

# VISION

## ‘It’s time for realistic nitrogen targets’

**Nitrogen professor Wim de Vries says the Netherlands should revise its nitrogen targets and stop ‘the detailed focus on nature areas’.**

### *What is wrong with the current nitrogen targets?*

‘From a scientific perspective, nitrogen emissions need to halve to even come close to the average critical load in the Netherlands. That still won’t be enough to get down to the critical deposition value (CDV). That is not really doable. In some areas, even the nitrogen blown in from other countries — about 35 per cent of the nitrogen deposition in the Netherlands — is enough to exceed the CDV.’

### *What does that say about the nitrogen policy?*

‘In my opinion, we need to take a more realistic look at our nitrogen targets. Set a national emissions ceiling for agriculture, for example, that gets as close as possible to the average critical load. If you divide that by all the agricultural land, you get the maximum emissions per hectare. Then you will have the same target for all provinces, which will also encourage land-based farming.’

### *What about the vulnerable nature areas?*

‘There is too much detailed local focus on deposition in nature areas. The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment says that 21 per cent of the ammonia falls within 20 kilometres. So most of it, 79 per cent, doesn’t — it is blown to other provinces or abroad. That local focus on nature areas also fuels the debate about whether they should be kept. I think the government should concentrate more on a national and provincial policy on emissions where there is potential for major steps.’

### *A national and provincial policy, such as...?*

‘Maximum emissions per hectare, so that you get a level playing field between provinces. We know that only part of the ammonia is deposited within a province. So farmers in Brabant are responsible for nitrogen deposition in Groningen and vice versa. Then it’s only logical for all provinces to have to achieve comparable emissions per hectare. And of course that means most reductions will be needed in the provinces with the most intensive agriculture.’ **Ⓜ ME**

*See Resource online for a longer interview with Wim de Vries about nitrogen targets.*