

I'm honoured to welcome you all to our beautiful city. Rotterdam prides itself on being a city of enterprise, of innovation and of re-invention. Our venue is an example of these qualities. These buildings were formerly the wharves of the Rotterdam Drydock Company. More than three hundred ships have sailed forth from here, connecting Rotterdam to the rest of the world. Even though no ships are built here anymore, the spirit of industry is still very much alive. Now, RDM is a hub for innovative businesses, research and technical education. I'm sure you will get to know this place better in the next two days, and I hope it will inspire you.

We need these same qualities - enterprise, innovation and re-invention – if we want to close the plastics loop. Plastics have brought prosperity to Rotterdam, as they have to Europe as a whole. However, we are here today because several challenges with this ubiquitous material need to be addressed. Worldwide, 95 percent of all plastic is not re-used; the value of this resource is lost to the economy. Worse, huge volumes of plastics are not even collected at all, but they end up in the oceans and accumulate there. With a business-as-usual scenario, there may actually be more plastic than fish (by weight) in the oceans in 2050.

The proposed solution to these issues is closing the plastics loop; reducing the volumes of plastic waste we produce, separating it from the other waste streams and using this resource again in new products.

The EU has taken on this challenge by adopting the Circular Economy Package last year, and in the Netherlands, we are eagerly anticipating the National Resource Agreement between the national government, business and other stakeholders. In preparation for this and the EU Strategy on Plastics, Dutch stakeholders have signed the Plastic Value Chain Agreement in 2013.

The ink is still wet, but last month Rotterdam has put its ambitions on paper along with seven other Dutch cities in the City Deal Circular Cities. We have committed ourselves to executing several circular pilot projects, tracking our progress in making the city of Rotterdam circular, and exchanging knowledge with the other participants.

All this talk of innovative policy is very exciting to us of course, but the inhabitants of Rotterdam have more practical demands of their city government: we need to keep the city clean. The municipality fulfils this

responsibility as well as our circularity ambitions by starting up source separation of plastics, at home and in our public spaces (1). We promote citizen participation with campaigns to explain the value of plastic waste (2). Finally, we are investigating the possibilities for separating plastic from other domestic waste in a materials recovery facility.

We are also using our role as a procurer of goods and services as a leverage point by starting up a circular procurement programme, so that using recycled plastics in your product will be seen as a fundamental advantage rather than as an expensive gimmick.

Furthermore, we're giving breathing space to new ways of manufacturing products by making space for innovators in our old harbour districts, and by cutting them some slack on regulations.

One particularly inspiring initiative makes use of Rotterdam's delta location. In our hinterlands, plastic waste ends up in rivers and is carried to the sea. But before getting there, it has to pass through Rotterdam. The Port Waste Catch project of the Port of Rotterdam is developing several technologies for capturing that plastic in the harbour, from small floating barriers (3) that capture surface plastic to Waste Sharks (4), drones that surf around the harbour and gobble up plastic waste.

The captured plastic can be re-used. For example, WHIM, a Rotterdam architecture bureau, is working with several universities and the Rotterdam Municipality to take this waste and develop it into the Recycled Park (5). The plastic is re-manufactured into hexagonal tiles upon which plants and trees can grow. They are even designed in such a way that underwater life can find shelter in nooks underneath the tiles. In this way, we can create floating parks in the city harbours.

In conclusion, we are all presented with the challenge of closing the plastics loop. Rotterdam has never shied away from a challenge; we get to work instead, and we make our city better tomorrow than it is today. Initiatives like the Recycled Park show that the challenges we face today can sometimes be opportunities in disguise. I hope our city can be an inspiration to you, and that we can in turn learn from the other innovative solutions that will be presented these two days. Thank you very much.