

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF INTEGRATED WATER MANAGEMENT REGIMES IN THE NETHERLANDS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The history of water management in the Netherlands is one of fighting against the water: water coming from sea and the rivers. The concern for **safety and dry feet** has always been high on the agenda. Therefore since the middle ages, the Dutch gave a lot of attention to the construction of dikes. The second period was characterised by its concentration on **drainage** and transport of water: the original natural landscape was transformed into a man-made landscape. The low part of the Netherlands is mainly created by man: a patchwork of lands gained by the sea, polders, drained lakes and meres, crossed by innumerable ditches and canals. Without the hydraulic infrastructure and the expert management, a great deal of the Netherlands would be uninhabitable. **Drainage, watersupply** and related management of the water are (still) of great importance to agriculture. Waterquantity management remained priority number one in watermanagement till the seventies. However the focus shifted to **waterquality** issues when it became obvious that the Dutch waters became more and more polluted. The third period therefore is characterised by its concern for waterquality. The 1970 Pollution of Surface Water Act and the 1975 Pollution of Sea-Water Act became operational during this period. The last period distinguished started mid nineties with the introduction of the concept of **integrated** water management. Till then the national policy documents on watermanagement were fragmented. Each dealt with a single theme in isolation (either waterquality or waterquantity or floodprotection). Integrated watermanagement means that all water related issues are no longer examined in isolation. They are considered in the context of all relevant policy themes and in relation to other phenomena.

The paper will focus more in detail on the different periods of watermanagement in the Netherlands and the regimes that were in place. Regimes in this context are understood as a combination of policy aspects and property rights. Central question to be answered is what factors/conditions cause water resource regimes to change. In particular the transition towards an integrated water management regime will be studied.