

Presentation Wietse van der Werf, Sea Ranger Service, 5 October 2017

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen. I am very honoured to be able to address you from this stage today and present to you the world's first international maritime ranger service: the Sea Ranger Service.

My name is Wietse van der Werf and ever since I was a young boy I have been fascinated by nature and actively working towards its protection.

Over the last three decades I have worked with multiple conservation organisations and even had the opportunity to go on numerous Antarctic expeditions. I started training volunteers as Citizen Inspectors and assisted authorities in collecting evidence of illegal fishing.

By 2015 I had launched my own aviation initiative, whereby we repurposed the flights of private pilots for environmental monitoring. While many pilots might not necessarily have a personal passion for nature, they do jump at the opportunity to do their beloved flying with purpose.

It is through this work, which has been about finding the most effective way to protect our oceans, that I experienced the power of citizen engagement. I also realised that it is possible to combine otherwise seemingly unrelated issues and individual passions to come to creative solutions and I now dare to dream big about what it is that we can collectively achieve.

There are now roughly 6.500 Marine Protected Areas around the world. While it is an amazing achievement that these areas have been created, the reality is that they often lack the capacity to be adequately patrolled, monitored and managed. This lack of resources exists globally and is threatening our ability to implement the policies we have all worked so hard to put in place.

We often look at modern technology to fix problems yet I found that many answers to our questions about the future, can in fact be found in the past. What inspired me to start the Sea Ranger Service is an initiative called the Civilian Conservation Corps, founded in 1933 by US president Roosevelt.

Faced with massive unemployment during the Great Depression and a nation which had neglected much of its natural land, Roosevelt mobilised 3 million unemployed young men from the cities - and under the guidance of the military - got them to establish 800 national parks in 9 years.

Today, the situation is not much different: in fact youth unemployment is on the rise, with major expense to governments. Just imagine: two global problems becoming each other's solution. Tackling youth unemployment while restoring nature. It is exactly this kind of holistic approach we need to bring about change in the way we manage Marine Protected Areas and restore ocean biodiversity. The only difference is that we need ships - so we started building them.

The Sea Ranger Service is as a social enterprise. We offer cost-effective capacity to assist governments in managing fisheries and regenerating Marine Protected Areas. We do this by building specially designed sailing work ships, the first of which is currently under construction in The Netherlands.

Navy veterans then train local unemployed youth during a 5 week bootcamp, in which the youth go through at least 20 maritime trainings. With the ship built and crew trained the Sea Rangers then start the contracted monitoring, research, maintenance and regeneration work at sea.

So what makes the Sea Ranger Service unique?

- Cost-effective capacity: sailing ships are cheap, we finance their construction and our clients only pay for the days Sea Ranger work at sea
- Global scalability: We can replicate the Sea Ranger approach across the world. Making nature preservation possible on a global scale, cost effectively. That is our core business.
- Social economic benefits: we create jobs, we tackle youth unemployment and give veterans back a sense of pride and purpose.

But central to all we do are the young people we train as Sea Rangers. They are the future. Our future ocean ambassadors. And so far over 500 youths have applied for the bootcamp. Then there are 42 maritime companies and investment funds that are involved to get us to launch operationally by next summer with close to 3 million euro in investments behind us.

Our initial objective was 5 ships in 5 years in the North Sea but the oceans are much much bigger. 30 ships in 10 years, 100 ships in 15 years: we have the investor connections and are keen to scale across and beyond Europe, with West-Africa, South-East Asia and the Pacific on our wishlist.

This conference is an opportunity for us to strengthen our commitments to protect the high seas. I would now like to challenge you to start the conversation with me, with us as a Sea Ranger Service, about how we can bring the Sea Ranger Service to your nation. To start training local youth, to create Sea Ranger jobs and to bring shipbuilding business to your ship yards.

From my own experience I know that working on ocean issues can often seem daunting, like an uphill struggle. However, as I recently met the youths that applied for the Sea Ranger Bootcamp and learned of their enormous enthusiasm. When I talked with veterans and hear how teaching young Sea Rangers brings back a sense of identity, pride and purpose for them. When I meet ship builders and see how they embrace the Sea Ranger Service as a way to bring about innovation in their ship building trade, I realised that the idea of Sea Rangers has the power to spark people's imagination.

And if there's anything we need right now to bring about the required change to tackle the huge problems we face in our oceans - it's imagination.

I look forward to start our conversation. Thank you!