Speech by the Director-General of the ministry of Economic Affairs, dr. Hans Hoogeveen, at the Aquaculture High Level event, in the SQUARE meeting centre, Brussels, May 24th, 2016.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When talking food and blue growth, it is wise not to get distracted from a number that many of you know of:

nine billion.

It is common knowledge that in 2050 nine billion people will be living on planet earth. *People*, men, women, children, who have names and personalities. Stomachs and bellies to be fed every day. Strivings to have lives of quality, in societies of quality.

Probably, this will not be off our agenda in the year 2050. Scientists indicate that there is a 70 per cent chance that the population will *not* stabilize in the decades thereafter. So, in 2100, there may be 12 billion of us.

We also know that people broadly appreciate wild fish. Men, women and children have them on their menu – they just are a good source of proteins and essential fats. Nutritional guidelines advise consumers to eat fish at least once a week.

But we *are* dealing with declining catches of these fish.

If we keep our arms folded, the world population may be living under the threat of nutritious scarcities soon.

That seems to be bad news so far. Here's better news: in the field of food, we often see threats trigger solutions. Scarcities can provoke sustainable and profitable production methods. Aquaculture and fish farming *are* solutions, that *will* become increasingly important in the coming years. We really don't have to despair on proteins and omega three.

For a number of reasons, our share in safeguarding food will continue to grow. We know, for instance, that fish farmers form less of a burden to the environment than meat producers. Their ecological footprint is considerably lower.

However, in recent years, European Aquaculture did not develop economically, and there is still a lot to improve when it comes to sustainability, Europe faces stagnation in aquaculture.

But the Common Fisheries Policy provides good guiding points. . Recovery should come from member states with long-term plans and strategic visions on how to develop aquaculture sustainably.

In the Netherlands, we have our National Strategic Plan for Aquaculture. Our national perspective is based on *innovation* and *cooperation*.

Please allow me to elaborate on those two a bit more.

As for *innovation* in the fish farming sector, the Dutch government puts efforts into markets and technologies. We aim to increase both profitability and sustainable operations. We consider, for instance, marine exploitations to be promising. In the North Sea companies now develop productions systems for fish and shellfish jointly. Our colleage **Marieke Mossink** will offer you some inspiring examples of multi-use of off shore platforms this afternoon. Like wind turbine parks produce green energy and edible seaweed. And other stories from the North sea.

As for *cooperation*, the Dutch government actively supports new market chains. We therefor strengthen the collaboration between companies from different economic sectors, and encourage cooperation with stakeholders, like NGO's.

In terms of production volumes, we have a small aquaculture industry But we largely compensate. In the Netherlands, two traditions of technological knowledge and experience go together with an open attitude. Leaving traditional and new entrepreneurs in the aqua cultural sector a lot of knowledge and knowhow.

We are open to share that knowledge and expertise with you. It seems to us that many more EU companies and member states could take advantage of it. Just like we could take advantage of their knowledge and experiences. For these are qualities that

multiply as we share it.. Holding the Presidency, we truly believe they present numerous opportunities to turn European stagnation into expansion.

And please allow me to stress, in this regard, nature's perspective. I just indicated that, on a national level, the Dutch are developing a profitable *and* sustainable aquaculture. We are equally ready to share with you our experience in how to reduce our ecological footprint and respect the environment.

Just another home grown example.

Like the Netherlands, some member states face restrictions in marine protected areas. As natural resources are being conserved there, it may affect human activities and food production activities.

Recently, the mussel farming sector, NGO's and the government reached an agreement on how to develop a sustainable mussel farming sector in the Wadden Sea. That's where most mussel seeds are cultivated, and half of our mussels grow - a golden breeding ground for mussel fishermen.

Parties involved say less mussel seeds will be harvested in ways that damage the sea floor. They say they will promote mussel seed cultivation in capture installations, and not disturb areas of nature conservation value. Also, the sector will develop new

methods to capture mussels. And this time parties agreed to solve their disputes through discussion and negotiation, rather than seeking redress through the courts.

The urge for sustainable production is broadly known since the Brundtland-report. But these days, sustainability in aquaculture is not a notion. It is practice, experiment, activity. Our government emphasises that fish and sea animals are to be produced respectfully, in accordance with nature and the local environment. We should also be paying extra attention to the health and the welfare of our animals. And we do: in recent years several researches on fish killing methods have been carried out. And last but not least: our animals have to be healthy and highly qualified for human consumption.

Ladies and gentlemen,

European aquaculture is ready to evolve now. It may grow into one high quality sustainable sector. And be a solution to the food dilemma. But that position has to be conquered. There is a journey to make. An expedition.

Opportunities are to be explored with our fellow travellers. Among them: European fish farmers and scientists. They have to further develop innovative and sustainable practices on different levels. We all have to stimulate the creation of new jobs with them.

Over time, the EU could contribute to food demands globally.
Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me underline once more that it is a moral duty not to forget about the growing world population. Aqua production methods are key to keep feeding the 9 billion, key to the world's economies, and key to restore and maintain biodiversity in the waters of the world.

Therefore, it is most essential to exchange the knowledge we possess today. As we share it, sustainable food solutions will be able to expand in Europe and beyond.

It will also enable us, every day, to recognize more of our chances. 'Chance favours only the prepared mind'*, that's how a founder of food solutions – Louis Pasteur – put it. As a Dutch native, I would rather say it this way: once you are the owner of a hammer you will see nails everywhere.

I am sure we will be finding lots of them during this meeting.

*"Dans les champs de l'observation, le hasard ne favorise que les esprits préparés" Bron: toespraak bij Douai, 7 december 1854, tgv de inhuldiging van de Faculteit der Letteren van Douai en de Faculteit Wetenschappen van Rijsel.