

**Nitrate and PPP
challenge in
vulnerable
groundwater
protection areas -
#15**

Cors van den Brink, june 2025



Decades of study & Stimulation Projects *provincie* Drenthe

1. Stimulation Projects, Result-Based Rewards (mid-'90s – ~2005)

Financial incentive to reduce PPP use, awareness raising

2. Study groups (mid '90 – present)

Knowledge transfer, awareness, since 2nd Drinking Water Policy Note: 'Protect to Preserve'

3. Since 2016: 'Farming for Water' as part of regional implementation program of the Drinking Water Protection Files

Knowledge transfer, awareness, but additionally: goal achievement

4. Since 2017 (effective from 2019): Nitrate-program in vulnerable GWPA as part of 6th NAP

Knowledge transfer, awareness, goal achievement and a deadline: 2021 or at the latest 2025



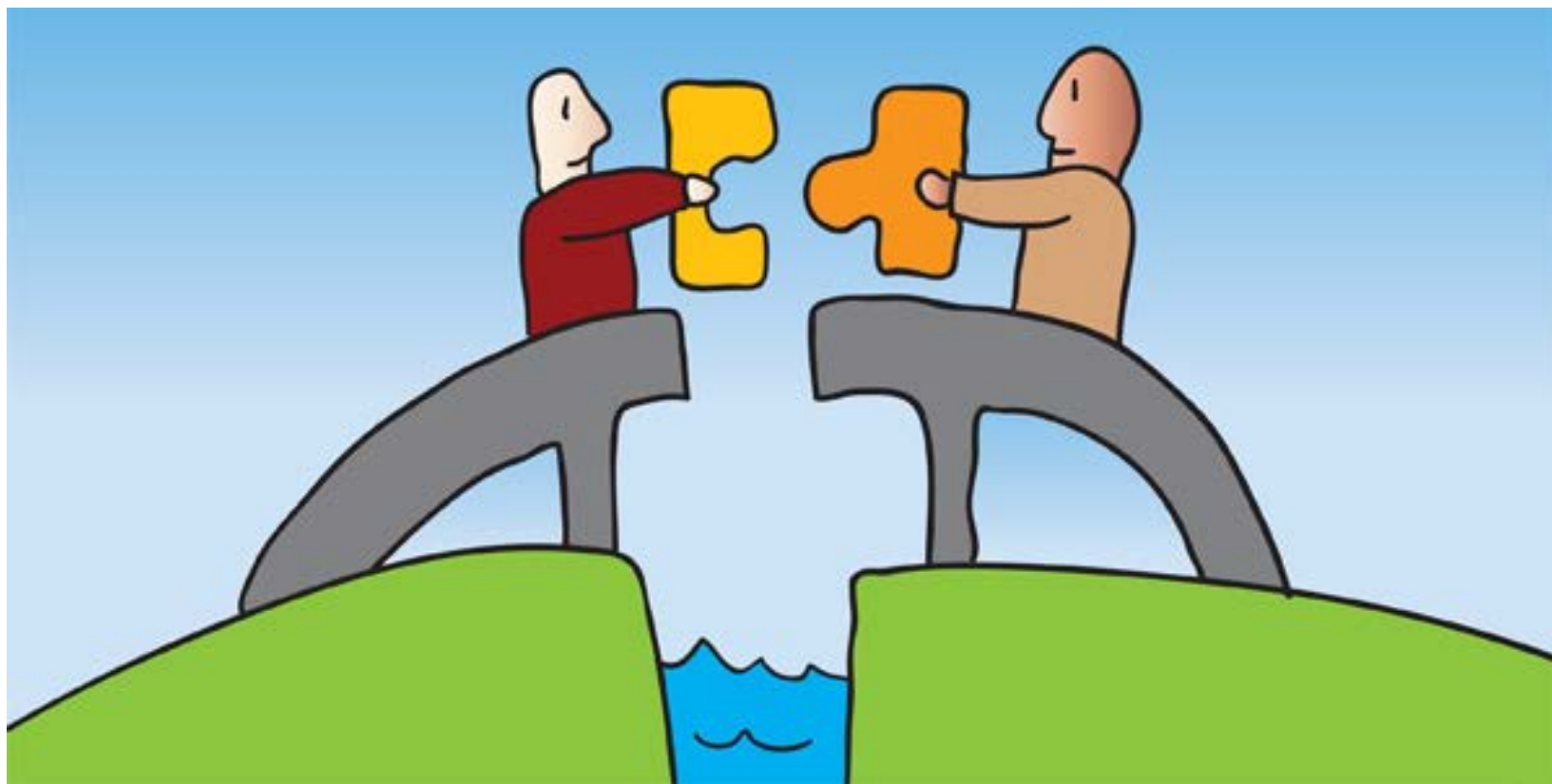
Approach of the nitrate-program

Potential participants invited on a voluntary basis

Mutual gain as guiding principle:
“Connective Negotiation”

Searching for the common interest:

1. durable future perspective for the farmers
- 2. robust protection of the drinking water abstraction



What does this involve?

Two farm visits

Analysis and farm plan

Progress and agreements

Cluster- and field meetings

In-depth group work

Learning from each other

Observing & following measures

Annual evaluation meeting



Possible measures

- Improve catch crops
- Optimize grazing
- Reduce autumn grazing
- Place-specific fertilization
- No manure on maize in recently plowed grassland
- Less N-demanding crops and varieties
- Split manure application based on N-min measurements

...

NOT:

- Significantly less nutrients than permitted
- Expansion of crop rotation / set aside land



Results evaluation 2021

1. Broadly shared view: unclear when to enforce binding measures for goal achievement
2. Participants generally satisfied with the collaboration
3. Nitrate goal not achieved. Imbalance between regulatory frameworks and voluntariness
4. Still, extension was requested and granted to continue the Nitrate-program into 2023 for a “soft landing” within the NPLG (National Program for Rural Area): *‘There is no alternative approach than focus on the engagement process’*



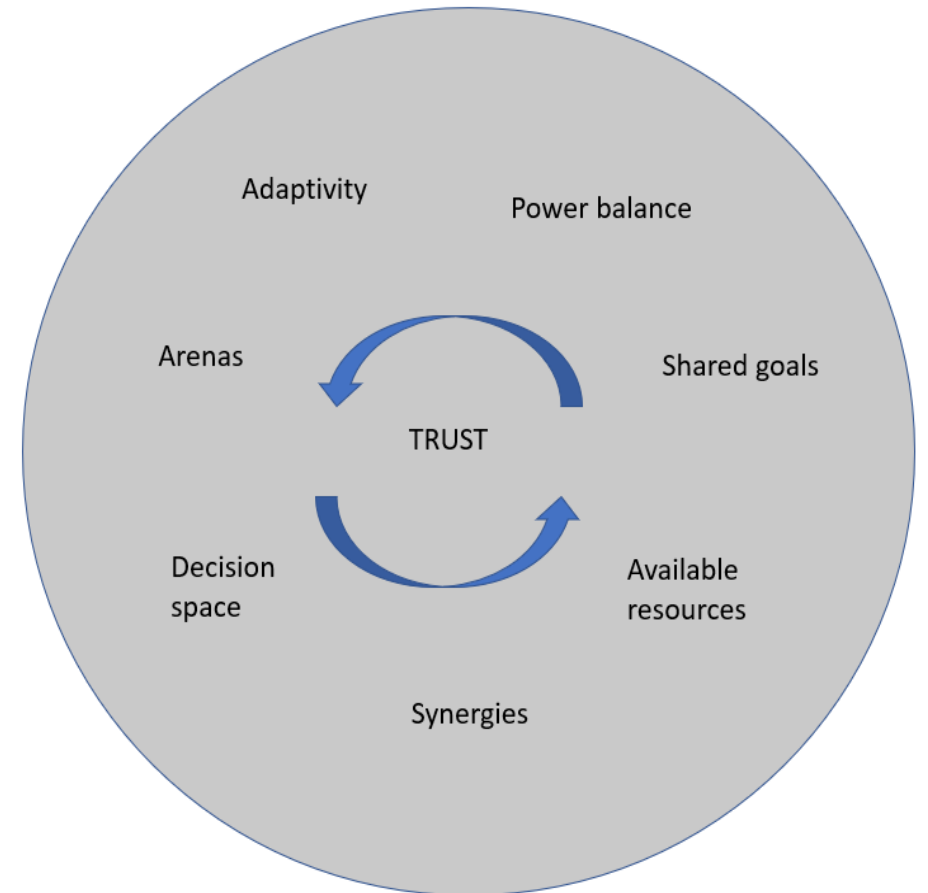
(<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2021/11/26/kamerbrief-over-het-zevende-actieprogramma-nitraatrichtlijn>).

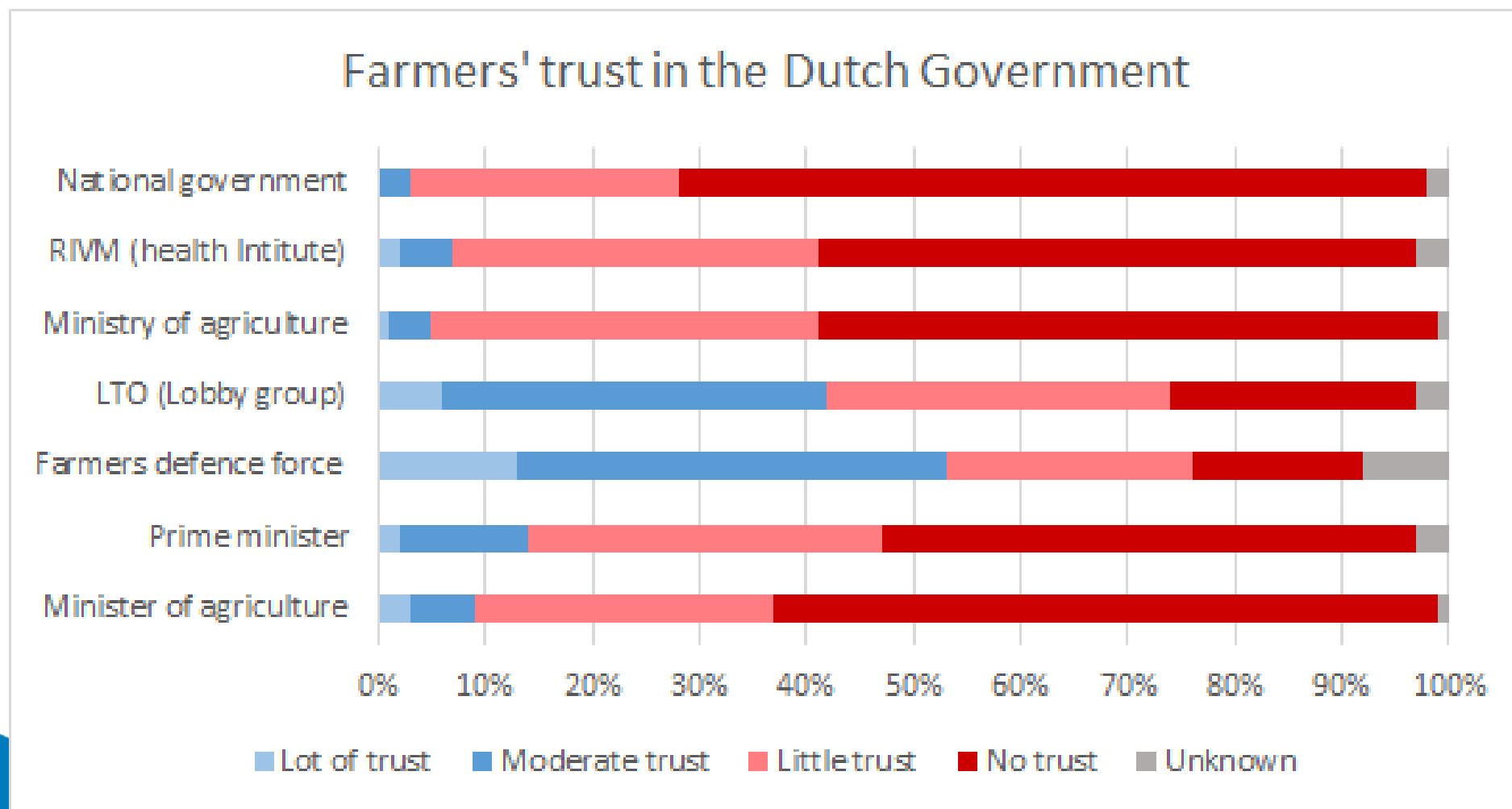
Can improving engagement process help us? *provincie* Drenthe

The engagement process enlarges the knowledge base of the processes and increases the legitimacy of the outcomes and the experienced ownership influence over them

Farmers acknowledge the MAP for exchange of knowledge and experiences and platform for discussion & addressing issues

Trust is a factor cutting across all dimensions (Sundnes e.a. 2021)





(De Volkskrant, October 2021)



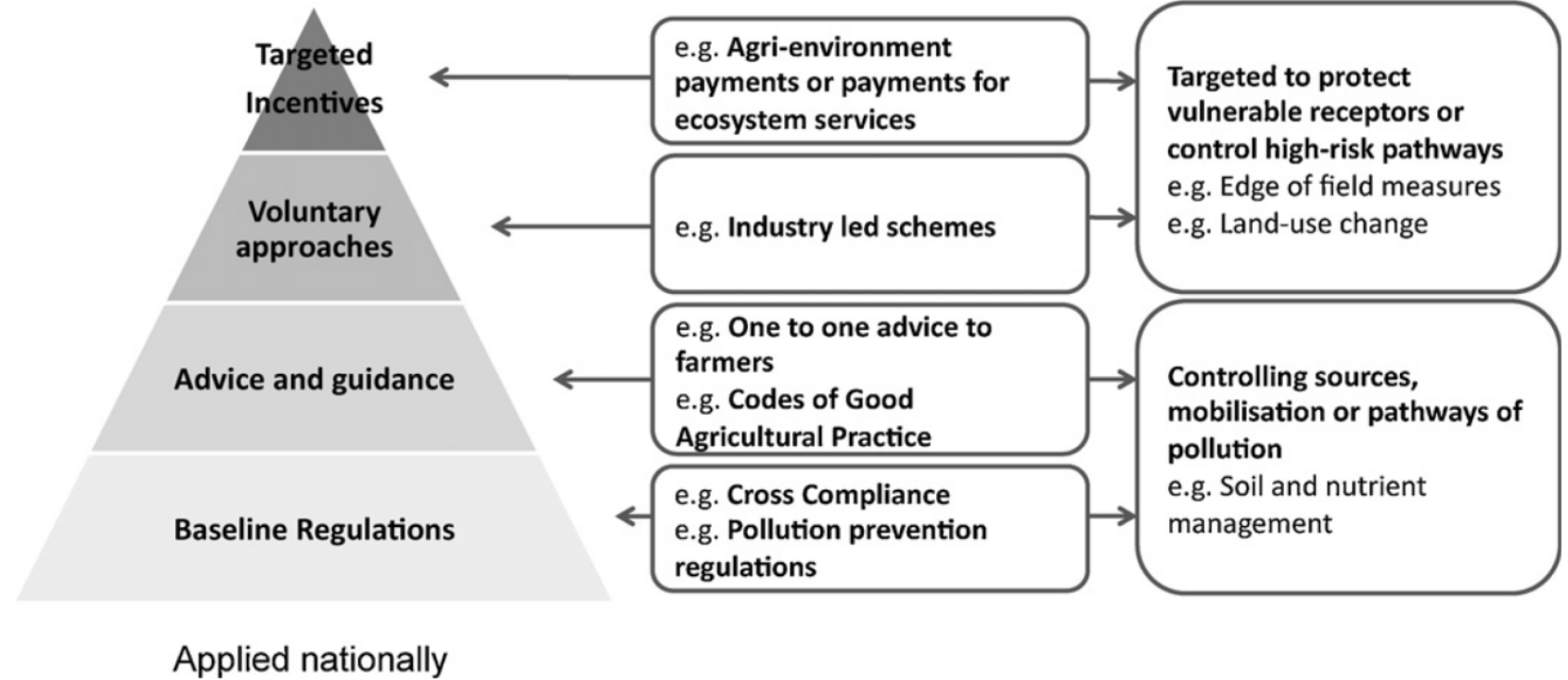
Situation 2025

1. Lack of trust, uncertainty, and imbalance between rules, voluntariness and required GW-quality
2. Farmers / lobby-organisation LTO participated in voluntary approaches in order to prevent general limitations and maintain derogation. However, derogation is lost
3. Lack of future perspective for agriculture in vulnerable GW areas:
 1. Limited farm management control (e.g., irrigation)
 2. 'Autonomous' process reduces financial viability and land value
 3. National Program for Rural Area is skipped by the new government
 4. Coalition agreement Drenthe: no additional limitations for agriculture on top of national policy – uncertainty remains
4. Two farmers wrote an urgent letter to the province



Policy instruments & process

1. Baseline regulations:
not in place to meet the WFD objectives in vulnerable GWPA
2. Advice & guidance:
After decades of advice & guidance, objectives are still out of reach
3. Voluntary approaches:
agricultural management is improved / optimized to some extend, but not enough to meet the objectives
4. Targeted incentives!
(Nice projects, but expensive & time consuming)



(McGonigle e.a. (2012))




Challenge: targeted incentive

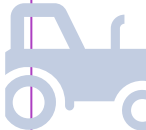
1. Durable future perspective for agriculture in (vulnerable) GW protection zones: developing an 'agriculture 2.0'
2. Robust protection of the drinking water abstraction
3. Tailor made approach starting with only 1 GW-abstraction:
 - Long-term commitments and **agreements balancing restrictions of land-use and value of the land**
 - Hard targets, with room for innovation & entrepreneurship
 - Potential for agreements on 'sociatal services'
4. So, together with the farmers in the GW-protection area we design a plan:
 - With sufficient support (> 85% agri land)
 - That fits within (EU) state aid regulations
 - And with provincial leadership aligned with legal objectives



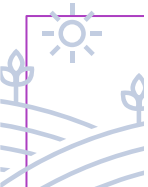
Approach



1. Framework & objectives



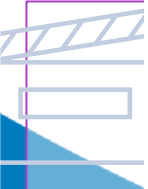
4. Regional Plan GWPA




2. Agri-analysis



5. Agreements



3. Measures & Econ. consequences



6. Realisation



Remaining questions

1. What to do if less than 85% of the farmers are willing to participate on a voluntary basis? Will the politicians consider to force farmers?
2. What will be the impact of constantly changing national policy on the ambition to make long-term commitment and agreements?
3. The Best Alternative To No Agreement (BATNA) is not (yet) clear, unless the fact that the province is responsible for protecting GWPA
4. The province is responsible for the protection of all GWPA. Do we have the budget & capacity to carry out this targeted approach in all GWPA?



Questions & discussion

