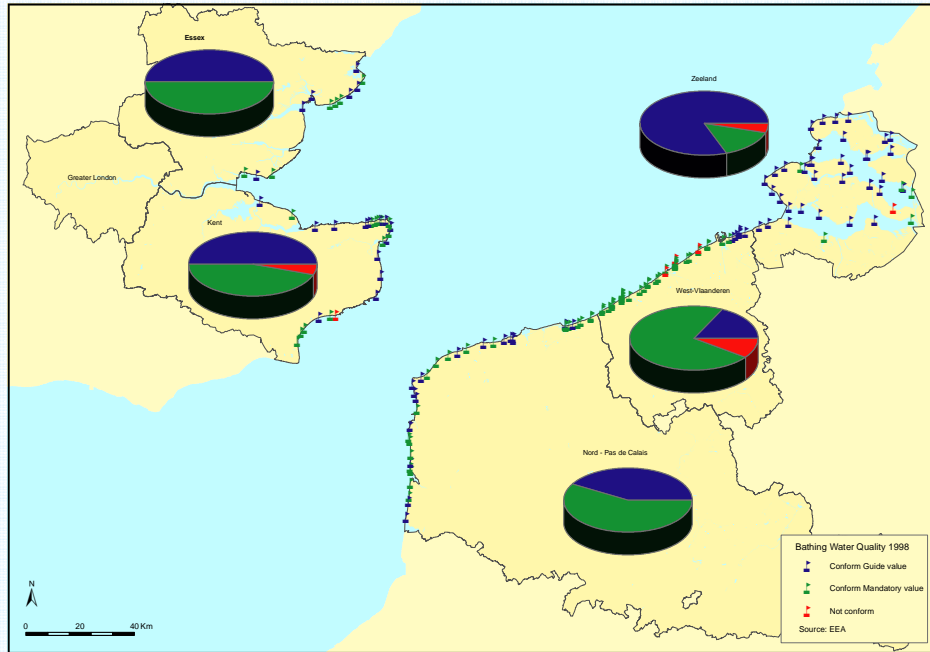
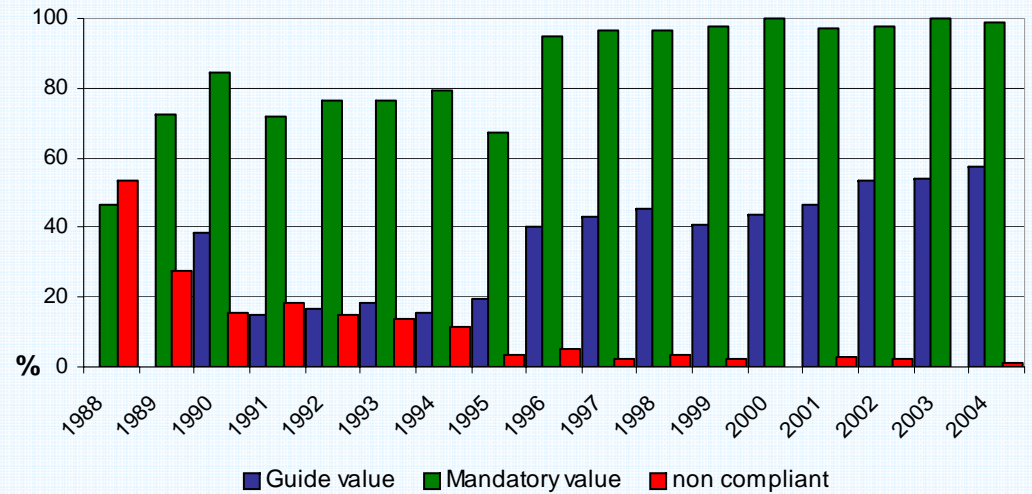
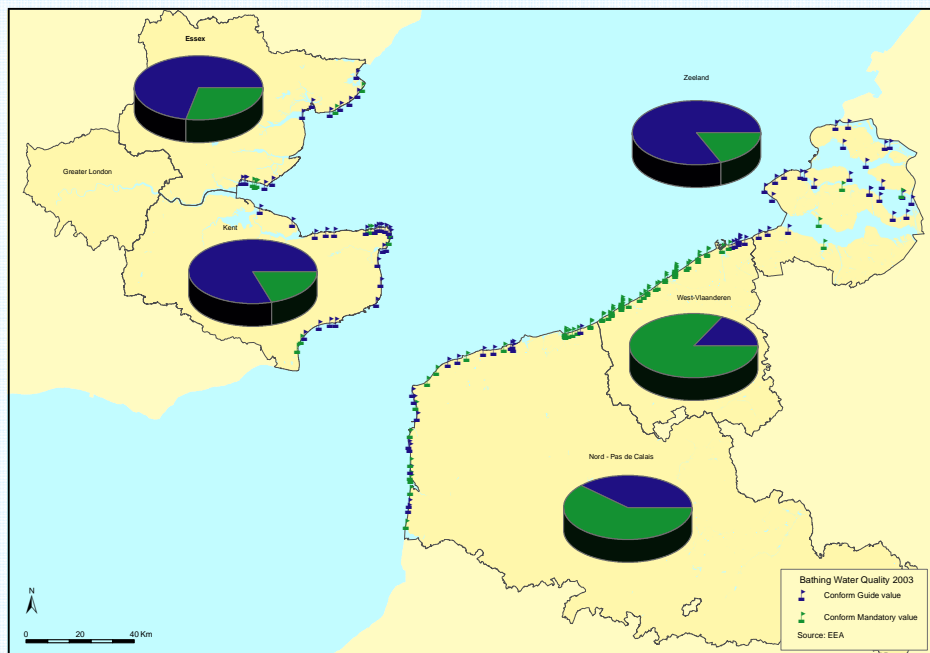
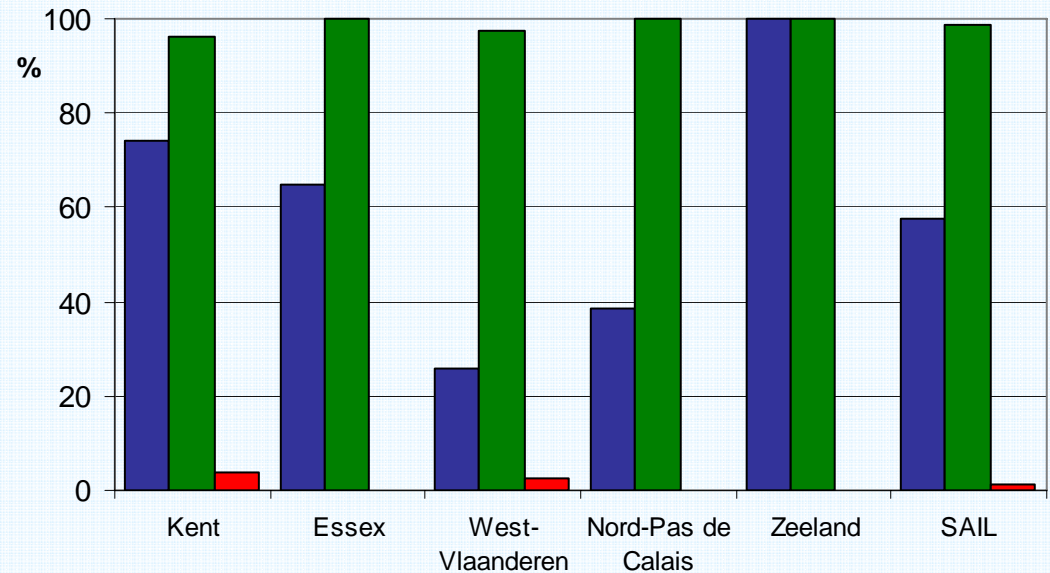


Indicator 13 Bathing Water Quality

Percentage of bathing waters compliant with the Guide value and the Mandatory value in the SAIL region (1988-2004)



Percentage of bathing waters compliant with the Guide value and the Mandatory value in the SAIL sub-regions 2004



- *Percentage of designated coastal bathing waters compliant with the Guide value of the European Bathing Water Directive.*
- *Percentage of designated coastal bathing waters compliant with only the Mandatory value of the European Bathing Water Directive.*

Key Message

- Water quality at designated bathing areas in the Southern North Sea has improved steadily since the mid-1990s.
- In 2004, 98% of the sampled coastal bathing waters within the region complied with the Mandatory value, while 58% of the sites complied with the Guide value, which is 20 times stricter.

Why monitor bathing water quality?

Dirty seawater is a hazard to bathers. Most contaminants are derived from sewage and typically include human excrement, sanitary products, condoms, engine oils, fat balls, detergents, industrial and trade effluent, road surface runoff and stormwater. They commonly cause diarrhoea and gastro-enteritis and, more rarely, life-threatening illnesses such as hepatitis A. Dirty water is also a threat to marine life, and a deterrent to holidaymakers and tourists. Measuring the quality of bathing water regularly alerts authorities to the risk to bathers and to the source of any contamination. Warning signs may be posted and, *in extremis*, beaches might be closed. Persistent failure to comply will point to the need to renew sewage treatment works or redesign sewage outfalls.

Where do the data come from?

National and regional authorities sample bathing water at regular intervals during the bathing season. The samples are analyzed and communicated to coastal municipalities in order to safeguard bathers from severe diseases. Member States submit results from sampling designated coastal bathing waters annually to the European Environment Agency which posts them on its website <http://europa.eu.int/water/water-bathing/report.html>.

Data are posted for every sampling point and sub-regional, regional, national and all-Europe summaries are available.

What does the indicator show?

Within the SAIL region, efforts to monitor bathing water quality of coastal waters have increased considerably. The number of measuring points has increased steadily over the years from 28 in 1988 up to more than 140 in 2001. In 2004 West-Vlaanderen counted the highest number of measuring points (39) while Essex had the least (17).

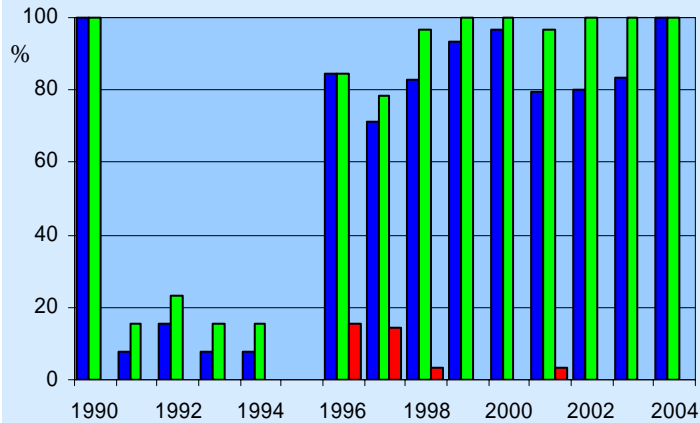
In 2004, 98% of the sampled coastal bathing waters within the SAIL region complied with the Mandatory value while 58% complied with the Guide value. In spite of these high rates of compliance with the Mandatory value, at the regional level only 1 of the 5 regions achieved over 80% compliance with the Guide value in 2004: less than 50% of the measuring points in Nord-Pas de Calais (39%) and West-Vlaanderen (26%).



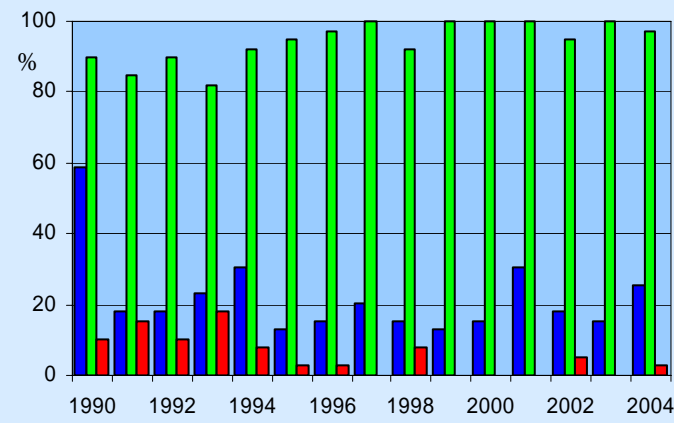
Compliance of bathing waters (%) with Mandatory and Guide values of the EU Bathing Water Quality Directive

■ Guide value ■ Mandatory value ■ non compliant

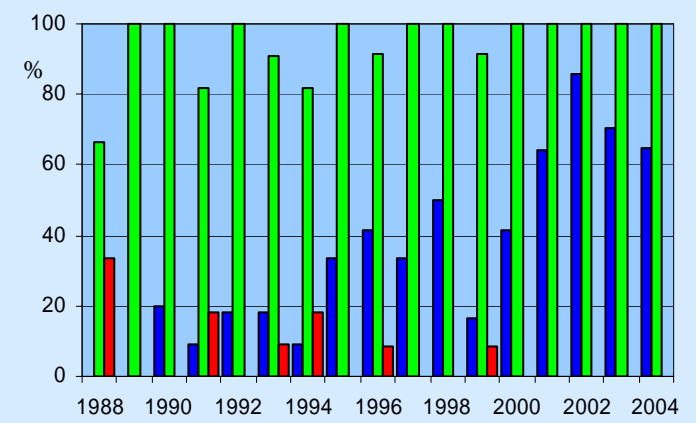
Zeeland



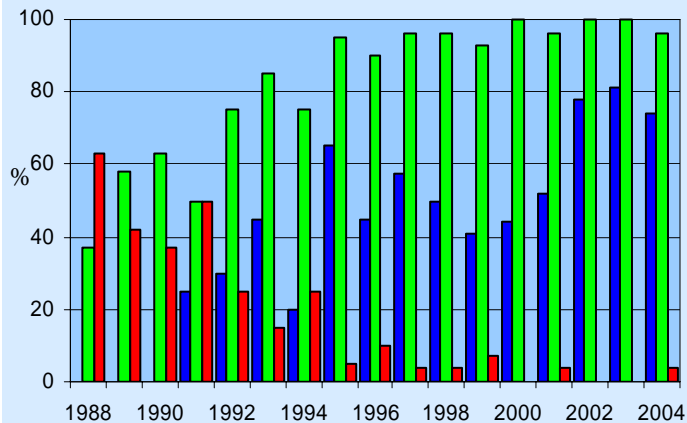
West-Vlaanderen



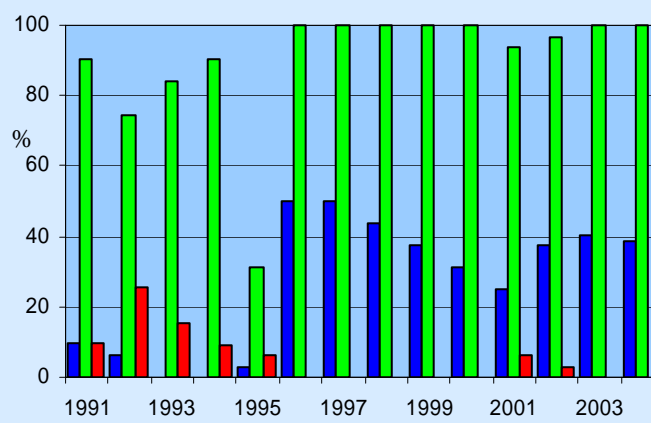
Essex



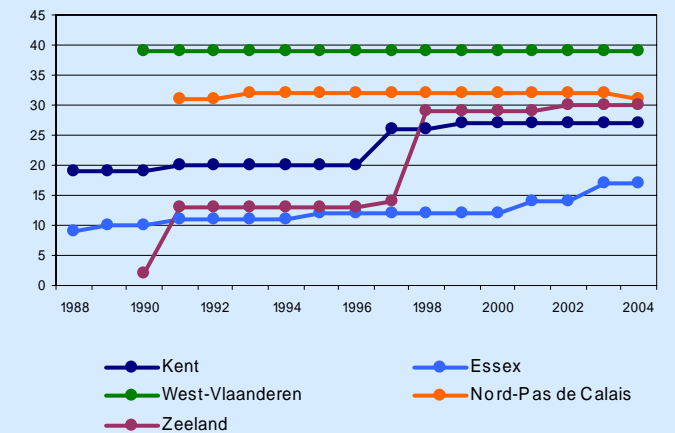
Kent



Nord-Pas de Calais



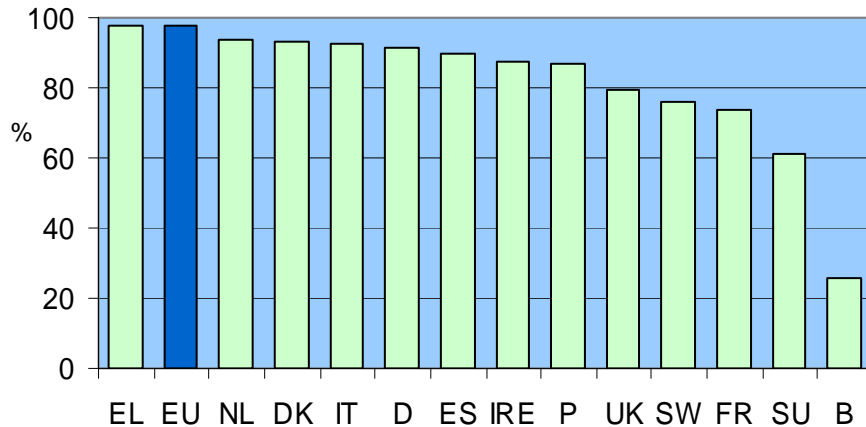
Number of sampling points for the Bathing Water Directive, per SAIL sub-region



These low compliance rates may be due to the input of waters from inferior quality (e.g. agricultural run-off, occasional sewage outfall) or by differences in monitoring methodologies. In Kent and Essex respectively 74% and 65% of the sampling sites were compliant with the Guide value in 2004. Zeeland shows the best results with all sampled sites compliant with both Mandatory and Guide values (2004).

Eight of the 13 European coastal Member States in 2004 achieved over 80% compliance with the Guide value. The long-term trend of rising compliance has been disrupted in a number of countries since 2000.

Compliance with the Guide value of the Bathing Water Directive in European coastal Member States 2004



What are the implications for planning and managing the coast?

At first sight, the indicator’s message to policymakers is clear: regulating the quality of bathing water through the Bathing Water Directive has led directly to an improvement in the state of the environment and reduced the impact of faecal pollution on human health and marine life. While this is true, it is not the whole story. The drive for cleaner bathing waters has been abetted by the Urban Waste Water Directive (91/271/EEC) which has led to significant investment in the upgrading and renewal of urban coastal sewage systems. Both Directives have been supported by the public, environmental NGOs and the tourist industry. The Europa bathing water website receives more than 2 million hits each year as holidaymakers check out possible destinations. Again, the Marine Conservation Society in the UK ships 5,000 copies of

its *Good Beach Guide* each year and its website attracts an average of 500 enquiries a day throughout the holiday season. Fulsome public approval of the goal to eliminate faecal pollution coupled with effective regulations all pulling in the same direction have been a potent force for driving up the quality of bathing water. More of the same should be the objective of good management.



How reliable is the indicator?

Data are produced to a common methodology across Europe, allowing comparisons to be made between and within countries and regions. There is a demonstrable trend and clear inferences can be drawn about the relationship between the regulations and the result. Caution in the interpretation is recommended where percent of compliance is based on a low number of sampling stations. A higher number of measuring sites can significantly influence the compliance rates.

