



## News from the Delta Alliance Front Line

Thank you to everyone who has met with us and provided feedback on the preliminary vision for an international Delta Alliance - contributions from partners in all four initial deltas as well as international partners are critical for the creation of a successful and truly international initiative.

Valuable recommendations and ideas have come out of initial meetings in Vietnam, California, Indonesia, and the Netherlands. Following these meetings we are convinced of several things:

1. There is overwhelming support for an international Delta Alliance;
2. The scope and objectives of the international alliance and the scope within each delta region must soon be defined;
3. Communication and events must continue over the coming months to maintain momentum for this initiative.

To further develop the details of Delta Alliance and the creation of Delta Chambers we will be coordinating meetings and events in each delta this summer and autumn, and keeping all partners updated through our website ([www.delta-alliance.org](http://www.delta-alliance.org)) and a monthly *Delta Dispatch*.

As this fledgling initiative finds its feet it depends upon the support of many partners. Help us to grow by sharing with us your comments and recommendations on everything from our evolving website to our strategy for building this alliance. In the meantime, we will do our best to incorporate the visions of our partners and keep the fire beneath this initiative burning.

Enjoy this first edition of the *Delta Dispatch*.

With all best wishes,

*Kees Slingerland*  
Delta Alliance Acting Chairman

*Katherine Trajan*  
Delta Alliance Project Officer

### Discover [www.delta-alliance.org](http://www.delta-alliance.org)

We will be developing our website to better inform our partners over the coming months. In the coming days you will be able to find the following information at [www.delta-alliance.org](http://www.delta-alliance.org):

#### Upcoming Events

We will post information on upcoming meetings and Delta Chamber launch events.

#### Delta Alliance Draft Definition

A first attempt at outlining some of the details of Delta Alliance – awaiting your comments. We will continue to update this online version so everyone can follow along as the initiative evolves.

#### Reports on Delta Alliance Meetings and Events

Updates on meetings and events that have been held to discuss and develop Delta Alliance.

#### Link to Expert / Knowledge Platform

This forum is also in its infancy, but do log in and check out the information and experts that are there. We anticipate this forum being a key tool for connecting our partners both within and across deltas, so keep coming back to it as it grows. It can also be reached directly at: [www.deltastatement.org](http://www.deltastatement.org)



## The First Four

What do the following four places have in common?

[The Mekong and the Red River Deltas, Vietnam](#)

[San Francisco Bay and Delta, California](#)

[Jakarta, Indonesia](#)

[The Rhine Delta, The Netherlands](#)

Answer: They are all initial delta regions for the Delta Alliance.

Chances are, if you are receiving this newsletter, you already knew that. And you probably also know of the plan to expand Delta Alliance to other delta regions after a successful launch with the initial four (target Autumn 2010).

But you might be asking yourself – what are the common issues between these delta regions that make them good partners for one another? After all, they are so different from one another, both physically and institutionally - how could they possibly learn from one another?

Several of our partners have highlighted the need for a clear identification of common issues that the four initial deltas can address together. As low-lying areas dependent upon freshwater from upstream, there are obvious challenges that these deltas will share in adapting to a changing climate, and we encourage our partners to start considering where the most valuable areas for cooperation are now, and may be in the future.

In the meantime, here is some preliminary information on our first four deltas, along with links to further information, to help us consider some of the similarities and differences between these incredible locations.

### Mekong and Red River Deltas

- The Mekong Delta consists of approximately 5.5 million hectares of land, most of which is less than 5 m above sea level.
- Most inhabitants are rural farmers/fishers – this region is one of the world's largest exporters of rice, and also produces significant amounts of fish and shrimp.
- The Red River Delta is smaller but more densely populated and developed than the Mekong Delta.

[http://www.arcabc.org.ph/wetlands/vietnam/vnm\\_mekdel.htm](http://www.arcabc.org.ph/wetlands/vietnam/vnm_mekdel.htm)

### San Francisco Bay and Delta

- The San Francisco Delta (also known as the Sacramento San-Joaquin Delta) is the largest estuary on the west coast of North America.
- More than 95% of the tidal marshes that existed in 1850 have been leveed and filled - over 1600 km of levees now protect farmland, communities, and infrastructure.
- This water system supplies water for 23 million people and over 2.8 million hectares of farmland.

<http://sfbay.wr.usgs.gov/>

### Jakarta

- 13 rivers run through the city of 8.5 million inhabitants – greater Jakarta is considered the second largest urban area in the world, after Tokyo, Japan.
- Jakarta has been identified as the most vulnerable region in SE Asia to the impacts of climate change, according to an IDRC-EAPSEA study.
- The land beneath Jakarta is subsiding at a rate of 1 – 10 cm per year, varying with location in the city.

[http://www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/12324196651Mapping\\_Report.pdf](http://www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/12324196651Mapping_Report.pdf)

### Rhine Delta

- The Rhine Delta has housed large cities and industrial areas for centuries, but its extensive experience has not made it immune to typical problems faced by deltas. Most notably, in 1953 many dikes failed, flooding huge areas of land, and killing over 1800 people.
- Sea level rise expected by 2050 will increase the risk of flooding in the port city of Rotterdam by a factor of 10.

<http://www.deltacommissie.com/en/film>



## What's in a Delta?

So what exactly is a delta? We discovered in our initial conversations in Indonesia that the definition of a river delta is not the same in all places, or for all people. Is a delta a triangular deposit of sediment at a river mouth? Is it the land between the forks of a river? Is it everything between the coast and 50 km upstream? Is it a natural environment with many species of plant and wildlife, or could it be a fully urbanized environment?

If we were to look down at one of our deltas, we would see much more than the mouth of a river – we would see water and land, roads, buildings and bridges, we would see people and animals, and we might see vehicles and garbage, and agriculture and dikes. We would see a complex system tying together the natural and the built environment. This complex system is the focus of Delta Alliance. The problems that deltas face, from flooding to energy use, cannot be solved without consideration of many aspects of the complex system that they exist within. And this is one reason why Delta Alliance is being formed – to bring together the many forms and fields of knowledge required to address complex problems.

Would a clear definition of a delta help Delta Alliance? We may not agree on a definition of a delta, yet we can all agree that these regions face some unique and critical challenges, many of which can only be adequately addressed at the “delta” scale, for which there are no clear jurisdictions. This is another reason why Delta Alliance is being formed – to create a platform where the problems of delta areas can be discussed at the “delta” level.

Yet, within each delta location that is a part of Delta Alliance, some scope must be chosen to give structure to the Delta Chamber. In Indonesia we heard that the Ciliwung Delta is too narrow a focus, because the problems of that delta cannot be considered without looking at the whole city. In Vietnam, many partners have recommended including or focusing only on the Red River Delta rather than the Mekong Delta. Should there be one Delta Chamber that includes both deltas, or one for each delta?

The scope of each Delta Chamber must be decided by the partners in that delta, but borders should not be set too strictly, as the relevant scope of the delta may be different for every project that takes place in the delta. Ultimately, we want each Delta Chamber to organize itself in a way that is most effective for its particular situation, and to maintain an open community that welcomes all partners who feel they can contribute or benefit from being a part of Delta Alliance.

## Fear versus Fascination

Fearing the consequences of our disruption of natural systems  
Hearing the sea level rising - and wonder – who is actually listening?

Urgency and obsession! Millions listening and watching!  
Land use adaptation: new potential for saline nature and cropping?

Ecological reliance and coastal defense  
A holistic landscape where the fish can dance  
Productive polders of salty tasting, deltaic romance

A hundred thousand hectares of saline intrusion  
Is multifunctionality just an elegant illusion?

We're fascinated by the potential for ecological symbiosis  
And to integrate humans, before this opportunity closes!

The mouth opens and screams!  
Deltas are changing and the water is green  
But take a step back; keep your breath and your dreams  
For the land of the future and the upcoming scenes

- Kealan Gell