Rat für
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Peer Review of Germany's Sustainability Policies
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Announcing Germany's Peer Review on national sustainability policies

Germany will perform a Peer Review of its sustainability policies. The Federal Government asked the Council for Sustainable Development to set up a working process, to invite distinguished Peers, and to conduct the review. The report will be tabled in autumn 2009.

The Review will feature a broad perspective covering both the Federal Government's sustainability policies with the National Sustainability Strategy at its heart, and the initiatives and working schemes in the private sector as well as key areas of actions being taken in civil society.

A focus will be laid on governance issues of the strengths, weaknesses and development potential of Germany's sustainability policies. The Review is focussed on the requirement to improve the effectiveness of sustainability policies and to deliver reliably against the targets that have been set. Therefore, it is expected to cover governance issues such as administrational implementation, vertical integration in federalist countries, management frames in the private sector, governance issues arising with the ongoing input of scientific evidence, civil society's input, leadership and governance, the issues of global transition and technologies, economy, development and sustainability, the governance of advisory schemes.

Peers

The concept of the Peer Review takes into account the international standards and will invite distinguished Peers with a wellknown record in conceptionalising schemes for sustainable deveplopment and in implementing it in enterprises, civil society and the administration. The

About this Info-News:

This newsletter informs interested parties and the public about the Peer Review of Germany's Sustainable Development Policies. The German Federal Government asked the Council for Sustainable Development to organise this review process. High-profile international experts will review and report back on Germany's sustainability policies.

To provide expertise and new thinking the German Federal Government put in place the German Council for Sustainable Development in 2001 and continued its mandat ever since. The Council is independent. As of today, the Council is formed by fifteen individuals from businesses, trade unions, churches, the media, environmental associations, and is supported by a secretariat. The Council is involved in elaborating sustainability policies in administration, the private sector and in the civil society. Its mandate includes bringing the vision of sustainability closer to the general public.

Peers are expected to guarantee a high-profile of the report. As long standing practioners the Peers should reflect different professional backgrounds, such as business and politics, civil society, research and technology transition, the southern perspectives on development, experiences in connecting global responsibility to national frontrunning, also with a focus on federally constituted countries.

The Peers are independent in their views and recommendations.

Timetable

The Council for Sustainable Development has already started the internal preparations for the Review. The review process will take place in 2009. The baseline study on the state-of-the-art of Germany's sustainability policies will be put together until May 2009. In a scoping process Peers will be asked to decide on issues and thematic areas of prime importance. Peers will meet face-to-face for an indepth-deliberation phase which will end with formulating the recommendations. Documentation and editing will follow. The findings and the review result should be delivered to the Federal Government in autumn 2009.

Role of the German Council for SD

The Council sets the Review process up and supervises it. The Council will make sure the review process will be properly documented, and will convey the results to the German Federal Government in October/November 2009. Council Members will be available for the Peers to discuss review issues, as will representatives of other institutions devoted to sustainability, too.

For facilitating purposes the German Council for Sustainable Development commissions consultants for the drafting of a baseline-report on the state-of-the-art of Germany's sustainability policies. The consultants will also provide highly skilled moderators and note-takers for the deliberation phase. For the baseline study the consultant is asked to bring in the views and perspectives of German key actors. For this particular piece of work three consulting firms are teaming up: Forschungsstelle für Umweltpolitik / Freie Universität Berlin (FFU), IFOK GmbH, Adelphi Research. Dr Klaus Jacob, FFU, is leading the team.

Rationale for the Peer Review

The 2008 progress report on Germany's national sustainability strategy builds on the national sustainability strategy of April 2002 and some stocktaking efforts following thereafter. With its highlighting of governance issues and with a number of external contributions the 2008 progress report sets a new stage[1].

To measure the effectiveness of policies and strategies towards sustainability, Germany introduced pre-set indicators for key thematic fields, and target values and time tables assigned to the majority of these indicators. Since 2001, at two-year intervals, the indicator

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[1] http://www.bundesregierung.de/Webs/Breg/EN/Issues/Sustainability/sustainability.html

trends have been reflected and analysed in an indicator report. The Federal Statistical Office is responsible for compiling the reports the latest of which is the 2008 indicator report[2].

The 2008 stocktaking shows some succes, but most of the trends are far from turning in on the targets. In these areas ground must be made up, and, therefore, the issues of effectiveness, delivery and accountability are coming up. The Council for Sustainable Development supports this finding by his so called traffic light assessment of the 2006 figures which he published 2008.

The 2008 progress report is stepping up some elements of sustainability management within the administration. It makes the point of mainstreaming sustainability in ongoing political activities. The strategy introduces the planning for a legislative instrument regularly assessing new pieces of legislation against their possible impacts in terms of sustainability. An amendment to the rules of procedure of the German government is expected to lay down this new approach. The strategy also commits the State Secretary Committee for Sustainable Development, chaired by the Chief of Staff of the Federal Chancellery, Federal Minister Thomas de Maizière, to intensify its working schedule.

Is is a quite common notion that Germany is not short on objectives and aspirations when it comes to sustainability. It seems that what really is needed is a rethinking of how we implement and make sustainability a joint effort on the part of government, civil society, the federal states and local authorities and the private sector. The general public sees sustainability as a political issue that is too vague and lacks impact. Everyone always appears to support it, and yet nothing seems to change. There is a general consensus accepting the enormous importance of sustainable development – but it is quite clear that not enough concrete measures and concepts are being implemented.

Institutionwise, Germany's sustainability policy is being framed by the German German Council for Sustainable Development, the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development in the German Bundestag, the Federal states and the leading associations of local authorities, besides, of course, of the Federal Government itself. The private sector set up forum on sustainable development of major German enterprises, called econsense, and the German Global Compact. The German Sustainability Award stages a new brand in corporate social responsibility. Adding to this, there is a number of specialiased initiatives. Environmental NGOs, the churches, and some other institutions set up sustainability projects and expert groups, or award schemes. The Federal Government, in its research policies, provides the Forschungsprogramm Nachhaltigkeit (FONA) with some major funding schemes on sustainability research.

International Background

The Declaration of the 1992 Rio de Janeiro World Summit on Environment and Development introduced the concept of National Sustainability Strategies. In order to involve civil society, the politics and the private sector, it proposes to establish National Councils of Sustainable Developemt. Meanwhile, in a couple of countries, both exist. Experiences on what works and what is still bottlenegged are piling up.

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2 http://www.destatis.de/jetspeed/portal/cms/Sites/destatis/Internet/EN/Navigation/Statistics/TimeSeries/Indicators/SubstainableDevelopmentIndicators__nk.psml

In Europe, the 2006 European Union's Sustainability Strategy, in a general way, suggests making sustainability an issue for the whole of a society, and defines tasks and functions of national sustainability advisory bodies. The European Commission encourages Member states to review their sustainability strategies by setting up independent review processes with the involvement of those bodies. The Netherlands did so in 2006/2007. Prior to this there was a French Peer Review. The Norwegian Government came up with a Peer Review as well.

The network of European Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils produced some fact-finding studies on the state-of-the-art of the EU's Member state sustainability performance. They showed besides a common understanding, huge practical differences in political connectiveness of sustainability bodies, capacity building, public involvement, the political effectiveness of recommendations, and the communication efforts[3]. The overall picute underlined the need to rethink and improve the way sustainability issues are being brought into society.

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