Preliminary remarks

The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) periodically outlines its Work Programme for medium-term tasks. After being newly constituted in June, the Council's first session of its legislative period was held on 8 and 9 September 2010. The Work Programme was discussed and a variety of initial work steps agreed.

Below is an editorial summary of the content of the Council's work approaches and aims as summarised by the Head Office.

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1. Political points of reference for the work of the German Council for Sustainable Development from 2010-2013

The social dialogue on sustainable development issues and processes should be intensified. This is also the wish of the Federal Government. The Council's time-tested work with interesting combinations of dialogue partners should be continued and the flow of information between departments and the Council intensified.

The Council will also continue to make active contributions to the furtherance of the National Sustainability Strategy. The Federal Government had planned two phases of consultation on the Progress Report for 2010/2011. The Council will be involved in both of these. In addition, fundamental questions relating to how sustainability can be institutionalised in society, politics and the economy, especially the "soft" links, e.g. to sustainability strategies at the federal and *Laender* levels, will need to be addressed further.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development scheduled for 2012 (UNCSD 2012) is a vital point of reference for the work of the German Council for Sustainable Development. At the heart of the matter are the principles for a green economy (UN) and what institutional structures are suited to linking national actions and the international dimension.

2. Overarching matters pervading the work

The social dialogue on sustainability cannot restrict itself to the expounding of aims and indicators or initiating projects. It must rather focus on discussing and shaping opinions on a couple of, in part very fundamental, issues.

Being able to map out visions for a sustainable future requires having an understanding within society of concepts of values such as progress, rationality, culture and growth, but also of how to deal with knowledge, responsibility and the notion of sustainability in general. This includes attitudes within society to technology and large-scale engineering projects or even the longevity of undesirable developments in, for example, investments or real estate inventories.

Coupled with the development of visions for the future are the issues concerning the role to be played by our society's knowledge, science and responsibility. How does connective and orientative knowledge arise? In what ways might it become relevant to the actions taken? How does such a thing as social assuredness (security and trust) of having to act and being able to act emerge from particulate knowledge components? How is "complexity" and process thinking dealt with? What role is played by institutions for sustainability policy, the media and politics? To prevent the term 'sustainability' being used arbitrarily, the question which arises for the Council is how the term 'sustainability' can be utilised more substantively while still allowing for the comprehensive dialogue role to be enlarged.

To ensure that pioneering policy decisions are recognised and accepted as such, the Council sees itself in the role of helping to shape the social dialogue to such an extent that the quality of long-term decisions is developed and improved.

3. Individual issues of priority for the German Council for Sustainable Development

"*Vision 2050. Dialoge Zukunft*" project

Following on from the findings of the Peer Review on Sustainable Development Policy in Germany (2009), RNE seeks to tackle the lack of an overarching vision of sustainability and the lack of a dialogue on sustainability being a guiding principle. Given the anticipated global population growth, technological leaps and scientific innovation are required which present us with new, even ethical, challenges. One concrete component which can be applied in order to develop the Grand Design by 2050 is the "*Vision 2050. Dialoge Zukunft*" project. By including a broad range of societal players in a multi-stage dialogue project, new and more far-reaching impetus for effective goals and agreements, social alliances and conventions should be provided. In its approach and content, the dialogue is geared to young people who have a perspective and discuss among themselves, with members of the Council, and with a wide variety of societal players.

"Germany – a resource country"?

Despite having a well-practised raw materials and recycling economy, the fact remains, for the time being, that Germany's consumption is an expansive, untapped raw materials warehouse. As yet, there is no closed-loop recycling management for strategic raw materials. The adoption of a "Made in Germany" approach to urban mining, i.e. the production of raw materials taken from the recycling bin, could turn this trend around. The Council wants to take up this issue and flesh out approaches to a sustainable raw materials policy. In addition to bulk commodities, this should also include so-called strategic raw materials. Encouraging responsible structures in resource countries is an essential task, given the rise in demand for resources and the related burdens on the environment and climate in resource-rich countries.

Green economy, consumption and lifestyles

The issue of a green economy tops the German and international agendas and continues to gain in significance. The German Council for Sustainable Development can build on its role to date and play a more influential part in shaping the regulatory framework of a sustainable economy. In doing so, RNE strives to work on green economy issues in close conjunction with consumption and lifestyles issues. The questions to be asked relate to the future of economic management in general, as well as concrete sub-steps such as the future of product information and safeguarding the credibility of sustainability seals. The substance of the recommendation of the Council with regard to "Consumption and Sustainability" should be pursued further. The health and lifestyle aspects should be expanded upon as a strategic element of consumption policy. In this context, focus should be placed, among other things, on communicating what sustainability is about. The "Sustainable Shopping Basket" project should be continued.

The green economy issue should be taken up fundamentally and also give consideration to the global context (Peer Review, UNEP/OECD). What are the principles of a green economy (principles of the Charter for Sustainable Economic Activity (G20), UNEP, OECD, EU)? What specific contributions does Germany make? How can the business and political communities be brought together, a must in order to outline the road maps for sustainable development? Do "green jobs" necessarily equate to "good jobs"?
Other issues of specific interest include:

• Proposals on measuring sustainability in national economic development
• Drafting a "German Sustainability Code"
• Recognising what companies have achieved in terms of sustainable development

Sustainable City / Lord Mayors for Sustainability

RNE is in talks with Lord Mayors who, in special ways, are beacons of commitment in their cities to the notion and advancement of sustainability. They collectively develop common sustainable urban development principles and formulate policy demands based on the needs of municipalities. The aim is to present a policy paper to the general public. How this should proceed further is a matter of discussion with the Lord Mayors. The Council acts as an initiator and facilitator in this process.

Fiscal sustainability strategies

Over the past few years, the fiscal dimension of sustainability has increasingly become a focal point of the discussion. This has been caused by highly volatile and risky investment decisions which have been made at increasingly shorter intervals and destabilised the financial markets. This underlined that the flow of money was not a means to an end in order to meet the funding needs of the producing economy but rather an end in itself which developed a logic of its own that is both alien and counter-productive to long-term investment decisions. However, many sustainability solutions require exactly such long-term investment strategies.

Demographic development, health, services of general interest

Demographic trends in Germany bring about a multitude of repercussions on people’s lives which are not restricted to the pension problem or work place developments. It can rather be expected that healthcare strategies, preventive strategies on the maintenance of public health, strategies on services of general interest as well as urban development strategies play a crucial role overall.

Whilst urban development issues, the pension debate, and the feared lack of skilled labour have already been referenced in numerous contexts, a similar broad-ranging discussion on the other issues has yet to materialise. The German Council for Sustainable Development could trigger such a discussion by offering conceptual proposals. These would also be aptly suited as input for the *Zukunftsvision 2050* project (see above).

Energy, climate, water, mobility

The German Council for Sustainable Development has, thus far, already issued statements on matters relating to climate and energy policy (most recently in November 2008). The current discussions on the future energy mix and international climate policy are driving the Council to continue to devote its attention to climate and energy policy issues. With regard to its link to

infrastructure, technology policy, urban development and lifestyles as well as services of general interest in view of demographic change, mobility policy poses similar challenges for the Council.

RNE strives to highlight the significance of the other environmental factors and that of water in particular. Efficient water use is just as important as the efficient use of energy; nevertheless, its significance is usually overlooked at present. In some world regions water shortage and water abundance are influenced by man and significantly limit quality of life and development potentialities.

Land resources in Germany

Land use is a cross-cutting issue. It affects both the debate surrounding demographic development and quantitative growth, and lifestyles. It equally addresses issues of regulatory law and sustainability (voluntariness, responsibility, government regulations) as well as vertical coordination in federalism. Through its work in the past and the “Goal-30-ha” recommendation, the German Council for Sustainable Development has played a central role in this discussion, which should continue to be filled with new initiatives. In addition to the land use indicator, the indicator on the share of organically farmed land will also play a key role.

"Education for sustainable development”, integration, cultural diversity

Universities and colleges are facing the challenge of empowering students, resolving the complex problems of modern society and of making sustainability the guideline for all levels. To ensure that “sustainability and academia” are afforded more substance and recognition in the education sector as a whole, a dialogue could address the current state of affairs (German Rectors’ Conference, UN Decade) and raise public awareness.

Civil involvement, culture of recognition

RNE intends to support civil involvement and a culture of recognition. By way of example, the visions of German sustainability foundations could be called up as an expression of civil involvement.

Parliament and sustainability

The German Council for Sustainable Development strives to work in close cooperation with the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Sustainable Development. To the extent that it is meaningful and necessary, this includes the preparation of contributions on “Rio plus 20” and sustainability audit methods and procedures.

Statements on the political processes of the Sustainability Strategy

Not accounting for other potential concretisations which may be presented in the course of commissioned assignments, there is a possibility that the Council will be issuing statements on the following matters:

- On key areas for furthering the Sustainability Strategy (2010), on the findings of the 2010 Indicator Report, as well as on the further development of sustainability indicators, on the Federal Government’s efforts to further the Sustainability Strategy (2011), and on the findings of the furthering process (2012)

- On quality assurance measures on specific sustainability measures such as the sustainability audit
- On political statements and contributions on the Federal Government's (planned) activities in the run-up to UN CSD2012 (2012 UN Conference)
- On recommendation to strengthen sustainability aspects in international cooperation

Annual conferences & other communications work

In terms of its communications work, the annual conferences should remain the Council's flagship in future. By way of extending their reach, it is conceivable that the RNE Newsletter and website will be upgraded and a sustainability presence established in the Social Media.

Werkstatt N

Given the success of the Mission Sustainability communications project (2007 – 2009), a competition honouring civil involvement will be launched as part of "*Werkstatt N*", the follow-up project.