

## // Contact

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## // Institutional hierarchy

Government of Flanders  
Policy Area Environment

## // Research domain & discipline

Humanities: History and archaeology  
Natural sciences: Biological and earth sciences



## Abstract

The Flanders Heritage Agency deals with built, archaeological and landscape heritage but also with heraldic heritage and the historical fleet. The agency realises inventories, studies and protects valuable buildings, landscapes, archaeological sites and sailing heritage. The agency also supports the immovable heritage management and performs research that supports policy and management. From 2003 onwards, there were a variable number of researchers active within the Flanders Heritage Agency and its predecessors who perform policy-oriented research on topics related to maritime and/or underwater heritage. In the present structure marine researchers are spread over different units of the agency and have different responsibilities. The marine or maritime research expertise within the agency is related to the following topics:

- late medieval fishing settlements in the southern North Sea coastal areas;
- medieval cogs of Doel;
- maritime conservation: this topic gradually became more important since the start of the project 'De Kogge' (2009-2014);
- medieval origin and development of commercial fisheries in the North Sea, the Baltic Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. This includes combining data from European archaeological research on fish remains from the period 600-1600 AD;
- archaeological heritage in the Belgian part of the North Sea and the adjacent intertidal zone (developing inventories of old findings, research on new findings). This topic aims at achieving three scientific goals: (i) development of a reliable research methodology (using geophysical and remote sensing techniques); (ii) developing proposals for a transparent and sustainable management policy and for the further development and implementation of a legal framework for underwater heritage and (iii) practical guidance for actors at sea and an increase of the support for underwater heritage;
- support for the conservation policy of the historical fleet (inventories, documentation and history of ships and shipyards);
- legal aspects related to Underwater Cultural Heritage in the North Sea;
- archaeological Heritage present in rivers.

The challenge faced by the marine researchers is to create awareness among policy makers and maritime actors of the importance of marine heritage and to obtain the necessary resources to study and conserve this highly-vulnerable maritime heritage when appropriate.

Key events of the maritime group are the cooperation agreement (5 October 2004) between the federal government and the Flemish Region concerning maritime heritage, the realisation of the TV documentary 'Vergaan in de Noordzee' (Canvas; 2004), the realisation in 2006 of an online accessible database on maritime archaeology ([www.maritieme-archeologie.be](http://www.maritieme-archeologie.be)), the multidisciplinary study-project 'De Kogge' in the period 2009-2014, the approval and realisation of the IWT/SBO-project 'Archaeological heritage in the North Sea' (2013-2016), the ratification by Belgium of the UNESCO-Convention for the protection of underwater cultural heritage in 2013 and advice for the Belgian laws (2014, 2021) on protecting underwater cultural heritage, and the conservation and exhibition trajectory of the Cog of Doel. In October 2025 Flanders Heritage Agency organises IKUWA 8 in Ostend in close collaboration with many partners.

There is also a close collaboration with both national and international institutes and participation in various international research projects. Flanders Heritage Agency is a member of ICUCH (the International Scientific Committee on Underwater Cultural Heritage) and of the Scientific and Technical Advisory Board of the UNESCO Convention of 2001 for the protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage (UCH).