

Preface



Wim Kuijken

- *Government Commissioner for the Delta Programme,*
- *Former Secretary-General of the Ministries of the Interior, General Affairs, and Transport, Public Works and Water Management, the Netherlands*

The Netherlands is a fertile, highly productive, densely populated, low lying coastal country, which serves as a gateway to Europe and the world. Located at the confluence of four major rivers and the sea, the Netherlands is an important hub for the worldwide transport of goods as well as a key centre of international commerce. Our rivers are vital axes of transport and providers of water for agriculture, industry, nature and drinking. The western part of the Netherlands is extremely low lying, with some areas more than six metres below present sea level. These conditions pose major challenges for survival. To survive, during the last millennium, our nation developed an almost inborn alertness to combat the forces of the rivers and the sea. The Delta Works (1953 – 1998), a series of hydraulic constructions in the south-western part of the Netherlands was created after the great flood in 1953. This post-disaster reaction was based on the advice of the first Delta State Committee.

The Netherlands is safe for now, but can become more vulnerable to the impact of future global changes such as climate change. We measure and predict that both temperature and sea water levels are rising and that our soil is subsiding. We expect that wet –and dry – extremes will increase further. We are already observing increasing extremes in precipitation. Consequently, we must improve our coastal and river defences against flooding in order to prevent future disaster.

Effective responses in advance of future developments are now being formulated on a global level. The Netherlands' government, following the advice of the second Delta State Committee (2008), has started the Delta Programme not as a reaction to a disaster but to avoid one and to be prepared for the future. A Government Delta Commissioner was mandated to direct the implementation of this long term Delta Programme with all relevant Ministries, regional authorities, non-governmental organisations and local stakeholders. The Delta Commissioner is assigned for the national coordination of the Delta Programme, securing the cooperation and integration of all relevant parties involved. This programme, our Delta Works of the future, aims to protect the Netherlands and its future generations against flooding and to safeguard a sufficient fresh water supply.

Based on our long tradition of enabling life in a delta where four rivers continuously interact with the North Sea, we have learned how to adapt to ever changing circumstances. Building with nature has become an important lesson, and we apply this concept wherever possible to make the Netherlands safe and attractive, now and in the future. We seek flexible solutions, for instance, by adding sand to our coast to maintain and expand natural sand budgets. Moreover, we prepare for greater financial investments that may be needed in the future if critical stages regarding the impacts of climate change are reached.

In its continuous fight with the forces of nature, the Netherlands has developed a vast amount of knowledge and experience in the field of coastal zone management and flood protection and water management. In the last decades, the Netherlands has been actively supporting the cooperation with other countries and will continue to do so, particularly in the field of adaptive measures, preparing for the near future.

I wish the “Climate of Coastal Cooperation” all the success in the world on its path to promoting international exchange of knowledge and experiences, in order to deal effectively with the coastal challenges.... empowering our children to cope with their future challenges.