place in line with the requirements of the Directives.

Other Environmental and Social Aspects

None.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This operation is fully driven by compliance with the EU relevant environmental directives and health considerations. All schemes covered by the programme will be subject to the Promoter complying with the following requirements:

- The Promoter will be required to act according to the provisions of the relevant EU Directives, including the EIA (2014/52/EC) amending the EIA Directive 2011/92/EC, Habitats (92/43/EEC) and Birds (2009/147/EC) Directives. The promoter undertakes not to allocate Bank funds to project components that require a full EIA until the EIA and/or the necessary nature assessment have been finalised and approved by the relevant competent authority. Once any EIA is available, the promoter will provide the Bank with an electronic copy of its Non- Technical Summary (NTS) and full copy of the EIA, for publication on the EIB website.
- The promoter shall not commit any EIB funds against any project component that impacts nature conservation sites, without receiving from the relevant competent authorities the declaration under Art. 6(3) of the Habitats Directive that there are no significant effects and informing the Bank of such declaration having been obtained
- The Promoter undertakes to provide to the Bank, if requested, any decisions and subsequent justification that screen out project components from the requirement of a full EIA, as well as the decisions issued by competent authorities regarding the Habitats and Birds Directives.

Under these conditions, the operation is acceptable to the Bank's financing in Environmental and Social terms.

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