

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my absolute pleasure to join you in the Senior Leadership Taskforce meeting of Future Fens, all be it from my workplace in my home in the small town of Boxtel in the Netherlands. Even in my capacity as Dutch national delta commissioner I very infrequently leave home for the seat of government in The Hague. Nevertheless, the work on safekeeping the Dutch Delta continues, as does the challenge of adapting to climate change, weather extremes and changing societal needs.

And this is what we have in common, even though there are, without a doubt, also marked differences between the UK and The Netherlands. Having said this, the similarities between the Anglian Fens and the low lying parts of my country (about 60% of it) are striking. And this goes back to the times of James I and Charles I and the famous Dutch engineer sir Cornelius Vermuyden. His family motto was "Niet zonder arbyt" or "Not without labour", and how true is that, right up to the present day.

I was invited to share in 10 minutes some backgrounds of the Dutch delta programme, for which I act as independent government commissioner, appointed by the crown. I hope it may be of interest and perhaps provide inspiration for the Future Fens programme that you are undertaking.

The delta programme was designed in 2007-2008 by a state committee, after floodings in the Netherlands in the nineteen-nineties from the major continental rivers Rhine and Meuse, but also after torrential rainfall in

1998 followed by an intense drought in 2003. “Is the way we manage our water prepared for the 21<sup>st</sup> century?” was the question, followed by the even more existential question “Can we the Dutch remain to live in this delta?” To the nation’s relief the answer to the last question was “yes”, but we have to adapt fundamentally. This was the conclusion by the state committee. Cabinet followed up the main conclusions and conditions set out in the report they presented.

These were:

1. Put in place a forward looking adaptive water management policy – from reactive to proactive – with the ambition to become climate resilient by 2050, and maintain this beyond to the year 2100.
2. Re-design the flood protection standards for the major dykes, barriers and pumping stations. They have to be risk-based (i.e. based on the statistical likelihood of infrastructure failure times the predicted effect in terms of lives lost and economic damage).
3. Shift from draining to storing freshwater, in order to become resilient against extreme droughts and to accommodate increasing demands from various economic sectors.
4. Establish a permanent delta fund for long term investments and maintenance.
5. Appoint an independent delta commissioner, who has the main task to bring levels of government and civil society together and present an annual delta programme to cabinet and to parliament.

Finally, the advice was to consolidate this in the existing Water Act; to make it permanent.

All of this was followed up from 2010 onward. And from 2014 on, measures and projects are financed from the delta fund. The annual budget for flood defense investments is about 400 million euro's. To this date we have invested another 400 million in innovations to store fresh water and/or reduce the water footprint of economic activities. For the next 6 years double that amount, i.e. 800 million, will be put into some 150 new fresh water related projects. And finally on the budget side, starting this year we have a new stimulus programme of 600 million for promoting climate resilient urban and utilities infrastructure. It is important to note that for each of these programmes the project budgets are co-financed between the national delta fund and the other regional and municipal branches of government. Currently there is about 19 billion euro's reserved in the delta fund, and the estimate towards 2050 amounts to a total of 50 billion. Which – as I explained is only part of the necessary funds to reach our goals in 2050.

Now all of this is fine, and without the money, we could not do much, but it could not work without the proper governance structure based on underlying principles.

The most important basis for the functioning of the delta programme, is that it is an national programme in the real sense, that it is a joint programme of central government, together with provinces, municipalities and water boards. The task of the delta commissioner is to bring all required branches and levels of government around dedicated tables to define the objectives for flood safety, fresh water availability and climate adaptive physical planning. And – most

importantly – make proposals for measures, projects and investments towards these objectives. From the onset of the investment phase in 2014 it was decided to re-calibrate the programme objectives, strategies and governance structures every 6 years. Last year we have done so for the first time.

Now we are 6 years into the investment phase, so the monitoring and evaluation of measures in place becomes more and more important. The number of tables for deliberations is quite impressive as you can imagine. But so far it has proven to be effective and it also includes different forms of formal and informal consultation with interest groups from the business community and civil society. Yesterday for the first time, I was in a meeting with a youth panel who gave valuable comments on the plans and the way forward!

All information and all proposals are consolidated in the annual delta programme, after approval by a national steering committee, which I chair, it is presented to the minister for Infrastructure and Water Management. She in turn puts it before cabinet, and sends it on to parliament for final approval and the delta fund becomes part of next year's national budget.

I have but a small staff of 12 professionals, but we bring together the output of many more. The active delta community of engaged elected public officials and professionals from the civil service, from consulting and construction firms, and from academia, I would estimate to be at least 2000 people. This is about the turn out on the annual delta conference that I convene; every year is a different part of the country.

The challenges that we face in the Netherlands, I am sure are very familiar to you:

- Increasing sea level rise (perhaps 1 meter or even 2 by the end of the century)
- Changing flow conditions on the rivers (both high and low)
- More extreme and localized weather events, in terms of rainfall, droughts and heat waves
- Land subsidence
- biodiversity loss

And many more. Including pressures from financial institutions; central banks, rating agencies and insurers that are warning us that the stability of the financial system, the investment climate, the ratings of debts, the solidity of balance sheets are also at risk if we do not step up.

It takes leadership and a holistic view to face all of this and create the conditions for a sustainable future where the ever changing needs and preferences of society and the economy can be met best, without burdening the environment and future generations.

I would like to finish by underlining yet a few of our core principles and values:

- Be proactive and not reactive
- Be holistic and trans sectoral in strategy– but the physical basis of water and soil should be taken into account every step of the way from policy planning to implementation. Land use should preferably be adapted to the conditions of water and soil, and not the other way around!

- The key values we use are: solidarity, flexibility and sustainability
- We invest in joint fact-finding – so no fact free politics!
- We are down to earth in our approach, alert towards tipping points and signals of change, and prepared for the future

And finally: climate adaptation measures are not an alternative for investing in climate mitigation measures. In other words: climate mitigation is the best climate adaption strategy.

Thank you very much, and I am looking forward to taking your questions and to exchange our views and experiences today, and in the future.

Peter Glas, 19 May 2021

@ Future Fenland meeting (online)