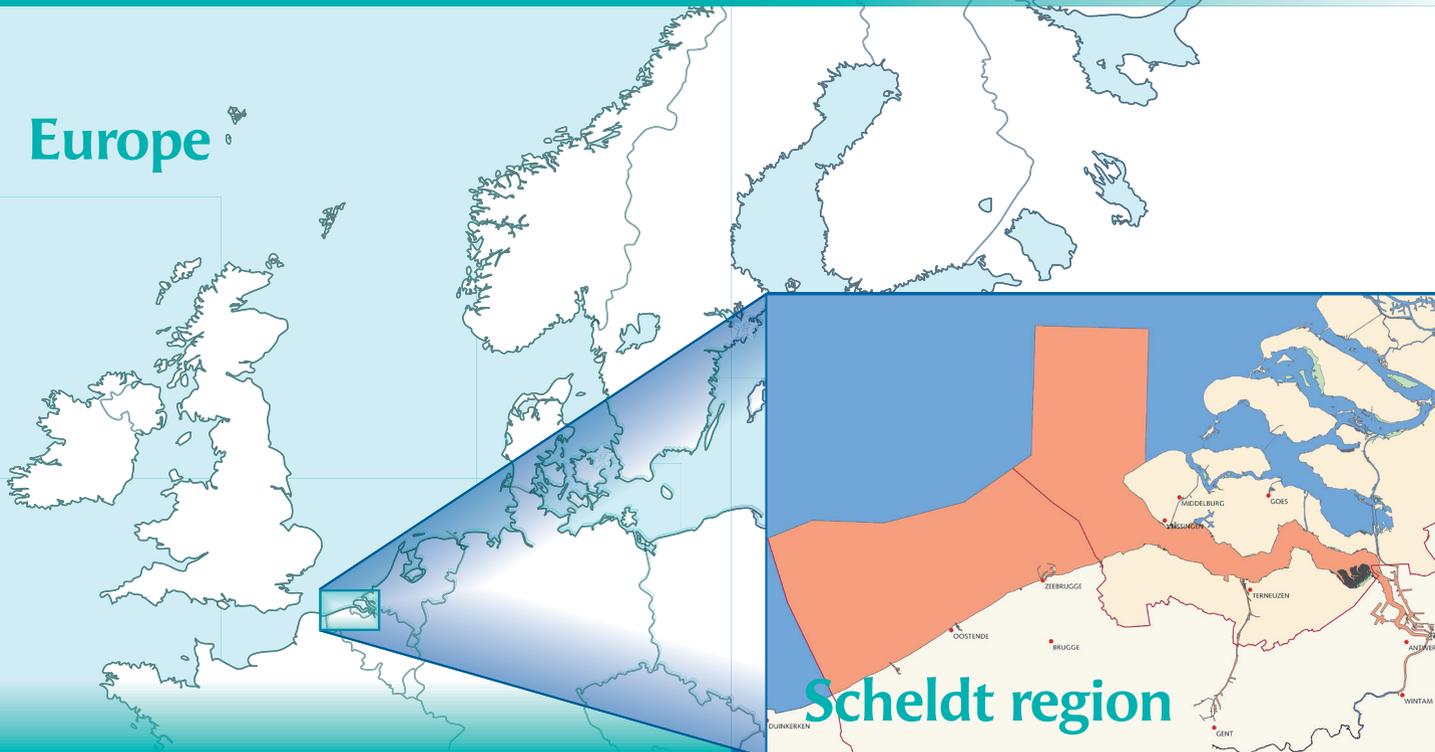


Europe



Scheldt region

In the area managed by the Common Nautical Authority, it is compulsory to use either Dutch or English in marine communication. Failure to do so is subject to punishment. In the period July–December 2011, crews of ships that fail to comply with this obligation will be sternly reminded of the official-language obligation. As of 1 January 2012, failure to fulfil this obligation will result in prosecution.



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For further information, visit www.vts-scheldt.net



Official language for the Scheldt region

Dutch or English compulsory on the Western Scheldt



The Western Scheldt is one of the busiest waterways in the world. It is also one of the most dangerous rivers in the world. For this reason, clear communication between all parties involved is of essential importance to safety on the river. It therefore helps to have a common language.

Ever since the introduction of the Scheldt Radar Chain in 1991, Dutch and English have been the official languages used for marine communication in the Scheldt region. As of July 2011, a collective announcement was made by the Common Nautical Authority [Gemeenschappelijke Nautische Autoriteit] to explicitly establish Dutch and English as the official languages for communication between vessels in the area or communication with waterway traffic controllers. This means that it is mandatory to use Dutch or English in such communications.

The dangers on the Western Scheldt are posed by the tidal variations, the dangerous currents and the numerous, partially uncovered sand flats. Furthermore, the river is used by a wide variety of inland and seagoing vessels. Seagoing vessels make up the majority of regular users of the waterway. However, for many inland captains, the river is unknown territory.

Furthermore, they are not always used to sharing the water with large seagoing vessels. Dangerous situations often occur because the crews of different ships do not understand each other properly. This also hampers communication with waterway traffic controllers. As a result, the Committee for Nautical Safety in Scheldemond [Commissie Nautische Veiligheid Scheldemonden] conducted research into the cause of ship accidents. This research showed that poor communication played a role in a large number of accidents.

“Pilots are compulsory for seagoing vessels, but this is not the case for inland vessels. However, they can hire mud pilots for their ship. Mud pilots are active or retired pilots who know the waters well and can use their knowledge and experience to help inland ships to navigate the Western Scheldt. This is a good solution if the crew is not fluent in either of the official languages.” **Hans Witte, head of waterway traffic control**

“Nautical terms such as port and starboard should be familiar to all ship’s captains in English, and this should also be so for the English names of the colours of the buoys along the waterway. All too often, this creates problems. Ease of communication is vitally important to preventing accidents, especially with captains who are not familiar with the Western Scheldt.” **Peter Caspers, waterway traffic controller, Hansweert**

“If you enter waterways that are being used by seagoing vessels, then you can get into difficulty if you do not speak English. Sailing in the Western Scheldt without making the necessary preparations puts both your family and your livelihood in jeopardy.” **Johnny van Ijk, inland captain, Terneuzen**

“Small inland ships must cross the waterway to get to Terneuzen. Once, the waterway traffic controller instructed an inland ship to wait for two passing seagoing vessels to pass, but this instruction was not heeded by the inland ship. Thinking on his feet, the waterway traffic controller was thankfully able to warn the inland ship just on time. However, it nearly went horribly wrong.” **Adrie Kosten, mobile waterway traffic controller and manager, Directorate-General for Public Works and Water Management [Rijkswaterstaat]**