

Realisation of the national ecological network - land acquisition and conversion, 1990-2017

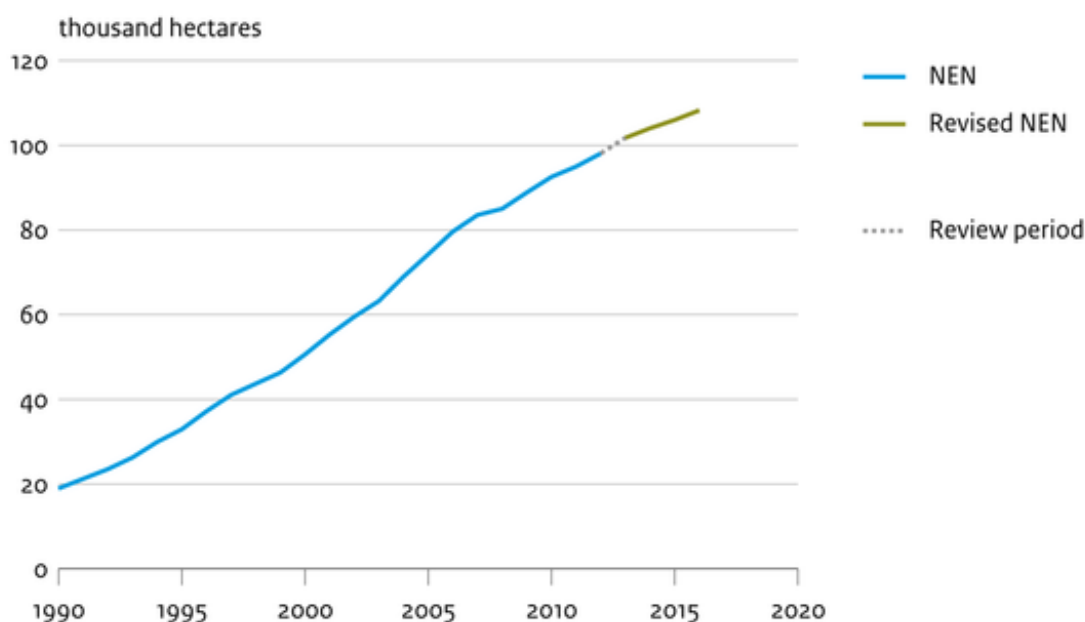
Indicator | 5 December 2018

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On 1 January 2017 more than 108,000 hectares of land had been acquired (including change of designated land use) for realising the national ecological network (NEN). Between 2011 and 2017, more than 33,000 hectares of agricultural land had been converted to nature and more than 15,000 hectares had been acquired.

[figuurgroep]

Land acquisition and change of use for new nature

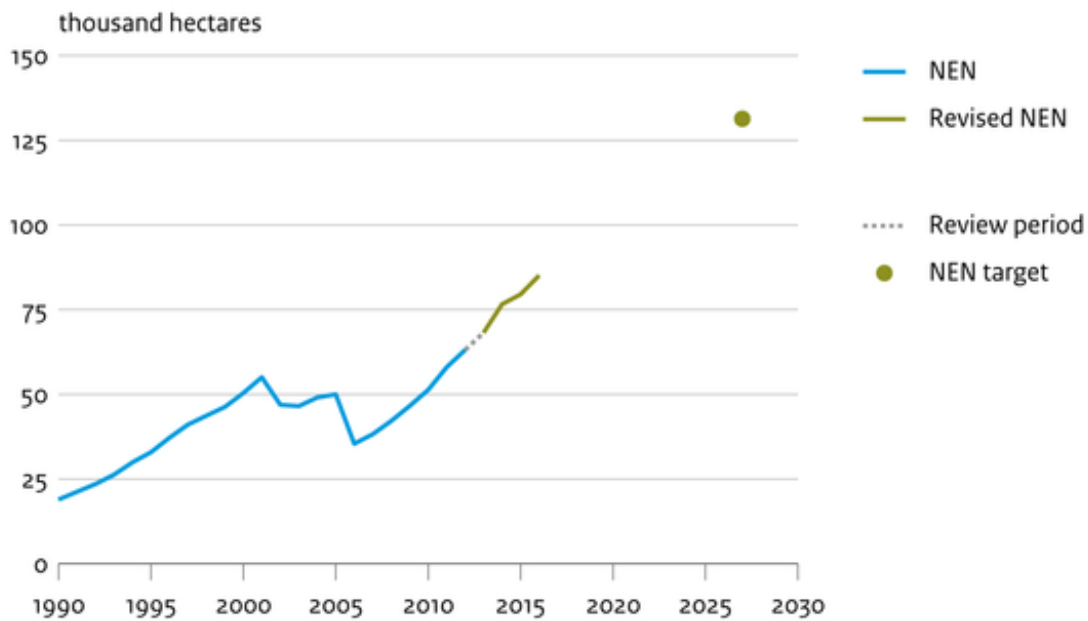


Source: IPO

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Conversion to new nature

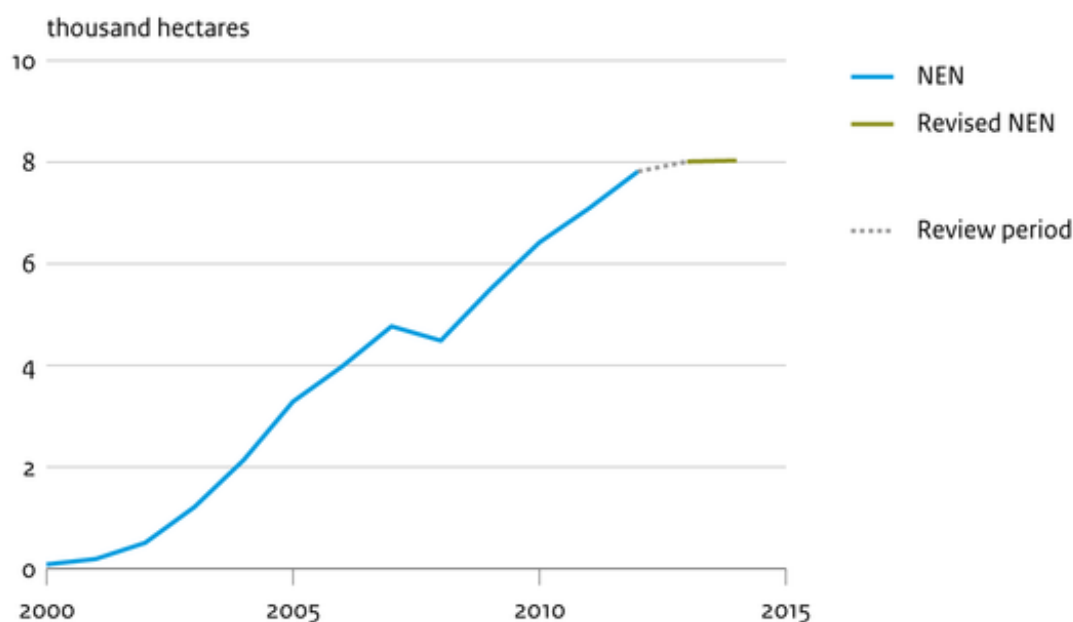


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Change of use to new nature



Source: DR; Min EZ; IPO

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[/figuurgroep]

Gradual expansion of new nature

The area of new nature has gradually increased since 1990. In 2016, 2,290 ha of land within the national ecological network (NEN) were either acquired for habitat creation or were brought under private conservation management following a change of designated use. In the same year a total of 5,570 hectares of agricultural land were converted to nature (IPO 2017b). Progress was slower than in 2014 but faster than in 2015. In 2014 8,436 hectares were converted to nature and in 2015 2,875 hectares (IPO 2015, IPO 2017a,b).

The provinces indicate that in the years immediately following the revision of nature policy, the conversion of land to nature progressed rapidly because much land had already been acquired before 2011. If the average pace of conversion can be maintained, then the target of 80,000 hectares will be achieved in 2027. However, it is not sure whether the pace can be maintained. Although the current provincial plans provide for the target of 80,000 hectares, it is expected that meeting this target will be difficult because landowners are often reluctant to cooperate (PBL & WUR 2017). The habitat creation graph shows a dip in 2002 and a further dip in 2006. The 'baseline survey' project showed that some of the new nature did not fully meet the requirements of the target natural habitats and so these areas were no longer registered as adequately created.

Slower progress with habitat creation by private landowners

The Nature Pact, an agreement between the Dutch government and the provinces, states that some of the target area for the development of the national ecological network is to be achieved through a change of designated land use followed by conservation management by private landowners.

Although the specific target for habitat creation by private landowners has been dropped in the revised nature policy, it remains a policy instrument. On 31 December 2014 the area of habitat creation had risen to 8,032 hectares. Realisation of the national ecological network through habitat creation has been slower in recent years. Since 2015 habitat creation by private landowners has not been reported consistently and separately by the provinces.

Changes to the original national ecological network

In 1990 the national government estimated the area of existing natural and semi-natural habitat in the national ecological network to be 450,000 hectares (LNV 1990). At that time, the additional area to be realised by 2018 was about 250,000 hectares. This has been achieved by habitat creation (land acquisition and habitat creation by conservation management organisations and habitat creation by private landowners, amounting to about 150,000 hectares in total) and uptake of agri-environment schemes or farmland conservation management (about 100,000 hectares). The new objectives for the creation of natural habitats for the period to 2027 are set out in the Nature Pact, which was prepared jointly by the national government and the provincial governments (EZ & provinces, 2013). Most of the provinces have redrawn the boundaries of the national ecological network in their territories.

As a result, some areas that were within the former network now lie outside the network, including some large areas of land. Most provinces have added these areas to their provincial green networks. The majority of these areas are now subject to what is called a 'yes, provided' protection regime in physical environment plans, although this is not interpreted in exactly the same way in all the provinces. Under these protection regimes, various types of economic activity and land uses are permitted in these areas on the condition that the conservation values are taken into account. The land in the national ecological network is subject to the 'no, unless' protection regime in the National Policy Strategy for Infrastructure and Spatial Planning (SVIR) (IenM, 2012), which is enforced via provincial and municipal physical environment plans.

As a result of the revision of nature policy, the area of designed land in the national ecological network has been reduced to about 750,000 hectares (excluding the large water bodies). To strengthen the network the provinces will develop at least 80,000 hectares of new nature by 2027. In 2011 40,000 hectares of this area still had to be acquired. All the provinces have now formally delineated the national ecological network areas in their territories and made appropriate provisions in their physical environment plans, structural visions and planning regulations. However, not all of the land within the current boundaries of the network will be converted to nature; a small area is still formally a search area for new nature and a small area will be subject to agri-environment management. The minimal intended area of natural and semi-natural habitat within the designated 750,000 hectares of the national ecological network will be 668,000 hectares (IPO 2017b). Besides this terrestrial network, all the large water bodies, including the Wadden Sea, IJsselmeer lake, the delta waters of Zeeland and the territorial waters of the North Sea are included in the national ecological network.

National ecological network policy increases the size of natural areas

The restoration and conservation of biodiversity is an important national and international policy objective under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the EU Birds and Habitats Directives and the EU Biodiversity Strategy. Creating and managing a coherent network is one of the main strategies of Dutch nature policy.

The national ecological network is a network of existing natural and semi-natural habitat, and agricultural land to be converted to nature. It was introduced in the 1990 Nature Policy Plan by the then Ministry of Agriculture, Nature Management and Fisheries. The aim of this network is to halt the decline in the area of natural and semi-natural habitat and the loss of biodiversity through the creation of a coherent network of protected areas. This is being achieved by increasing the size of natural areas and linking them together by acquiring the surrounding agricultural land and

agricultural enclaves for habitat creation. Large contiguous natural areas are also favourable for improving water and environmental conditions. The Nature Pact (2013) gives the responsibility for meeting the land acquisition and habitat creation objectives to the provinces.

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CBS, PBL, RIVM, WUR (2018). [Realisation of the national ecological network - land acquisition and conversion, 1990-2017](#) [12] (indicator 1307, version 13 , 5 December 2018).
www.environmentaldata.nl. Statistics Netherlands (CBS), The Hague; PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, The Hague; RIVM National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, Bilthoven; and Wageningen University and Research, Wageningen.

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- [10] <https://www.pbl.nl/sites/default/files/cms/publicaties/pbl-2017-lerende-evaluatie-van-het-natuurpact-1769.pdf>
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