

**Speech Ed Nijpels, on the occasion of the presentation of 'Breaking the ice', the final report of the International Wadden Sea Forum, to Cees Veerman, minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality on 10 February 2005.**

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Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The work is done. The work is about to begin. That may sound contradictory, but it is entirely true. For three years, the international Wadden Sea Forum worked on this compact report. An impossible task, the pessimists said beforehand. And sometimes it looked as if they were going to be proven right: the discussions at some points got quite heated and for some subjects it was difficult to reach total agreement.

After six plenary forum meetings I have every reason to be satisfied, and you also have reason to be satisfied. The course is clear. The wish list is sizeable, but realistic. The main issues have been defined. And we are now able to share with you an important product of our efforts. One could see it as a by-product, but I tend to see it as the main product. That is why I decided to express it in the title: 'Breaking the ice'.

Our Wadden Sea Forum has brought together people and opinions. Your Excellency, you can see people and organisations sitting here together – relaxed and also a little bit proud – who in the past would mainly face each other in court and at protest campaigns. Tensions have been made subjects of discussion. Conflicting interests were inevitable, but have led to new insights and especially to understanding. The ice was broken. That is something we have accomplished ourselves. We are grateful to you however for making this possible. And I hope you will not regret it, because you will be dealing with a region that knows exactly what it wants. A region that has emerged from this process stronger, more self-assured and full of confidence. A region that has learned to look beyond the boundaries of interests and countries.

Although this would make some politicians slightly anxious, I believe it has a different effect on you. Indeed: I am convinced that you enjoy strong stands, that a strong response helps you formulate your opinions, but especially that you have an eye for the strength of arguments. What's more, we are no adversaries. We want to design our own future and help you make the right decisions in the areas that are relevant to you.

We are the natural allies of a national government that claims it does not patronise, that aims for decentralisation, that wants to go through regulations and procedures with a fine-toothed comb. The ice between us was broken beforehand.

Your Excellency, stagnation means decline. The Wadden Sea Forum opts for dynamics. We want to move along with the demands made by society, nature, economy and personal development. We do not want to be locked up in a museum. You simply cannot condemn more than 3 million people to life in a large glass showcase. That would be a misjudgement of needs as well as potential. Because we are not only talking about a naturally rich area, but also about millions of citizens that are aware of that richness and want to contribute to realising the best possible combination of what man and nature have to offer this area.

And that has brought me to one of the key conclusions of our report: combining, joining, and enhancing each other's strengths. Economic growth and properly guided establishment of businesses can go together with the protection of our vulnerable area. Our forum calls on the governments of the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark to continue working together. Even more intensively than so far, while at the same time exercising more restraint. Because we - as the cooperating regions in three countries – want to take the lead ourselves and decide about the design of our lives and our future. And subsequently we want your blessing. Observe, see that it is good and say that as well! We hope that you can subscribe to this approach and that you will make sure it is generally accepted during the trilateral conference of ministers in November. This will demonstrate that everyone who has a heart for this area, the government, the users, the inhabitants, are jointly responsible for its future.

Our plans need support; in terms of policy space, man power and resources. Because we are tackling quite a lot of issues: infrastructure, coastal protection, shipping, nature conservation, industry, agriculture, fishing industry, energy, tourism, innovation, demography, labour market, education. And all of this mutually related as well. That is why we are hoping to find a strong messenger and a convinced ally in you. Since this does not only concern three countries, but also policy areas of numerous departments.

In our discussions we have once more established what we in fact had known for a long time from everyday practice. Looking at the three countries, there are enormous differences in rules and regulations and their application. This applies to various areas: spatial planning, environment, shipping, fisheries, water management, and nature conservation. This affects citizens, businesses and administrators. There are too many regulations that are too difficult, too vague, and too fragmented. They are sometimes patronising, often redundant. In short: they

are annoying because they promote tensions between and within sectors and areas. We want fewer rules and regulations. And no differences. The same rules and regulations for everybody.

We are talking about a vulnerable area. The most important nature reserve of Europe and one of the most important ones worldwide. There is only one Wadden Sea. And we are talking about more than three million people. A raging sea, illegally dumped pollution or the consequences of a shipping disaster do not care about borders between countries and policy areas. That is the reason for cooperation and integral choices! For coastal protection, for the safety of shipping courses, for actions in the event of calamities. Our report offers recommendations concerning these issues as well as the importance and the scope of various sectors. I am not going to discuss them, you can find them in the final report. But I will briefly take you through our wish list:

- We need a common coastal management strategy for the three countries. And – as I have emphasised earlier – we want to be able to determine this strategy.
- We need a new common instrument for sea disasters. All countries concerned will ensure that a sufficient number and cleverly positioned tugboats are prepared. It is also necessary to organise traffic control between Rotterdam and Northern Denmark in a well-oiled and logical system.
- We need support in the development of a Wadden Sea quality label. All kinds of sectors could benefit from such a label in marketing their products and services. The Wadden as a strong brand!
- We need better railway connections, including cross-border connections. Especially the bad east-west connections form an impediment to the desired development and cooperation. As part of improving the infrastructure we call for attention to a proper pipeline network, particularly in Northern Germany and Groningen.
- We need space for scale enlargement in agriculture. A healthy industry binds people to the region, contributes to nature and landscape management and can very well be combined with tourism. This could also benefit the establishment of the Wadden label.  
And I would like to point out that a sustained reward for good nature and landscape management would only be appropriate.
- We need a trilateral platform for the fishing industry. That will make it possible to properly weigh the interests of the fish stock and the fishing industry. We also want to get rid of the different practices in the countries when it concerns licences. These should preferably be long-

term and not restricted to one species. We also need benefits for fishermen that voluntarily limit their catch.

- We need a policy that enables offshore wind parks outside the twelve-mile zone. It is obvious that their position does not constitute a hazard to the important shipping industry.
- We need opportunities for harbour development, large as well as small. By assuring their accessibility. By treating them in the same manner. By providing assistance in the development and implementation of cooperation concepts for container harbours. Harbours function as magnets for business. They also offer the possibility to cluster industries. Well-positioned near the harbour and not scattered over the entire area: more efficient, more checkable, and boosting each other.

This was just a selection from our wish list. When you leave, you will have quite a lot of homework. But you will also have the assurance that the region is prepared to do everything in its power to realise the recommendations. The Wadden Sea Forum is very clear in this respect. Indeed, it would like its work to be continued, in one way or other. We consider our report as a first step. We have worked hard on it and with conviction and we can assure you that we enjoyed it. We would like to invite you to work on this together with us, to implement this program, each of us delivering his own contribution and expertise.