



No safety net for the Caribbean Netherlands

No strategic stocks on
Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba

2026



Netherlands
Court of Audit

Contents

1. Executive summary | 3

2. Strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands | 5

2.1 No strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands | 6

2.2 Significant import and supply chain reliance | 9

2.3 Absence of policy and no allocation of responsibilities | 11

3. Response of the minister and Court of Audit's afterword | 13

3.1 Response of the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations | 13

3.2 Court of Audit's afterword | 15

Appendices | 16

Appendix 1 About this audit | 16

Appendix 2 References | 17

1.

Executive summary

The security of the islands of Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba (the Caribbean Netherlands) is at risk in many ways, not least from hurricanes and volcanoes. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz raised the risk of a global fuel shortage and in January 2026 the geopolitical situation in Venezuela (70 km from Bonaire) was so precarious that Dutch airlines temporarily suspended flights to and from the Caribbean region. This intervention had an immediate impact on the residents of the Caribbean Netherlands because the islands are almost completely reliant on imports. Sufficient reserves of drinking water, food, fuel and medicines are critical to the residents of the Caribbean Netherlands.

As part of our Accountability Audit of the Dutch central government, this year we examined the policy conducted by the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) regarding strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands. A strategic stock is an additional inventory or reserve held to mitigate the risk of unexpected supply chain disruptions. Our examination looked at strategic stocks of food, fuel, drinking water and medicines. We conclude that there are no strategic stocks on the BES islands. This is a worrying concern.

An island's lack of sufficient strategic stocks can have serious social consequences. A disruption in the supply chain could rapidly lead to shortages, with an immediate impact on day-to-day life, such as empty supermarket shelves. What's more, the islands themselves produce very little food. Energy supplies can also be at risk.

There are no strategic stocks. We therefore examined the regular stocks held by the 3 islands. Reasonable stocks of fuel and medicines are available, but drinking water and fresh food are in very short supply. If drinking water production or the weekly delivery of fresh produce is disrupted by a crisis, there is very little the islands' residents can do. They are soon reliant on private parties for drinking water and food.

The Minister of BZK coordinates government policy on the Caribbean Netherlands but has introduced very little policy on strategic stocks. No firm agreements have been made between the government, the island authorities, private parties and vital sectors. It is not clear who is responsible for what.

We recommend that the government determine the level of strategic stocks that must be held in the Caribbean Netherlands and decide who is responsible for them. We further recommend that the government establish stocks of food and drinking water on the islands as soon as possible.

The content of this report forms part of the 2025 Accountability Audit of Kingdom Relations (IV) and the BES Fund (H).

2.

Strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands

As part of our Accountability Audit of the Dutch central government, this year we examined the policy conducted by the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) regarding strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands. The Minister of BZK coordinates government policy on the Caribbean Netherlands, for instance by deciding on and investing in economic development, infrastructure and services. Just €9,000 was invested in the food security of all the 6 islands in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom in 2025. However, it was not earmarked for strategic stocks. A total of €24 million is being provided to increase food security in the Caribbean part of the Kingdom in 2025-2028. The Netherlands Court of Audit has previously carried out a focus investigation of strategic stocks in the European Netherlands (Netherlands Court of Audit, 2022). This present audit considers strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands.

The Caribbean Netherlands are exposed to a variety of threats, not least natural disasters such as hurricanes and volcanic activity on Saba and Sint Eustatius. The situation in Venezuela (70 km from Bonaire) is also precarious. The United States struck a series of targets in Venezuela on 3 January 2026, captured President Maduro and transported him to the US (NOS, 2026). This situation forced Dutch airlines to temporarily suspend flights to and from the Caribbean region. In the light of the geopolitical and natural threats to security, strategic stocks are particularly important to Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. This year we examined strategic stocks in the context of the security theme in our Accountability Audit of central government.

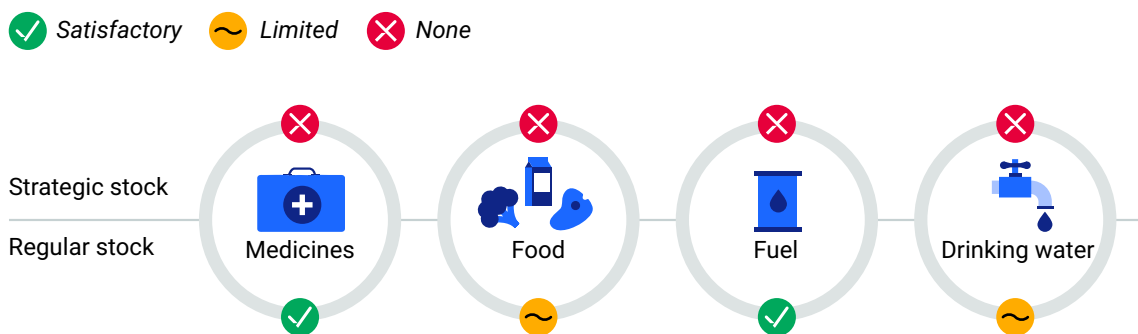
EU regulations oblige the Netherlands to hold certain strategic stocks. Under the Petroleum Products (Stockpiling) Act 2012, its oil and fuel stocks are held by COVA (the Netherlands Petroleum Product Stockpiling Agency). The EU regulations, however, do not apply to the Netherlands Caribbean and the Dutch government has not set goals for strategic stocks in that part of the Kingdom. Our audit found that there were no strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands. We accordingly confined ourselves to assessing the status of regular stocks. Appendix 1 of our report provides a detailed account of our audit.

2.1 No strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands

We conclude that there are no strategic stocks of drinking water, food, medicines and fuel in the Caribbean Netherlands (see figure 1). We understand a strategic stock to be an additional inventory or reserve that is not intended for regular use but is released only in the event of the supply chain being disrupted during a crisis

Figure 1 Strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands

No strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands



Given the absence of strategic stocks, we analysed the regular stocks held in the Caribbean Netherlands. Unlike strategic stocks, regular stocks are not held in reserve but are released for day-to-day use. By providing an insight into the regular stocks, we hope to identify the Caribbean Netherlands' greatest risks and exposures.

Although they do not qualify as strategic stocks, regular stocks of fuel and medicines on the islands are relatively high. This is not the case with drinking water and food stocks, which are limited. We present our findings below.

Drinking water

The BES Electricity and Drinking Water Act defines emergency drinking water as drinking water that is made available to consumers when a disruption lasts longer than 24 hours. A drinking water distributor has to offer an alternative supply method if a disruption lasts longer than 12 hours. Our standards framework, based on international standards for strategic stocks, stipulates that a strategic stock of drinking water must last 10 days. Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba do not have a strategic stock of drinking water. The regular stock of drinking water is shown in figure 2.

- Bonaire does not have a strategic stock because the standard infrastructure is used to distribute emergency drinking water. The regular stock of drinking water will last 3 to 4 days with regular use.
- On Sint Eustatius, too, the drinking water company does not hold a strategic stock but has a regular stock for 7 days with regular use.
- Saba, too, does not have a strategic stock. The island has the lowest regular stock: 600 5-gallon bottles. This is enough to provide the island's population with drinking water for 1 day.

We conclude that there is no strategic stock of drinking water and that the regular stock is limited.

Food

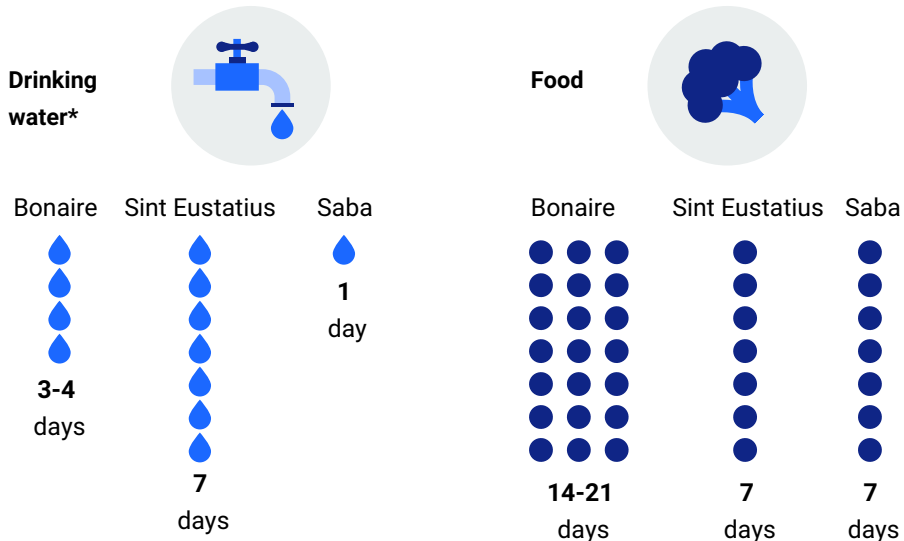
There is no policy specifically for food. Our standards framework, based on international standards for strategic stocks, stipulates that a strategic stock of food must last 7 days. The Caribbean Netherlands does not meet this standard. The regular food stock consists of perishable fresh food and non-perishable produce. All 3 islands receive weekly supplies of fresh food by air and/or sea. The regular food stock is shown in figure 2.

- Bonaire has a regular stock of perishable food that, on average, will last 2 to 3 weeks. Supermarket orders for new produce are based on weekly consumption. The stock of non-perishable food is higher than the perishable stock, but it is not known precisely how high it is.
- Sint Eustatius has a regular stock of about 1 week's fresh food. Again, it is not known precisely how big Sint Eustatius' non-perishable stock is.
- Rough estimates suggest that Saba has a stock of about 3 months' non-perishable food and a stock of 1 week's perishable food.

We conclude that there are no strategic food stocks and that regular stocks on Sint Eustatius and Saba are limited.

Figure 2 Regular stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands

Limited regular stocks of drinking water and food in the Caribbean Netherlands



*Held by the drinking water producer

Fuel

There is no policy specifically for fuel. Our standards framework, based on international standards for strategic stocks, stipulates that a strategic stock of fuel must last 72 hours. This standard is not met. All 3 islands have large regular stocks. Fuel plays a critical role throughout the supply chain. It is a source of electricity, power for emergency services and cooling for medicines and transport.

We conclude that there is no strategic fuel stock in the Caribbean Netherlands but there is a significant regular fuel stock.

Medicines

The BES Medicines Supply Act is in force in Saba, Sint Eustatius and Bonaire. Pharmacists are subject to its requirements on, for instance, the preparation, storage and dispensation of medicines. Our standards framework, based on international standards for strategic stocks, stipulates that a strategic stock of medicines must last 7 days. This standard is not met.

- The hospital on Bonaire has a regular medicine stock of 4 to 6 weeks. In addition, the public pharmacy holds a minimum medicine stock of 3 to 6 weeks.

Dispensation and stockholding of these medicines is recorded in a European Netherlands' pharmacy management system.

- Sint Eustatius holds a regular medicine stock of at least 1 month and at most 2 months.
- Saba holds a regular medicine stock of at least 1 month and at most 2 months.

We conclude that there is no strategic medicine stock in the Caribbean Netherlands but there is a large regular stock.

2.2 Significant import and supply chain reliance

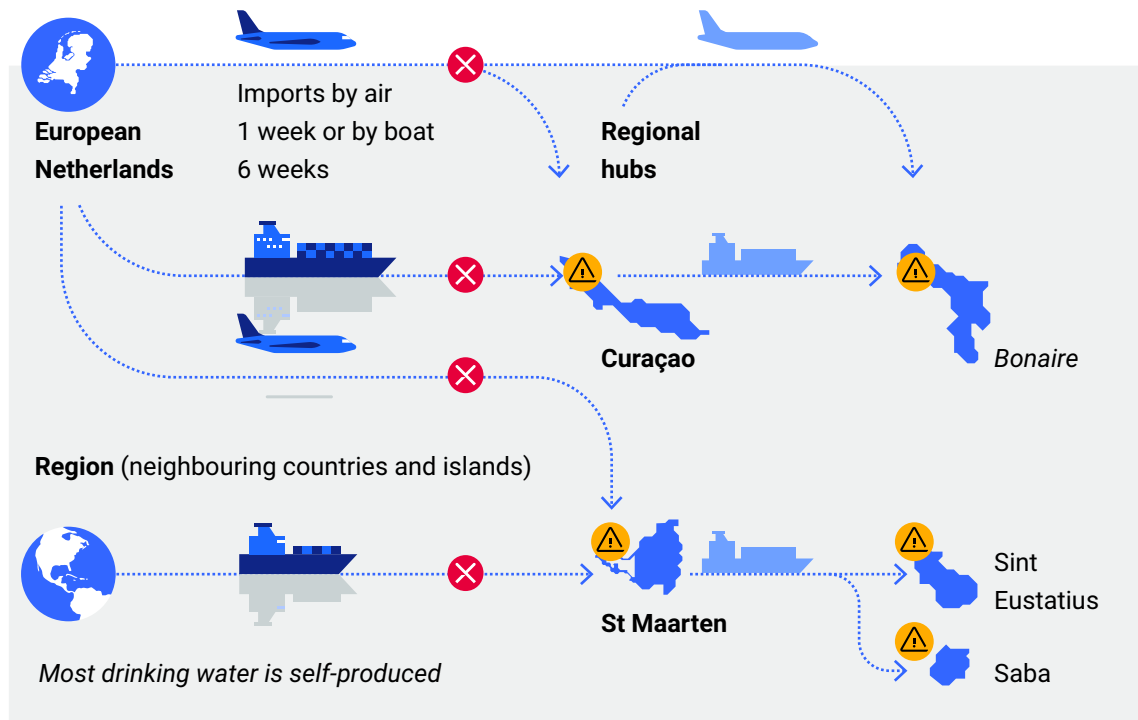
All stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands are reliant on imports, brought to the islands via regional hubs in Curaçao and St Maarten. Medicines are imported from the European Netherlands. Food is imported from the European Netherlands, Santo Domingo, Colombia and Miami. Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius produce little to no food of their own. Fuel is also imported.

Given this reliance on imports, vital supplies to the BES islands are systemically vulnerable (see figure 3). Disruptions in international logistics will have an immediate impact. Transport and storage costs are high owing to, among other factors, the long and complex supply lines. Imported goods are therefore expensive. The reliance on imports also reduces the islands' options in times of crisis. The BES islands will have to compete for scarce goods against other islands in the region and it is far from certain which islands suppliers will prefer.

Figure 3 Caribbean Netherlands highly reliant on imports

If the supply chain is disrupted, the islands will receive no supplies

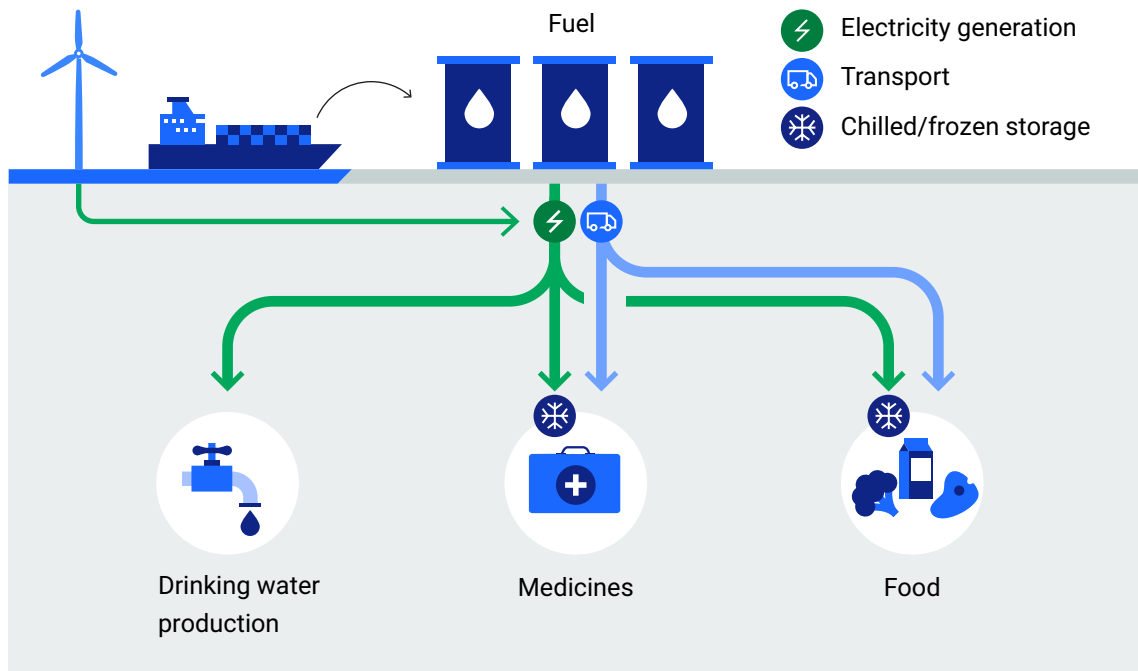
✘ Blockade ⚠ No stocks



Supply chain reliability is critical for the stocks held in the Caribbean Netherlands. A business or organisation may have its own stocks in order but will have no influence on vulnerabilities elsewhere. It might be reliant on a link over which it has no control. A fuel shortage, for instance, can have knock-on effects for electricity generation and thus for drinking water production. This in turn creates problems for the storage of food and medicines. Without electricity, food will perish if it cannot be chilled or frozen. The islands' limited use of solar and wind energy heightens their reliance on imported fuel. Fuel is the decisive link in the supply chain, as shown in figure 4.

Figure 4 Fuel supply chain in the Caribbean Netherlands

Fuel is the critical link in the Caribbean Netherlands' supply chain



2.3 Absence of policy and no allocation of responsibilities

The Dutch government and the authorities on the 3 islands have introduced little policy regarding strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands. Laws and rules have been adopted only in the case of drinking water. They lay down how much emergency drinking water must be available if regular supplies are disrupted. The lack of policy has prevented the government, private parties, vital sectors and the public bodies from making clear agreements on who is responsible for what. Where there are formal agreements, as in the case of fuel, there is uncertainty about the allocation of responsibilities. In light of the supply chain reliance, clear responsibilities and coordination are key for the responsible use of stocks. In the current situation, private parties and commercial interests may determine how regular stocks of drinking water, fuel, medicines and food are used in times of crisis.

2.4 Conclusion and recommendations

There are no strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands. There are relatively large regular stocks of fuel and medicines but regular stocks of food and drinking water are limited. Furthermore, the islands are reliant for their regular stocks on imports

and partners in the supply chain. Without a clear allocation of responsibilities, it is not obvious who is responsible for what. In a crisis, people will have to depend on private parties for food, drinking water, fuel and medicines. Given the reliance on imports and the supply chain, strategic stocks are more important to the islands than they are to the European Netherlands. Their absence makes the Caribbean Netherlands extremely vulnerable to supply chain disruptions. Strategic stocks are of major importance to the islands in the Caribbean Netherlands.

The absence of strategic stocks could have significant social repercussions. Supply chain interruption or disruption could quickly lead to shortages, with an immediate impact on day-to-day life. In view of the islands' own limited food production, supermarket shelves could quickly become empty. Energy supplies could also come under pressure. There is a real risk of supplies being disrupted. The situation in Venezuela is precarious, further unrest in the region cannot be ruled out and there is always the annual threat of hurricanes and other natural disasters. In April 2026, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz raised the fear of a global fuel shortage.

We therefore recommend that the government:

- determine and document the amount of strategic stocks that must be held in the Caribbean Netherlands and decide who is responsible for what;
- establish a strategic stock of food and drinking water (with the requisite storage capacity) that meets applicable standards, as regular stocks of both these goods are also limited.

Opinion on policy results

This audit examined whether the minister's policy results met the standards required of them. Based on the international standards in place for strategic stocks, we found that little policy was in place. Our opinion is based on a five-point scale: very worrying, worrying, poor, acceptable, good. We qualify the lack of policy on strategic stocks in the Caribbean Netherlands as worrying.

Opinion



3.

Response of the minister and Court of Audit's afterword

The Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) and the State Secretary for BZK responded to our draft report on 28 April 2026. Their response is presented below. We close this chapter with our afterword.

3.1 Response of the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations

The minister writes “I agree with your finding that no overarching goals have been set for strategic stocks on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba and that, under the definition and standards applied by the Court of Audit, there are no strategic stocks. However, the islands have regular stocks that they can draw on. You acknowledge this with regard to fuel and medicines. A range of emergency systems has been set up to support and stand by the islands if necessary in times of crisis.

Drinking water and food stocks

With regard to drinking water, it should be noted that the BES Electricity and Drinking Water Act provides for a framework for the supply of emergency drinking water. It is overseen by the Human Environment and Transport Inspectorate. The islands have limited regular stocks of drinking water because they can produce their own drinking water from seawater. In this light, the supply chain's reliance on fuel and energy is a matter of concern. As you mention in the report, the regular stock of fuel is relatively large. The robustness of drinking water security in Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba should be subject to the same critical assessment as it is in the European Netherlands.

I recognise the observation that the islands' food supply is highly reliant on imports and supply chain security. An important factor in this respect is the presence of adequate stocks in the regular commercial flows. Your audit shows that despite the lack of so-called strategic food stocks, the islands hold regular food stocks. They range from about 3 months on Saba to 2 to 3 weeks on Bonaire. This is logically shorter for fresh products, on average about 1 week (figure 2 in your report). In the event of a crisis, the islands can also appeal for aid and assistance. Measures are being taken to further strengthen food security, in part through the earlier commitment of €24 million (for all 6 islands together) via the CariFoodFund Foundation (under formation). The food topic will also be addressed in the chapter on social continuity in the National Crisis Plan for Military Threats (KCP-MD).

Supply chain reliance and imports

The government is aware that the islands are highly reliant on imports of goods and food, with about 50% or more being imported from the United States. The United States' new trade policy and the unrest in early 2026 concerning the Strait of Hormuz have increased the pressure on maritime logistics chains and the islands' vulnerability. This was recently highlighted by the tension between the United States and Venezuela. A joint working group of the autonomous countries and Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba and the relevant ministries in the European Netherlands is following the situation closely and exploring avenues to diversify trade and strengthen regional ties. The House of Representatives is periodically informed about these developments by means of progress reports on the joint economic agenda of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK) and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy (EZK).

Allocation of responsibilities

The State Secretary for BZK is responsible for coordination of government policy on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. Several line ministries are responsible for Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba in their own policy fields. They include the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport in the field of medicines and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management in the field of drinking water. The Ministry of Justice and Security is responsible for the crisis management system. The islands themselves also have certain responsibilities. Your opinion on the policy conducted clearly shows that more explicit coordination of these responsibilities is required. I agree that necessary steps will have to be taken in this area.

The government is working closely with Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba to strengthen the islands' crisis resilience in view of geopolitical and climate-related

developments. The State Secretary for BZK and the Minister of Justice and Security, for instance, have commissioned an analysis of the 6 islands' crisis capacity. It will be anonymised and shared with the House of Representatives before the summer of 2026. The Court of Audit's examination of strategic stocks on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba is a valuable addition that further clarifies the picture.'

3.2 Court of Audit's afterword

The minister agrees with our finding that no goals have been set for strategic stocks on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba. He writes that he is setting up the CariFoodFund and will consider the islands' food supply in the chapter on social continuity in the National Crisis Plan for Military Threats (KCP-MD). He further states that he will include our findings in the analysis of the islands' crisis capacity that he and the Minister of Justice and Security will share with the House of Representatives before the summer. We understand from his response that he will not give a definite follow-up to our recommendations to establish appropriate strategic stocks and make agreements on who is responsible for what.

This is a concern because the dependence on imports and reliance on the supply chain make strategic stocks an important issue for the islands. Drinking water supplies on Bonaire, Sint Eustatius and Saba would be at particular risk if desalination equipment failed to work. This is not a hypothetical scenario; the current fuel stocks are not strategic stocks. In a crisis, such as a global oil crisis, these regular stocks of fuel might be substantially lower than they currently are. Partly in view of the high reliance on food imports, supply chain disruption can quickly lead to serious problems.

Regarding our opinion on the policy conducted, the minister acknowledges that steps must be taken to strengthen his role as coordinator. However, it is not clear what form the steps will take and when they will be taken. We look forward to them with interest.

Appendices

Appendix 1 About this audit

Our audit objective was to gain an insight into the status of strategic stocks of drinking water, food, fuel and medicines in the Caribbean Netherlands. The Caribbean Netherlands is extremely reliant on imports for the supply of these and other essential goods. Owing to its geographic location, limited production capacity and exposure to supply chain disruption – due in part to natural disasters, geopolitical events and transport limitations – continuity of strategic stocks cannot be taken for granted. The audit did not consider crisis management.

The ministries and the 3 public bodies have not set standards for strategic stocks. The indicators we used were based on generally accepted international standards drawn up by the WHO, UNHCR, Sphere, the EU and other authoritative bodies. Our application of these standards took account of the local context in which Saba, Sint Eustatius and Bonaire find themselves.

We used the following audit techniques to answer our audit questions: interviews, document analyses, on-site visits and questionnaires.

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Geen vangnet voor Caribisch Nederland;
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Bonaire, Sint Eustatius en Saba.

The Hague, May 2026