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## **NATUURPUNT VZW COMMUNICATION ON ENGAGEMENT (COE) – UNITED NATIONS GLOBAL COMPACT**

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Period covered by this COE: January 2022 to December 2023

### **Part I. Statement of Continued Support by the Chief Executive**

To our stakeholders,

I am pleased to confirm that Natuurpunt reaffirms its support to the United Nations Global Compact and its Ten Principles in the areas of Human Rights, Labour, Environment and Anti-Corruption. This is our Communication on Engagement with the United Nations Global Compact. We welcome feedback on its contents.

In this Communication of Engagement, we describe the actions that our organization has taken to support the UN Global Compact and its Principles as suggested for an organization like ours. We also commit to sharing this information with our stakeholders using our primary channels of communication.

Sincerely yours,

Noah Janssen,  
Algemeen directeur

## **Part II. Description of Actions.**

About Natuurpunt's engagement for the environment.

### **Nature and biodiversity**

For Natuurpunt the protection of nature and biodiversity form the foundation of a sustainable society. People need nature. We are an integral part of nature. Even though society supports the irreplaceable services of nature, biodiversity is decreasing. We want to turn the tide. To do this, Natuurpunt works on a Flemish level, but always from an international perspective.

Nature and biodiversity can only get sufficient chances when they are embedded in a network of core nature areas and connecting areas. This network is aimed at fulfilling the need for nature in Flanders and meeting international nature conservation duties. We develop a clear vision on how such a network can look and take the lead in its realization by focusing on acquiring, hiring and managing wildlife areas. We aim for large connected units of nature. These can be managed more efficiently and offer more space for spontaneous processes. At the same time we purchase and manage small, sometimes isolated wildlife areas. These also play an essential role in preservation, recovery and the spread of species and often have a major perception and awareness raising value for local residents. Although the intrinsic value of nature comes first for us, Natuurpunt also takes account of the fact that people can have greatly varying images of nature.

Nature has a place in everyone's life. This is why we as a society take care of nature 'for everyone', so everyone has access to local nature. We also find it important to open our areas for visitors. We always search for a balance between nature conservation and recreational use. We also stand up for nature and biodiversity outside our wildlife areas.

We protect and develop urban nature and urban forests and stand up for more nature in agricultural areas. We aim for an attractive and natural countryside, where an end has come to the fragmentation of open space, the alarming degeneration of the wealth of species and the loss of land-based heritage.

As nature and landscape are inseparable, we dedicate ourselves to improving the quality and the protection of heritage and abiotic elements. We ensure that our own areas are managed properly, by us or together with others. This leads to our areas being regarded as a reference for proper conservation of nature. We also promote more owners and users outside our wildlife areas to cooperate in the execution of a sustainable biodiversity policy that meets high quality standards.

The more participants who take responsibility to actually protect nature, the better. Where possible, we make our knowledge and expertise in nature conservation available. With this, we work on 'nature with everyone'.

### **Civil society**

Volunteers are the beating heart of Natuurpunt. There is room for everyone's commitment, ranging from occasional to far-reaching, from local, to regional to national. At Natuurpunt, volunteers get the opportunity to develop themselves and grow in the organization. They cooperate with a team of professionals, on the basis of respect, mutual empathy and realistic expectations. Via a targeted diversity policy we form a reflection of the make-up of society.

We focus extra attention on involving youngsters in the organization. To offer people who have trouble finding a job in regular employment new opportunities, Natuurpunt invests in jobs in the social economy. We ensure that the workers can work in nature in a useful manner. We act as a responsible employer and provide good working conditions and career development opportunities.

Natuurpunt is developing into *the* knowledge center of biodiversity in Flanders. Professionals as well as volunteers have knowledge about species, habitats and conservation. We are recognized for our expertise by the users. In addition, knowledge is expanded via low-threshold citizen science projects.

### **Involved into public debate**

We strongly focus on increasing our impact on the government policy. To this end, we invest in consultation with the government and other participants. If necessary, we take action and use legal measures to protect essential natural values.

Natuurpunt stimulates the 'sense' of nature, works on a change of mentality, among others, by getting to know nature, and raises awareness regarding treating nature with respect.

### **Natuurpunt joins and proposes partnership projects**

We enter into strategic alliances for natural objectives can be realized. We cooperate with partners and organizations on all levels: we organize activities together, work on joint projects, etc. This way, Natuurpunt introduces nature conservation to numerous organizations.

## **Part III. Measurement of Outcomes.**

### **Partnerships for nature and environment.**

Last year Natuurpunt has been involved into different partnerships for nature and environment. Here we describe the partnership with the AB INBEV.

#### ***Waterreplenishment***

In Belgium Natuurpunt and the AB INBEV Company defined a project which aims to give back water to nature, in order to improve biodiversity, and protect at the same time communities for floods. AB INBEV and Natuurpunt work together in one specific nature project, located in the province of Vlaams Brabant. The project is called "Doode Bemde" in the Leuven area.

The purpose of this project is carrying out specific actions for restoring historical wetlands, increasing the average groundwater level and improving the biodiversity within the supported nature reserve.

Once restructured, the nature project will ensure a holding capacity of an enormous quantity of rain water. The extra water holding capacity will prove valuable given the more extreme weather conditions expected.

Because the use of the land will change from farming to nature management more CO<sub>2</sub> will be stored in the soil. Through this project, the area with grasslands will take up more CO<sub>2</sub>.

All these elements help as a climate buffer for the future.

At the same time, we are ensuring improved quality for several Natura 2000 protected habitats using the proposed planning measures, including focusing on creating the right circumstances for rare birds and plants in the area.

We invest in developing an attractive, water-rich landscape on the own site and getting the public excited about it.

The following **measures** will be taken with the financial support of AB INBEV.

We want to realize these targets:

### **1. Preliminary studies**

Preliminary studies are indispensable if nature area's are to be restored successfully.

Various studies had already been conducted for this project: seed bank analyses, archaeological survey, eco-hydrological system analysis and soil studies.

These studies form the basis of an integral management plan with implementation measures.

### **2. Purchase of missing parcels.**

There are still plots of land owned by third parties in the Dyle flood basin. Despite agreements and previous works, the general rule remains that the hydrological situation of a third-party plot cannot be changed without its consent. Only possibilities are purchase, hydrological isolation of the plot (often complex and/or expensive), or expropriation by the government. Expropriation is a final measure that does not benefit community support, and may also involve a long procedural battle. We therefore leave this one out of consideration here.

Natuurpunt will therefore, with the support of AB INBEV, purchase the key parcels.

### **3. Reconstruction of old relief**

In the first place, the aim is to restore the old relief by creating canals and marshes that have disappeared and by excavating them again up to the original profile. The original depth of the canals can be mapped by means of soil samples. The trick consists of excavating precisely to that original level with an excavator.

The plots of land that Natuurpunt acquires in these area's are usually highly 'degraded' by desiccation. For the natural hydrology to be restored, the drainage of the area must be substantially reduced so that the entire area can become more marshy again.

A lot of these parcels were subjected to detailed dewatering and were systematically fertilized. They thus developed into grazing lands. Part of the grazing lands in the area retained the original microrelief. Other plots were turned into artificial fishing ponds with the result that the natural habitat have disappeared.

The restoration of these plots of land consists of:

- Filling the dewatering trenches and ditches on the plots of land where the microrelief is still present
- Reconstructing the early microrelief on the basis of a detailed soil analysis. New marshes are constructed and the drainage pipes and canals are removed.
- Remodeling of the artificial ponds to a more natural environment that will contain more water and allow biodiversity.

## **Targets:**

### **1. Return of symbolic species**

Thanks to the afore mentioned initiatives, rare, EU-protected biotopes will increase again in area size where they currently have only limited expanse.

Symbolic species such as the common snipe, which is now seen only sporadically in the Doode Bemde, will hopefully settle permanently here.

### **2. Ecosystem services and climate buffer**

Once restructured, the project will ensure a holding capacity of an important quantity of rain water. The extra water holding capacity will prove valuable given the more extreme weather conditions expected. This will prevent the downstream area's and city's from flooding. Because the vegetation can now develop beautifully extra carbon and therefore CO<sub>2</sub> also will be stored in the soil. Through this project, the area with marshes and grasslands will take up more CO<sub>2</sub> than the current maize and grass fields.

All these elements help as a climate buffer for the future.

### **3. Visitor infrastructure and facilities**

Access to the Doode Bemde and the related nature experience for the public can be improved. We therefore foresee a number of investments for the visitor infrastructure in this project. More specifically, Natuurpunt will invest in:

- \* The construction of a new viewing platform on a pond. This will enhance the involvement of visitors in nature and the area, and enable us to create support for the at times drastic restoration measures that are necessary in the area.

- \* Permanent benches will be installed in certain areas. The benches will be made from wood from Natuurpunt nature reserves by Natuur en Landschapszorg [Nature and Landscape Care], the social integration structure of Natuurpunt. The area will be discovered in comfort thanks to this infrastructure.

## **European Peatland Conference.**

Natuurpunt and partners organized from September 19 to 21, 2023 in Antwerp the European Peatland Conference "Power to the Peatlands".

Attitudes to peatlands are changing. They are no longer seen as valueless wastelands, but are now appreciated as precious habitats that deliver significant ecosystem services. Peatlands have become key components in national and international strategies on biodiversity, climate change mitigation and water retention.

The conference celebrates the end of an era with a last gathering of the Interreg North-West Europe project Care-Peat.

Care-Peat is an Interreg North-West Europe (NWE) project with 12 partners working together to reduce carbon emissions and restore the carbon storage capacity of different types of peatlands in North-West Europe. The main partnership consists of 7 knowledge institutes

and 5 nature organisations from Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Together with 7 sub-partners and 41 associated partners, we develop and test new techniques and socio-economic strategies for carbon reduction.

Effective conservation and restoration requires the development and sharing of knowledge. Although significant progress has been made in recent years, there are still many questions to be answered. These cannot be tackled in isolation, but require scientists, managers and decision-makers to work together. After all, only large-scale mobilisation and cooperation will ensure that we can put peatlands back at the heart of our society.

During the conference we will jointly discuss questions and solutions through lectures, workshops and field visits in Belgium and The Netherlands. We will learn from each other how to strengthen, restore, monitor and promote our precious peatlands.

The event was organized by Natuurpunt, University of Antwerp and the partners of Interreg Care-Peat and ADMIRE, together with the European chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration, the International Mire Conservation Group, Wetlands International, Greifswald Mire Centre, Society of Wetland Scientists and Ecologic Institute.

More than 500 peatland enthusiasts of which managers, ngo's, scientists, policy makers and businesses were present. Also we went international with over 40 countries, from Canada to Portugal to Latvia. No more than 160 presentations and 80 posters in 30 sessions were presented.

We are very satisfied that we could create this opportunity for people to come together and share: their interests, passions, concerns and experiences.

On the last day of our conference, peatland experts globally visited no less than 6 restoration sites.

### Some other key figures

- the total number of 31.703 members at the end of 2022
- 1005 ha nature area restored in 2022. The total area of nature reserves managed by Natuurpunt has increased up to 28.256 ha
- 2.322.547 visitors on [www.natuurpunt.be](http://www.natuurpunt.be)
- 33.500 participants for nature education courses and 14.262 participants for webinars
- 3.272 km walking paths
- 377.601 visitors in our nature centers