Due to the enormous carrying capacity of ships, maritime freight transport of goods has a relatively low greenhouse gas emission rate per tonne of material, compared to road transport. It seems a relatively environmentally friendly mode of freight transport. On the other hand, environmental policy has sharply reduced the sulphur content in diesel fuel for trucks, but not yet in bunker fuel. Nevertheless, some international shipping emission control measures were recently agreed on, despite the difficulties of multilateral decision-making.

Shipping is responsible for a large share of the total emissions of harmful pollutants in the Netherlands, including Dutch territorial waters.