

## **Speech Johan Hamster - regional minister of the Province of Groningen**

October 12, Provinciehuis Groningen

[ENG]

First of all, welcome to our beautiful Provincial House. Today we are gathered in the state hall, the heart of our provincial democracy. The provincial council has been using this state hall for their meetings since the 1600's.

But of course we also welcome the kick-off of the Interreg North West Europe project BUFFER+. As the Province of Groningen, we have the honor to be the lead partner of this beautiful project. I am Johan Hamster, regional minister of the Province of Groningen, and my portfolio includes climate and water. These topics match perfectly with this morning's program, which focuses on the peatlands of North-West Europe.

In Groningen we have a beautiful peat area that surrounds the city of Groningen. The peat areas currently emit a vast amount of CO<sub>2</sub> and therefore contributes to climate change. And to tackle that, water is an important factor.

We are becoming increasingly aware of our environment and try to make decisions that are based more on our surroundings. For example by taking into account the natural state of soil and water in an area when deciding how to use the land. This approach is very important for peat areas. What will peat areas look like in the future if we take the peat soil and water buffering capacity into consideration when making our choices? How can we use and protect the beautiful peat area of Groningen in the future? That is what we want to find out together in the coming years. BUFFER+ will hopefully help us with that. And of course we hope we can aid other regions with their approach. Because together, as 5 regions in North West Europe, we are working on rewetting the peat, developing new revenue models in peat areas and on new cooperation structures.

It is not without reason that here in Groningen we say: VEUR MEKOAR (which means for each other). I would like to say, for each other and with each other.

And that also applies for today. I want to wish you an inspiring and successful day for each other and with each other.