

## **Speech delivered by Han-Maurits Schaapveld, Netherlands Ambassador to open the Symposium on Circularity in African Aquaculture at the Aquaculture Africa Conference and Fair, Alexandria, 27 March 2022.**

We are here in a historic place. The biggest city in the delta where the longest river of the world brings African water to the sea. In ancient times, Alexandria stood out as a centre of learning and innovation. This is exemplified by the Great Library that has been recreated by this building in which we gather today, a fitting location for this conference and this seminar. In ancient times, Alexandria connected Africa, Europe and the Orient. Today again, the African Aquaculture sector and its international friends meet the world in Alex.

The Netherlands is proud to be part of this opportunity for knowledge exchange. We would be happy to contribute to generating the knowledge needed to contribute to the SDGs, not least SDG2 aiming to deliver health and sustainable diets for all. Fish are an important part of health and sustainable diets. However, as the human population increases, the capacity of natural, biodiverse ecosystems to sustainably provide enough fish has been exceeded. As our Egyptian friends know - who over the last decades have developed the largest fish farming sector in Africa – aquaculture has proved to be a way to overcome these planetary boundaries. This growth was led by small and medium fish farmers here in the Delta and in the Fayoum.

We the Dutch played our small part in this success. In the 1970s collaboration between Egypt and Wageningen led to setting up hatcheries for grass carp. These were aimed to control weeds in irrigation channels. In the beginning of this century two anchor investors Skretting/Nutreco and Koudijs Kapo set up animal feed production facilities in Egypt, which gradually expanded from poultry feed to fish feed. A grant from the Dutch government, knowledge from Wageningen and facilitation by the embassy's agricultural team, supported these companies to move from trade to investment.

Now however, we realized that this growth is not been sustainable and there are threats to the sector's inclusiveness. As water is prized above all else in Egypt, irrigation water is not to be used for fish farming. As a consequence, fish kept in the drainage water that is left after many cycles of intensive agriculture, and contaminated by waste produced by millions up stream. When fish are subsequently intensively fed with quality feed produced from imported food-grade feed stock, nutrients build up. With increasingly hot summers, due to climate change this leads to toxic conditions in ponds and a further threat to ecosystem health in wetlands and coastal areas.

Our friends in the government of Egypt have seen the challenges of such fish farms. They are looking for new alternative large scale production models, run by national companies. Will these plans build on what the entrepreneurial aquaculture sector in Egypt has to offer, or does it risk crowding out entrepreneurial farmers and the private sector? What are the implications for inclusiveness?

In the Netherlands we are learning that a food system that doesn't take planetary boundaries into account, or policy that doesn't take farmers interests into account are not future proof. Our politics and society no longer accepts the impact of intensive livestock production and the emissions this generates on biodiversity and climate change. In fact, for the first time our Ministry of Agriculture has two ministers, including one for Nature and Nitrogen.

Such planetary concerns are not ours alone. This year the world's leaders of politics, industry, activism and academia will gather in Egypt to discuss the global response to climate change. Sustainability of the world's food system will be high on the agenda. We as the Netherlands are convinced that solutions to these food system challenges can be found. Not only for livestock and cropping, also as will be discussed here for aquaculture.

Today some of our experts will share some insights they generated in Africa, the Netherlands and beyond. I must warn you however that we do not have full answers or final solutions. We have learned that solutions cannot be copy-pasted, but developed within the local context. Although you will see a

whole row of men from the Netherlands sharing ideas, these ideas are not the gospel truth, or a recipe for success. These insights are just the beginning of a learning process. These ideas will have to be challenged, validated and adapted to Egyptian and African realities. By our partners, by you!

We brought them here not to transfer knowledge but to exchange, inspire and co-create. Our global problems can only be solved together, based on mutual interest and mutual benefit. As I learned in Africa, if you want to go fast go alone. If you want to go far, go together.