

**Speech by Mark Harbers, Minister of
Infrastructure and Water Management, at the
2nd UN Ocean Conference, Lisbon, 28 June 2022**

Ladies and gentlemen,

When opening the first UN Ocean Conference in 2017,
UN Secretary-General Guterres said:

*'The truth is, the sea has a special relationship with all
of us. It keeps us alive. But that relationship is now
under threat as never before. We are here to turn the
tide.'*

Since then, five years have passed. And it has become
even more urgent to improve the protection of our
oceans.

We are gaining a better understanding of the crucial
role of oceans as our heat sink, carbon sink and oxygen
tank.

At the same time, pressure on the oceans is growing.
More offshore wind farms, more shipping and,
unfortunately, more pollution, acidification and global
heating.

It's vital that we step up our efforts to better protect the oceans. So it's good that we're meeting today and deciding on the next steps.

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is glad to do its part. For us, the stakes are clear:

- Two-third of our lowlands next to the North Sea are vulnerable to flooding, something we can afford to hold off with ingenious but costly water works.
- The six islands of the Kingdom in the Caribbean depend on the ocean for their food and water. And the marine environment plays a vital role in the islands' economies.
- But the North Sea has also made us prosperous and connects us with other countries.

That's why our Kingdom has big ambitions when it comes to creating a sustainable blue economy.

In 2020, for example, the Dutch government and stakeholders concluded the North Sea Agreement.

The North Sea is one of the most intensively used maritime regions in the world, and also has a rich marine environment. There are many different interests at play, but a healthy sea is in everyone's interest.

The North Sea Agreement sets out guidelines for sustainable use of the sea. New offshore wind farms will be combined with the building of new oyster reefs. We are restoring nature in marine protected areas. And we are giving fishermen perspective with a different way of fishing.

We are also keen to work actively at international level to better protect the world's oceans.

- First, by being a strong advocate of Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction. We believe this can be an effective instrument to protect oceans from harm caused by new activities.
That's better than having to repair damage after the fact.

I hope we'll get as many countries as possible on board, so that we can adopt a treaty later this year.

- Second, we want to further develop the Source-to-Sea approach, which calls for tackling pollution at the source. Even when that source is on land. Whether the pollutant is plastic or wastewater.
- Third, we are fulfilling a number of concrete, voluntary Ocean Commitments. This year, for example, we're deploying four new Argo floats in the Caribbean Sea. These will provide more data on temperature, salinity and water pressure.

In conclusion,

The Kingdom of the Netherlands is committed to keeping the oceans high on the agenda. And to doing everything in our power to *turn the tide*.

For that matter one more thing:

- Urgent action is needed to prevent a massive and destructive oil spill in the Red Sea.

- Together with other donors we try to raise 145 million US dollars to find a solution for the neglected oil tanker Safer.
- I call upon you all to join us in this Voluntary Ocean Commitment and make sure the Red Sea does not turn black.