

PRESS RELEASE - 28 MARCH 2017

For more information:

Media

Kathleen Iwens
Elia
+32 478 66 45 55
Kathleen.iwens@elia.be

Dominique Verbelen
Natuurpunt
+32 484 11 98 99

Elia fits 'black line' in Ghent Canal Zone with bird flight diverters

Belgium has 5,700 km of high-voltage lines, many of which comprise a life-threatening obstacle for birds. According to Natuurpunt, there is an estimated number of at least 170,000 'wire victims' in Belgium every year: birds that sustain life-threatening injuries following a collision with cables. Elia - operator of the Belgian high-voltage grid - and Natuurpunt are joining forces to tackle this problem by installing 'bird curlicues', i.e. clearly visible safety markers on high-voltage lines. Next in line is the 150 kV high-voltage line in the Ghent Canal Zone, between the high-voltage substations of Rodenhuize and Langerbrugge.

In 2013, Elia launched a project to identify all the dangerous 'black' lines in its grid. This study was conducted by Natuurpunt, AVES, the Flemish Association for the Protection of Birds and the Institute for Nature and Forestry Research. Approximately 200 km of high-voltage lines, making up a total of 3.4% of the Belgian high-voltage grid operated by Elia, comprise a high risk of avian flight injuries. Employees of Natuurpunt and Natagora visited and ranked each of these high-risk lines. Every year, Elia draws up a plan to provide a number of high-voltage lines with anti-collision devices, in part based on this ranking. This week, the 150 kV high-voltage line in the Ghent Canal Zone, between the high-voltage substations of Rodenhuize and Langerbrugge, will be provided with the markers. The line is currently out of service, and weather conditions will allow the anti-collision devices to be safely installed at a height of 35 metres.

Commute zone for water birds

The 'black' line currently being provided with markers is located in the Ghent Canal Zone, on the left bank of the Ghent - Terneuzen Sea Canal, between the Algist Bruggeman site in Doornzele and the old power plant in Langerbrugge.

Natuurpunt has indicated that this stretch of land comprises a danger to the thousands of birds and water birds that 'commute' between the Port of Ghent and the Kluizen water reservoir on a daily basis. The high-voltage line is perpendicular to the flight movements of primarily protected species of seagulls that travel between the water reservoir of Kluizen, the Ghent-Terneuzen canal and the docks of the port. Many birds cross this line at twilight, as well as at dawn. The chance of a collision with a high-voltage line is therefore considerable.

A few lines a year

Ilse Tant, Director of Public Acceptance at Elia: 'Our action plan allows a few high-voltage lines to be made more bird-friendly every year. In this, we have to take into account the maintenance schedule, in which the lines are taken out of service, and the weather conditions. Working with drones would, in any case, be a much better alternative for us, and pilot projects elsewhere in the world have demonstrated that this is possible. It is an inexpensive, safer method that we could easily put into practice. A project is currently being conducted with an external partner to further explore this option.' Last year, Elia installed anti-collision devices along the line between Zeebrugge and Dudzele and on the Herderen-Lixhe line.

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Dominique Verbelen, Natuurpunt research department: 'Natuurpunt is very pleased with these anti-collision devices, but also hopes that Elia's action plan will be carried out at an accelerated pace. Out of all the 'blackest' lines charted out in 2015, the only line to have been provided with these flight diverters is the one along Doornikse Heerweg in Oudenaarde. The 'curlicues' have produced outstanding results: the number of wire victims has been brought down here from 70 to 2.'

Interested journalists wishing to take a look at this from close up can do so on Wednesday, 29 March. Please contact us by telephone so that we can direct you to the right location.



Photos: installing bird flight diverters on the high-voltage line between Zeebrugge and Dudzele

For more photos:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/natuurpunt/sets/72157674055075333>

About Elia

Elia Group is composed of two transmission system operators (TSOs) for electricity, Elia Transmission in Belgium and (in cooperation with IFM, Industry Funds Management) 50Hertz Transmission, one of the four German TSOs active in the northern and eastern parts of Germany.

With over 1,900 employees and a grid comprising approximately 18,300 km of high-voltage connections serving 30 million end-users, the Group is one of the five largest system operators in Europe.

Elia Group ensures the efficient, reliable and safe transport of electricity from producers to distribution system operators and major industrial users, and additionally handles the import and export of electricity to and from neighbouring countries. The Group is a driving force behind the development of the European electricity market and the integration of renewable energy.

In addition to its TSO activities in Belgium and Germany, Elia Group offers a wide range of consultancy and engineering services to corporate clients via EGI (Elia Grid International).

The Group operates under the legal entity Elia System Operator, a listed company whose reference shareholder is municipal holding company Publi-T.