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Speech by Melanie Schultz van Haegen, Minister of Infrastructure and the Environment, at the opening of the Water Seminar in Beijing, Monday 26 September 2016

Minister Chen Lei, ladies and gentlemen,

- On 28 May last year something special took place at the celebration marking 80 years of the Nanjing Hydraulics Research Institute.
- On this day a plaque was unveiled to commemorate the institute's founders. Among them were three Dutch engineers: Maurits Alma, Nicolaas van den Heuvel and Francois Bourdrez.
- In the 1930s they worked for the Chinese government on many hydraulic projects, including on the Yellow, Yangtze and Huai rivers.
- The plaque speaks volumes about the long-standing friendship between our two countries in the field of water.
 - We want to know more about each other.
 - We're keen to learn and profit from each other's knowledge.
 - And we recognise each other's challenges.
- Here in China, many of those challenges are on a massive scale.
- Take fresh water for example. China has 20 per cent of the world's population and 7 per cent of its freshwater supply. A supply that's shrinking.
- And then there's the problem of flooding. This year it was bad again in central and southern China – in part due to Typhoon Nepartak.
- At international level we can do even more to help each other – by sharing new knowledge, insights and experiences.
- That's why I'm happy to be here today with a large group of Dutch water experts.

- The Netherlands is always keen to work with other countries, especially when it comes to water. We can learn a lot from other countries. But our knowledge is also in demand.
- Minister Chen Lei, that's why I look back with pleasure at your visit to my country three years ago. You saw the Netherlands from above on a helicopter flight and got to know the challenges we face.
- The very existence of my country depends on efficient and innovative water management.
- Let me explain.



- On the screen you can see how our country developed over the centuries. The Netherlands you see today was shaped by nature and by man. We've reclaimed land from lakes and even from the sea. And rivers have deposited sand and sediment downstream, also changing our landscape.
- There is a famous saying: God created the Earth, but the Dutch created the Netherlands. Meaning that we created our country by interfering with nature – reclaiming land and building massive hydraulic works and dykes up and down the country.

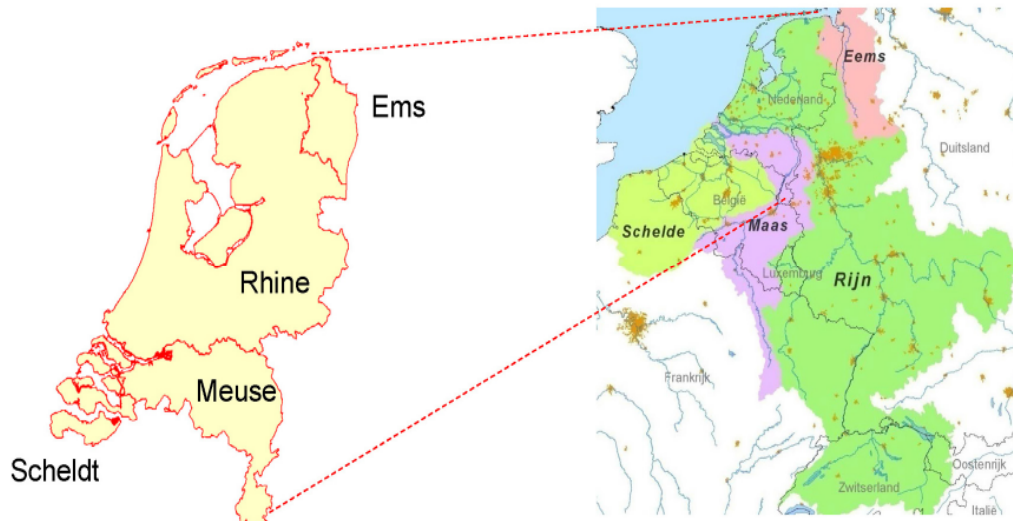
- When you land at Schiphol Airport you probably won't realise that you're at the bottom of what used to be a lake. The airport is 4 metres below sea level.
- Land reclamation and the creation of polders has made our country what it is today.
- Learning and developing knowledge in the field of water management is crucial to the Netherlands' existence:
 - Two-thirds of our land is vulnerable to flooding.
 - Over half of our population lives in that region.
 - And 70 per cent of our GNP is generated there.
- So how do we prepare our country for the future?
- We've had to make important new choices in water management. Two years ago we launched the second Delta Plan. Sixty years after the first plan, we decided we needed to make some changes.
- The biggest difference between the two plans is prevention. The first plan was made in response to a major flood disaster in 1953.
- The second focuses on preventing disaster.
- Until about 17 years ago, we were intent on holding back the water. We built dykes and dug channels to drain it, contain it and control it. Take the Maeslant storm surge barrier. Its construction signalled the completion of our first Delta Plan – the very symbol of our centuries-old battle against water.
- But like I said, we needed new strategies. The flooding of our rivers in 1993 and 1995 was a key trigger. It convinced us to give water more space.

- Over the centuries, Dutch rivers have increasingly been squeezed in between higher and higher dykes. But this simply isn't effective. Water needs more space.
- We need to embrace water – not just fight it.
- For instance, by equipping our cities to handle surplus water. And by giving our rivers more space, like here on the photo.



- This is near the city of Nijmegen. The river bends sharply here, and it also gets narrower – increasing the risk of high water and flooding.
- So, we moved the dyke and dug a channel through the flood plain. This has created a new island and a unique urban riverside park, with lots of opportunities for recreation and cultural activities, and room for water and nature.
- We call this approach building with nature. Another example is the sand motor.

- Currents pick up sand from this man-made sand bank, continuously shoring up the beach. This helps maintain the dunes that protect our coast from flooding.
- [Minister Chen Lei: You had a bird's eye view of both projects during our helicopter flight.]
- It's crucial for the Netherlands to refresh its knowledge and renew its strategies. Not only for flood protection but also for water quality.
- I'm proud of the quality of our water. It's the best non-chlorinated drinking water in the world. And a miracle of technology.
- We can't take supplies of fresh water for granted. This might sound strange for a country with so much water. But if we did nothing, half of the country would be without fresh drinking water.



- Because to our west is the salty North Sea. And from the east flow great European rivers, laden with sediment and pollutants. The Netherlands is Europe's drain.
- In these circumstances and with so many new substances and medicine residues in our surface water, it's a constant challenge for

Dutch water treatment engineers to produce the best drinking water.

- That's why it's crucial for us to work closely with other countries, to try out new technologies, gain new insights and move forward step by step.
- So I'm pleased with the cooperation between China and the Netherlands.
- For instance, in the partnership working under the Huai River Water Resources Commission.
- It's interesting to note that the Huai basin resembles that of the Rhine in the Netherlands.
- The big difference, of course, is the climate: the Huai River has to deal with prolonged heavy rainfall, as well as periods of severe drought.
- As our climate changes, the Rhine will also experience periods like these. And that will have serious consequences.
- We can learn from China's experiences with flooding and flood protection. And also apply our own innovations, like our modelling capabilities. That will benefit both our countries.
- Another example is the partnership with the Taihu Basin Authority. I have personal memories of this.
- When I visited China in 2006, I opened a wave measurement station at Lake Tai near Shanghai. That was the start of many years of successful collaboration with the IJsselmeer region in the Netherlands.
- This direct way of working together – looking for solutions and improvements that benefit both sides – is typical of Sino-Dutch water cooperation. That's why we've both got so much to gain.

- I'm keen to continue our work together. And that's exactly what we'll be committing to later when we renew our existing MoU.
- I'm grateful that China has opened its doors to our knowledge and innovation.
- And I'm proud that Dutch companies and knowledge institutions are keen to share that knowledge with you. We face many of the same challenges. But the scale on which new innovations can be applied in China is incomparable.
- That's why I see a lot of potential in working together. And why I want to take our partnership even further.
- Not only for economic reasons. Not only because both our countries are facing big challenges. But also because it is a confirmation of the friendly ties between China and the Netherlands.
- Thank you.