

**Keynote speech by the Dutch Minister for the Environment, Wilma Mansveld, spoken by Hugo von Meijenfeldt,**  
at the European Sustainable Phosphorus Conference, 7 March 2013, Brussels

## **Sheet 1 - introduction**

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to speak to you today on behalf of the Minister for the Environment of The Netherlands, Wilma Mansveld. She planned to come and talk to you today, but had other urgent matters why she couldn't attend the conference herself. She wants to stress the importance of the Phosphorus issue for Europe and her personal commitment to make new policies in this field a success.

I would like to thank Mr Potočník for his inspiring speech. I am glad with his initiatives on Resource Efficient Europe and the Green Paper on Phosphorus. The Netherlands supports the policy of the European Commission. We want to join the Commission and the other member states on the road to a sustainable society and economy, like the one Mr Potočník described. We

know that it's a long and winding road full of hairpin bends. But every journey starts with a single step. First, I will tell you something about the change in environmental policies, which become visible these years. It's all about making the most of opportunities. A good example of this is our joint venture with the Dutch Nutrient Platform, in which we are working together to implement the Phosphate Value Chain Agreement. I will elaborate on that process and the results after one year of close collaboration.

Finally, I want to stress the importance of an active and enabling European policy which we can shape together as a European network of governmental authorities with businesses, knowledge institutions and NGO's.

## **Sheet 2 – different environmental policy**

Environmental policy used to be seen by businesses as abstract and problem oriented visions and strategies, as restricting policies, which disturb their business with a lot of prohibiting rules and administrative burdens. But that is an outdated picture. It's time for environmental policy

3.0. No more doomsday predictions! The glass is half full, not half empty. We need to think in terms of opportunities, not threats. We want to give people and businesses the chance to come up with their own solutions. Instead of pointing a finger, we want to hold out a helping hand, so that we can shape a sustainable society and green economy together. Environmental policy 3.0 involves creating legal frameworks, which sustain innovation in a sustainable direction. Environmental policy 3.0 means we are happy with every single step towards sustainability, also if it is only a minor step. Sustainable innovation evokes new steps on the road to a sustainable society.

To achieve innovation, and not only the technical one, we need to know where we are heading to and focus on building trust between each other. We have to build trust between businesses in production chains. Trust in committed and reliable governmental authorities. And trust that we can all take concrete steps together.

### **Sheet 3 – opportunities in the value chain**

That's the approach we took when tackling the phosphorus issue in the Netherlands. The Nutrient Platform was set up in 2011 by businesses, knowledge institutions and NGOs working in agriculture, the water sector and the chemical industry. They were all looking for ways to recycle nutrients in order to resolve environmental problems and cut costs. Later on, the Dutch government got involved.

Parties in the Netherlands saw opportunities. Why not create a market for phosphates recycled from animal manure, sewage sludge and other organic waste? Europe faces a possible phosphate shortage in the long run because demand will rocket elsewhere in the world, threatening the security of supply.

Yet in the Netherlands we have a surplus of phosphates in our waste. We farm intensively, so we produce a lot of phosphate-rich animal manure. We import a lot of biomass through our ports, so we have a lot of organic waste in the food and feed industry as well. And our

small country is densely populated, so we have a lot of wastewater produced in a small area, from which phosphates can be recovered.

But elsewhere in Europe, too, we could recover plenty of phosphates from solid and liquid waste. Why throw away something so valuable? A European market for recycled phosphates means that we can tackle some problems at the same time:

1. We can prevent the phosphate rock market from becoming overstretched, driving up the price of food and raw materials.
2. We can reduce environmental problems, because fewer phosphates will go to waste in landfills, incinerators and surface water.
3. We can boost green growth by cutting the cost of waste processing and creating new green industries.
4. We can ensure that the world doesn't use up all its phosphate resources in a matter of decades, but manages them sustainably for future generations.

## **Sheet 4 – Dutch business cases**

So how are we tackling this in the Netherlands? The Dutch government started in October 2011 with signing a letter of intent with 20 companies, knowledge institutions and NGO's. We looked at the individual drives and interests of the parties involved and connected those with a simple, but ambitious goal: within two years we create a market for recycled phosphates. The Phosphate Value Chain agreement was born.

We've been working on it for over a year now. Let me give you some examples of successful market initiatives:

- A water board in Amsterdam is building a fermentation plant to produce struvite from waste water. This will cut costs and generate income because the struvite can be sold to a factory that produces fertilisers. Other water boards and main water suppliers are also proposing to recover phosphate from waste water and put it back into the chain. Even Schiphol Airport has just started doing it!
- The VION Ingredients meat processing company is building a fermentation plant to convert animal manure

into fertiliser granules for export. So recycled phosphate fertilizers will become an export product.

There are many other projects along the same lines.

## **Sheet 5 – drivers and enabling environment**

What's the reason for all this activity?

Take the Dutch company ICL Fertilisers:

- This company believes that production companies can only survive in Europe if they produce as sustainably as possible.
- At the same time the company can be less dependent in the future on imports of phosphate rock from Northern Africa and the Middle East.
- Another advantage of using recycled phosphates is that it contains less cadmium and other heavy metals contaminations.

But they also stress the need for certainty. For companies to invest, they need to know that they can

count on getting enough supply in the right quantity, in the right quality and for the right price. They also need to be sure that the government can be relied on when it comes to rules and regulations. They want to know where the country's heading. They want to know whether the government can work with industry to achieve sustainable innovation to create an enabling environment.

That's why it was so important for us to play our part as governmental authorities. In brokering between parties, in brainstorming with all the parties involved, and testing out the road ahead. In a nutshell: businesses are the key actor, and government plays a supporting role.

## **Sheet 6 – Europe**

Europe needs to play a supporting role, too. We need to create an enabling environment so that businesses in Europe dare to innovate, dare to be enterprising and dare to make sustainability their goal.

So it's a very good thing that the European Commission will issue a Green Paper on Phosphorus. The Green Paper will help to prepare the ground for businesses to create green jobs in a circular economy. The European Commission is also working on the harmonization of the Fertiliser Regulation, making it easier for businesses to trade in recycled fertilisers within the EU. The European Commission deserves to be supported in this.

I firmly believe that if we work together more within Europe, with a European platform for businesses, governments, knowledge institutions and NGOs, we can exploit the opportunities that are there. Opportunities that can help closing the phosphorus cycle and make growth green. I invite you to join the establishment of the European Phosphorus Platform today.

We must continue to support efforts to harmonize legislation together. And we must go on investing in knowledge and innovation as part of Horizon 2020 and the European Innovation Partnerships. Phosphorus needs to be part of that!

But we must also invest in more sustainable relationships with the rest of the world. The phosphorus challenge is not limited to Europe. We need a stable development of the recycled phosphate market along with a more sustainable fossil phosphate rock market in the coming decades.

In the Netherlands, we want to move forward, but we can only do it together with you. This is our road to the future. And that future starts today.

Thank you.