

**Statement delivered by  
Her Excellency Christianne van der Wal, Minister for Nature and Nitrogen Policy in the  
Netherlands (Kingdom of)  
on the occasion of the  
43rd Session of the FAO Conference (1-7 July 2023)  
3 July 2023**

The Netherlands align itself with the statement of Spain, on behalf of the EU Member States that will be delivered later this afternoon.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

“Minister,” my advisers said some time ago ... “On the third of July, you’re speaking at the FAO in Rome and you only have five minutes.”

“Five minutes?” I said. “Okay ... No problem.”

Of course, I know: the world is facing so many challenges. We’re looking for so many answers. Droughts, flooding, crop failures, wildfires, food insecurity because of war, hunger, plastic waste, nitrogen, CO<sub>2</sub>, toxins, – you name it.

So, what do you do, as a Dutch minister, when you have five minutes and when some might say it’s five minutes to midnight on the Doomsday Clock? You go back 800 years in time.

About 800 years ago, the Dutch had to find ways to protect their new “polders” – their self-made land – and manage the flow of water. To keep their feet dry, the Dutch just reached out their hands and started working together: in local water councils. And these councils for water governance still exist today.

Over the course of the centuries, we became famous for our water management skills. But nature will sometimes put those skills to the test. For instance, we built the now famous Delta Works after the disastrous North Sea Flood of 1953, that killed many hundreds of people. That disaster made us rethink. Improve on our skills again. Innovate.

In a way, the Dutch are fortunate to face the constant threat of floods. Why? Because I believe our tradition of cooperating will help us tackle today’s new challenges.

We’ve always been happy to cooperate internationally. Regionally, we work with countries along the Rhine basin. And on a global scale, we cooperated with Tajikistan, co-hosting the Water Summit in New York last March, for a sustainable development agenda.

Famous for water management, we are not so famous for ... wildfire management. Yes: due to climate change, our usually very wet country is facing more and more droughts.

So once again, we do what we do when nature challenges us: we cooperate. Because last June, I joined some Dutch firefighters on a visit to Spain – where Catalonian experts gladly shared their knowledge of wildfire prevention.

We reached out to each other.

And reaching out is exactly what the world did in Montreal in December – at the United Nations Biodiversity Conference. All those people from all over the world putting their heads together. Attending the summit, I felt energy. I felt commitment. I felt the will to make things work, to protect nature – the cornerstone of our existence – together.

I felt a wow.

Today, I'm feeling a new wow. Thanks to you, thanks to all of us – putting our heads together for the management of our precious water resources. Water flows downhill ... but thanks to New York and thanks to today, it's now streaming all the way up to the top of the political agenda.

The massive problems and major challenges that the world is facing – they're all connected. In order to overcome them, we need to be exactly that: connected. Because we do not know what the coming years will bring us. But I do know that together, we will succeed in protecting our land, our water, our wildlife – and our agriculture, our economies, our people. By learning from each other.

I'm not naïve. I know that cooperating can be difficult. Very difficult. Just look at all the armed aggression. Conflict is part of our nature. But a stronger part of our nature, is that we all want to find a future.

Let's do this together – because on our own, we will not succeed. And together is simply more fun.

The Netherlands is willing to invest in a global effort. To invest in us, to invest in the world.

Fiat panis – let there be bread;

Fiat aqua – let there be water;

Fiat manus – let there be a hand – a helping hand.