

Speech by Max van den Berg, Queen's Commissioner and chairman of Energy Valley at the opening of the Energy Delta Convention, Groningen, 22 November 2011

Ladies and gentlemen,

The International Energy Agency (IEA) made no bones about it this month: it is five to twelve. In the latest World Energy Outlook, the IEA warns that “without a bold change of policy direction, the world will lock itself into an insecure, inefficient and high-carbon energy system.” This message reflects the future scenarios published earlier this year by Shell. In which energy demand in 2015 is three times as much as in 2000. Yet, unless there is a change of policy, we will only be able to produce about one and a half times as much energy.

In short: we know what is expected of us during this Energy Delta Convention. The energy issue is a hot item worldwide. The later it becomes, the

greater the urgency to work on solutions. We cannot burden the generations to come with an uncertain future, a threatening shortage of energy, a world polluted by CO₂. We must bundle all our knowledge, strength and know-how to prevent this.

And that is why I think it's wonderful that you are all here. A warm welcome to you to Groningen. North Netherlands is the 'place to be' for working on a reliable, affordable and sustainable energy management. Our natural gas has traditionally given us a strong energy base. With a strategic role in Europe. A role we are developing further with the Green Gas Roundabout. Our geographic location alone offers many possibilities for this. We have fantastic knowledge institutes, a strong energy business community. We are bundling all these strengths in Energy Valley. And with success. That is shown, for example, by the support given us by central government through

the recently concluded Green Deal. Together we are strengthening the position of North Netherlands as energy port.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is five to twelve. That means that time is running out. But we may not be too late. We must and we can accept the challenge to move towards a sustainable energy management. What are the principles we must adopt for that journey? I will mention a few, based on the way in which we work on the energy issue here in North Netherlands. I hope this will inspire you. For days such as these here in Groningen. But also for those following, when you again return to work in your own region, company, organisation or knowledge institute.

Anybody who makes a journey sets sight on a dot on the horizon. For us in North Netherlands, that

dot is a completely sustainable energy supply. A first principle is that we must be idealists, but at the same time down-to-earth and level-headed. After all, we are still Northerners... A sustainable energy management is a wonderful aim. But we must also be practical. We don't just need energy in the future. We also need it today. And tomorrow. And next year. We cannot satisfy that demand with only renewable sources.

And so we mustn't focus exclusively on one energy option. Which brings us to my second principle: we must concentrate on different tracks. On our voyage, we will dock at many different harbours. In each harbour, we must make use of things that catch our attention. In North Netherlands, that means that we must stimulate renewable sources. For example wind and biomass. That we invest in innovation. In the development and in the use of regional and smart energy systems. It means that

we must use fossil sources – in particular natural gas – in as green a way as possible.

We invest in education, research and development. In that respect, we have taken a giant step forward here in North Netherlands. We are going to bundle all Dutch knowledge in the field of energy in the Energy Academy for higher and university education. For secondary vocational education we will be setting up the Energy College. The best possible combination. The aim: more top research, more innovation and enough highly trained professionals who can work in the growing sustainable energy sector.

We must be idealistic *and* level-headed. We must concentrate on various energy options. And third: we must work together. As governments, businesses and knowledge institutes. As regions and as countries. Energy and climate problems

effect us all. Together we are responsible for exploring and finding solutions. And in addition we must also be practical here. No single region, no single country or company is able on its own to solve problems that arise on a world-wide scale.

‘Collaboration’ is a key word in the energy policy of North Netherlands. And here I must keep a promise I made. Last year I told you, at the opening of this same conference, that together with North Germany we had received a European subsidy for setting up a joint energy programme. I am proud to be able to tell you that that programme – the Hansa Energy Corridor – has now got off to a start. With the University of Groningen as ‘pilot’, governments, entrepreneurs and researchers from North Netherlands and Germany are collaborating on project proposals in eight different areas. From Wind and Biomass to Smart Grids and Legal energy issues. The aim:

generating more sustainable energy, contributing to a stable and secure supply of energy and creating jobs in both regions.

And now we are looking farther afield. We want to extend the Hansa Energy Corridor into a wider international collaboration of energy clusters around the North Sea. There are already contacts with a Norwegian and with a Scottish cluster. We intend to submit an application at the start of the new year for a European subsidy from the Regions of Knowledge programme. And so this is becoming an exciting serial... Who knows what I'll have to tell you in next year's episode.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Full of ideals and practical. Making use of renewable energy, complemented with fossil sources that are as green as possible. In that way,

we set sail slowly but surely towards that dot on the horizon: sustainable energy management. But what applies above all else: we cannot do it alone. That is why this Energy Delta Convention is so important. All the subjects I've mentioned will be addressed here. There is every opportunity for exchanging knowledge and experience. Get ideas from what you see and hear. Participate actively in discussions and workshops.

It may be five to twelve. But it's not yet too late. Let us bundle our strengths for a responsible and sustainable use of energy. Now and in the future. In the Netherlands, in Europe, in the world. North Netherlands would like to playing a leading role. We want to and we can. Please join us! I wish you all an interesting and inspiring Energy Delta Convention.