



**THE NORTHERN NETHERLANDS:  
A STRONG REGION  
FOR A  
STRONG EUROPE**



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NETHERLANDS**  
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**THE NORTHERN NETHERLANDS:**

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The Northern Netherlands, a region full of potential and resilience, is making its voice heard in the run-up to the 2024 European elections. Our region addresses European Institutions and asks them to put the region at the centre of their plans for a better, greener, and stronger Europe. The objectives we set for ourselves at the European and national level are being tackled in our region. The Northern Netherlands realises that strong regions form the basis for a strong European Union. We want to use our strength and expertise to provide solutions for the challenges that Europe faces. To do this, the region needs (regulatory) space for solutions that are made-to-measure and innovative, as well as encouragement to excel. We ask you to commit to these two core principles and we share our vision on seven important European themes. With your help, the Northern Netherlands can and wants to make a difference.

**1. Energy:** As the first Hydrogen Valley, the Northern Netherlands offers solutions for European energy challenges. We advocate for a cross-border Hydrogen Valley between the Northern Netherlands and Lower Saxony, and for areas free of excessive regulations to stimulate innovation.

**2. Circular Economy:** The Northern Netherlands is a frontrunner in regional collaboration on the circular economy. We want the European programme Hubs for Circularity to continue to strengthen innovative collaboration on circularity, with financial stimulation as an important tool.

**3. Mobility:** The Northern Netherlands aims for a robust Northern European cross-border rail network through better connections, such as the Lely Line and the Emmen-Rheine connection. Investments from European funds are crucial to strengthen the (Northern) European network.

**4. Regional Economy:** The Northern Netherlands wants to continue addressing economic and societal challenges using cohesion funds in the new Multiannual Financial Framework. It is important that these funds remain accessible to all member states and are distributed within the Netherlands in such a way that they reach the regions facing the most challenges.

**5. Agriculture:** The Northern Netherlands advocates for flexibility in national and European legislation, such as within the Common Agricultural Policy and the Farm-to-Fork initiatives. This allows farmers to take company-specific measures that make optimal use of region-specific circumstances, while achieving European goals.

**6. Climate Adaptation:** The Northern Netherlands believes in more intensive European commitment and support for climate adaptation in all European regions. We ask for specific encouragement of measures against heat and for behavioural change to strengthen climate adaptation.

**7. Digitalisation:** The Northern Netherlands advocates for a comprehensive European approach that encourages economic strengthening and enhancement of societal elements in the field of digitisation. We emphasize the importance of an elaboration of the Digital Decade strategy, including the strengthening of a digital government and digital society.

We look forward to your commitment to provide the region with the space and stimulus to excel at and contribute to European issues.



H<sub>2</sub>

HYDROGEN  
ENERGY STORAGE



# 1. ENERGY: SUSTAINABLE REGIONS

In the field of energy, we advise focusing on strengthening skills, organizing prerequisites, investing, and excelling with a Dutch (cross-border) pilot project to rapidly scale up green hydrogen.

## What do we ask of you?

### *Skills:*

- Ensuring the standards for skills and training modules for various educational levels (including for governments) throughout the entire value chain. This is needed for the further development of the hydrogen economy.
- Adequate resources for training licensing providers to accelerate the licensing of renewable energy projects.

### *Prerequisites:*

- A stronger incentive for the production and use of green hydrogen through favourable state aid frameworks, financial instruments, and mandatory blending of fuels.
- Good European coordination of hydrogen policies, especially where cross-border infrastructure and common standards and systems are needed. Such support is needed for large-scale IPCEI projects, but also for small-scale projects with scaling potential. For this, the European Hydrogen Valleys are ideally suited as a test bed
- Strengthening the synergy between European, national, and regional funds, such as funds linked to European infrastructure projects in the field of mobility and energy (TEN-E and TEN-T).
- Promotion of laws and regulations at the European level that are in line with the new reality of the energy transition; that is, an energy system where supply does not always follow demand.
- More freedom for network operators to experiment with network distribution, storage, energy exchange, and smart grids, and the use of spare capacity. The current implementation of legislation causes network congestion.
- A level playing field in Europe to compete with countries like France, where companies can get cheaper electricity (state nuclear power plants).

### *Investments:*

- Incentives and financing for the further development of cross-border Hydrogen Valleys.
- Programmes like The LIFE Clean Energy Transition, specifically addressing the challenges for homeowners to tackle energy poverty sustainably.

### *Excelling:*

- Europe's focus on cross-border Hydrogen Valleys and allowing them to experiment with deregulated areas, the so-called regulatory sandboxes. Europe's first Hydrogen Valley in the Netherlands (HEAVENN) can contribute as a European pilot project to accelerate the scaling up of green hydrogen. Due to the favourable location of the region, this Hydrogen Valley can be expanded into an international Hydrogen Valley, connected to Lower Saxony.

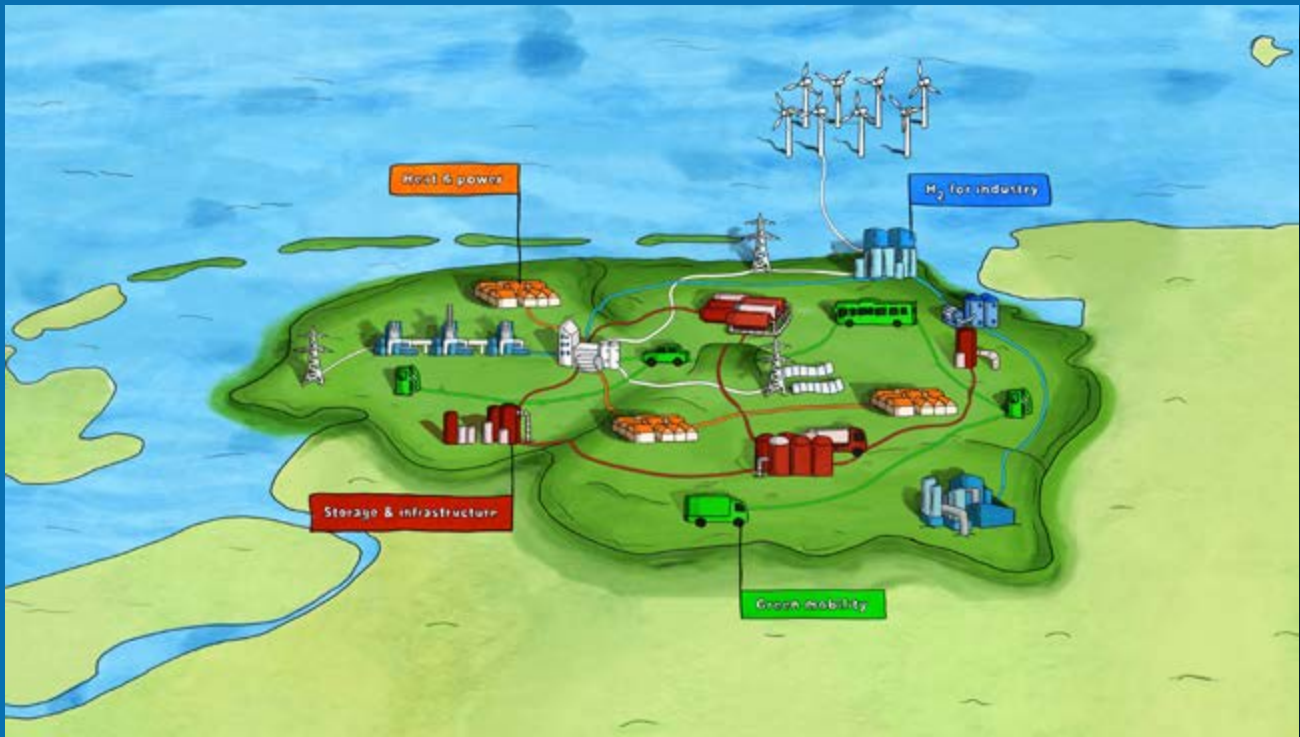


Image: HEAVENN hydrogen chain in the Northern Netherlands

## What is happening in the Northern Netherlands?

The Northern Netherlands is the energy region of the Netherlands. Where peat, oil, and gas once dominated the energy landscape, we are now evolving into a sustainable and versatile energy region. The Northern Netherlands is leading the energy transition in Europe. We aim to maintain and strengthen this leading position. In the North, we have the right innovative projects, knowledge, and infrastructure to do so. The Northern Netherlands is Europe's first Hydrogen Valley, and we are the foremost hydro-thermal region of both the Netherlands and Europe.

### *An Energy System Designed for the Future*

We have robust national and international gas and electricity connections and are working on large-scale onshore wind energy implementation (33% of Dutch offshore wind energy already originates from the Northern Netherlands). We are installing new stations, cables, and pipelines, such as new hydrogen pipelines in Emmen and the Eemshaven. Existing natural gas infrastructure is being repurposed for the transportation of hydrogen. Besides grid reinforcement, we are also focusing on innovative solutions for the electricity network. Consider, for instance, the storage and direct use of solar power and the conversion of electricity from solar fields into hydrogen, as in Oosterwolde. In the urban zone of Sneek/Bolsward, we are implementing a fully integrated system where the hydrogen hub, besides producing hydrogen and oxygen for industries with sustainable electricity, also generates heat for residences.

### *Hydrogen and Beneficial Facilities*

The Northern Netherlands was the first region in Europe to be awarded the status of Hydrogen Valley through the EU Clean Hydrogen Partnership – a project called HEAVENN (see box and picture). Significant physical facilities in the Northern Netherlands include seaports, existing and partially new gas pipelines, storage capabilities in salt caverns, the presence of water, and the possibilities to import green hydrogen via its seaports. Together with the existing knowledge and expertise, this makes the Northern Netherlands an exceptionally suitable region for realising the hydrogen ecosystem.

## HEAVENN - EUROPE'S FIRST HYDROGEN VALLEY

- The HEAVENN project was declared Europe's best Hydrogen Valley in 2023.
- The HEAVENN project pioneers a fully operational hydrogen economy, combining the production, storage, distribution, and use of green hydrogen.
- Within HEAVENN, GZI Next is developing the Netherlands' first energy hub. They have built a hydrogen refuelling station on the site of the former gas purification plant in Emmen. Additionally, an electrolyser will produce green hydrogen for the nearby Getec industrial park.



## PHOTO: WARM HEEG

Since 2019, work has been underway in Heeg on a collective heating system for the entire village. This collective heating system should be available, achievable, and affordable for everyone in the village. The heat is drawn from the surface water of the Heger Lake. The village is collaborating with three government bodies on this project: the municipality of Súdwest-Fryslân, the Province of Fryslân, and Wetterskip Fryslân. The village's vision includes being energy-neutral by 2025. This means, first and foremost, saving as much energy as possible, including through solid home insulation. But it also means becoming independent of natural gas.



### *Hydro thermal energy for Collective Heat Networks*

The Northern Netherlands has the ambition to realise five demonstration projects with hydro thermal energy in Fryslân by 2025. Furthermore, by then, there should be a central service desk to assist local initiatives with queries about technology, finances, and legal matters. By that year, there should also be an active learning network with about 50 organisations that share lessons and schedule unresolved learning points. Through this, we aim to bridge the gap from the current solitary hydro thermal energy applications to large-scale application in collective heat networks.

### *Heat Transition as an Alternative to Natural Gas*

The heat transition implies that all neighbourhoods and villages must transition away from natural gas, necessitating an alternative: household-level solutions like heat pumps or collective solutions such as a heat network supported by thermal energy storage (TES) or residual heat from companies. Groningen aims to be gas-free by 2035. Provinces and municipalities are working together to ensure homes in the Northern Netherlands are heated sustainably and affordably. To organise this collectively and to involve residents in the search for new models, the Groningen Heat Transition Centre was established. We are currently preparing large-scale heat networks.

### *Energy Poverty and Assisting Vulnerable Groups*

In recent years, it has become painfully clear that a significant portion of the population in the Northern Netherlands is struggling with energy poverty. We provide solutions where problems arise. Through a personal and intensive approach, we assist the target group with small-scale energy-saving solutions and insulation, which results directly in lower energy bills and indirectly in a more inclusive transition. In addition, we can apply learned lessons, such as from the Interreg programme Stronghouse – promoting the customer journey towards sustainability for homeowners. This means that Europe also needs to focus on involving homeowners with energy poverty and include this topic in upcoming policies. In Drenthe, we help homeowners with energy poverty with the insulation offensive: insulation worth €2.500 carried out on behalf of the province. By preventing debt and complicated regulations in this way, we make sustainability much more accessible for homeowners with low incomes. Our experience in Interreg projects, especially in the field of sustainability and energy, is that regulations alone are not enough. As the needs and (financial) capabilities of end-users – be they homeowners or companies – vary so much, that the real challenge is to engage them in a dialogue to understand their needs and thus provide tailored support in their journey towards sustainability. As a regional government, Drenthe does this by standing alongside its citizens and businesses, rather than stating how they should become sustainable. This seems crucial at the European level to achieve policy goals.



## How does this contribute to European objectives?

Europe is keen to significantly reduce its energy dependency on third-party countries. Moreover, Europe is committed to tackling energy poverty and protecting vulnerable consumers. Given its role as a frontrunner in the energy transition, the Northern Netherlands is ideally suited as an innovative region for the application of new technologies, as a test bed for new rules, and as a source of lessons in combating energy poverty. Europe can learn from the Northern Netherlands' experience in resolving grid congestion, establishing a regional hydrogen hub, and expanding this internationally such as the European Hydrogen Backbone.

Hydrogen is crucial for sectors where electrification is impossible or less feasible. At the same time, the hydrogen economy promotes employment and economic growth and ultimately leads to a better integrated sustainable energy system. Because of our location and the aforementioned advantages, the hydrogen ecosystem of the Northern Netherlands region is invaluable for Europe's hydrogen ambitions.

## WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

- **Greater socio-economic potential of the region by scaling up the hydrogen economy, especially in terms of employment and economic growth;**
- **A contribution to achieving national and European climate objectives;**
- **The approach to energy poverty in order to protect vulnerable consumers.**







## 2. CIRCULAR ECONOMY: CIRCULAR REGIONS

In order to pioneer and lead in the circular transition in the Northern Netherlands, we need appropriate legislative frameworks and co-financing.

### What do we ask of you?

- Promotion of regional and cross-border initiatives for the circular economy (CE).
- An appropriate legislative framework for pilots, experimentation space, and support for the upscaling of CE business cases.
- Simple grant or financing schemes for circular activities aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises and citizen initiatives. For example, for the development and promotion of the use of biobased building and insulation materials and machines for the production and more efficient processing of raw materials.
- Fostering legislation, so that banks more easily finance circular investments.
- Certification and labelling of circular products, materials, and buildings. This leads to more certainty for investments, for instance in circular construction.
- A guiding framework for circular construction standards.
- Continuation of the European programme Hubs for Circularity to strengthen regions with innovative cooperation on circularity through financial incentives. For this transition, Hubs for Circularity should become an overarching initiative in the European Union.

### What is happening in the Northern Netherlands?

Our core circular competencies are circular plastics, water, circular construction, and circular procurement and tendering. With these, we attract investments and promote the development of an increasing number of circular businesses.

Companies are collaborating with knowledge institutions and governments to promote our circular knowledge and activities. We distinguish ourselves with this so-called “triple helix” cooperation. An example is the Circular Friesland Association (Vereniging Circulair Friesland) founded by local small and medium-sized businesses. Here, these businesses involve knowledge institutions, and governments. They reinforce the transition from the bottom up, collaborate and inspire others to also take circular steps. With Chemport Europe, we aim to become the first chemical cluster in Europe with a net zero impact on the environment through the use of renewable energy and raw materials. With the WaterCampus, we are developing the possibilities in the Northern Netherlands to discharge less polluted water and reuse the raw materials that this process yields.



## Greenwise Circular Plastics

Plastics are anything but sustainable. This situation can and must change. Within Greenwise Campus, we are working on solutions to make plastics more sustainable and improve their use: Circular Plastics. Together with knowledge institutions and businesses, we are seeking ways to reuse plastics longer or ways to recycle them, preferably for the same application or for an even higher-quality product.

We concretely shape our circular ambitions through our flagship projects:

- Greenwise Circular Plastics (see box and image). We aim to structurally address the major environmental issues surrounding plastics, with the goal of becoming Europe's leading circular plastics hub.
- The Northern Netherlands' residences are circular (circular construction). We aspire to normalise circular construction by demonstrating its efficacy through various pilot projects, encompassing both demolition and new construction throughout the whole of the Northern Netherlands.
- Circular Procurement & Tendering. We seek a level playing field in the Northern Netherlands, where government entities challenge companies to create circular products and services.

### **How does this contribute to European objectives?**

The Northern Netherlands is leading the way in promoting the transition to a circular economy, by encouraging the production of resource-efficient products, energy-neutral and circular construction, closing the circular plastics loop, and focusing on industrial symbiosis in the chemistry and plastics sector.

With the launch of the European Green Deal and the Action Plan for the Circular Economy, the EU has proposed a new agenda for sustainable and circular growth. This new agenda is intended to alleviate pressure on resources. The EU is striving for an economy in which products are designed sustainably, with the aim of preventing waste by keeping resources and products in the economy for as long as possible. In the Northern Netherlands, we welcome the steps the EU is taking to promote the transition to a circular economy.

## **WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?**

- **A sustainable circular economy in the region - where in the long term only circular businesses will establish themselves;**
- **A contribution towards achieving climate goals at the national and European level;**
- **Experimental space to truly give circular business cases a chance and to promote sustainable, circular economic growth.**







## 3. MOBILITY: CROSS-BORDER REGIONS

### What do we ask of you?

- An improved integration of the Northern Netherlands into the European Transport Network (TEN-T). Once the current revision is complete, it is vital that the EU invests in our cross-border connections towards Northern Europe. Accessibility is the key to harnessing the strength of Europe and the individual regions, for which European investments are required.
- Priority for the resilience of the European transport network. A fast train connection between Paris/Brussels and Bremen/Hamburg/Copenhagen via Amsterdam using the Lely Line makes the Dutch railway network less vulnerable and strengthens the European network. Realising this Northern European connection aligns with the objective of phasing out short-distance flights. The connection between Emmen-Rheine, as a cross-border extension of the Lower Saxony Line, will also enhance the European network. It is important that investments from European funds such as the Connecting Europe Facility are made to improve the Northern European connection.
- European regulations that encourage the application of innovation in the fields of transport, energy, and digitisation, including the transport of green hydrogen throughout Europe. This way, we can replace diesel trains with hydrogen trains in our region and on cross-border connections without unnecessary investment in overhead lines.

### What is happening in the Northern Netherlands?

We have ambitions for the accessibility of our region. The Lely Line, Lower Saxony Line, and the improvement of the existing railways are crucial to better connect the North with the rest of the country, as well as the rail link between the Netherlands and Northern Germany and Scandinavia. The Northern Netherlands is the gateway between Western and Northern Europe.

The European Parliament is pushing for this with the addition of the Lely Line and Emmen/Rheine to the TEN-T network. The Wunderline (Groningen-Bremen railway line) has been qualified by the EU as a “Flagship Project” and has received substantial co-funding from CEF Transport twice so far. The existing goods connection between Emmen and Rheine is being upgraded to a sustainable passenger connection.

Following a successful test in 2021 between Leeuwarden and Groningen, the first green hydrogen trains in the Netherlands are expected to run in the province of Groningen in 2027. Our region has introduced intelligent transport systems and was the first in Europe to test a self-driving passenger train. We are also working on a test centre for a new, sustainable form of transport: the Hyperloop. We are developing smart urban mobility solutions and zero-emission urban logistics projects, and by 2026, around 90% of all buses in the Provinces of Groningen and Drenthe will be emission-free.

Lastly, the Northern Netherlands is active in the field of 5G, through initiatives such as 5Groningen/5G Fieldlab and 5G Fieldlab Drenthe. Here, we test innovations and apply them in the transport and mobility sector and in agriculture, primarily by accelerating the market introduction of 5G solutions.



## How does this contribute to European objectives?

The European Union, with the Green Deal and the Strategy for Smart and Sustainable Mobility, is focusing on sustainability, application of innovation, and achieving the 'modal shift'. Our region is ideally suited as a testing ground for innovation to apply European ambitions in practice. Our region has the ambition to reinforce this leading role in order to accelerate the twin transition in the field of mobility as well. By improving the accessibility by rail, our region helps to expand the role for clean forms of transport. This leads to less air and car travel. Better rail connections between the Northern Netherlands, Scandinavia, Germany, and Eastern Europe improve the connectivity between innovative regions. A better connection provides a favourable cross-border business climate, economic structural reinforcement, and promotion of cross-border labour mobility. The ultimate goal is to increase the broad prosperity of all involved North European member states.

## WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

- **Enhancement of the socio-economic potential of the border regions. An international connection provides more opportunities for work, economic growth, and education on both sides of the border;**
- **The key international sustainable connection of our country;**
- **International connectivity. You only get to know each other when you can meet. The Lely Line and the Lower Saxony Line bring people, companies, and ideas together.**





# 4. REGIONAL ECONOMY: INNOVATIVE REGIONS AND COHESION WITHIN EUROPE

## What do we ask of you?

- Allow the cohesion funds for structural reinforcement in the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to remain available for all member states, especially for regions with societal and economic challenges.
- Prioritise the principle of 'do no harm to cohesion'.
- Allow sufficient room and flexibility within the EU framework and regulations to enhance the impact of programmes. Currently, this room is too restricted: when European goals are translated into frameworks, this often comes with incentives that contradict the original aim.
- Uphold the cohesion objectives, ensuring that European funds end up where they are most needed: efficiency is paramount.
- Facilitate European investments through the Pact for Skills, enabling the development of a regional approach to tackle the Skills agenda.
- Continue to stimulate collaborations between businesses, governments, and knowledge institutions aimed at knowledge exchange to promote sustainable employability.
- Improve diploma recognition within the European Union.

## What is happening in the Northern Netherlands?

The stimulation of knowledge and innovation at the European level is necessary for economic and societal development. Within Europe, we are pioneers with our ambitious approach and strategy to extract economic value from societal challenges and transitions in line with the European Twin transition.

Together with the three northern provinces, large municipalities, knowledge institutions, and entrepreneurs, the Northern Netherlands has developed a Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation (RIS3) for the period 2021-2027. Since 2014, the Northern Netherlands has been the first region in Europe to work on connecting economic and societal objectives in its Regional Innovation Strategy. This innovation strategy focuses on four major transitions:

- from a linear to a circular economy,
- from care to (positive) health,
- from fossil to renewable energy,
- from analogue to digital.



By focusing specifically on innovation within and among the four transitions, we achieve not only economic returns but also social returns. This contributes to widespread prosperity in our region. The European funds, such as the Just Transition Funds (JTF), the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), or the European Social Fund (ESF+), are deployed nationally to accelerate these transitions. Our region has a unique task and position to make the transition from fossil to renewable fuels, leading the European Commission to designate Groningen and Emmen as the foremost regions to utilise the JTF. Within Europe, we are an ideal testing ground with the right scale for applied innovations. The Northern Netherlands may be relatively sparsely populated by Dutch standards, but by European standards it is just right. The provinces of Drenthe, Fryslân, and Flevoland have the European status of 'transition region' within the Netherlands, because the Gross Regional Product of these three provinces is below the European average. Thus, the European cohesion objective of reducing disparities between regions is also a Dutch concern.

Furthermore, everyone is needed for a future-proof European labour market, and lifelong learning is indispensable. Regions such as the Northern Netherlands can be used as a testing ground for applications. We therefore embrace the mission-oriented approach of the European Commission, which helps to work together on a task from the national, regional, and local governments. The European Pact for Skills supports this and can be provided with resources to work on Skills agendas at a regional level.

### **How does this contribute to European objectives?**

Making small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) more innovative is a major objective of European regional policy funds. The Northern Netherlands is an SME region like no other. We draw our strength from linking SMEs to societal challenges in the areas of food, digitisation, energy transition, circularity, and health. Our innovation power is known and recognised in Europe. The four transitions from the RIS3 are very closely aligned with the so-called 'twin transition' that the EU is pursuing. In the Northern Netherlands, we provide an example of how the twin transition goals can be integrated into innovation policy.

Successful Northern innovations can be applied at an international level, as the transitions are a global concern. After all, there is only one Paris or Berlin, but there are many regions like the Northern Netherlands. In our region, European funding is used to achieve the goals of the Green Deal - we are looking for both economic and social returns: in addition to the 'twin transition', also a 'twin return' to contribute to widespread prosperity. As the Northern Netherlands has been doing this since 2014 in connection with Europe, we are one of the drivers within the Partnership Regional Innovation (PRI), with which the EC also tries to achieve this 'twin return'. The recognition and funding that the European Commission has granted to the Northern Netherlands as Europe's first Hydrogen Valley is a significant example of this.





The aim of European cohesion policy to reduce the disparities between regions is more relevant than ever and aligns well with the report from the national advisory boards 'Every Region Counts' ('Elke regio telt'). The interpretation of this is that structural funds remain available for all countries within the Union and are deployed in those regions where, based on the Gross Regional Product, the most significant challenges lie.

Regions especially can ensure that European funds achieve their objectives and should be able to contribute to the execution and expenditure of European funding. Ownership and implementation for regions/provinces must be safeguarded in spending European funds, when the objectives of those funds need to be realised in the region, such as the Just Transition Fund (JTF). To ensure this, the EU should impose stricter requirements on member states.

By designating the municipality of Groningen as one of the hundred European cities within the European Union to be climate-neutral by 2030, Europe is helping us achieve climate goals and making the transition. In this, we seek connection in the region. The province of Drenthe and Friesland have been selected by the European Commission to participate in the mission for climate-resilient European regions. With this European support, we as a region can be and remain ambitious.

## WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

- **Collaboration that leads to economic and societal development in the EU;**
- **European funds that actually achieve their goals;**
- **A future-proof European labour market.**





# 5. AGRICULTURE: SUSTAINABLE AND FUTURE-PROOF REGIONS

## What do we ask of you?

- Flexibility in national and European legislation within the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Farm-to-Fork Initiatives. The measures to achieve European objectives must offer company-specific room for farmers to optimally exploit region-specific conditions.
- The encouragement of innovation that can only be achieved through collaboration between farmers, knowledge institutions, and governments at regional, national, and European levels. To realise this innovation and sustainability, there is a need for (policy and funding) room to instigate a transition from the government, encouraging farmers and related organisations to take accelerated steps.
- To harness the strengths of the regions in fleshing out the Green Deal and the Common Agricultural Policy after 2027. We have the ability to make new initiatives such as carbon farming a success. In this way, we are making the transition to a circular, nature-inclusive economy together with Europe in the Northern Netherlands.

## What is happening in the Northern Netherlands?

Two-thirds of the land surface in the Northern Netherlands is used for agriculture. The productivity of our agricultural sector and the development of knowledge and scientific innovation contribute to food security and food quality worldwide. Furthermore, agricultural activity is crucial for the liveability and landscape management of large parts of the Northern Netherlands. Therefore, our region is working towards sustainability from various aspects: we promote healthy food from a healthy soil for healthy living throughout Europe.

Food security worldwide must be maintained for a growing population. Our farmers should be able to work under conditions that allow them to achieve sustainable economic returns from their production. Therefore, our region supports the European Green Deal and the Farm-to-Fork strategy, and our region is an important factor in achieving the goals set out in these strategies. These European ambitions align well with the sustainability objectives from the National Programme for Rural Areas. In the Northern Netherlands, we want to combine achieving these objectives with working towards agriculture that contributes to a healthy and sustainable living environment, produces valuable raw materials, and thus assures a good future perspective (Top Quality Food from a Rich Landscape).

The provinces of Drenthe, Fryslân, and Groningen have a Region Deal with the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality to work on 'Nature-inclusive agriculture'. In eight northern Dutch regions, farmers operate under various conditions and challenges (such as soil type, groundwater availability, and oxidation of peatlands)

The aim of this area-specific approach is to offer every land user or farmer a course of action tailored to the natural challenges in their environment. This pertains to offering perspective for realising nature-inclusive farming that fits in that area.



## How does this contribute to European objectives?

Various initiatives in the North are contributing to European objectives. An example of this is the 'Fascinating' project (an acronym for 'Food Agro Sustainable Circular Nature Technology in Groningen'). This is an open innovation programme that connects agricultural companies, educational institutions, and society, accelerating the protein transition towards plant-based proteins. Together, we are working towards circular agriculture that respects nature and consequently combines healthy nutrition with healthy yields. We consider all aspects of the entire chain. This system leads to a new business model for farmers and contributes to a healthy soil, useful application of residual flows, strengthening of biodiversity, and healthy food.

Our farmers are in a unique position to contribute to carbon sequestration in the soil through carbon farming. The transition to CO<sub>2</sub> storage in the soil in our region is already taking place through programmes like 'Currency for Peat' ('Valuta voor Veen'). We aim for carbon storage through a combination of measures, such as non-inversion tillage, use of cover crops, improved crop rotation, leaving behind crop residues, and field edge management. The cultivation of fibre crops in our region also contributes to objectives aimed at making construction more sustainable. In addition to making conventional agriculture more sustainable, our region helps farmers make the transition to organic farming.

## WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

- **Agriculture that considers the unique conditions of each farmer;**
- **Ecologically and economically sustainable agriculture;**
- **Food security through a strong position for European farmers in the food chain.**





## 6. CLIMATE ADAPTATION: CLIMATE-RESILIENT REGIONS

### What do we ask of you?

We ask for an intensification of commitment and (financial) support across all European regions, throughout the full spectrum of climate adaptation. This includes promoting measures to combat heat and encouraging behavioural changes and human actions.

### What is happening in the Northern Netherlands?

In the Northern Netherlands provinces, we are working together with municipalities and water boards to make the region climate resilient. Individual decentralised governments are also acting in working groups in the Northern Netherlands to address their own climate adaptation challenges and goals resulting from national, regional, or local policy. The provinces of Drenthe, Fryslân and the Region of Groningen-Assen have joined the European Commission's Mission Adaptation to Climate Change: an initiative to bring innovations in regional cooperation in the field of climate adaptation to the Northern Netherlands. This means that our region has been selected as a frontrunner to contribute ideas on possible measures/programmes for climate adaptation across Europe. With this affiliation, the Northern Netherlands can share acquired knowledge and experience with other regions in Europe. Thus, the Northern Netherlands will contribute to climate resilience in the region and in Europe.

### How does this contribute to European objectives?

Europe is as climate resilient as its regions. The Northern Netherlands helps other European regions by sharing knowledge and experience gained in its own region via the EU Mission for Climate Adaptation. By intensifying its own regional commitment to climate adaptation, the Northern Netherlands is contributing to the EC's goal of having at least 150 climate-resilient European regions by 2030.

## WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

- A healthier and more resilient living climate, for all inhabitants of the EU.



## WHAT ARE THE RESULTS?

- **New opportunities for the economy and society using new technologies, embedded by our government;**
- **Regions that leverage technological developments and thus attract start-ups and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), for the sake of regional development.**



## 7. DIGITISATION: DIGITAL REGIONS

It is necessary that the Digital Decade strategy is translated into a comprehensive European approach where both economic strengthening in the region in terms of digitisation, as well as societal elements that also enhance government performance such as digital government and digital society are encouraged.

### What do we ask of you?

To strengthen the digital ecosystem in regions by promoting the acceleration of digitisation of SMEs and stimulating innovation, technological leadership, and digital skills. Strengthening cybersecurity and maintaining and expanding the digital infrastructure are important prerequisites for this.

Governments can perform better using digital tools. Social issues can receive a powerful boost through digital innovation – and data, policy, advice, and decision-making can also be improved using data science & data-driven work (including open data). Also, service delivery to citizens can be improved where digital inclusion creates social inclusion. The government should aim to promote digital democracy and open government.

### What is happening in the Northern Netherlands?

The Northern Netherlands is cooperating in the field of digitisation with a focus on the digital economy and digital government; this is being carried out through the project 'the North Digital' ('het Noorden Digitaal') with the aim of utilising the opportunities of digitisation for economic and social developments for the Northern Netherlands that contribute to broaden prosperity for the region. The North Digital contributes to further building communities that collectively address societal challenges and issues by bringing professionals and ideas together, and by formulating strategic advice for regional stakeholders. The Northern Netherlands is taking advantage of the opportunities of the digital transition from the Regional Development Strategy and is helping SMEs to climb higher up the digital ladder by making use of the Northern Digital ecosystem that has been mapped out. The North is joining forces in an acceleration programme for digitisation of the Northern Netherlands – the so-called "Digital Decade Noord-Nederland 2030".

### How does this contribute to European objectives?

The twin transition is an important part of EU policy to promote the transition to a sustainable and digital economy. The policy aims to make progress in the field of climate change and digitisation. The focus within this Twin transition is on sustainable energy, circular economy, climate-neutral technologies, and stimulating innovation and digital technologies. Europe wants to utilise the Twin transition as an opportunity to promote economic development, employment, and welfare for citizens, with respect for the environment and future generations.

# Questions?

Please visit

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