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Dr. Henk Bleker  
Minister for Agriculture and Foreign Trade  
Ministerie van Economische Zaken, Landbouw en Innovatie  
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THE NETHERLANDS

Dear Mr. Bleker,

Thank you for your letter of 13 April 2012 and for the information concerning the measures that the Dutch Government intends to take with regard to the Westerschelde.

I am reassured to learn that the Netherlands shares the European Commission's concern about the urgent need to stop the deterioration of the quality of the estuarine nature in the Western Scheldt and commits to implement its obligations in this regard under the European Nature legislation, which is long overdue.

The Commission considered the original plan as foreseen in the 2005 Treaty with Flanders as the most appropriate way forward and was concerned about its non-implementation.

Given the recent developments and the urgent need for nature restoration, we are prepared to consider the new package of measures proposed by the Dutch Government as being equivalent to the complete depolderisation of the Hedwigepolder and as an important first step towards achieving compliance with the provisions of Art 6(2) Habitats Directive.

An important element of the proposal is the installation of an independent monitoring committee. Such committee should accompany and evaluate the effects of the measures taken so far and assist in identifying any possible need for further measures, both under Article 6(2) and under 6(1) Habitats Directive, in line with the Development Scheme 2010. The monitoring committee should also contribute to a broader understanding and public acceptance of the necessary nature conservation measures and enable everyone to verify the progress made.

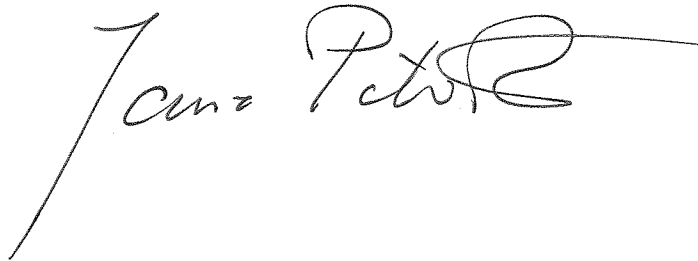
The Commission's acceptance of the new package of measures is however conditional upon receiving further assurance that these measures will be implemented in a single package and start immediately.

I would welcome if the Commission could receive the detailed package including a timetable on the implementation of the proposed measures and the above mentioned assurances by mid-May so that my services can examine them and assess if the conditions to waive the need of formal legal proceedings based on Article 6(2) of the Habitats Directive are fulfilled. Such timetable and periodic reports on its implementation should give us the confidence that commitments will be realised and kept on track towards completion of the proposed package of measures by 2016 at the latest as proposed in your letter.

I would like to reiterate the importance of reaching our common objective of halting the environmental damage to the estuary and of working towards a fully science-based approach to taking any further measures necessary to give the estuary sufficient space for its restoration.

I look forward to your response.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jane Peter". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.