

## ***Interactive comment on “Understanding and managing a complex estuary: the process towards more congruence between the physical system characteristics and the management system of the Westerschelde (Netherlands)” by A. van Buuren and L. Gerrits***

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1. The reviewer suggests that our knowledge of the hydro-morphological and ecological issues is superficial and that we should consult someone with in-depth knowledge in order to strengthen this part of the manuscript. We agree with that and acknowledge that, as social scientists, we do not have the level of knowledge of the engineers working in this field, especially those involved with the management of the Westerschelde.

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We will therefore ask two experts to peer review our paper from a hydro-morphological and ecological point of view.

2. We will clarify in the article why we restrict ourselves to the Westerschelde, rather than to the Scheldt basin as a whole (including the tidal river to Gent).

3. We understand that we should be more explicit about our choice of the adaptive management paradigm and why we think that other perspectives are less useful for our analysis. We will do this by further elaborating on the requisites that arise from the physical system characteristics of an estuary.

4. Our choice for the three focal points from the LTV is deliberate. We acknowledge that those three points are, in some way, limited. However, these goals are the officially validated policy goals and as such they form the point of reference for the involved actors. Therefore we believe that it is fair to use these overall goals as stated in the LTV as departing point for our analysis and evaluation. Our analysis aims to understand whether the decision making is increasingly tailor-made to facilitate reaching those goals. We do not think that we have fallen in a self-referential trap as our conclusions are not that the goals in themselves are correct or that the management and development of the Westerschelde has reached the goals (our conclusions being cautiously optimistic). Making evaluations is very much about choosing a number of focal points and any choice is open to discussion. However, the LTV focal points themselves are not so much subject of debate within the policy network around the Westerschelde, but rather the way to reach the goals and it is the latter we analyze in our article.

5. We thank the reviewer for the insightful commentary and we are encouraged to work on a revised version of the article in order to address the points mentioned in the review.

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