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The Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management
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P.O. Box 20901
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Date 29 November 2018
Reference: Rli-2018/3074
Cc:
Appendices: 1

Subject: Proposal for Rli's Work Programme 2019-2020

Dear Mrs Van Nieuwenhuizen,

The Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli) has met on several occasions in the last few months to discuss possible topics for its work programme for 2019-2020. In its deliberations the Council considered issues raised by the ministries and in the discussions with you and your colleagues. The Council's ambition is to contribute to accelerating the necessary transitions in the broad domain of the human environment in the coming years. Because the relevant challenges are closely interconnected, most of the advisory reports published by the Council will transcend the boundaries of the four individual ministries with responsibilities for the human environment.
Partly on the basis of the discussions, the Council has included the following topics in this proposal for its 2019-2020 Working Programme:

1. Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
2. Hazardous substances
3. Aviation policy
4. Disposal of stranded assets
5. Healthy soils
6. Conference on inclusive transitions

These topics are described in more detail below. In addition, the Council may also, if the outcome of the relevant decision-making processes and policy developments warrants it, write advisory letters on the following topics:

7. North Sea
8. Consequences of climate change for spatial planning policy

Finally, we wish to point out that the preparation of an advisory report on the topic of 'Digitisation of policies on the human environment' - planned in the 2018-2019 working programme - has not yet commenced.

This letter contains a brief elaboration of the background to topics 1 to 6. We will be happy to discuss the precise parameters of each request for advice before commencing our deliberations.

Yours sincerely,
Council for the Environment and Infrastructure,

J.J. de Graeff
Chair

R. Hillebrand
General Secretary

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Brief elaboration of the topics in the 2019-2020 Working Programme

The topics to be addressed in 2019 are discussed below. We have also indicated which of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals are addressed with each topic.

1. Reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is expected to give Member States greater scope to adopt specific measures to increase sustainability and address regional objectives in the 2021-2027 budget period. The European Commission is committed to imposing tougher conditions for providing income support (in terms of climate, soil, water and biodiversity) and to introducting eco-schemes in Pillar 1 for measures that go beyond the mandatory legal requirements of nature, environmental or climate policy. It might also be possible to transfer some of the funds to Pillar 2, whose implementation is currently the responsibility of the provinces. The European Commission is leaving these important choices to the Member States, which will have to incorporate them in the national CAP Strategic Plan and notify them to the Commission.

The Council proposes publishing an advisory report on the Netherlands' implementation of the CAP in the 2021-2027 period to supplement previous advisory reports on reform of the CAP. How can the reform of the CAP contribute to the desired transition to a circular agriculture? What scope will there be to use CAP funds to meet statutory objectives and beyond for agriculture, nature and water that will promote the transition to a circular agricultural system? How can the national CAP Strategic Plan make the most effective use of Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 to achieve the objectives for the climate, soil, biodiversity, the environment and the landscape?

2. Hazardous substances

The understanding of the consequences of the production and use of substances for the human environment is constantly evolving. It is commonplace for frequently used substances to be found to be harmful after a period of time, whereupon the policies and rules governing them have to be revised. Examples of such substances include heavy metals, asbestos, PCHs and ozone. Microplastics, residues of medicines, new chemical compounds and nanoscale substances are some of the materials whose presence in the environment is currently a source of growing concern. Substances already known to be hazardous can also lead to the circulation and accumulation of hazardous (toxic) substances in our ecosystems if novel uses are found for them. Thirdly, the

transition to a circular economy and the energy transition could lead to changes in the use, production, storage and transport of hazardous substances which could in turn create new risks of harm to the environment and human health. Furthermore, there is growing tension between the (public) perception of risk and the (scientific) determination of risk. Hazardous substances can give rise to serious public unease even if the risks associated with them are believed to be small.

In the current system chemical substances are allowed onto the market on the grounds of the European REACH Regulation. Responsibility for oversight and enforcement of the rules lies to a large extent with the business community. The question is whether the current system of evaluation, authorisation, regulation and enforcement is sufficient to adequately manage the risks arising from both new types of substances in our environment and new ways of using substances. There are also questions about how governments should address social disquiet (which can be quite unpredictable) regarding these substances in terms of evaluation, authorisation, regulation and enforcement. The recent example of the contamination of sources of drinking water with GenX illustrates the clear discrepancy between public perception and scientific findings. How can gaps in the system be prevented? Do the national government, provinces and municipalities possess adequate instruments and resources to deal effectively with the risks of new hazardous substances and address the related social disquiet, all within the framework of European legislation?

3. Aviation policy

Economic growth and improving mobility have been the guiding principles in the decisions made with regard to the aviation sector in recent years. The ensuing exponential growth of the sector, partly as a result of low prices for consumers, increasingly conflicts with the current climate policy and undermines the quality of life for a growing number of people. The aviation sector was exempted from measures under the Paris climate agreement but that privileged position cannot be maintained for much longer. Public support for the sector's favourable treatment is weakening. The question is how to create a sustainable future for aviation in the Netherlands in which the economic importance of aviation is balanced against the climate challenges and the quality of the human environment. What role can alternative modes of transport play in meeting the growing demand for international freight and passenger transport? What will the choices mean for the decisions that have to be made on investments, for the location policy and for the regulatory framework? An important aspect that needs to be considered is the international context. In 2021, a global carbon offsetting and reduction scheme for international aviation (CORSIA) will take effect and flights within Europe will be incorporated into the European carbon emissions trading system (ETS). Negotiations are also underway at European level in this domain. To what extent can the Dutch government still actually guide and influence policy? What effect will the tax on plane tickets announced in the coalition agreement have? A basic requirement for this advisory report is that it can make a contribution the aviation strategy document to be debated in the House of Representatives mid-

2019. The Council therefore commenced preparations for its advisory report in October 2018 with a view to ensuring that it can be completed by March 2019.

4. Disposal of stranded assets

The transitions in the human environment will greatly alter the Dutch economy. The value of some assets will inevitably depreciate over time. It will no longer be possible to use some offshore, land-based and underground assets, such as installations, cables, pipelines and real estate, for their original purpose. This will certainly be a factor in the oil and gas sector and in agriculture and horticulture, but possibly also in other sectors over time. This raises the question of how we will arrange the disposal of operating assets when they are no longer fit for purpose.

The offshore industry is one example. A great many gas and oil platforms in the Netherlands' Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) will become redundant within the foreseeable future. The owners have an obligation to dispose of them. In the Dutch part of the North Sea alone, the cost of removing these assets comes to around five billion euro (10 to 100 million euro per platform). The question is who is going to ensure that they are actually disposed of. Although market actors are currently drawing up plans for this operation, many installations are owned by small international companies and there is no guarantee that they will be able or willing to bear the costs of the clean-up in the long term. An additional consideration is that the energy transition will also create opportunities for the reuse of the platforms, for example to produce hydrogen in combination with offshore wind energy.

Another example is the clean-up of non-sustainable horticultural areas or agricultural properties that become vacant, for example as a result of the transition to a circular agricultural system.

What can be done to guarantee that the costs of dismantling stranded assets are not passed on to the public? How can the optimal reuse of redundant assets and demolition materials be guaranteed? Another question that needs to be answered is how to prevent the operating assets that are currently being built for the energy transition from generating social costs in the future. Who will remove the wind farms and solar parks when new technologies emerge that are better able to meet the demand for energy? What policies and regulations are needed? What demands will they impose on governance structures?

5. Healthy soils

Sustainable soil management helps to improve the quality of soil. High-quality soil is essential for properly functioning primary production and for biodiversity. The health and fertility of soil deteriorate due to intensive use, compaction and the use of fertilisers and pesticides. There are many aspects to this problem, which has negative consequences for soil life and hence for agriculture and nature. In the Soil Strategy published on 23 May 2018, the Minister of Agriculture, Nature and Food Quality drew attention to the biggest challenges in relation to soil management and presented an outline programme for agricultural soils. The change of course announced in the policy document aims to encourage owners of farmland to establish their own circular system of soil management. What further steps are needed to arrive at sustainable soil management in the long term, also in the context of the implementation of the Soil Strategy? What are the responsibilities of public authorities and private owners in relation to soil?

6. Conference on inclusive transitions

Creating a more sustainable society will cost money, for the individual and for the community as a whole. The ability of different social groups to bear those costs varies. It is crucial for the success of the transitions on which the Council advises that different groups are involved in achieving them. The Council is planning to arrange a further debate on this topic. However, in the knowledge that the topic is not confined to its own advisory domain the Council will explore the possibility of organising a conference in 2019 in association with other advisory bodies and research institutes.