

# Water board (Netherlands)

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(Redirected from Water board (The Netherlands))

Dutch **water boards** (Dutch: *waterschappen* or *hoogheemraadschappen*) are regional government bodies in the Netherlands. A water board is charged with managing the water barriers, the waterways, the water levels, and the water quality in its region. Water boards are among the oldest forms of local government in the Netherlands, some of them having been founded in the 13th century.

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## Terminology

### Historical usage

Historically, a *hoogheemraadschap* was the name used for a large area comprising a number of smaller *waterschappen* within its jurisdiction.<sup>[1]</sup> The term *hoogheemraadschap* was also traditionally the term used for water boards located along the Rijn and the Vecht.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Modern usage

The term *waterschap* refers to the jurisdiction or to the administrative body. This also applies to *hoogheemraadschap*. In Dutch, the plural of *waterschap* is *waterschappen*. The plural of *hoogheemraadschap* is *hoogheemraadschappen*. In present-day usage, the official term is *waterschap*. However, the term *hoogheemraadschap* is still used by some Dutch water control boards for historical reasons or when a number of *waterschappen* are grouped together into a larger regional body.

Officially, there is no difference between a *hoogheemraadschap* and a *waterschap*. The Water Control Board Act (*Waterschapswet*), the Dutch statute that governs water control boards, refers only to the term *waterschap*.<sup>[3]</sup> A Dutch water control board that still uses *hoogheemraadschap* in its name (e.g. the Hoogheemraadschap van Delfland) may have chosen to do so because *hoogheemraadschap* was part of the historical name. However, a *waterschap* that styles itself as a *hoogheemraadschap* no longer has its traditional structure with subordinate *waterschappen*. They have been merged into the *hoogheemraadschap* itself.<sup>[4]</sup> Some Dutch water control boards chose the name *hoogheemraadschap* after the merger of a number of *waterschappen* into a larger water board (e.g. Hoogheemraadschap De

Stichtse Rijnlanden). When used in this sense, the word *hoogheemraadschap* refers to a large, regional *waterschap*.

## English translation

When referring to the administrative body, the English translation of *waterschap* is either "water board" or "water control board". It is also sometimes referred to as a "district water board" or "district water control board". The jurisdiction of a Dutch water control board is generally referred to as the "water board district" or "water control board district". These translations also apply to *hoogheemraadschap*, which is translated in the same way as *waterschap*.

The term "water board" may be confusing in the Dutch context, as water boards in other countries are often responsible for the supply of water to the public. A *waterschap* or *hoogheemraadschap* in the Netherlands is charged with the control and management of water, not the supply of water. For this reason, it is clearer and more accurate to refer to the administrative body as a "water control board" and to refer to the jurisdiction as a "water control board district".

## History

Around 25 percent of the Netherlands is below sea level. Three main rivers run through this relatively small country. Historically there was a good deal of flooding from both the sea and from the rivers. It has always been in the common interest to keep the water out. The ever-present threat of loss of life and land required short lines of communication between the authorities and the residents who maintained the infrastructure. The threat of flooding was best dealt with by local authorities.

This method of controlling water emerged in the 13th century as the unpredictable water system was tamed and the land drained for agriculture. Local water control boards were set up to maintain the integrity of the water defences around the local polders, to maintain the waterways inside the local polders and to control the various water levels inside and outside the local polders. These *hoogheemraadschappen* were responsible for protecting the land against the sea and for regulating the water levels of the various canals and lakes into which water was pumped from the polders and *waterschappen*. The counts of Holland created them top-down by charter for the common good. These bodies were also granted the right to make their own bylaws.

This early form of local government played a role in the development of a political system in the Netherlands that was decentralised and dependent on communal cooperation. In the 16th century, widespread experience with decentralized government was a factor in the formation of the Dutch Republic. The function of the water boards has basically remained unchanged to this day. As such they are the oldest democratic institutions in the country.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Responsibility

Within its territory, a water board is responsible for:

- management and maintenance of water barriers: dunes, dikes, quays and levees;
- management and maintenance of waterways;
- maintenance of a proper water level in polders and waterways;
- maintenance of surface water quality through wastewater treatment.

Dutch water boards are *not* responsible for the supply of public water. They are not a utility.

Each water board has the authority to impose taxes. The central government contributes to this system by paying for the cost of constructing and maintaining the water barriers and the main waterways. The costs of water treatment are financed by a water pollution levy, which is based on the polluter pays principle.

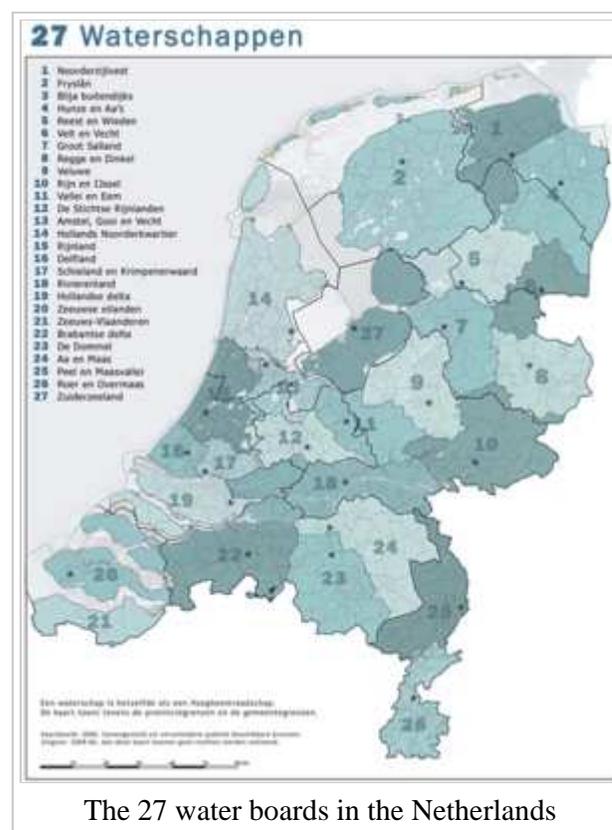
## Organization

Water bodies hold separate elections, levy taxes and function independently from other government bodies. The structure of the water boards varies, but they all have a general administrative body, an executive board and a chairperson. The general administrative body consists of people (the *hoofdingelanden*) representing the various categories of stakeholders: landholders, leaseholders, owners of buildings, companies and, since recently, all the residents as well. Importance and financial contribution are factors in determining how many representatives each category may delegate. Certain stakeholders (e.g. environmental organisations) may be given the power to appoint members. The general administrative body elects the executive board (of *hoogheemraden*, councilors) from among its members. The government appoints the chairperson (*dijkgraaf*, literally: "dike count") for a period of six years. The general administrative body is elected for a period of four years. Unlike municipal council elections, voters do not usually have to go to a polling station but they can vote by mail or even by telephone. (The water boards also wanted to offer voting by Internet, however, the Dutch government has determined that voting by Internet is not yet secure enough.<sup>[6]</sup>)

## List of Dutch water boards

Typically, a water board's territory is made up of one or more polders or watersheds. The territory of a water board generally covers several municipalities and may even include areas in two or more provinces. In 2006, there were 27 water boards in the Netherlands.

1. Waterschap Noorderzijlvest (Groningen, Friesland and Drenthe)
2. Wetterskip Fryslân (Friesland and Groningen)
3. Waterschap Blija Buitendijks (Friesland)
4. Waterschap Hunze en Aa's (Groningen and Drenthe)
5. Waterschap Reest en Wieden (Drenthe and Overijssel)
6. Waterschap Velt en Vecht (Drenthe and Overijssel)
7. Waterschap Groot Salland (Overijssel)
8. Waterschap Regge en Dinkel (Overijssel)
9. Waterschap Veluwe (Gelderland)
10. Waterschap Rijn en IJssel (Gelderland)
11. Waterschap Vallei en Eem (Utrecht and Gelderland)
12. Hoogheemraadschap De Stichtse Rijnlanden



(Utrecht and South Holland)

13. Hoogheemraadschap Amstel, Gooi en Vecht (North Holland and Utrecht)
14. Hoogheemraadschap Hollands Noorderkwartier (North Holland)
15. Hoogheemraadschap van Rijnland (South Holland en North Holland)
16. Hoogheemraadschap van Delfland (South Holland)
17. Hoogheemraadschap van Schieland en de Krimpenerwaard (South Holland)
18. Waterschap Rivierenland (Gelderland, South Holland, North Brabant and Utrecht)
19. Waterschap Hollandse Delta (South Holland)
20. Waterschap Zeeuwse Eilanden (Zeeland)
21. Waterschap Zeeuws-Vlaanderen (Zeeland)
22. Waterschap Brabantse Delta (North Brabant)
23. Waterschap De Dommel (North Brabant)
24. Waterschap Aa en Maas (North Brabant)
25. Waterschap Peel en Maasvallei (Limburg)
26. Waterschap Roer en Overmaas (Limburg)
27. Waterschap Zuiderzeeland (Flevoland)

The Roer and Overmaas Regional Water Authority and the Peel and Maasvallei Regional Water Authority have jointly set up the company “Waterschapsbedrijf Limburg”. One of its tasks is to ensure that the sewage treatment plants function efficiently.

## Unie van Waterschappen

The Unie van Waterschappen (Association of Water Boards) promotes the interests of Dutch water boards at a national and international level. All 27 water boards are members of the Association. It is especially about the safeguarding of interests with regard to the Dutch government and parliament <sup>[7]</sup>. The Unie van Waterschappen acts collaboratively with other appropriate bodies or institutions to pursue the Association's objectives including linking to Europe through with membership of the EUWMA, (European Union of Water Management Associations)<sup>[8]</sup>.

## References

1. ^ B. Dolfing, Vroegste ontwikkelingen in het Waterschap, in: J.C.N. Raadschelders and Th.A.J. Toonen (Eds.), *Waterschappen in Nederland: een bestuurskundige verkenning van de institutionele ontwikkeling*, Uitgeverij Verloren, Hilversum (1993), pp. 76 ff. (in Dutch)
2. ^ What's in a name (in Dutch)
3. ^ Waterschapswet (in Dutch). Accessed 2008-08-13
4. ^ Hoogheemraadschap van Delfland (in Dutch) Accessed 2008-08-11
5. ^ Raadschelders, J.C.N.; Th.A.J. Toonen (eds.) (1993). *Waterschappen in Nederland: een bestuurskundige verkenning van de institutionele ontwikkeling* (Water boards in the Netherlands: a management inquiry into the institutional development). Hilversum: Verloren b.v.. ISBN 90-6550-365-X.
6. ^ No voting by Internet (in Dutch) Accessed 2008-08-11.
7. ^ Unie van Waterschappen
8. ^ European Union of Water Management Associations

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