

## **Summary of Environmental Impact Report**

### *Provincial Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment and EIA*

The Provincial Strategy on Spatial Planning and the Environment for Limburg (hereafter: the Strategy) gives the Province of Limburg a framework for dealing with any future developments and activities. The Strategy therefore explains the critical policy choices the Province has made and provides the basis for any further specifications and plans. To give ecological and environmental interests<sup>1</sup> their full due in the Strategy, an environmental impact assessment (EIA) was carried out and an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) drafted.<sup>2</sup> The planning EIA compares current and new policy approaches in terms of the opportunities and threats that they represent for People, Planet and Prosperity. Many elements of the proposed policy set out in the Strategy aim to reduce impacts on Natura 2000 areas and to improve the physical condition of these areas (e.g. hydrology and nutrient loading). The Strategy also does not allow for major spatial planning developments.

### *Procedure*

The EIA procedure began in 2019 with the publication of the Memorandum on Scope and Level of Detail. The Memorandum describes the EIA approach to the Strategy. The independent Environmental Impact Assessment Committee (EIA Committee) has advised on the Memorandum. The EIA Committee is an independent advisory body established by law that must be consulted during an EIA. The Committee issued its opinion on the draft Strategy and the planning EIR during the public consultation period.

A supplement to the EIR has been drawn up in response to the opinion of the EIA Committee. This Supplementary Environmental Impact Report (dated 15 December 2020) provides additional information on which policy (existing and new) was examined, what the opportunities and risks are of the new policy, and how this was determined (by means of expert judgement). Chapter 3 of the Supplementary Environmental Impact Report includes an Appropriate Assessment of Natura 2000 areas, in line with the nature of the Strategy.

### *Approach to the EIR*

There have been several iterations in which a relationship was established between the process of drawing up the Strategy and the process of conducting the EIA. In other words, as the Strategy was being drafted, there was interaction between the development of policy under the Strategy and the EIA. The EIR describes this iteration process in detail.

The EIR focuses on identifying the opportunities and threats represented by the Strategy's proposed policy (aggregated for all policy themes) for the assessment aspects grouped under the main aspects, People, Planet and Prosperity.

These opportunities and threats are based on an analysis of the proposed policy for all the themes of the Strategy and are summarised in the EIR for both the Province of Limburg as a whole and for each separate region (North, Central and South Limburg) using a matrix. The matrix is shown below.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'environmental' no longer covers the full meaning, but still applies as the legal term.

<sup>2</sup> It is customary to use the abbreviations EIA and EIR. The abbreviation EIA stands for the full assessment procedure. EIR stands for the environmental impact report that is drafted as part of that procedure. The EIR, like the EIA, not only looks at the environment but also at the broad assessment framework based on the categories people, planet and prosperity.

| Policy theme                   | People                          |                               |         |                | Planet             |                      |                            |                    | Prosperity       |                 |                        |               |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------|----------------|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------------|---------------|
|                                | Health, safe living environment | Attractive living environment | Housing | Social setting | Ecological capital | Energy and resources | Soil, water and subsurface | Historical capital | Business climate | Work and income | Education and networks | Accessibility |
| Soil and subsurface            |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Water                          |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Nature                         |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Landscape                      |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Housing and living environment |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Health and safety              |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Culture, sport and heritage    |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Economy                        |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Workplaces                     |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Agriculture and horticulture   |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Mobility                       |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |
| Energy                         |                                 |                               |         |                |                    |                      |                            |                    |                  |                 |                        |               |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | large opportunity for (significant) positive impact |
|  | opportunity for positive impact                     |
|  | slight opportunity for positive impact              |
|  | no positive or negative impact                      |
|  | slight threat of negative impact                    |
|  | threat of negative impact                           |
|  | large threat of (significant) negative impact       |

### Notes on the matrix

In the matrix above, the columns show the twelve aspects of a broad and comprehensive assessment framework, based on the categorisation People, Planet and Prosperity. The matrix colour codes are based on expert judgement. The rows show the policy themes of the Strategy. The shades of green indicate an opportunity for a positive impact and the shades of red indicate the threat of a negative impact. If a column (i.e. an aspect) has both green and red shaded cells, it means that the proposed policy is both an opportunity and a threat. The EIR describes and explains this in more detail.

### Overall conclusion

Based on the EIA, the overall conclusion is that a number of the proposed goals and targets of the Strategy can be achieved, but to what extent depends in part on economic factors and the degree to which resources and instruments are actually used. In its Strategy, the Province makes choices about twelve policy themes. The question is whether Limburg can accommodate all the claims that arise from these policy themes simultaneously. Some claims may compete with one another or, on the contrary, produce benefits when combined. For example, competing claims may arise in practical terms when it comes to the energy transition, an ambition which, under certain circumstances, may

conflict with another ambition, i.e. to preserve Limburg's characteristic and diverse landscape. An example of complementary claims can be seen in the stated ambition regarding housing (i.e. to focus first on the quality of the built-up area before embarking on new suburban developments), a policy that will have major positive consequences for the Province's safety, landscape and ecological ambitions. The three regions differ to some extent. In North and Central Limburg, the biggest threats are to Planet-related aspects (ecological and historical capital and soil, water and subsurface). In South Limburg, on the other hand, that is the case for People-related aspects (health, social setting).

The conservation status of the Natura 2000 areas remains a point of concern, but the proposed policy is likely to lead to improvements. The measures proposed in the Strategy (and other autonomous policy) are likely to reduce the impact on these areas (from nitrogen emissions, but also groundwater and shared leisure use). Flanking policies are of major importance for achieving the conservation targets. Biodiversity (beyond the nature reserves) is a major concern.

#### *Appropriate Assessment*

The proposed policy of the Strategy is not expected to lead to significant negative impacts on the conservation objectives. A supplement to the EIR has been drawn up to clarify this in more detail for each Natura 2000 area. The supplement includes an Appropriate Assessment of the impact of the proposed policy on the conservation objectives. This Appropriate Assessment is geared to the Strategy and looks at opportunities and risks posed by the proposed policy for the Natura 2000 conservation objectives. The Appropriate Assessment concludes that the Strategy primarily yields opportunities for improvement. This conclusion confirms what had already been established in the EIR, namely that the risk of the proposed policy resulting in a deterioration of the conservation status is negligible. The Appropriate Assessment has been included in its entirety in the Supplementary Environmental Impact Report (dated 15 December 2020).