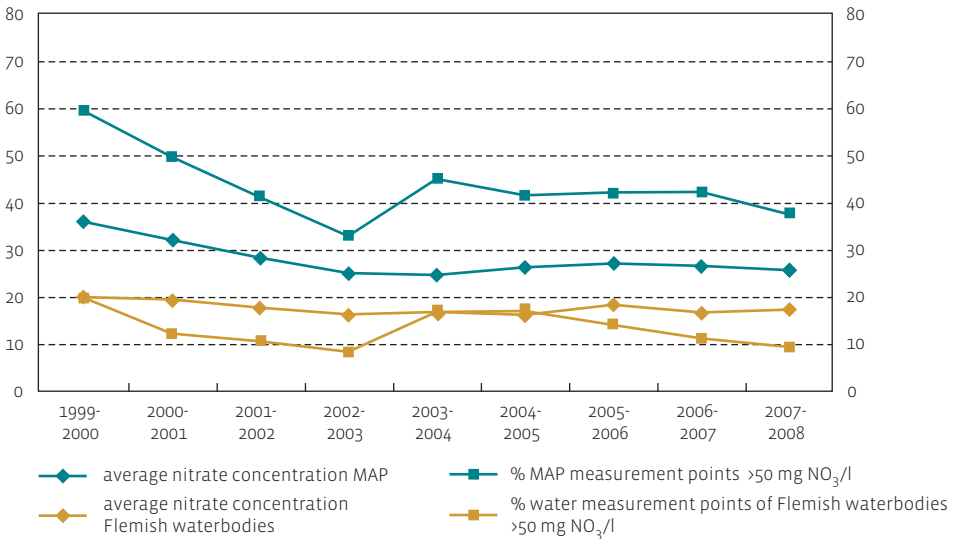




nitrate concentration (mg NO<sub>3</sub>/l)

measurement points (%)



Source: VMM

### Recent improvement but further reductions in nitrate losses are needed

The quality of the surface water in agricultural areas is monitored in the MAP monitoring network using measurement points that are almost exclusively affected by the nitrogen losses from agriculture. The ‘operational Flemish waterbodies monitoring network’ covers approximately 220 measurement points in larger watercourses that are not only affected by agriculture but also by domestic and industrial discharges. In areas with manure surpluses there are high nitrate concentrations especially in the winter months and therefore it makes more sense to assess the winter year instead of calendar years.

The average nitrate concentration in the MAP monitoring network shows a remarkable improvement in the period 1999-2000 up to and including 2002-2003, since then there has been little change. The last winter year was a little better than the previous three. The average concentration of the Flemish water bodies shows no clear development.

### Standard exceedances

The % of MAP measurement points with a maximum concentration higher than 50 mg nitrate per litre remained fairly constant in the period 2003-2004 up to 2006-2007 and in 2007-2008 was significantly lower. 37 % of the MAP measurement points nevertheless exceed the threshold of 50 mg nitrate per litre at least once. In the operational Flemish water bodies monitoring network the % exceedances is clearly lower and has been there a gradual decrease since 2004-2005. The target in the MINA plan 3+ (2008-2010) is no more exceedances in 2010.

Although in the last winter year there were clearly less exceedances of the threshold value registered in agriculture areas, it is still too early to speak of a positive trend. The results of the coming measurement series must be awaited for this. Given that 37 % of the measurement points in agriculture areas still exceed the threshold value, a further reduction of the nitrate losses from agriculture is necessary in any case.