

PRESS RELEASE

Netherlands creates opportunities through circular agenda

June 18, 2015 – The Netherlands can benefit from making smarter use of raw materials. To achieve this, a government-wide circular agenda is needed. This states the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli) in its advice 'Circular economy: from wish to practice', which was presented today to the Minister of Economic Affairs and the Minister for the Environment. A government-wide approach can bring more coherence to the major efforts which are currently already underway in various places to make the economy circular.

Waste no longer exists in a circular economy and the fact that raw materials are retained in the economy for longer and at a higher grade can result in extra prosperity growth. The Netherlands is highly dependent on the import of raw materials: more than two-thirds of our raw materials are sourced from abroad. The global scarcity in raw materials and rising resource prices make our economy vulnerable. A smarter approach to the use of resources however actually presents new opportunities. This may result in cost savings, innovation and new earning opportunities for the Netherlands. Initiatives to this end are already underway in many places in the Netherlands: several companies are by now operating according to circular principles, such as DSM, Desso and Van Houtum paper; provinces are exploring the themes in their strategic policy development; and a clear shift is also noticeable among citizens, with a growing number of local sharing companies, product reuse through thrift shops and new services such as clothing libraries or repair cafés.

According to the Rli, the challenge for the Netherlands is to build on the existing activities and to create more cohesion, thus spurring the circular economy to develop from an experiment to common practice. In relation to the national circular agenda which the government needs to draw up, the Council offers recommendations for each specific minister. All ministers must contribute to the circular agenda based on their expertise and policy field. For example, the circular economy can be incorporated in the annual national Budget Memorandum formulated by the Minister of Finance. The top sector policy of the Minister of Economic Affairs can be geared to promising chains that serve as a figurehead for the Dutch circular economy. And the Minister of Foreign Affairs can use the six-month Dutch presidency of the EU in 2016 to further develop the circular economy package.

Like the ministers, the regions can also use their own specific strengths and qualities to focus on their strong points. This scale level is important: after all, it is in provinces, regions and municipalities that a circular economy will take shape. In line with their own positions, circumstances and area-specific qualities, they can create a mix of four main strategies: 'the zero waste region', 'the sharing region', 'the regenerative region' and 'the region of industrial symbiosis' (in which the waste flow of one company serves as raw material for another). The opportunities for a circular economy may differ from region to region. While one region may have a good starting point for the exchange of industrial flows (for example residual agricultural flows, phosphor), another region may have more potential in the area of sharing (for example due to cultural characteristics as neighbourliness [naoberschap]). By using inherent qualities as a starting point and allowing others to do what they do best, parties are prevented from all pursuing the same goals and getting in each other's way.

Note to editors

The advice 'Circular economy: from wish to practice' will be available on June 18, 2015 from 09:30 hours through www.rli.nl. For more information about the advice, please contact project manager Nicole van Buren, nicole.van.buren@rli.nl, +31 (0)6 10172005. To request interviews with members of the Council, please contact Miep Eisner, communications advisor, miep.eisner@rli.nl, +31 (0)6 15369339

About the Rli

The Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Raad voor de leefomgeving en infrastructuur, Rli) advises the Dutch government and Parliament on strategic issues concerning the sustainable development of the living and working environment. The Council is independent, and offers solicited and unsolicited advice on long-term issues of strategic importance to the Netherlands. The Rli is chaired by Mr. H.M. (Henry) Meijdam.

