



**COUNCIL OF EUROPE LANDSCAPE CONVENTION**  
**LANDSCAPE AWARD OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

*9<sup>th</sup> Session – 2025-2026*

**APPLICATION FORM**

**State Party: The Netherlands**



## I. STATE CONCERNED AND APPLICANT

|                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>1. State</b>                                                                                     | The Netherlands                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Represented by</b>                                                                               | Ms Christianne Mattijssen, Director of Heritage and Arts at the Ministry of Education, Culture & Science.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| <b>2. Applicant</b>                                                                                 | Vereniging Nederlands Cultuurlandschap (Association for the Dutch Cultural Landscape) & Staatsbosbeheer (Dutch State Forestry)                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <i>Name of the local, regional authority(ies) or NGO(s)</i>                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local / regional authority project<br><input type="checkbox"/> NGO Project |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Website of the Applicant (if exists)</b>                                                         | Vereniging Nederlands Cultuurlandschap / Association for the Dutch Cultural Landscape:<br><a href="https://www.nederlandscultuurlandschap.nl/">https://www.nederlandscultuurlandschap.nl/</a><br>Staatsbosbeheer / Dutch State Forestry:<br><a href="http://www.staatsbosbeheer.nl">www.staatsbosbeheer.nl</a> |
| <b>Represented by</b>                                                                               | Gertjan Sengers (VNC) & Jori Wolf (SBB)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
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## II. PRESENTATION OF THE PROJET

### 3. Name of the Project

UNESCO Man and Biosphere *Maasheggen*

### 4. Location of the Project

Maasheggen, province Noord-Brabant, municipality Land van Cuijk

### 5. Summary of the Project

The *Maasheggen* (heg = hedge) is an UNESCO Man & Biosphere area where the relationship between man and landscape is strongly visible. It combines the protection of landscape, heritage and nature with stimulating the development of people and the environment in which they live. Preservation of the landscape here is carried by people, economic activities are in balance with the ecological and landscape values. Here people live, live, work and enjoy together.

Since the UNESCO status was awarded in 2018, a lot has happened in the *Maasheggen* area: kilometres of new hedges have been planted, the existing hedges and trees are being restored and better managed, plots have been exchanged, the streams have been tackled, pools and other landscape elements have been created. Regional fences are forged and placed, the craftsmanship of hedge weaving and hedge laying is once again a living and current craft. More and more *Maasheggen* farmers are taking into account the specific characteristics of the landscape in which they work in their business operations. New cycling routes and walking maps make it more attractive than ever for tourists and recreationists to explore De *Maasheggen*. Entrepreneurs make their business and personal connection with De *Maasheggen* visible by developing regional products and jointly selling them, they can call themselves certified *Maasheggen* ambassadors. The club of *Friends of the Maasheggen* is a thriving and growing community. For children there is the *Maasheggenkids* program. And students and scientists regularly go into the area to conduct research into plant and animal species and historically grown cultural customs.

**6. Photo representing the Project**



**Author: Valentijn te Plate, VNC**



Author: Peter Ceelen, VNC

## 7. Website of the Project

<https://en.maasheggenunesco.com/home/>

## III. CONTENT OF THE PROJECT

### 8. Start of the Project

month  year

### 9. End of the Project

month  year

### 10. Partners

Governmental: Waterschap/Waterboard Aa en Maas, Gemeente/Municipality Land van Cuijk, Province Noord-Brabant, Rijkswaterstaat (water management NL), Staatsbosbeheer (State Forestry NL)  
Non-governmental: Brabants Landschap, Vereniging Nederlands Cultuurlandschap, ZLTO (agriculture and horticulture), en Groen Ontwikkelfonds Brabant, Stichting Landschapsbeheer Boxmeer

## 11. Financing bodies

All partners contribute (in hours and/or euros).

## 12. Central aims of the Project

- Landscape values are protected, managed and developed. Existing and new elements are safeguarded by management agreements.
- Kilometres of hawthorn hedges have been created. The craftsmanship is kept alive by organizing the NK hedge weaving/-laying. Youth teams and international teams also participate. It lives and grows!
- Provide room for climate adaptation by nature and landscape restoration, and cooperation with large river-projects on water management.
- By not only protecting the landscape, but also giving it an economic and lively social function, the landscape qualities are better safeguarded for the future than by simply falling back on legal protection.
- Implementing a health programme that focuses on prevention by being active outdoors in the landscape and eating healthily.

## 13. Type of the Project

It is a large-scale landscape restoration project of the *Maasheggen*, the largest preserved hedgerow landscape in the Netherlands. However, here too, as in the rest of the Netherlands, large lengths of hedges have disappeared and pools have been filled in, creating a faltering landscape. Many of the hedges that remained before restoration took place were in poor condition, so that the area also did not function optimally from ecological perspectives. By constructing new hedges and small ponds, by restoring and better managing of these small-scale landscape elements and by creating new nature elements, work has been done on a landscape scale to create a sustainable natural landscape, in which people and nature work together.

The project does not only focus on the protection and management of the landscape, but is much broader in scope from an area-wide collaboration. In 2016, preparations for the UNESCO Man and Biosphere application were started. Partly under this flag, an organizational structure has been set up, in which all the area partners work together to strengthen and manage the area, with a focus on recreation, education and citizen involvement. Involvement and cooperation is essential to preserve the landscape for the future. <https://www.unesco.org/en/mab/maasheggen?hub=66369>

The project fits in perfectly with national, provincial and municipal policy. It contributes to the policy of strengthening the green-blue infrastructure (nature/landscape elements), buffering nature reserves, interweaving nature and agriculture and focuses on the transition to nature-inclusive farming. The project is a bottom-up initiative that is supported by all kinds of different stakeholders. The project does not have a clear end time, but is an ongoing process, in which the goals are set and adjusted in an ambition document.

The shared ambition in the field of nature for the period up to 2028 is:  
"The aim is for the nature reserves in the area to be connected to each other by 2028. In addition, the Water Framework Directive (WFD) measures have been implemented and

improvements in water quality can be observed. The Natura2000 area *Oeffelter Meent* was expanded in 2028 with *De Meerkampen*. The number of hedges will have increased in 2028 and will be robustly bordered with herb-rich grassland and the old hedge pattern can be seen in the what is called the *Cultural Historical Monument*. Air quality will have improved by then. Parties work actively and well together and use the BOOM programme as a management tool. There is a green-blue veining between the cores. Parties are committed to regaining the blackthorn swallowtail (butterfly) as a priority species in the area, all in accordance with the programme on wildlife corridors of the province of North Brabant."

#### 14. Outcome

- Approximately 10 kilometres of new hedges have now been realised so far. This has often restored the original historic plot boundaries. Existing hedges have been revitalized by plugging holes and eliminating overdue maintenance.
- Approximately 50 kilometres of hedges have been brought under sustainable management. The majority of hedges are buffered by a herb-rich grassland edge or field edge to further strengthen biodiversity.
- Approximately 20 hectares of fields are specifically designed for birds. 17 extra pools have been created and 14 restored for the benefit of the great crested newt and tree frog. The tree frog has now returned to the area through reintroduction.
- Approximately 350 hectares of land have been exchanged through a voluntary plot exchange, creating approximately 200 hectares of new nature, making the Brabant Nature Network more robust and connected.
- Managers started working together in a management program, a monitoring program was set up and the active control of fire blight (*bacterievuur*) and introduced species control was taken up with volunteer groups
- Research has been carried out into historical field names and those field names have been made visible on new field fences that have been placed near the plots.
- Every year, the NK *Hedgelaying Maasheggen* is organized, which attracts thousands of visitors from inside and outside the municipality.
- The makers of *Maasheggen* products have joined forces and their products have been launched under the label *Taste of the Maasheggen* are going to market. From beer and gin to tea and jam to syrup.

### IV. RESPECT OF THE CRITERIA OF THE ATTRIBUTION OF THE AWARD

#### 15. Sustainable territorial development

Work has been done on the restoration, development and management of the landscape to strengthen biodiversity and become more resilient to climate change. For example, river projects on the river Maas (by de State organisation Rijkswaterstaat) are being carried out in which, in addition to flood risk management, work is being done at the same time on landscape restoration and there for biodiversity and nature development.

By planting and managing hedges, landscape and ecological connections are made. The hedges are often planted on the historic plot boundaries. This will undo the historical damage

caused by the grubbing up of hedges.

In recent centuries, the *Maasheggen* landscape consisted almost exclusively of layed hedges. These hedges were intended to keep the cattle within the meadows. An important part of the area development in the *Maasheggen* area is the realization of a *Cultural Historical Monument*. As a contiguous layed-hedge area, the area as a whole gives an fine impression of what the landscape has looked like for centuries. In the *Maasheggen*, ecological, cultural, social and aesthetic value come together.

In addition to new hedges, pools will also be created, which will provide biotope for amphibians such as the tree frog, and herb-rich fields specifically for birds. The contracts concluded with farmers ensure more nature-inclusive business operations, in which artificial fertilisers and pesticides are no longer used. Plants and butterflies, for example, benefit from this.

## 16. Exemplary value

It is pre-eminently an exemplary area for other (Dutch) landscapes. Where polarization between agriculture/farmers and nature/landscape is increasing everywhere and boundaries between nature and agriculture are hardened, here cooperation is taking place in the interest of the total landscape. By respecting and restoring old traditions in the management of the area and the strong link between people and their landscape, a healthy balance is created. Nature is not pushed back into reserves, but is naturally part of the total cultural landscape. People benefit from a healthy and beautiful environment where there is a balance between ecology and economy. This bottom-up process shows that landscape is the work of people and that people and nature go hand in hand.

## 17. Public participation

*Does the project actively encourage the public's participation in the decision-making process? How?*

*Which stakeholders were involved, and how and when were they engaged? When did the active public consultation and dialogue take place, and in what form?*

*Is the project in line with the wider policies implemented by national, regional or local authorities?*

In addition to the more formal cooperation between partner organizations (by steering committee, project group and working groups), a community has been built, the '*Friends of the Maasheggen*', who are informed about all activities in the area. The annual 'hedge laying championship' have become a tradition and many teams participate. Even teams from abroad and youth teams participate in the event.

There is cooperation with schools and universities and activities are organized for residents and visitors. Especially for children there is the *Maasheggenkids* platform and program. Entrepreneurs work together and can call themselves *Maasheggen* ambassadors if they meet the conditions.

## 18. Awareness-raising

*Is the project effectively increasing public awareness of the importance of landscape in terms of human development, consolidation of European identity, or individual and collective well-being? How?*

A health program has recently been started in the area and a general practitioner (*huisarts*) is a member of the *Maasheggen* steering committee. The health programme focuses on prevention by being active outdoors in the landscape and eating healthily. There is cooperation with *MooiMaasvallei* in the Integral Healthcare Agreement, a cooperation with health insurers. *MooiMaasvallei* wants to "bring about a movement from 'illness and care' to 'health and behaviour'". In this way, they not only want to reduce the pressure on healthcare (more accessible help, shorter waiting times), but at the same time enthuse residents of the municipality *Land van Cuijk*, among others, to live 'healthier and more active'. In the *Maasheggen*, this means also encouraging the greening of one's own living environment and promoting more exercise and healthier eating. The *Maasheggen* can play a role in this as a place for healthy walking and cycling, for example by creating extra walking detours around villages or improving existing ones. In addition, the pilot in *Vierlingsbeek* and *Afferden* will focus on topics that affect the living environment, such as how to deal with heat stress and climate adaptation.

## V. ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

- Text (20 pages max.): *PDF format*
- Photos (10 max.): *JPEG 350 dpi high definition*
- Posters (2 max.): *PDF format high definition or JPEG 350 dpi high definition*
- Video (5 min max.): *mpeg 2 format - It is recommended to present a video (even of amateur quality).*