

**NEWS EMBARGO: BEGIN OF THE SPEECH
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Speech A. Nijhof voor congres 'risk meets crisis' op 21 mei 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen (intro),

Today we celebrate and share the final outcomes of two European projects, Safecoast and Chain of Safety, where five North Sea countries have worked together on an important issue as coastal flooding.

The Dutch ministry of transport, public works and water management has been the lead partner of in Safecoast and was partner in Chain of Safety. I am very pleased that after three years of hard work, experts on both risk management and crisis management meet and will learn from each other.

I believe that such meetings are necessary to face the challenges around coastal management that climate change and economic development will bring us in the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Long term policies concerning the management of our coast, river and water system are of vital importance for continuing existence of the Netherlands, maybe more so than for most other countries. As you may know, 40% of our country is situated below sea level and we need about 3,500 km of dikes, dunes and barriers to keep us dry and to protect the area on which 60% of our Gross National Product is earned. Developing and implementing these policies is one of the tasks of the Netherlands Ministry for Transport, Public Works and Water Management.

Since the 1953 flood disaster large coastal defence works have been put in place. A decade ago, in 1997, the Maeslant storm surge barrier at Rotterdam was completed and the Delta Works were finally completed. In that same year the Flood Defence Act was formalised and provides the legal framework for safety standards and five yearly evaluations of our flood defence system.

It almost seemed we were ready, but we are fully aware that we are not. The future is clear: rising sea levels, perhaps more intense storms, higher river discharges and our increasing societal vulnerability to floods require a long term vision on integrated coastal zone management

In the 1990's we were aware that intensive exchanges of knowledge and expertise with our neighbouring countries around the North Sea would be beneficial for the Netherlands (and hopefully for our neighbours too).

Therefore my Ministry was one of the founders of the North Sea Coastal Managers Group (NSCMG). It is this Group that later initiated European projects such as Comrisk and Safecoast, in which current and future coastal safety management policies were compared between the North Sea countries.

In the conference today you will discuss the results of Safecoast and of Chain of Safety under the title *Risk meets Crisis*. This title fits very well the challenges we face. In regard with this I want to mention three things that will be important this year.

1) By the end of this year policy survey 'Flood Safety 21st Century' will give new insights on how to deal with future flood risks. The survey rests on three pillars:

a) Assessing the need to update our current system of legal flood safety standards.

b) Assessing the need to strengthen the link with flood risks and planning policy to limit potential consequences of flooding.

c) Improving awareness and risk communication

2) Also this year, a recently installed government commission known as the Delta Commission will advise the Dutch government on long-term sustainable coastal protection and planning

3) TMO (pending text)

Ladies and Gentlemen (closing),

In the past decade the concept of risk has again influenced our perception of flood management in general. I believe that investments in and maintenance of flood defences are essential to protect the Netherlands against coastal (and river) flooding, but it is also important to be prepared for a flood because we can not guarantee 100% safety.

The Netherlands has much expertise concerning water and coastal management. And yet, when we have to develop a vision for the future to meet the challenges that may lay ahead, as a consequence of climate change and economic development, I know that we should not rely on our own expertise alone. I am convinced that international knowledge and experiences can help flood management in the future.

I am very pleased that these point will converge here today. Thank you for your attention and I hope you will have successful meeting.