Coast guard
Could Belgium’s signature dish be used to save the country’s coastline from erosion?

There might be more used to seeing them steamed with white wine and parsley (with a side of fries, obviously), but a new purpose is being trialled for Belgium’s legendary mussels: as artificial reefs.

It’s the latest initiative to be rolled out by the cheekily named Coastbusters project, which specialises in developing natural ecosystems that enhance coastal resilience. Developed in wake of last winter’s Storm Dieter, which cost De Panne seaside resort in Belgium €20 million in coastal damage, the project has built artificial reefs of mussels and algae along the resort’s coastline. Attached to a cord fixed underwater, the idea is that the mussels will clip together over time to make a permeable field of shellfish that will gradually reach the seabed. This, in turn, should create a natural, eco-friendly barrier to the sea’s harshest currents, hopefully preventing powerful North Sea storms causing further erosion.

Funded by government agency, Flemish Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO), and run by the Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research (ILVO) and a selection of business partners, it’s Coastbusters’ coordinator Tomas Stierckx.

“As technology develops, we’re heading towards ecosystem defences more because natural methods are much more efficient. They improve water quality and biodiversity – the world needs these solutions.” Should the 36-month pilot scheme prove successful, multiple reefs along the Belgian coastline could be built, not only protecting the beaches from erosion but also investing in increasing the region’s bivalve population. So next time a storm is brewing, who you gonna call? pure.lto.vlaanderen.be

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