

Booming business

Delta networks are being created throughout the world and the formation of alliances is a much discussed topic during international missions.

RIA DE WIT

Conference Results

Official Launch of the Delta Alliance

Six deltas join the alliance: Vietnam (Mekong), Indonesia (Ciliwung/Mahakam), Egypt (Nile), USA California (San Francisco Bay), China (Yangtze), The Netherlands (Rhine-Meuse)

Three deltas declare their intention to join the alliance: USA Louisiana (Mississippi), Brazil (Pantanal), Bangladesh (Ganges-Brahmaputra)

Celebration of the second anniversary of the 'Connecting Delta Cities' network and launch of the second book on climate adaptation

Rotterdam and Ho Chi Minh City agreed to develop a climate adaptation strategy called 'HCMC moving towards the sea with Climate Change'

Letter of Intent for Cooperation between New Orleans and Rotterdam within the CDC network
Plans for a European Delta Network within the ERA-Circle project

Start of a comparative overview of delta issues, including an analysis of the resilience of seven deltas

The Delta Alliance is a network of deltas that is primarily aimed at sharing knowledge and jointly developing expertise. The basis of this network was the intensive cooperation between Vietnam, Indonesia, California (US) and the Netherlands under the Dutch Knowledge for Climate Research Programme. Programme Manager Wim van Driel: 'What began as bilateral cooperation between the Netherlands and the other countries, has developed into an increasingly larger network. Vietnam, Indonesia, Egypt, USA California and China have joined the Alliance. Others like Bangladesh, USA Louisiana, Brazil and Argentina have become very interested.'

The Delta Alliance was officially launched during the international conference Deltas in Times of Climate Change in September 2010. According to Van Driel, it is very important that countries share their knowledge about deltas, because "only too often we are reinventing the wheel". Delta Alliance plays a key role in developing ideas. "The next few years will see the creation of quite a few adaptation funds that will allocate money for projects within the framework of climate change. If you come up with a good plan, you are in the race for the cash prize."

"Despite the fact that Delta Alliance focuses on scientific knowledge, there are also

links with business and governance", Van Driel says. "We don't want to get stuck at an abstract scientific level, we also want to share best practices. An international conference like the one in Rotterdam is a very appropriate platform to achieve this."

Rehabilitating nature

The informal network, Connecting Delta Cities, also has a practical approach. Large delta cities throughout the world meet to exchange experience and expertise. (see page 15 Delta cities help each other). The World Estuary Alliance (WEA) is another informal network that was initiated by the Chinese branch of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) in 2008. This network takes nature conservation as a point of departure in addressing the challenges of climate change. The Vietnamese and Dutch WWF branches joined immediately, and India followed soon after. WEA takes nature as its starting point when tackling the problems that deltas are facing. The key question is how best to create natural conditions in these vulnerable areas and make them climate proof as well. Rehabilitating nature is an important focus in this process. The WEA was officially founded during the Third Yangtze Forum in Shanghai in June 2010.

WWF International Director General James Leape said in his speech: "Where the rivers meet the sea has always been one of the most important habitats for humanity, but we have done enormous damage to the vibrant life in estuaries. Now, in many estuaries the tide is allowed in again. In many estuaries and deltas, species abundance is going up and pollution is going down. Where we have curbed our instincts to clear natural features for development or navigation, fisheries are returning. But some estuaries, particularly in the tropics, are not experiencing the same improvements, and the growing impacts of climate change are threatening to undo some of our progress. We need to work together to



Launch Delta Alliance. PHOTO: NOOR VAN MIERLO

advance the best thinking in sustainable estuary development and protection.”

An expanding network

Meanwhile, nine countries have joined the estuary network and the number of parties that are interested is growing, according to Arjan Berkhuisen of WWF. “At the beginning, it was mainly the nature conservation organizations that joined the network but currently a growing number of local governments and universities are showing interest.” Examples of this phenomenon are the Dutch province of South Holland, the Chinese Fundan University and the East China Normal University in Shanghai. Berkhuisen cites this as an improvement because cooperation among different ‘blood groups’ is not self-evident. “Those working for nature conservation organizations are as a rule passionate experts, who know exactly what is going on in the field. They are different from pure scientists.” The same holds for policy makers who work for the government, argues Jeroen Aerts, professor at the VU of Amsterdam. “Generally speaking, policy-makers do not like uncertainties and scientists tend to use a lot of professional jargon. It is quite a challenge to try and understand each other and form alliances.” Berkhuisen adds: “And that is precisely the added value of those alliances.” ■

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Delta, estuary or coastal zone?

What is the difference between a delta and an estuary? Is every coastal zone a delta? If you ask four different experts you'll get four different answers. Opinions are divided. “There is a lot of bickering about definitions”, says Marcel Marchand from Deltares. “There is not much difference. An estuary is a river mouth where fresh water and salt water meet, creating a zone of brackish water. A delta is formed by the interaction between rivers and coasts; sediment is deposited, creating new land. A delta can be made up of a number of estuaries.” A prime example of this is the Nile Delta in Egypt, according to Marchand. “The Nile splits into three main tributaries at Cairo; each tributary is called an estuary.” The best-known exception to this is the Okavango Delta in Botswana, which is an inland

delta. The Okavango River never reaches the sea. Arjan Berkhuisen of the World Estuary Alliance does not want to waste too many words on the issue. “I find the discussion rather uninteresting. Deltas, estuaries, coastal zones; they are all low-lying coastal areas between seas and rivers which are particularly vulnerable to climate change. It doesn't matter what you call them. What is important is that we keep bearing in mind that human intervention in these areas must be carried out in a responsible manner so they don't become even more vulnerable.” In 2009, Deltares chose to avoid discussion on terminology, and produced the book entitled: ‘Towards sustainable development of deltas, estuaries and coastal zones’.