

When looking for know-how, go Dutch

■ BY VICTORIA VAUGHAN

WHAT have windmills, tulips and clogs got to do with Merlions, orchids and chilli crab? The answer – water.

Singapore is tapping the Netherlands' century-old water expertise, making Dutch companies a key part of water infrastructure and technologies here.

At this week's Singapore International Water Week (SIWW), the second annual event of what is hoped to become South-east Asia's definitive water conference, Dutch companies were out in force.

Dutch utility company PWN chose SIWW to globally launch its technology company at the event, and is hoping to work with

PUB on ceramic membranes – a type of water filter.

Pointing to Holland's efforts to keep water from flooding its land, PWN director of research and development Peer Kamp said: "The Netherlands is known for fighting water... I won't say Singapore is fighting water, but when it comes to land reclamation and sea level rise, there are some similarities."

About 30 per cent of the Netherlands is reclaimed from the sea and lakes. In Singapore, one-fifth has been reclaimed.

Optiqua Technologies is a Singapore-based company which launched its water quality sensor at SIWW and it also announced it would move its new research lab to the WaterHub in Toh Guan

Road, Jurong. Its core technology comes from parent company Opti-sense, based in the Netherlands.

Chief executive Melchior van Wijlen said Singapore caught its eye with the strong government policy to invest in and support new innovative technologies, and the goal to make Singapore an international water hub.

Prince Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands – the star guest at water week – explained why both nations are ideal partners: "We are both very small countries, and therefore always looking abroad to find other opportunities."

The Netherlands, a low-lying delta in north-western Europe, has always lived with water, said the prince, who chairs the United Nations Secretary-General's Advisory Board on Water and Sanitation. "Therefore our institutions and academia are at a very high level on water management, so we can collaborate with Singapore on this issue."