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# **Regulatory Aspects of the Disposal of Dredged Material**

Introduction :

Many seaports situated at the mouth of river deltas or in estuaries must undertake frequent maintenance dredging of their ports to maintain navigational depth. More often than not the dredged material contains contaminants that have settled with the sediment in the port area. The source of such contaminants is mostly upstream of the port; these sources may be diffuse (agriculture !) or point sources (chemical industries !).

In many ports the activities associated with shipping, loading and unloading represent another source of contaminants.

Nevertheless, the bulk of contaminants comes from elsewhere. Not surprisingly, many port authorities are frustrated when the contamination level is considered to be so high that sea disposal is no longer an option. The need for alternative disposal sites brings with it considerable cost.

In a situation where ports compete with each other, at least at a regional level, such costs are considered to distort competition within the EU. In many cases specialists would also take the view

that a decision taken by regulators concerning the dredging permit is unnecessarily conservative and causes disposal costs that may be characterised as wasteful.

During the last decade considerable expertise has been gained with the dredging and disposal of (contaminated) dredged material. Standards have been introduced in several European countries that are based on the definition of various levels of limit values for concentrations of contaminants.

The time has come to take stock and decide whether or not such a regulatory framework leads to permits for dredged material disposal that could be considered optimal. The term 'optimal' in this context means that the total cost plus the expected environmental impact would be optimised.