

# Ministerial Declaration of The Hague on Water Security in the 21st Century

1. Water is vital for the life and health of people and ecosystems and a basic requirement for the development of countries, but around the world women, men and children lack access to adequate and safe water to meet their most basic needs. Water resources, and the related ecosystems that provide and sustain them, are under threat from pollution, unsustainable use, land-use changes, climate change and many other forces. The link between these threats and poverty is clear, for it is the poor who are hit first and hardest. This leads to one simple

safe water at an affordable cost to lead a healthy and productive life and that the vulnerable are protected from the risks of water-related hazards.

2. These threats are not new. Nor are attempts, to address them. Discussions and actions started in Mar del Plata in 1977, continued through Dublin and were consolidated into Chapter 18 of Agenda 21 in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. They were reaffirmed in Paris 1998, CSD-6 and in the Second World Water Forum and Ministerial Conference. The process will continue in the meeting in Bonn in 2002 ("Dublin+10"), through the 10-

many regions of the world. This process has profited from the important contributions of the World Water Council, who launched the World Water Vision process at the First World Water Forum in Marrakesh, from the formation of the World Commission on Water in the 21st Century and from the development of the Framework for Action by the Global Water Partnership.

**The Main Challenges**

3. To achieve water security, we face the following main challenges:

**Meeting basic needs:** to recognise that access to safe and sufficient water and sanitation are basic human needs and are essential to health and well-being, and to empower people, especially women, through a participatory process of water management.

**Securing the food supply:** to enhance food security, particularly of the poor and vulnera-

ble, through the more efficient mobilisation and use, and the more equitable allocation of water for food production.

**Protecting ecosystems:** to ensure the integrity of ecosystems through sustainable water resources management.

**Sharing water resources:** to promote peaceful cooperation and develop synergy between different uses of water at all levels, whenever possible, within and, in the case of boundary and trans-boundary water resources, between states concerned, through sustainable river basin management or other appropriate approaches.

**Managing risks:** to provide security from floods, droughts, pollution and other water-related hazards.

**Valuing water:** to manage water in a way that reflects its economic, social, environmental and cultural values for all its uses, and to move towards pricing water services to reflect the cost of their provision. This

approach should take account of the need for equity and the basic needs of the poor and the vulnerable.

**Governing water wisely:** to ensure good governance, so that the involvement of the public and the interests of all stakeholders are included in the management of water resources.

**Meeting the Challenges**

4. We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegation, recognise that our gathering and this Declaration are part of a wider process, and are linked to a wide range of initiatives at all levels. We acknowledge the pivotal role that governments play in realising actions to meet the challenges. We recognise the need for institutional, technological and financial innovations in order to move beyond "business as usual" and we resolve to rise to meet these challenges.

5. The actions advocated here are based on **integrated wa-**

**ter resources management**, that includes the planning and management of water resources, both conventional and non-conventional, and land. This takes account of social, economic and environmental factors and integrates surface water, ground water and the ecosystems through which they flow. It recognises the importance of water quality issues. In this, special attention should be paid to the poor, to the role, skills and needs of women and to vulnerable areas such as small island states, landlocked countries and desertified areas.

6. Integrated water resources management depends on collaboration and partnerships at all levels, from individual citizens to international organisations, based on a political commitment to, and wider societal awareness of, the need for water security and the sustainable management of water resources. To achieve integrated

water resources management, there is a need for coherent national and, where appropriate, regional and international policies to overcome fragmentation, and for transparent and accountable institutions at all levels.

7. We will further advance the process of collaboration in order to turn agreed principles into action, based on partnerships and synergies among the government, citizens and other stakeholders. To this end:

A. We will establish targets and strategies, as appropriate, to meet the challenges of achieving water security. As

monitoring of Agenda 21.

C. We will work together with other stakeholders to develop a stronger water culture through greater awareness and commitment. We will identify best practices, based on enhanced research and knowledge generation capacities, knowledge dissemination through education and other channels and knowledge sharing between individuals, institutions and societies at all appropriate levels. This will include coordination at regional and other levels, as appropriate, to promote arrangements for coping with water-related disasters and for



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conclusion: business as usual is not an option. There is, of course, a huge diversity of needs and situations around the globe, but together we have one common goal: **to provide water security in the 21st Century.** This means ensuring that freshwater, coastal and related ecosystems are protected and improved; that sustainable development and political stability are promoted, that every person has access to enough

year review of implementation of Agenda 21, and beyond. These and other international meetings have produced a number of agreements and principles that are the basis upon which this and future statements should be built. The goal of providing water security in the 21st Century is reflected in the unprecedented process of broad participation and discussion by experts, stockholders and government officials in

## Driving Force behind the Dutch Economy

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tion as a whole, farming, nature, drinking water and industrial water supply, transport, fishing and recreation. The new approach sought to establish healthy and sustainable water systems. Integrated water management has proved successful. Anti-depletion projects are already bearing fruit. In some areas, the groundwater has been restored to its former level and proper composition, which means that certain species of plants and animals are staging a comeback.

During the preparation of the Fourth Water Management Policy Document (Rijkswaterstaat, February 1999), it became clear that despite the successes of policy up to then, certain targets could not be met within the set deadlines unless policy was amended.

At present, the thinking is that one should work with rather than against water. As Monique de Vries puts it: "Fighting natural forces not only upsets the balance of nature in existing water systems, but is also a very expensive business. Water always seeks its own level; influencing this process is both difficult and costly."

### More Elbow Room

What this means in practice is that in future the rivers will be given more elbow room. "Winter beds must remain a no-go area for construction or urban expansion. The uiterwaarden will also have to be deepened, and where possible the old

meanders will be restored," explains Monique de Vries.

Efforts will also be made not to let any more water in from other areas. Instead, an area's own water — which is after all what the local flora thrives on — should be retained longer. This can be done by setting up water catchment areas throughout the country, including the polders, where surplus water can be stored temporarily.

Another solution is to reverse the channeling of streams and rivers where possible, so that the water has time to seep into the ground and replenish the groundwater. And dikes should not be constantly raised, but just strengthened, if other measures to create more room for water prove inadequate.

Since room needs to be found not only for the rivers but also for the sea, the coast should remain out of bounds for construction purposes. An exception is made for places where buildings have already been erected, such as in coastal resorts. Large-scale sand replenishments will be used instead of "hard" constructions, thus creating room for natural dynamic processes, both along the rivers and the coast.

### Exporting Expertise

Dutch water experts do not confine their activities to the Netherlands, but can be found all over the globe, from Eastern Europe to Asia and Africa. Monique de Vries explains: "As soon as another country has water-related problems, they look to the Netherlands. Don't forget we are famous for manag-

ing to live quite happily on land that should by rights be under water!" When the Oder burst its banks in Poland, for instance, an army of Dutch hydraulic engineers leapt into the breach with 14 heavy pumps. To this day they are still providing structural assistance. Similarly, Dutch expertise is much sought after by the Chinese, as the Yangtze River causes serious floods every year. Monique de Vries cannot imagine living far from water. "I've lived on the coast all my life. I couldn't bear the idea of having to travel hours to get to the sea. I love swimming in it, walking along the shore and having a good think, or just watching the breakers in a big storm. It's great. Water's just a part of life as far as I'm concerned!"

### Partners in Water Management

- Rijkswaterstaat, since 1798 (central level);
- ministries in the fields of environment, agriculture, spatial planning and economic affairs;
- 12 provinces, water authorities (regional level);
- 60 water boards, management/executive services (local level);
- the Netherlands Water Partnership (NWP), an independent non-profit body that works with Dutch and foreign organizations with an interest in international water-related issues.

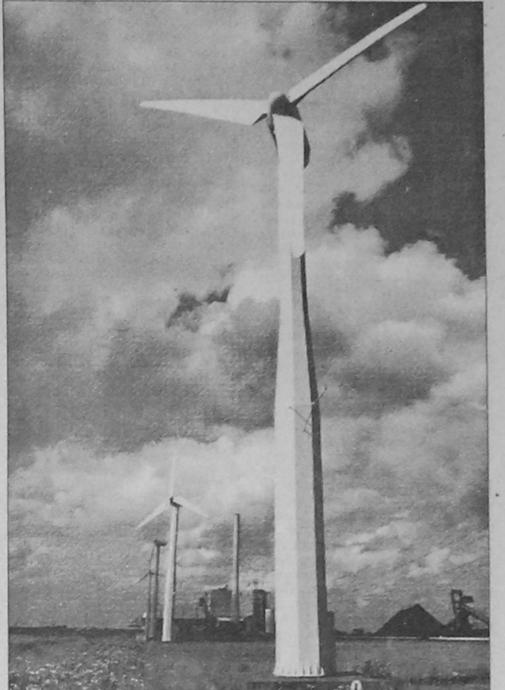
### Information:

www.nwp.nl/english  
Political responsibility lies with the Ministry of Transport, Public Works and Water Management. All water management partners are working with the World Commission on Water for the 21st Century. The members of this commission

include the Dutch crown prince Willem-Alexander. For some years, students have been able to take a course in integrated water management at both the University of Technology in Delft and at Wageningen Agricultural University.

### FOURTH WATER MANAGEMENT POLICY DOCUMENT DRAWN UP TOGETHER WITH WATER CONSUMERS:

The past 30 years have witnessed many changes in the way that policy documents and plans are drawn up. The First Water Management Policy Document, published in 1965, was written by experts, and then submitted to Parliament. It was only afterwards that the Dutch public could find out what the expert thought was best for the Netherlands. By the time the Fourth Water Management Policy Document was in preparation, the thinking had completely changed. It was felt that since water policy is so important to everyone in the Netherlands, the Dutch public as a whole should be involved in future policy. It was also thought that this would provide a broader support base for policy decisions. "When the Fourth Water Management Policy Document was being prepared, intensive use was made of marketing techniques," explains Albert van der Beesen, deputy head of the Rijkswaterstaat's Integrated Water Management Division, and project leader of Fourth Water Management Policy document. "A lot of consultation took place with and among the target groups, and that eventually resulted in a new water policy. It was not so much the Fourth Water Management Policy Document itself that was important, but the process that led to its completion."



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part of this effort, we support the development of indicators of progress at the national and sub-national level. In carrying this forward, we will take account of the valuable work done for the Second World Water Forum.

B. We will continue to support the UN system to re-assess periodically the state of freshwater resources and related ecosystems, to assist countries, where appropriate, to develop systems to measure progress towards the realisation of targets and to report in the biennial World Water Development Report as part of the overall

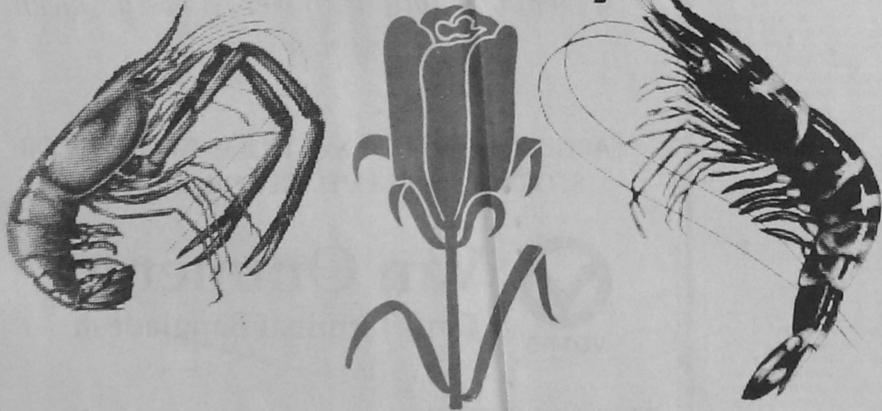
sharing experiences in water sector reform. It will also include international cooperation in technology transfers to, and capacity building in, developing countries.

D. We will work together with stakeholders to increase the effectiveness of pollution control strategies based on polluter pays principles and to consider appropriate rules and procedures in the fields of liability and compensation for damage resulting from activities dangerous to water resources.

E. Against the background of

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