



To: Gemeenteraad “De Fryske Marren”
Joure, The Netherlands

cc.: Burgermeester en Wethouders of “De Fryske Marren”
Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management
Parliamentary Commission on Infrastructure and Water Management
Province of Fryslân
Provincial Council of Fryslân
IUCN-Netherlands Committee
Comité Geen Zandindustrie IJsselmeer

Re: Appeal to conserve the ecosystem of the IJsselmeer

Dear members of the Municipal Council,

The IJsselmeer is a wetland of international importance, recognised as such under the Ramsar convention, signed a/o by the Government of The Netherlands. After the Zuiderzee-estuary was heavily altered because of the construction of a great barrier dam (“Afsluitdijk”) and a number of large polders, the area-management has resulted in a large fresh water lake with surrounding marshlands, resulting in a wetland of global importance.

The Ramsar website mentions for the IJsselmeer an impressive number of 22 animal species that are specially protected under European regulations and national red lists. It also refers in particular to the ecological importance of the shallow water bodies along the Friesian coast. Not surprisingly, the IJsselmeer has been recognised also as Natura 2000-site. Its richness of biological diversity is a good indicator of the healthy ecological functioning of the IJsselmeer that provides a number of locally, nationally and internationally important ecosystem services that people and nature depend on.

Your wetlands belong to the world’s most valuable ecosystems providing a large range of ecosystem products and –services, that are hard to replace by man-made services. The benefits of these services extend far beyond the borders of these ecosystems. Many are therefore of international importance. Examples include reproduction sites for commercially important fisheries, seasonal habitats for migratory birds, recreational sites for urban communities, etc.. Most wetlands are heavily used by Man and offer many services to the benefit of people and nature.

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment has defined 4 categories of ecosystem services, all of which are also delivered by the IJsselmeer. The importance hereof is further shown in the attached scheme.

As Chairperson of the Commission on Ecosystem Management of the IUCN and as Cultural Anthropologist I like to draw your attention specifically to the cultural services wetlands provide. People derive part of their cultural identity from the environment that they live in. They identify themselves with the historical towns and villages where they grew up; these are sites where people

remember and celebrate historical events. People cherish traditional activities and their products like fishing and fish-processing, sailing, etc. Altering ecosystems increases the risk of alienating people from their cultural roots. The fact that this is difficult to quantify in monetary terms (Euro's or Dollars), should not lead to giving too low a priority to this aspect of ecosystem management.

The council of De Fryske Marren will be deciding on a major intervention affecting heavily the ecosystem of the IJsselmeer. An intervention that may affect some of the ecosystem values beyond recovery. It is not about a choice between nature and the economy. It is about people.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature has demonstrated again and again, that the contradiction between nature and economy is a false one. The Sustainable Development Goals (on which the Government of The Netherlands has put its signature) demonstrate it also: sustainable development can only be realised on nature based solutions.

Ecosystem managers should work with nature, not against it, and do so with due respect for the cultural heritage embedded in these ecosystems.

Appeal

This is an appeal to you as decisive body to ensure that the exceptional Ramsar and Natura 2000 qualities of your IJsselmeer are conserved and strengthened. I wish you a balanced decision making process, leading to a wise decision to the benefit of people and nature, both depending heavily on the healthy functioning of the ecosystems of the IJsselmeer.



Dr. Angela Andrade,
Chairperson of the Commission on Ecosystem Management of the IUCN

Attachment: The IJsselmeer as wetland of international importance.

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The importance of the valuable IJsselmeer ecosystems is further shown in the attached scheme

The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment ¹ has defined 4 categories of ecosystem services, all of which are also delivered by the IJsselmeer:

- Supporting services, that are necessary for the production of all the others.
 - *Ecosystem process maintenance: oxygen production, soil formation, nutrient cycling, primary production from submerged vegetation, etc.*
 - *Life cycle maintenance : nursery habitats, seed dispersal, etc.*
 - *Biodiversity maintenance: genetic, species and habitat diversity. For instance, the shallow waters along the Friesian coast provide a hibernation habitat for an impressive number of birds breeding in the Arctic.*

- Regulating services that maintain natural processes.
 - *Purification and detoxification of water, air and soil*
 - *Natural hazards regulation: storage of excess water, stocking fresh water in case of drought to be used in adjacent ecosystems, etc.*
 - *Climate regulation*
 - *Etc.*

- Provisioning services which are harvestable and sustainably usable goods.
 - *Provisioning of clean water;*
 - *Food provisioning: In the case of the IJsselmeer especially fish such as Laaxumer bot and eel, a red-listed species. (Having completed part of my study in The Netherlands, I know how important smoked eel is for the traditional fishing communities around the former Zuiderzee), etc.*

- Cultural services, that are the non-material benefits people derive from natural systems.
 - *Reference is usually made to education and research*
 - *Recreation and tourism.*
 - *Aesthetic values, inspiration for the arts*
 - *Cultural identity and heritage*
 - *Mental wellbeing and health*
 - *Peace and stability*

¹Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005. Ecosystems and Human Well-being: Synthesis. Island Press, Washington, DC