



Press Release Belgian Hydrogen Council – Joining Belgian forces on clean hydrogen to excel in Europe and beyond

17 March 2023, Brussels – Regional cluster organizations WaterstofNet and Cluster Tweed today launched the Belgian Hydrogen Council (BHC) to consolidate and strengthen Belgium’s position in Europe and on the global stage as a pioneering hub of excellence for clean hydrogen. The eight CEOs who make up the Board of the Council met for the first time today in Brussels.

Rationale

WaterstofNet and Tweed have both been coordinating their regional hydrogen clusters in Flanders and Wallonia respectively for several years and are now jointly establishing a national hydrogen council that aims to transcend the various political levels in our country. The Belgian Hydrogen Council will take on important tasks such as the promotion of the Belgian hydrogen industry at home and abroad, as well as advise policymakers on the rollout of their regional and federal hydrogen strategies.

With Europe rapidly accelerating its ambitions and activities on hydrogen to meet its decarbonisation targets and to become independent of fossil fuels. Belgium has led a pioneering role in hydrogen technology development. This has been possible thanks to suppliers and the country’s ports as a unique geographic location for import and consumption of hydrogen, and governments aiming for hydrogen leadership in Europe. Creating a Belgian Hydrogen Council is crucial in consolidating and strengthening this leadership in hydrogen. As a matter of fact, the Belgian hydrogen industry has been calling for a long time for the creation of a national forum where companies are in the driving seat and tangible results are the main goal. With this Belgian Hydrogen Council, Belgium follows the example of other countries such as Germany and France.

National Council

The Belgian Hydrogen Council will take on some important tasks such as profiling and promoting the Belgian hydrogen industry at home and abroad, acting as a representative of the Belgian hydrogen ecosystem in national and international forums. The organization also aims at advising our various Belgian policymakers on the rollout of their regional and federal hydrogen strategies. The Council is neither a regional nor a federal initiative but it is a national council driven by the hydrogen industry. The industry is the Council's pilot with the support of the various governments. The four competent ministers have all expressed their support for this new initiative.

Tinne Van der Straeten, Federal Minister of Energy: “Our country's ambition is to become Europe's hydrogen hub. With renewable hydrogen, we are strengthening our energy independence and greening our industry. Our unique location, at an energy crossroads in the middle of several industrial clusters, makes us an ideal import and transit country for renewable hydrogen. In addition, our companies are pioneers in hydrogen technology and we have one of the most developed hydrogen networks in the world. The Belgian Hydrogen Council is strengthening cooperation at home to ensure Belgium as a leader in the energy transition.”

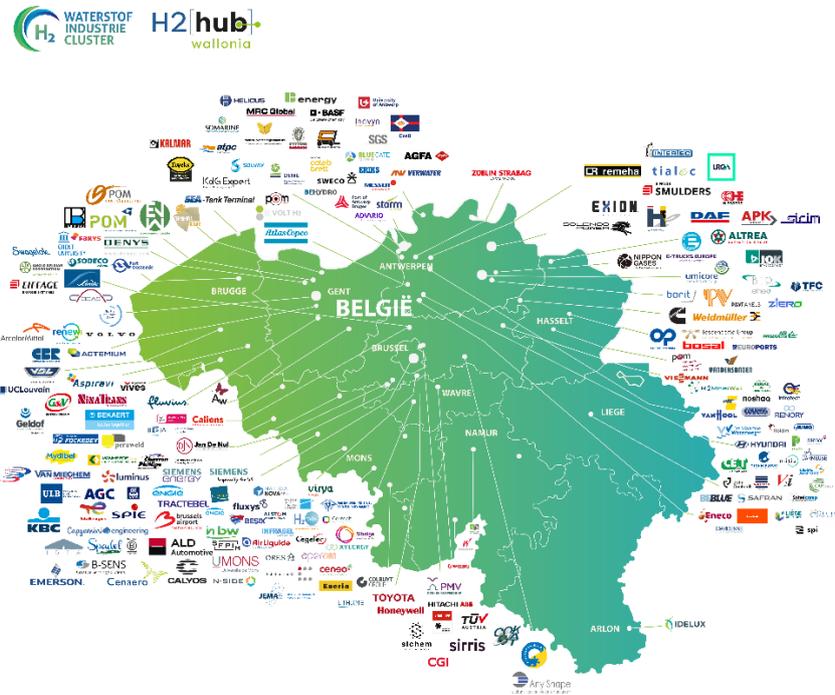
Philippe Henry, Walloon Minister of climate, Energy, Mobility and Infrastructure: "Wallonia is committed to encouraging and taking all opportunities to enable the emergence of a hydrogen industry on its territory in the short term. This energy vector is both a cornerstone of the decarbonisation of sectors that emit large amounts of CO2 and a major strategic and economic challenge. In this regard, I fully support the joint TWEED - WaterstofNet initiative aiming at constituting a new industrial player at the national level, which will transcend the specificities of each entity and with which the Walloon Government will actively collaborate."

Jo Brouns, Flemish Minister of Work, Economy and Innovation: "Flanders wants to be a European leader in hydrogen and sustainable hydrogen technologies. We do this together with the industry and knowledge institutions, where we also work well together with WaterstofNet and the Waterstof Industrie Cluster. That is why I also support the initiative to join forces with other Belgian clusters. In this way we can strengthen collaborations, consult with our neighbouring countries and together weigh more on European policy. This cooperation is thus again an added value for Flanders."

Alain Maron, Brussels Minister of Climate transition, Environment and Energy: "Belgium has always been a country at the forefront of technology, and this expertise and our position are assets both nationally and internationally. I wish this new Council great success and hope that it will accelerate the decarbonization of industries in the different regions."

Membership

The Belgian members of the Waterstof Industrie Cluster coordinated by WaterstofNet since 2015 and the members of the H2Hub Wallonia coordinated by Cluster Tweed since 2020 are automatically members of the Belgian Hydrogen Council (± 200 members). Thus, the Council effectively seals a partnership and brings together the existing industrial hydrogen ecosystems in Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels that reflect the entire Belgian hydrogen sector. It is these companies that will be the driving force of the Council.



Organisation of the Council

Five thematic working groups or "Tasks" are already being set up. These will become the beating heart of the Council. For example, Task 1 will focus on advising the various Belgian authorities on important hydrogen issues and will develop proposals on topics such as hydrogen certification. Task 2 will deal with the development of hydrogen infrastructure in Belgium. Task 3 (Promotion) and Task 4 (Internationalization) will work on raising the profile of our companies at home and abroad. Finally, Task 5 will focus on training and education around hydrogen. New working groups may be created according to the needs of our companies. The interested companies can become members of the different Tasks. Relevant sector federations like essenscia, Agoria and FEBEG are also invited to contribute to the Tasks.

Board of the Belgian Hydrogen Council

The Board of the Belgian Hydrogen Council is formed by eight companies, covering the hydrogen value chain. These companies were elected among all cluster members and will represent the Belgian Hydrogen Council for the coming two years: ENGIE (production), John Cockerill (technology), Fluxys (infrastructure), Port of Antwerp-Bruges (ports & import), ArcelorMittal (industry), INEOS (industry) Virya Energy (mobility) and Sirris (research).

These eight board members welcome the creation of the Council:

"The goal of the Belgian Hydrogen Council is to create a national industrial forum on hydrogen, supported by all governments, with two main objectives. The first objective is to facilitate a swift implementation of hydrogen in Belgium by solving regulatory/technical/economic barriers. The second objective is to develop a strong narrative on hydrogen with a view to turning Belgium into a major hydrogen import hub and to promote national hydrogen technology, so our country can export both hydrogen technology and knowledge worldwide. To reach those two objectives a close collaboration with comparable councils in neighbouring countries will be key."

Program Office of the Belgian Hydrogen Council

WaterstofNet and Cluster Tweed together form the "program office" and take on the secretariat, organization and coordination of the Belgian Hydrogen Council.



The eight CEOs of the Board and the program office of the Council met for the first time today in Brussels: Adwin Martens, Stefan Van Laer, Isabel François, (WaterstofNet), Cedric Osterrieth (ENGIE), Raphaël Tilot (John Cockerill), Raphaël De Winter (Fluxys), Tom Hautekiet (Port of Antwerp-Bruges), Philippe Alboort (ArcelorMittal Belgium), Wouter Bleukx (INEOS), Stephan Windels (Virya Energy), Pieter Jan Jordaens (Sirris), Cédric Brüll and Valère Counet (Cluster Tweed).

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