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Adaptation to climate change: strategy and policy

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Not all climate risks covered by policy

Successive governments have taken steps in recent years to adapt the Netherlands to climate change. But the policy implemented (including the Delta Programme) concentrates on flood safety and spatial planning. It does not cover all areas that are vulnerable to climate change. Risk and vulnerability analyses are regularly carried out of the weaknesses in the climate resilience of the Netherlands. In some areas, however, the effects of climate change have not been properly analysed. These areas include health, energy, transport and recreation. Insight into the risks and vulnerabilities in these areas is therefore lacking. Individual studies by knowledge and research centres, moreover, often do not consider the common ground between the areas. (Do the effects strengthen each other? What consequences does adaptation policy in sector x have on sector y?) The absence of a comprehensive climate adaptation policy means there is a risk of the country being ill prepared for the consequences of climate change.

Climate adaptation policy not coordinated, monitored or evaluated

With the exception of the Delta Programme, climate adaptation policy as a whole is not coordinated by a minister. Parts of the national climate adaptation policy are therefore not aligned to each other. This entails the risk that measures overlap each other or can have undesirable side effects in other areas. Lack of coordination also means certain issues may be overlooked or ignored. Furthermore, climate adaptation policy is not monitored or evaluated even though the government had undertaken to the House of Representatives in 2007 that it would be.

Costs increased by delays

We also identified a financial risk. If measures in many areas are not taken until a late stage, their cost will be far higher. Buildings, roads, railways, energy systems



and sewer systems, for example, last for tens of years and are expensive to replace. It is cheaper and more effective to design in climate change now. Delaying measures makes adaptation more difficult and more expensive.

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Consistency with European policy: matter for concern

If the government does not develop and implement a national climate adaptation policy in the near future, there is a risk that the Netherlands will get out of step with European policy and policy in other EU member states. Adaptation to climate change is enjoying greater priority in European policy. Member states, including the Netherlands, will increasingly be urged to take measures and make investments. Some European countries facing similar challenges as the Netherlands are already implementing broad and coherent national adaptation policies.

Recommendations

We recommend that the government periodically analyse the climate change risks and vulnerabilities in all policy sectors. The relationships between the sectors should not be overlooked. The government should integrate and evaluate the results of such analyses so that comprehensive and government-wide decisions can periodically be taken on the need to revise climate adaptation policy. The government should develop and implement a national climate adaptation programme in the near future. It should consist of a coherent package of actions. All current activities, such as the Delta Programme, could be included in the programme and other policies could be adapted to it. The government should further establish effective interministerial cooperation on climate adaptation and should have the adaptation policy periodically monitored, evaluated and, if necessary, revised.