

**RETOUCH  
NEXUS**

2023

2026

## POLICY BRIEF | INTEGRATED WATER GOVERNANCE: FLANDERS' BLUE DEAL INTO ACTION



The RETOUCH NEXUS project promotes a cross-sectoral Water–Energy–Food–Ecosystems (WEFE) Nexus approach to support a resilient EU water economy. It ensures that water governance considers ecological, social, and economic dimensions, fostering coherence and effectiveness across sectors and governance levels.

### KEY STAKEHOLDERS

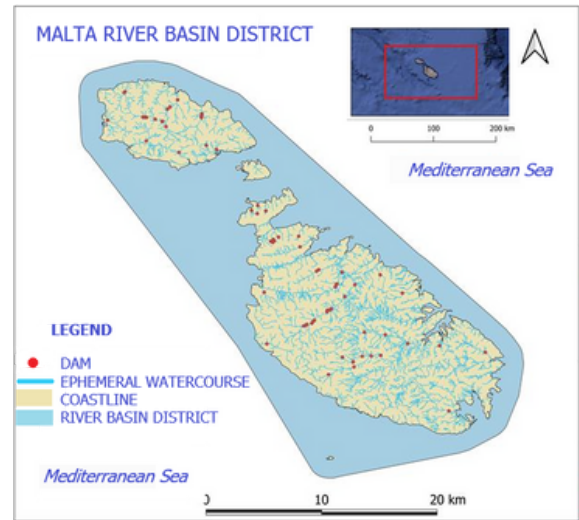
- Ministries and relative competent public authorities
- Utilities and Service Providers in the Energy and Water Sectors
- Environmental-NGOs
- Water User Representatives (e.g. farmer associations, industry associations)

### PRIORITY ACTIONS

- Increased consideration to economic cost recovery for groundwater abstraction, underpinned by robust economic models that consider all four elements of the WEFE nexus.
- Integrate the WEFE nexus comprehensively within the programme of measures of the River Basin Management Plan required under the Water Framework Directive, broadening the scope and impact.
- Expand the existing Water Table stakeholder platform to ensure balanced representation and engagement from the food, energy, and ecosystems sectors.

### INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIPS FOR INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

The Water Table in Malta exemplifies how government, public entities, NGOs, and private sector actors can collaborate to shape long-term visions, policies, and governance. Serving as an example of how Malta's small size and highly centralized administrative system can lend itself well to effective co-ordination, the potential for replicability of this stakeholder grouping, which is based on voluntary participation, across other WEFE sectors, could be the key towards integrated holistic governance which considers all elements of the nexus. Scaling the model up to include other elements may however warrant further formalization to ensure that the broader scope is not detrimental to the responsiveness and level of participation currently enjoyed.



### CONTEXT

Malta, a small, densely populated island with a semi-arid climate and no permanent inland water, faces competition among food production, ecosystem preservation, and renewable energy. Heavy reliance on desalination and growing use of treated wastewater highlight water-energy-food interdependence. Combined with climate vulnerability, these conditions demand innovative governance and an integrated WEFE-nexus approach to ensure sustainable resource management and compliance with water legislation.

### NEXUS GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

- The islands' Mediterranean climate and high climate-change vulnerability, which can make immediate climate emergencies take priority over long-term nexus planning.
- Rapid population growth and competition for limited land among food, ecosystems, and renewable energy, which make ministerial-level coordination insufficient and require broader, more complex governance structures across WEFE sectors.



### FRAGMENTATION VS INTEGRATION

Aspect	Current State (Fragmented)	WEFE Nexus Approach (Integrated)
Policy Focus	Water-Energy nexus strongly considered in policy making and closely administered from a policy making perspective.	A holistic approach which expands the current water-energy nexus policy design mechanisms to include all WEFE-elements.
Stakeholder Engagement	Water Table Stakeholder Grouping is active and has a broad scope. Other WEFE elements currently not included.	Broadening of the scope of the current stakeholder grouping to especially consider food and ecosystems.
Coordination Mechanisms	Inter-Ministerial Committee set up to ensure effective and timely implementation of RBMP.	WEFE coordinating body built into the national administration.
Outcomes/Risks	Aside from Energy-Water, silo policy-making with competing/conflicting priorities.	Better coordinated prioritization with sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing circumstances.



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## PATHWAYS TO SUSTAINABLE NEXUS WATER GOVERNANCE

- **Broadening of the Stakeholder Groupings:** The brief of the Inter Ministerial Committee on Water should primarily be expanded to include all four WEFE elements, potentially through a sub-committee with a political mandate to coordinate water policy design with other Ministries as necessary, with particular emphasis on coordination of land-use.
- **Mainstreaming into policy design:** Policymaking should systematically account for WEFE impacts and linkages. This can be supported by further developing the assessment tool currently piloted to evaluate WEFE impacts in the 4th RBMP's programme of measures.
- **Prioritising water reuse:** Water reuse should be prioritised at all levels, including households, supported by targeted legislative measures. A dedicated fund could help advance WEFE-related initiatives.
- **Water pricing models:** Recovery of costs for water use, in line with the principles established in the Water Framework Directive, should reflect the WEFE nexus and promote efficient use. Legislative interventions will be required to optimise water pricing policies.
- **Education and awareness:** Embedding a "WEFE-by-design" approach in policymaking requires education focused on holistic resource management. Capacity building and public information campaigns, including media outreach, can help mainstream the concept and strengthen understanding of nexus interdependencies across and beyond WEFE sectors.
- **Financing the transition:** Expanding existing 'green' funding at national and project levels, including domestic initiatives like greywater systems, is essential. EU-funded projects should lead by demonstrating practical, integrated resource management, driving broader change.

## PROGRESSION TIMELINE ROADMAP (2025-2035)

**2025-2027**  
Short-term Foundations

**2028-2030**  
Medium-Term Implementation

**2031-2035**  
Long-Term Consolidation and Scaling

Phase	Short-Term: Cross-Sectoral Governance Alignment	Medium-Term: Strengthening institutions	Long-Term: Stakeholder Engagement and Performance Evaluation
Key Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage with stakeholders (public and private sector) to introduce the NEXUS context.</li> <li>Review data management across sectors (WEFE) for the development of integrated data-bases at the national level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a National Community of Practice (CoP) on the integration of the NEXUS in management planning.</li> <li>Integrate the NEXUS in the development of management plans such as the River Basin Management Plan.</li> <li>Promote the application of the NEXUS through pilot and demonstration initiatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a review framework for assessing the NEXUS friendliness of sectoral management plans.</li> <li>Extend the application of the NEXUS beyond the water sector, influencing other national sectoral policies.</li> <li>Promote the impact of the NEXUS approach in ensuring increased climate resilience.</li> </ul>
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy and Regulatory Authorities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Policy and Regulatory Authorities, Sector Representatives, NGOs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ministries, Policy and Regulatory Authorities.</li> </ul>
Enablers/ Tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National and EU funding instruments; Data Management Platforms.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National and EU funding instruments; Community of Practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National and EU Funding instruments; NEXUS assessment tool.</li> <li>Communication Tools.</li> </ul>
Challenges & Mitigations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resistance from stakeholders to new context to be mitigated by Effective Communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of interest in Community of Practice to be mitigated by Promotion of cross benefits from NEXUS approach.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resistance from other policy sectors to be mitigated by Effective engagement and promotion of cross-policy impact.</li> </ul>
Milestones / Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrated data management platform including all pillars of the NEXUS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of Community of Practice and number of operational demonstration projects.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of NEXUS review tool and its application to sectoral policies of the four NEXUS pillars.</li> </ul>

