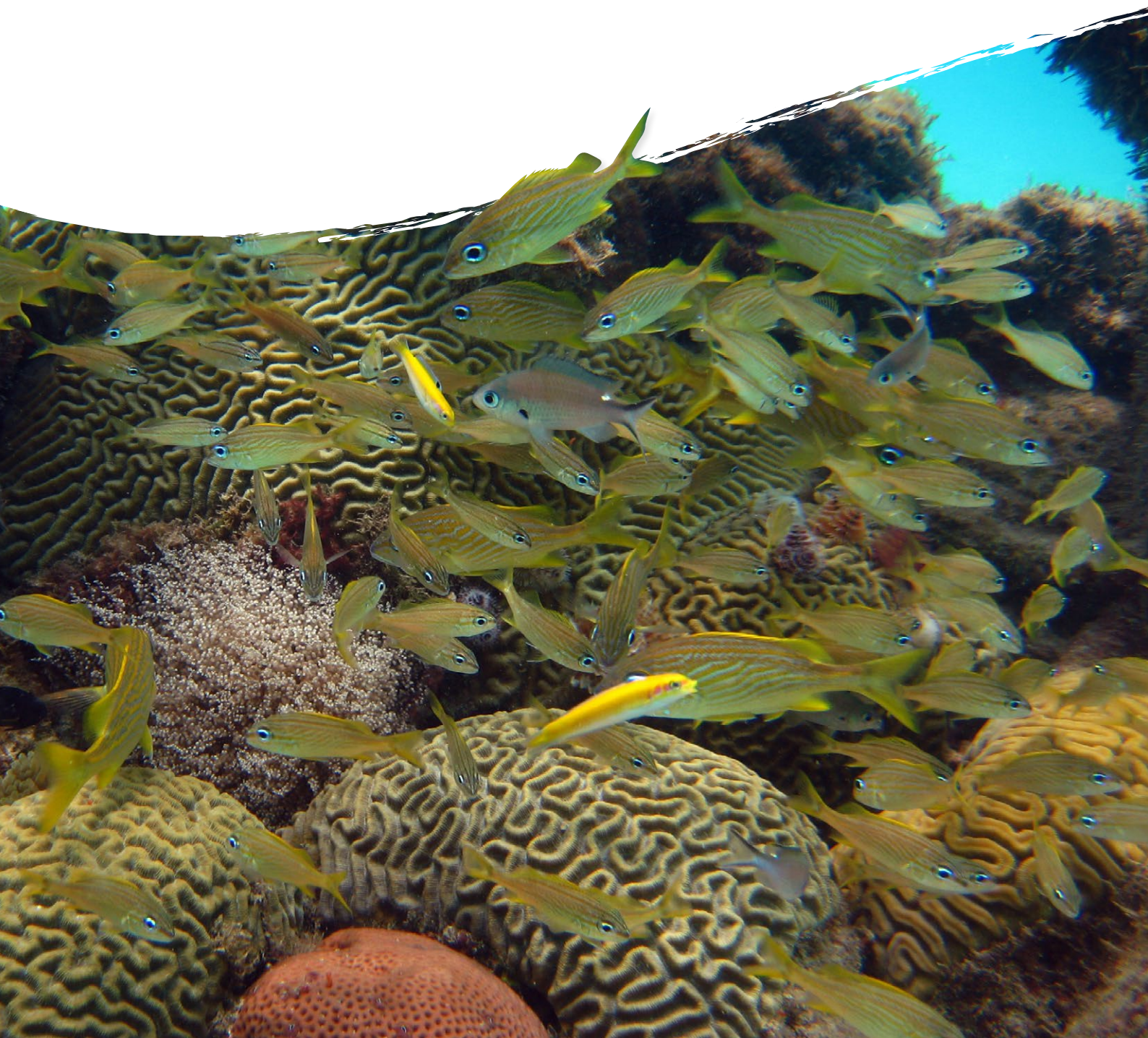




Dutch Caribbean Climate Action Plan





Introduction

Small Islands - like the Dutch Caribbean islands - are at the forefront of the climate crisis, with effects already starting to become noticeable in the region. Experts have warned, in amongst others the recently published IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, that we have just ten years left to avert the worst climate impacts. However, this will require decisive action, both in terms of mitigation and adaptation strategies.

The Dutch Caribbean islands have barely contributed to the overall cause of climate change yet they are particularly vulnerable to the impacts. Due to their small size, their limited economies of scale and limited capacities, these islands are not resilient against the extreme effects. People's lives and livelihoods highly depend on aspects that are now vulnerable.

Considering the expected impact drastic action is needed. Strengthening resilience and finding adaption solutions is a must. New visions are needed to create prospects of hope and opportunities.

Impacts of Climate Change on Dutch Caribbean Islands

The Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance, through their network of nature organizations is at the heart of the islands and sees how climate change will have an effect on nature and habitats.

Warming Seas

Water temperatures are increasing in an alarming rate, which have many negative effects on oceans and the land they surround. It has a direct effect on marine life. For example, coral bleaching due high temperatures, siltation of mangroves due to erosion or damage to coastal areas due to extreme weather. The ecosystems and biodiversity are crucial for nature, local economies, coastal protection and food supplies.

Besides the direct effects of increasing water temperatures there are also secondary influences that can have further impacts. For example the occurrence, and also the intensity, of tropical storms is expected to increase. These storms can be disastrous, like Hurricane Irma hitting the Windward Dutch Caribbean Islands in 2017 - of which they are still recovering.

Changing Weather

An increase in the length of dry seasons and a decrease in the length of rainy seasons will reduce the availability of freshwater, including drinking water, to homes, communities and businesses and cause severe stress to plant and animal life on the islands.

Intense rains and flash floods - which do not compensate for shorter rainy seasons - are set to increase. These rains are very damaging as they wash away topsoil and increase the amount of sediment and waste that runs off into the sea, polluting the already stressed-out coral reefs.

Sea Level Rise

Globally, sea levels are rising at an unprecedented rate, and the sea around some of the Dutch Caribbean islands is rising even faster than the global average. Rising sea levels, together with storm surges caused by tropical storms and hurricanes, can result in inundation. As most of the islands' economic activities, critical infrastructure, and population centres are located near coastal areas, these trends may have huge implications for local communities and the tourism industry.

Nature Degradation

These components of the climate crisis (warming seas, changing weather, and sea level rise) combine to form a great threat to nature on the Dutch Caribbean islands – both on marine and terrestrial ecosystems. For example, warming oceans and extreme weather may destruct coral reefs, mangrove forests, and seagrass beds. On land, they may impose threats like beach erosion and surface run-offs and may have negative effects on vegetation – and thus placing extra pressure on species.

The natural environment provides important services such as flood control, storm surge protection, groundwater replenishment; and limits the impacts of sea level rise and droughts. The destruction of our wetlands, forests and coral reefs reduces the environment's ability to protect itself and us.

These natural environments provide crucial habitats for many species. The Caribbean is home to many unique animal and plant species, many of which are already endangered due to loss of habitat, fishing and poaching, pollution and other stressors. The effects of climate change will be an extra burden for these species. For example, turtles may lose nesting beaches due to sea level rise and birds will lose nesting sites because of vegetation loss. Fish that use coral reefs, mangrove forests, and seagrass beds for shelter will disappear if these are lost. Just to name a few...



Fish that use mangrove forests and seagrass beds for shelter will disappear if these habitats are lost.

Act Now!

The effects of climate change pose an existential risk to our nature, society, and all forms of life on earth. In the Caribbean, such effects are already noticeable and we need to act now to prepare for upcoming effects, to prevent further damage and loss, to recover from already done damage but also to adapt to this new reality. Secondly also to join the world community in mitigation. Hope is absolutely not lost. We believe there are many options. We can become more resilient. We can adopt and prepare and learn how to recover. We can even grow and create new opportunities.

1

Improve the health of the natural environment

Reducing pressures on the environment and rehabilitating degraded ecosystems are top priorities. There are already legislation and conservation policies in place on all islands, and there are already many relevant conservation projects. The skills and knowledge to implement further measures are already there. However dedicated structural funding and capacities are needed.

Protecting nature and habitats in nature reserves serves many purposes. Marine protected areas can increase the health of coastal and marine habitats, making them more resilient to climate change pressures and better able to support healthy fisheries in the future. On land, protected areas serve to safeguard vulnerable species and ecosystems from adverse human impact.

Prioritize nature based solutions. Nature is also our best friend. Examples are forests, mangroves, reducing free roaming livestock, removing invasive species or improved agricultural methods. Nature based solutions will strengthen existing ecosystems and stimulate biodiversity. Implementing these changes will boost the islands' natural ability to regulate these pressures and will give the islands greater resilience to the effects of climate change.

2

Developing national adaptation plans

Islands need to start preparing now for the change that will come. Each of the Dutch Caribbean islands should have a national adaptation plan which details how to adapt to climate change impacts. These plans should incorporate:

- A risk assessment of the infrastructure, economy and nature of the island.
- A disaster preparedness plan.
- Economic and livelihood diversification strategies.
- Sustainable, safe, proactive urban planning and development strategies.
- A vision on the impact on society and how to include all citizens.

3

Cooperation

The 6 Dutch Caribbean islands are bound by history, culture, nature, ecology, geography and so on. And they are all part of one Kingdom. Unfortunately too often islands try to figure out things on their own instead of doing things together. Also, some islands are better connected to Europe and better tapped to resources than others. Cooperation will produce better results if there is a level playing field. Nature, knowledge and dealing with climate change should have no boundaries.

The (Dutch) Caribbean Islands need to work together to learn from each other, to support each other, to tackle challenges jointly, to scale up. Together they also make a stronger fist, even become leader in the region. Times of change do not only bring threats but also opportunities.

4

Blue and social

More and more people demand sustainable destinations and societies. The ocean and its resources provide the Caribbean islands with an opportunity to tap into the "blue economy concept". However this only works if it is done with commitment, and when everybody can profit from it. Social inequality is a major issue on the islands. Poverty and being excluded from opportunities must be addressed. Mitigating the causes of climate change or adapting to the effects only works if the social issues are also addressed. Everybody needs to be included.

As the impacts of climate change worsen, it is essential that greater efforts are placed on enhancing the implementation of mitigation and adaptation strategies in the Dutch Caribbean. Sustainable development and combating climate change require an integrated approach that prioritizes the protection of nature, energy independence, a sustainable tourism industry, and a diverse blue economy. But most importantly this needs to be a joint effort where islands and regions work together to strengthen each other's effort and resolve.

The DCNA calls on all governments, both in the Netherlands and in the Dutch Caribbean, to embrace this plan and collaborate with local stakeholders on the implementation of a climate-smart future for our beautiful islands and their communities.



Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance

Safeguarding nature in the Dutch Caribbean



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