

Press release

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The Métropole Européenne de Lille lays the foundation stone for the future Wattrelos-Leers wastewater treatment plant

On Thursday, August 28, 2025, the Métropole Européenne de Lille (MEL) will hold the official groundbreaking ceremony for the future Wattrelos-Leers wastewater treatment plant.

The event will bring together Damien Castelain, President of the MEL, Dominique Baert, Mayor of Wattrelos, Jean-Philippe Andries, Mayor of Leers, Isabelle Matykowski, Managing Director of the Artois-Picardie Water Agency, as well as representatives of the Saur Group and its subsidiaries, including Élise Le Vaillant, Vice President of Saur France North-East region, and Hugo Bardi, President of Saur Water Engineering and Stereau, alongside member companies of the consortium appointed to carry out the work, including NGE.

This milestone symbolizes the launch of a strategic project for the region, which is one of the largest wastewater treatment plant modernization projects in France over the next decade.

A major project for the MEL's ecological and climate transition

The Wattrelos wastewater treatment plant, which opened in 1986 and was renovated in the early 2000s, now treats wastewater from nearly 417,000 population equivalents spread across 15 municipalities in the Lille Metropolitan Area and the municipality of Mouscron (Belgium).

With this expansion and reconstruction project, its capacity will increase to 511,500 population equivalents by 2031, representing an increase of more than 20%.

The future station will offer enhanced performance :

- treatment capacity increased from 3.3 m³/s to 10.3 m³/s thanks to the creation of a new system dedicated to rainy weather of 7 m³/s
- a 30,000 m³ storage basin, equivalent to 10 Olympic swimming pools, enabling better management of heavy rainfall,
- the potential integration of treated wastewater reuse (REUT) for local uses, and exemplary landscape integration, with the creation of 4 hectares of flower meadows and the reinforcement of the hedgerow network to promote biodiversity.

The phasing of the project will be designed to limit the impact on the environment and local residents. A group of 20 to 40 residents will also be involved in regular discussions on the progress of the project and will provide feedback on their observations.

An exemplary plant with energy-positive

The new Wattrelos-Leers plant is designed to be a model of simplicity, performance, and circular economy. It will be a net producer of energy thanks to a unique combination of technologies :

- methane production from sewage sludge, generating 11 GWh/year of biomethane, equivalent to the annual consumption of 2,800 inhabitants,
- an energy potential of dried sludge representing 14 GWh/year,
- unavoidable heat recovery (2.2 GWh/year), covering the station's needs and equivalent to heating 1,500 homes.
- 6,000 m² of photovoltaic panels and hydroelectric turbines covering more than 10% of electricity needs,

In addition, the station is powered entirely by green electricity.

The station will thus become one of the largest positive energy stations in France, contributing fully to the objectives of the MEL Climate Plan and the decarbonization of essential services.

Respect for the environment and living conditions

The wastewater treatment plant will integrate innovative features to improve the comfort and quality of life of local residents :

- reception and treatment of odors at source,
- enclosure of noisy equipment,
- process fed entirely by reused water,
- optimized sludge drying, reducing transport volumes by more than 1,000 trucks per year.

These developments will limit pollution, preserve resources, and anchor the metropolitan policy of sustainable rainwater management, in line with the Local Urban Development Plan and the fight against heat islands.

A large-scale construction project

The project represents a total amount of nearly €293 million :

- €200 million investment for the works,
- €93 million for 12 years of operation entrusted to Saur France.

The financing includes subsidies from the Artois-Picardie Water Agency (€45 million in subsidies and €30 million in repayable advances) and the ERDF (€6 million for the energy component).

The project is being carried out in stages to ensure continuity of public service:

- 2025 : launch and preparatory work,
- 2026 – 2028 : construction of new structures,
- 2029 – 2030 : gradual commissioning,
- 2031 : operation of the modernized station.

Statements

Damien Castelain, President of the European Metropolis of Lille :

"With this €200 million project, the European Metropolis of Lille is undertaking one of the largest wastewater treatment plant modernization projects in France. It is a structuring project that will increase treatment capacity by 20% and guarantee a modern and efficient public sanitation service for hundreds of thousands of residents. Beyond the technical aspects, this project embodies our choice to invest in the future, enhance the attractiveness of our region, and improve the daily lives of our residents. The MEL is setting an example by placing investment and innovation at the service of the public interest."

Elise Le Vaillant, Vice President of Saur France North-East region :

"Together with the European Metropolis of Lille, we are embarking on a project that concretely illustrates the water transition: a plant capable of treating the wastewater of nearly half of the region's inhabitants, while producing more energy than it consumes. It is a forward-looking project, designed to adapt to regulatory changes, climate hazards, and the needs of future generations."

Hugo Bardi, President of Saur Water Engineering and Stereau :

"The laying of this foundation stone marks the launch of a major project. Engineering, innovation, and consultation have come together to create one of the most efficient and exemplary wastewater treatment plants in France. This project highlights the expertise of our teams and the commitment of the consortium alongside the MEL."

Bruno Parent, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of the NGE Group :

"This groundbreaking ceremony symbolizes the launch of a major project for which the NGE Group is mobilizing its expertise in large-scale civil engineering works, acquired through numerous projects in France and abroad. Alongside the MEL, elected officials, and our partners, we are helping to protect water resources in a sustainable manner and to reinforce the actions for the ecological transition of the European Metropolis of Lille."

Consortium

Agent and operator : Saur France

Treatment engineering : Stereau

Civil engineering : NGE GC, filiale du Groupe NGE

Architects : HB Architectes associés et Atelier 9.81

Project management : Artelia

Total contract value: nearly €300 million, including €200 million for construction work and €93 million for Saur France's 12-year operation of the plant.

**About the European Metropolis of Lille - MEL :**

The European Metropolis of Lille brings together 95 municipalities and serves 1.2 million inhabitants every day. It exercises essential powers that directly affect daily life and the future of the region: mobility, housing, economy, development and urban planning, urban policy, water and sanitation, waste management, public spaces and roads, accessibility, nature and living conditions, culture, sports, tourism, and crematoriums. The Metropolitan Council, composed of 184 elected officials, has been chaired by Damien Castelain since April 18, 2014.

About Saur :

As the first water company to issue blue bonds in 2024, Saur is paving the way for the integration of environmental responsibility and financial innovation. The Group offers high-quality services and smart solutions for water management, serving everyone – from small towns to large cities and industrial players – while protecting the environment. Guided by its purpose, “fighting to give water the value it deserves,” Saur serves 20 million consumers and works with 9,200 local authorities and industrial clients. In 2024, the Group generated revenue of more than €2.3 billion and employed 12,000 people worldwide. Present in more than 25 countries, including Cyprus, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States, Saur provides essential services in drinking water treatment and distribution, wastewater treatment, and smart water management for local authorities and industries.

About Stereau :

Stereau, the engineering subsidiary of the Saur Group, designs, builds, and commissions drinking water production facilities and wastewater treatment plants for its local authority customers. Committed to meeting the highest standards of quality, performance, operability, and environmental protection, Stereau continually innovates to combat new forms of pollution, conserve water and energy resources, and recover value from effluents. With nearly 2,500 water treatment plants built in France and internationally, Stereau stands out for its innovative technological choices and exemplary project execution. www.stereau.com

About NGE :

NGE - New Generations of Entrepreneurs – France's fourth-largest construction group, builds major infrastructure and urban or local projects. With its expertise in financing, design, construction, and maintenance, the Group is a leading player in the construction of structures adapted to the economic and ecological challenges of different regions. Its entrepreneurial dynamic is driven by a solid employee shareholding structure (the founders, management, and employees hold 72% of the Group's capital), supported by the French investment fund Montefiore (28% of the capital). With revenue of €4.6 billion, NGE is present in 20 countries and supports private and public clients in financing, designing and implementing their transition projects in the fields of water, mobility, urban renewal, energy and telecoms. NGE's 24,000 employees are proud to contribute to the construction of projects that change the world.

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