

The storm surge which caused the overflow of the Thames in England, on 31 January 1953, was responsible for a major catastrophe in Holland with 1853 deaths, with 1200 km of dykes destroyed, 500000 acres of land flooded and 72000 people made homeless. Disasters were nothing new to the Dutch, with terrible floods in 1574, 1775, 1808, 1894; the worst of these was the disastrous Saint Elizabeth Flood of 1421 which drowned more than 10000 people.

Never again, was the resolve of the Dutch Government, and its proposal to provide a storm surge barrier across the whole Rhine, Meuse and Eastern Scheldt Estuaries was accepted by Parliament on 23 June 1976 and passed into law: The Delta Plan. It was completed on 4 October 1986, when Queen Beatrix opened the barrier across the Eastern Scheldt. During these 10 years Europe's greatest interdisciplinary macro-engineering project demanded many new technologies, as for example the construction of two special ships to lift 62 giant concrete piers, each weighing 18000 tons, and deposit them in precise positions on mattresses in the river bed.

I was naturally most interested in, and considered it my duty to report on, the Delta Plan, as during the same time the Barrier across the Thames was much discussed in England and finally completed in 1982. My first article on the Delta Plan was published in the *Weekend Telegraph* of 18 January 1965, and it could reproduce three large colour photographs, two coloured maps and 1.06 column meter of text. I often visited the building sites of the dams in Holland and got to know the Chief Engineers H.A. Ferguson and his successor H. Engel. Later, as Editor of *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* both contributed extensive reviews to my Journal [*ISR* Vol. 1, p. 247. (1976) and *ISR* Vol. 14, p. 29 (1989)] describing in considerable detail the macro-engineering tasks and the ecological consequences of the Delta Plan. [See Title 365].

The Delta Plan had a threefold objective, to provide an impenetrable barrier against storm surges, to construct a highway across the three major dams to open up the district to trade and commerce, and thirdly to provide a fresh-water reservoir for agriculture and industry. Ecological pressure, however, demanded the free flow of sea water into, and out of, the Eastern Scheldt area to preserve its fishing industry, and hence the dam across it to guard against the storm tides needed sluice gates of gigantic size. This was achieved by 62 inlets across the 3 km length of the dam, the sluice gates being suspended from huge piers 45 m apart, built at the rate of one every two weeks. The special ship *Ostrea* [Oyster] lifted these piers from the nearby dry construction site and placed them in their centimeter precise position on the river bed. This magnificent macro-engineering feat alone deserved, according to my judgment, the greatest praise I could give.