

PRESS RELEASE

Mr. Bernard Wientjes awarded water students in the Dutch-Israel Forum headed by Dutch Prime Minister Rutte

'Reclaim agriculture' wins the first Wetskills Water Challenge in Israel

Tel Aviv – On Sunday 8 December Mr. Wientjes (President of the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW)) awarded a team of two Israeli and two Dutch water students. This team won the prestigious Wetskills Water Challenge Israel 2013 with their out-of-the-box concept "Reclaim Agriculture", about improving the social context of using reclaimed water for agricultural purposes in Arabic areas in Israel. He was impressed by the Wetskills event: *"maybe you can teach politicians and professors to limit their presentations to two minutes when they present professional messages"*.

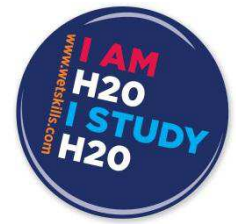
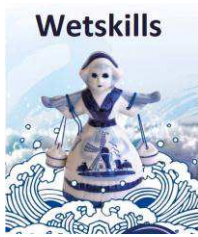
The award ceremony led by Mrs. Aleid Diepeveen (Netherlands Water Partnership) took place during the Water Seminar, organised by the Wittenburg Council. This water seminar was held during the official visit of the Dutch government delegation to Israel, headed by Dutch Prime Minister Rutte, who was accompanied by Dutch ministers Timmermans and Ploumen. The team existing of Erinke Wiegiersma (Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences), Noa Aharoni (Tel Aviv University), Denis Shteynberg (Technion), Menno Brouwer (Wageningen University) highly impressed the jury, headed by Prof. Avi Shaviv (head of Grand Water Research Center at Technion). The jury highlighted the practical and technical concept for a social challenge. *"It has a great potential to increase the profitability of irrigation for small farms."*

Program in Israel

During the Wetskills Water Challenge four mixed teams from Israeli and Dutch universities are challenged to come up with innovative ideas for practical water issues. Each team had a central study case, provided and supported by organisation in the water sector. The four cases were:

1. Parasite Police - Sustainable control to minimize infections by Giardia and Cryptosporidium
2. Reclaim Agriculture - Encourage the Arab community to use reclaimed water in profitable non-traditional agriculture
3. Let's Dew It - Atmospheric water extraction
4. A Drop into History - Using ancient techniques to make the desert bloom

This Wetskills event took place in Haifa. After a teambuilding trip to water-related and cultural sites in the northern part of Israel, the Wetskills BrainHurricane was organised. Each team brainstormed together with experts about their topic and ideas. During the week they elaborated their ideas, made a poster and prepared an 'elevator pitch', a two-minute presentation without visible help.



Amazing experience

Johan Oost (Netherlands Water Partnership / H₂Oost) as program manager of Wetskills is looking back at a very successful Wetskills Water Challenge. *“Again an amazing experience! Being in Israel is intense, a combination of cultural-historic and religion sites, but high-level water know-how and professionalism as well. I felt a growing enthusiasm and help for the Wetskills event. The student teams did a fantastic job and found concrete and useful concepts for the challenges. It was very special that Mr. Wientjes publically referred to Wetskills many times, also during the formal dinners where both the Dutch and the Israeli prime minister were represented. Via via I heard that they appreciated the Wetskills concept and the results.”*

Supervisor Janneke Diels (Waterschap Groot Salland) states: *“This is the third time that I’m supervising a Wetskills event. For me and Waterschap Groot Salland it is very important that students and young water professionals are enabled to bring in their fresh and innovative ideas on international water challenges. Because of water scarcity in Israel there is always a need for innovation in the Israeli water sector. I think this is an important reason why the Wetskills Water Challenge has been such a big success. The results of the students are highly appreciated by the involved parties, and provide a solid basis for follow up.”*

About the Wetskills Water Challenge

The Wetskills Water Challenge is a two-week event for students from all over the world. The participants developed their own innovative and creative concepts for broad water issues in a changing world. In multidisciplinary and intercultural groups, the students gained more in-depth knowledge on the challenge topics by workshops of renowned water experts and field trips.

It was the eleventh edition of the international challenge that has previously taken place in China, Morocco, Netherlands, Indonesia, Oman, South-Africa, Egypt, Romania and Mozambique. Wetskills is a program under the umbrella of the Human Capital program of the Netherlands Water Partnership in cooperation with Royal Netherlands Water Network. Main partners for the event in Israel were: Grand Water Research Institute at Technion, H₂Oost, Waterschap Groot-Salland, both the Dutch and Israeli Embassy and Top Sector Water.

Contact Details

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Photos

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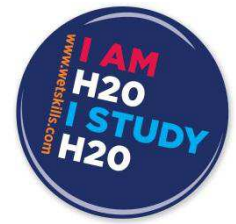
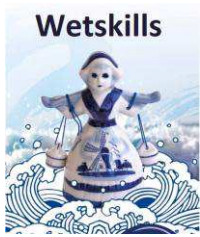


Photo 1: Winning team and Mr. Wientjes during Awarding ceremony



Photo 2: Wetskills group (students and supervisors) with Prime Minister Rutte