

23 March 2016

Table Speech for the **World Resources Institute** Board dinner

Delta Commissioner Wim Kuijken

Distinguished Board members of the World Resources Institute, Ladies and gentlemen,

1. It is a great pleasure to be here this evening and giving me the opportunity to elaborate on the approach of the Dutch Delta Programme. Thank you Mrs. Kitty van der Heijden for inviting me tonight. I am impressed by the work done in the Water Resources Institute. We all have in common that water-issues are our daily work and concern, and in fact, that we all share our knowledge to the global community to avoid or limit the consequences of water disasters.
2. In the Netherlands we have a long history of fighting floods. This is not surprising, as 60% of our country is floodable. In the past we responded to disasters by creating elaborate defense works like the Delta Works. These days we prefer also spatial solutions, living with water instead of only fighting it. Presently the Netherlands is very well protected. And I realize myself: we are a wealthy country.
3. Our Delta programme stands for a safe and attractive Netherlands. Now and tomorrow, where flood risk management, spatial planning and fresh water supplies are organized effectively in relation to changing circumstances. The aim of the Delta programme is to improve the current situation *and* prepare ourselves for the future, but in a sense of action instead of reaction. In fact, through effective coördination we achieve synergy and prioritization at national ánd local and regional level.
4. The success of the delta programme is based on 5 principles or also known as the 5 dutch D's. These are the institutional prerequisites for a solid and long term approach: the Delta Programme (a yearly report of measures presented to Parliament), Delta Decisions (strategic choices as backbone of the approach), Delta Commissioner (supervising coherence and multi governmental implementation), Delta Fund of 1 bln Euro per year (ensuring long term investment) and the Delta Act

(for legal anchoring of the programme, the fund and the position of the delta commissioner).

5. The Dutch Delta programme will make the Netherlands safer and resilient to the effects of climate change. That's our goal for 2050. The Netherlands has learned from the past and understands that avoiding disaster is more cost effective and socio-economic a smart choice. But we have to reach a different approach than reacting to a disaster. Within the uncertain context we have to find a balance between "too much, too early" and "too little ,too late". Therefore we adopt an adaptive approach with low-regret measures. This leaves us options in the future as well to respond to climate change adequately.
6. The Dutch Delta Programme has entered a new phase: from policy development by setting down frameworks, norms and standards [2010-2015, the Delta decisions], to elaboration, implementation and realization of the measures in de coming decades. We invest around € 25 billion in 30yrs. Work is in progress with emphasis to three specific issues: *flood risk management, freshwater supply and spatial planning*. Let me explain the challenges we are facing and our response up to the year of 2050.

(Flood risk management)

7. The Netherlands is vulnerable to floods. Flood risks relate to the coastal area, around our rivers, lakes and cities. Therefore flood risk management is one of the major focus areas of our programme. Safety standards for our dykes were drawn up in the 60's. Due to change in river discharge, rainfall but also new demographic and economic developments we have decided to actualize and raise the safety standards, based on cost-benefit analyses.
8. Next to enforcing dyke, we give more room to the river, widen the river bed where possible, create diversion channels, remove obstacles, all in combination with other spatial measures, combining ecological and water safety goals. This sometimes means removing people and houses, sometimes raising houses on artificial hills, and, of course, sometimes means reinforcing the present dykes. It is all about tailor-made solutions within the broader national context, that fit best into local spatial ambitions. At more than 30 locations, measures are implemented that give the river space to discharge safely. Moreover,

the measures are designed in such a way that they improve the quality of the immediate surroundings.

(Fresh Water Strategy)

9. As mentioned, the second aspect of the delta programme is the fresh water strategy. Sectors such as agriculture, shipping and many forms of industry strongly depend on the availability of fresh water. Sufficient fresh water is also crucial to the stability of dykes, urban development, the drinking water supply, electricity supply, nature and more. In the future we expect more frequent water shortage and drought as a result of climate change, salinization and socio-economic developments. Therefore a new supply-levels tool is introduced as well as an associated adaptive investment programme.

(Spatial Adaptation)

10. The third priority area of the delta programme is Spatial Adaptation. A great advantage of the preventive approach, is that we can take time to look for integrated solutions, solutions that combine water safety and water supply goals with other spatial developments for example in cities. In our country, where space is limited, it is more cost effective to combine for instance economic or ecological ambitions with water safety and supply. When working on water safety, it pays to combine such work with for instance housing or infrastructure development. Water-rich surroundings add value for living environments, opening avenues to other forms of financing.
11. The ambition is that by 2020, climate-proof action and water-robust design will constitute an integrated component of the policies and actions of all government layers. A number of supporting instruments is available to this end.
12. Although the general direction of future developments is clear, the speed and scale of change are not. A way of dealing with the uncertainty of future developments is so-called adaptive delta management.
13. A good example of a flexible and incremental strategy is the way we defend our coast through sand nourishments. We add sand to our coastline so that the beaches and dunes grow at the same rate the sea level rises. If the sea rises faster, we add more sand. This is much more cost effective than preparing major infrastructural works. The

forces of nature are used to help realize our goals. This is something we intensively study in the Building with Nature program, set up by a consortium of the private sector and knowledge institutes. It helps to lessen the ecological impact of measures, or to link ecological development with water safety and water supply.

14. Summarizing, our national program is based on the following characteristics: a shared understanding of the underlying problems, an emphasis on integrated planning, constantly looking for maximum efficiency in clever combinations, made possible by bringing together all stakeholders in a multi governance institutional framework. This underlines the importance that government, private sector and knowledge institutes need to work in close harmony, stimulating development of new methodologies and innovations. Solutions find expression in adaptive delta management, which helps to maintain the necessary flexibility in view of an uncertain future. The whole process is supervised by a the delta commissioner to ensure a coherent strategy at all levels, and supported by a dedicated fund and a special law to achieve the long term objectives. In this way we ensure that the Netherlands remains a safe and attractive place to live, work, invest and recreate for future generations.
15. The global challenge to respond to climate change and sea level rise is enormous. Adequate solutions need to be developed based on an increased knowledge base and new technological insights. The approach we follow in the Netherlands than have to be translated to the specific situation in other countries. We are ready to support and do so in other countries.

Thank you for your attention, and I wish you a joyful dinner.
