

DIVERSITY, ECOLOGY AND THE ROLE OF PROTIST COMMUNITIES IN THE SCHELDE ESTUARY – RESEARCH BY THE 'PROTISTOLOGY & AQUATIC ECOLOGY' GROUP, UNIVERSITY GENT

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The section 'Protistology & Aquatic Ecology' has been studying the diversity and ecology of planktonic and benthic communities of unicellular eukaryotes (or protists) in the Schelde estuary. The study area involves the entire estuarine gradient, going from the freshwater tidal reaches in the Belgian part of the estuary to the estuary mouth in The Netherlands. Large research efforts were invested in the diversity of protistan communities (diatoms and other micro-algae, heterotrophic flagellates and ciliates) and the biotic and abiotic factors that regulate their structure and composition. In addition, several studies dealt with the role of microbial plankton and benthos in the functioning of estuarine food webs. In these studies, attention was paid to the importance of diversity of microbial communities for fluxes of matter and energy through the estuarine microbial ecosystem. This poster aims at illustrating certain aspects of this research.