

From the Delta looking up...

The Zeeland call to action

We, experts and diplomats from six downstream countries, exchanged our experiences in an atmosphere of trust in Vlissingen, Zeeland, The Netherlands, from 12 to 14 September 2018. We shared experiences in transboundary water management, recognised commonalities and differences in approaches, and distilled lessons that may be useful for other downstream countries, as well as for their upstream counterparts.

Many of our strategies have been informed by a long history of cooperation and challenges, and are often culturally specific. The following lessons are an invitation to discuss and share experiences in transboundary water management.

Be proactive and visible

Downstream countries cannot afford to act in isolation. Developing a climate of trust and confidence with upstream neighbours is crucial. Downstream countries are advised to track upstream developments of mutual interest. They have to be alert, proactive and visible, reminding upstream countries of downstream needs. Leading by example is an important strategy. It takes political wisdom and courage to foster positive developments for the benefit of all riparians in a basin. Consider the concerns expressed by the public.

Mind the neighbour

Understand your upstream neighbours. Build long-term networks through joint learning, invest in joint research, monitoring and data sharing, and cultivate professional and personal relationships contributing to a climate of confidence and trust. National interests and ecological and socio-economic values do not stop at the border.

Mind nature

Deltas are living entities, dependent on complex water, salt and sediment dynamics, as well as social, economic and political systems. Due to water developments upstream, for instance large dams, deltas face not only the threat of sea-level rise, but also of a shortage of sediments that are vital for delta resilience. Tackle the problem nexus of dam construction, sediment traps, sea-level rise and salt intrusion in the deltas of the world.

Think long term but seize the moment

Downstream countries have to think long-term. Seize windows of opportunities. Prepare plans beforehand, identifying shared benefits and risks, and propose them when the time is ripe. These opportunities may arise at unexpected moments, so be prepared. Remember that 'crisis' and 'creation' have the same root.

Get issues addressed at the appropriate levels

Cooperation is a multi-level game. Avoid issues to be downplayed to a level where decisions cannot be enforced. Multilateral (legal) cooperation frameworks and international facilitation provide platforms to find balanced solutions.

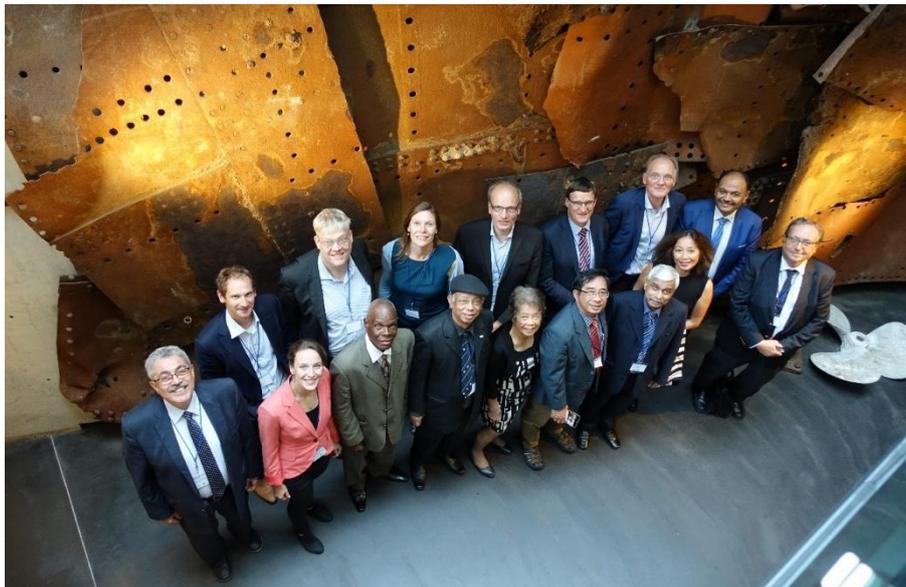
Combine diplomatic and technical expertise

Water requires fruitful cooperation between technical and scientific experts (social, engineering, economics, environmental, etc.) on the one hand (how to manage land and water), and policymakers and diplomats on the other (be creative, think beyond water). Invest in transboundary curricula and in a new generation of socially and technically literate water professionals that speak the same language.

The Zeeland Call to Action is an open invitation, not only to downstream countries, but also and especially to mid-stream and upstream countries, to match and complement the *“From the Delta looking up...”* initiative and come together to exchange experiences and draw common lessons on transboundary water cooperation and diplomacy. This creates an opportunity for a synthesising initiative for all riparian countries to bring water diplomacy to a higher level of maturity, and thus contribute to peace and prosperity.

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Dr M.A. Quassem and Mr Mir Sajjad Hossain, Bangladesh
Prof Aly Nabih El-Bahrawy and Prof Hesham Bekhit, Egypt
Mr Pedro Cambula, Mozambique
Prof Francisco Nunes Correia and Dr Pedro Cunha Serra, Portugal
Mr Willem Mak and Dr Erik Mostert, The Netherlands
Madam Do Hong Phan and Prof Le Anh Tuan, Viet Nam



Participants of the *“From the Delta looking up...”* high-level workshop
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Initiated and facilitated by

Prof Pieter van der Zaag and Ms Rozemarijn ter Horst, IHE Delft, The Netherlands
Prof Jeroen Warner, Wageningen University, The Netherlands
Mr Tobias Renner, RoyalHaskoningDHV, The Netherlands
Mr Niels Vlaanderen and Ms Monique Berendsen, Ministry of Infrastructure and Water
Management, The Netherlands
Mr Maarten Gischler and Ms Marlies den Boer, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Netherlands