

Speaking notes for Mark Harbers, Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management, for the Interactive Dialogue on managing, protecting, conserving and restoring marine and coastal ecosystems, Lisbon, 28 June 2022

What is the Netherlands doing?

- The Kingdom of the Netherlands believes that efforts must be stepped up in order to better protect our oceans;
- *Such protection begins with preventing disasters from happening of course. Preventing the oil vessel Safer in the Red Sea to leak a million barrels of oil is the first action for protection.*
- The stakes for the Netherlands – a low-lying delta country – are high. As they are for the six islands of the Kingdom in the Caribbean. The ocean is vitally important for their economies, and also provides them with food and water. And they too need to be protected against rising sea levels.
- We believe in a sustainable blue economy, an approach that aims to preserve the ocean and provide economic impetus. In other words, a healthy ocean whose resources are used sustainably.

How is the Netherlands working to achieve this?

- The Netherlands advocates strong, evidence-based ocean policy and close cooperation between government, knowledge institutions and the private sector.

- The heart of our vision is: cooperation between government, commercial parties and civil society. And joint investment in knowledge, innovation, safety, healthy ecosystems and a sustainable blue economy.

What are some good examples?

- The North Sea Roundtable is a good example. Government and stakeholders convene on equal footing, with an independent chair. The roundtable is about joint fact-finding, and making the necessary ecological transitions while leaving no one behind.
- There's an atmosphere of cooperation – one of working together and reaching consensus on how we can achieve our goals in the areas of nature, energy and sustainable food in a balanced manner.
- This is important because the North Sea is one of the most intensively used maritime regions in the world, and has a rich marine environment.
- There are many different interests at play, but a healthy sea is in everyone's interest. And we can only achieve and maintain a healthy sea through cooperation.
- Currently 30% of our marine areas are protected.
- This includes the Dutch Wadden Sea, which is a UNESCO world heritage site, and our coastal waters.

- By 2030 these areas will be managed and integrated into a well-connected trans-European network of marine protected areas.

With regard to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration:

- We'll be restoring 100 square kilometres of flat oyster reefs. Making a start on the restoration of biogenic reefs on a much larger scale. These reefs are good for biodiversity and also act as carbon sinks.
- Over the next two years we'll be working to set up a nature restoration programme with our North Sea neighbours.

One final point I'd like to make is this:

- It's crucial to adopt a Source-to-Sea approach that also tackles land-based sources of ocean pollution from rivers and run-off.
- We're very happy with our partner in promoting this approach: the Stockholm International Water Institute – and specifically the Source-to-Sea Platform.