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# Fish Migration River/ The New Afsluitdijk: No Innovation Solution Flourishes without Public Support

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*Fish Migration River*

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**Subtitle: Building Happy Fish communities**

**Title: ACT TOGETHER: CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH NATURE**

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

First of all, Erik and Katja, thank you for introducing this special project. An innovative fish passage with a scientific test and research facility, realized in the most famous dike on this planet: the Afsluitdijk.

But let us not forget the people, and how we can connect with nature!

Let me explain that. The creativity, energy and funding needed to realize this project did not appear out of the blue:

- It has a history of many years
- It has a lot of owners.
- They share many reasons to build this fish passage.

I want to share three of the main reasons with you:

1. Urgency: worldwide
2. A will to act: growing awareness
3. People want to connect with nature

The third reason raises a question. How can we connect people with rather abstract subjects like fish migration and swimways?

That is why the Fish Migration River is such an interesting example. It's not only about science! We reinvent the Afsluitdijk, we build with nature, our approach is multidisciplinary and cross-sectoral, we serve global and local goals, such as biodiversity. And we try to get as much public support and commitment as we can get.

That is a part of my job: to connect people with this project: in general as well on the actual spot on the Afsluitdijk. And we all hope our story will inspire you and many others to join us into a shared international approach that will end the decline of migratory fish worldwide.

## 2. URGENCY

Let us focus on urgency now. What is going on: in our backyards and in the world. You as scientists and professionals know the answer better than me. So, I stay close to home in the Netherlands.

In the seventies, we were shocked when we found Pcb's in our national dish: the herring.

Today biodiversity in sea and fresh water is on the decline more than ever. And our Wadden Sea (UNESCO heritage) and IJsselmeer (the estuary lake formed by the Afsluitdijk) are almost empty.

Dams, dikes, climate change, rising sea level, more dikes to be build, sand supplementation, pollution and – of course – fishing have caused this. Worldwide two million motorized boats go out fishing almost every day.

These are not a political statements or alternative facts, but reality.

The effects are alarming:

- species decline at an enormous speed
- estuaries are in danger
- and with the loss of biodiversity we also lose our languages, poetry and arts
- and we are losing the benefits (money included)

### **3. GOOD NEWS: WE CAN ACT!**

You need some good news now. And there is! We can build pyramids or repair the Afsluitdijk. And today we also can rebuild entire ecosystems.

Fortunately, we start to realize that we cannot survive without nature, the air we breathe, the water we drink and the food we eat. We are part of ecosystems. There is a growing social mass ready to invest in change.

There is a strong economic interest as well. Restoring and preserving ecosystems and biodiversity is good for people, planet and profit. It also leads to economic growth. This is the outcome of research by the G8, the Unites States included.

When it comes to water, the Netherlands are known for their creative ideas and innovative solutions. The Fish Migration River is such a project, where various disciplines and sectors come together. It offers great opportunities for the future.

But what really makes it special, is that long time opponents now work together to make this project successfully. Fishermen and conservationists for example. And - for the first time in 125 years - our National Water Board is making an opening in the Afsluitdijk.

By working together and overcome differences, we succeed in realizing magnificent projects. Then it will flow. And we all prosper.

#### **4. FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL GOALS**

We are also committed to these promising advantages. In 2015 almost 200 world leaders signed to 17 sustainable global goals, drawn up by the United Nations.

Seventeen goals to make the world a better place in 2030.

The Fish Migration River relates to the Global Goals 13, 14, and 15. However I would like to point out another one: Responsible Consumption.

Changing human or consumer behaviour is a tremendous challenge. But with great rewards if we succeed. It's a key to speed up sustainable developments all around the world.

To achieve this, we have to make the global goals, local. From abstract more political themes to goals you can do yourself. That is done by making them simple, visible and profitable. At home, school or at work. Use them as guidelines in the daily choices we make as consumers.

## 5. IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTIONS

So there we are! People feel the urgency (1.), they want to act (2.) and they have a desire to be part of our project and their environment (3.).

This condition is met in our project. We are fortunate to have a massive public support: for example, local governments, nature organisations, scientists, schools, fishermen and anglers. They are connected, all of them.

We want to make sure that well-intended ideas and words will lead to results.

Therefore we use three levels to draw public attention:

1. Destination: the Afsluitdijk as a reason to travel
2. Experience and discover: visit the Afsluitdijk Wadden Centre and Fish Migration River
3. Storytelling: use Happy Fish to tell our story

Let me explain these levels shortly:

## **6. DESTINATION AFSLUITDIJK**

Every year about 300.000 people visit the Afsluitdijk. A lot of tourists come from abroad. Right now, there is not much to see or do, except for the icon itself.

Now that we renew the dike - to make it climate proof – we cease the opportunity to change it into a destination worthwhile visiting. Therefore, we work together with the Netherlands Board of Tourism.

Their concept is simple: The Netherlands are a small, populous country, why not look at it as a capital – Holland City – with various districts that tell various stories. Our common story is all about water and the way Dutch people coped with it for many centuries: living below sea level!

So, we create a ‘new’ tourist destination. We do this in cooperation with local marketing organisations, restaurants, campsites, etc. And by doing so we provide local employment.

We connect nature with leisure. Our ambition is to create an outstanding eco-destination in the next 10 years.

## **7. AFSLUITDIJK WADDEN CENTER**

To make the Afsluitdijk an attractive tourist destination, we are building an experience center, nearby the Fish Migration River. We call it the Afsluitdijk Wadden Center, because it is not only located on the Afsluitdijk, but also directly to the borders of the Wadden Sea, an UNESCO World Heritage site.

The visitor centre itself will be a mix of entertainment, serious information and meaningful experiences. Creating a Sense of Place. For example, by using 4D-experience.

The center opens in March 2018 and visiting is free of charge.

## **8. FISH MIGRATION RIVER**

The Fish Migration River itself is quite spectacular to see and will appeal to many tourists. When finished in 2022, you could say there is a complete new nature park on both sides of the Afsluitdijk. Visitors can explore the environment by foot or by boat.

The hole or opening in the dike catches the eye immediately. And visitors will even be able to walk through the dike. A reverse Hansje Brinker, the boy who puts his finger in the dike. Instead of stopping the water, water can freely flow from one site to the other, and also can the fish.

Hundred Happy Fish, a remarkable work of art, float in the water, 'begging' to be photographed.

And to top it off, a huge window in the fish passage enables visitors to see fish swimming real time. The research facility, Katja told us about, will invite visitors and citizen-science-activities will be organized.

A must see!



## **9 EDUCATION**

The third level of experience is education. I don't have to explain to you the importance of children being able to play outside and discover the world. They will never forget a great experience in the wild. We therefore firmly invest in an educational and hospitality program. We start with the primary schools.

This program is developed by two ngo's, both founding fathers of the Fish Migration River. They cooperate with schools to make the program 'custom made'. Both in- and outside, children learn about fish migration and the ecosystem in their own area. Besides that, the program shows them the importance of building with instead of against nature.

Our ambition is to extend the educational programme to all levels of education, from primary schools to universities.

## **10. HAPPY FISH AS STORYTELLER AND CHANGE AGENT**

I've told you about our project and how we try to engage as many partners and people as possible. I have not mentioned our biggest asset yet: imagination! We want the story of the international swimway to be spread, shared, adopted and deepened.

The Happy Fish are going to help us achieve that goal. They are our story tellers and 'change agents'. At the Afsluitdijk and worldwide.

We would like to see the Happy Fish becoming an international and recognizable symbol for people, organizations and projects that aim to let the fish swim again.

## **11. WORLD FISH MIGRATION DAY**

And so, we are happy – and honoured – that the organizers of the World Fish Migration Day use our Happy Fish. It is a perfect symbol for their mission.

We admire what they have accomplished in just a few years: activities at over 600 places worldwide and almost 70 million people heard their message. It is a great platform to connect with a huge public. And we strongly support them.

In 2018 the WFMD will have its international headquarter in the Rhine delta in the Netherlands; we aim to put the river Rhine and the measurements taken for fish migration in the international spotlight! Major projects like the opening of the Haringvliet sluices and the Fish Migration River.

I hope to meet you there and then.

## **12. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED**

To end, I want to share some lessons learned so far. In one sentence, I can say this: reach for the top!

Happy Fish can serve you as a spinning wheel for all kind of initiatives related to free fish passages. And when you start, make sure that your project:

- a. serves people and nature – multidisciplinary
- b. has many owners, based on equality and working together
- c. is innovative and inspiring
- d. involves people who are open minded and eager to learn
- e. is built with nature instead of against nature
- f. leads to restoring nature as a whole; not just parts, but entire ecosystems

More on: [www.waddenvereniging.nl/happyfish](http://www.waddenvereniging.nl/happyfish)

Thanks for your attention! Any questions?

Kees Terwisscha van Scheltinga, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017



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