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Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment

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Subject: Progress report on the *From Waste to Resource* programme

**Our reference**

IenM/BSK-2015/68748

**Annex(es)**

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Dear Speaker,

We wish to live prosperous and healthy lives now and in the future. We therefore take a responsible approach to using raw materials, and the natural capital that our raw materials, food, clean air, water and energy produces. To this end, the Dutch Government with its programme *Van Afval Naar Grondstof* ("From Waste to Resource", VANG) is working on speeding up the transition to a circular economy. The programme is one of the eight domains in the Cabinet's green-growth policy (Parliamentary Paper 33043, No. 14). The program has also much in common with the biobased economy, whose essence is the optimum use of renewable resources (the cascading of biomass) with sustainability as a prerequisite. On 28 January 2014, I informed you by letter of the structure of the programme ("Implementation of the *Waste to Resource* programme", Parliamentary Paper 33043, No. 28). I hereby present you with the progress report on the programme's first year, also on behalf of the Minister for Economic Affairs.

In this report, I discuss the goals of the programme further, and state the main results achieved so far. I also describe the challenges for the coming year. Annex 1 provides a detailed overview of the status of the actions undertaken under the programme. The House has requested the Cabinet to inform it about the policy for a circular economy (Motion of Cegerek and others, Parliamentary Paper 34000-XII, No. 30). The *From Waste to Resource* programme is the expression of the Cabinet's policy for moving to a more circular economy. With this program and progress report, the Cabinet is complying with the request.

It is important that the *From Waste to Resource* programme continues to evolve. I have therefore asked the PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency to perform an evaluation of the predicted (*ex ante*) results. PBL published its findings on 30 September 2014. In Annex 2 to this letter, I discuss the PBL's recommendations for the structure of the programme, thereby complying with the Motion of Van Tongeren and Van Veldhoven (Parliamentary Paper 30872, No. 181). In Annex 2, I also discuss the ten signposts for a circular economy, presented by Ms Dik-Faber, and provide a summary of the Motions adopted by the House and the commitments made by the Cabinet that are fulfilled by this report.

**The circular economy**

A circular economy is an economic system, based on the reuse of products and materials, and the conservation of natural resources, coupled with the aim of creating value in every link of the system. In a circular economy, cycles are closed, and chains designed to be as efficient as possible. Waste and emissions no longer exist, transference to humans and the environment is prevented, and the

depletion of resources or the earth is not an issue anymore.

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The Cabinet has three objectives with the *From Waste to Resource* programme: keeping our natural capital vibrant, improving the security of supply, and reinforcing the earning power of the Dutch economy. The strength of the circular economy concept is that these objectives can be neither considered nor achieved independently of each other. An ambition for a more circular economy focusing only on the environment or only on the economy will not take off. A circular economy is the expression of a holistic approach, which therefore also demands an across-the-board commitment by the Cabinet. The approach the programme takes ties economic growth, employment and competitiveness to keeping our natural capital vibrant. As such, the *From Waste to Resource* programme focuses on all links in the chain. Its scope encompasses the sustainable extraction of raw materials, making circular services and design, production and consumption, and finally – because there will still be waste for some time to come – the programme will also focus on the waste stage.

### **Circular Netherlands**

The Netherlands is well placed to be a hotspot and test bed for the circular economy. We have an entrepreneurial spirit focused on the early adoption of innovations. As the gateway to Europe, the Netherlands with its large ports and excellent infrastructure is a major conduit for the international flow of materials. This provides us with the opportunity to fulfil the role of a hub, including for recycled and biobased materials. *Dutch Design* sets international standards. We have a healthy knowledge infrastructure and a mature waste and recycling sector. As a final point, the Netherlands has a government and collaborative culture defined by consultation and the search for unifying solutions. This enables us to look beyond our own special interests and collaborate within the chain. The transition to a circular economy is thus well underway in the Netherlands. It is being shaped by the effort of companies from all production sectors of the economy, initiatives of private citizens and consumers, NGOs, financial and legal service providers, and the scientific community.

### **Coalitions**

With the *From Waste to Resource* programme, the Cabinet is accelerating the transition by actively supporting the above parties, tying initiatives together, and hence utilising society's dynamics and energy to the greatest degree possible. This requires a government that learns quickly, adapts to situations, joins coalitions as a partner, and has the courage to take the initiative. The Cabinet answers these needs by creating the right incentives and opening possibilities for taking responsibility. It requires interventions at the system level, for example, in national as well as international regulations, tax regimes, and financial and business models. Another prerequisite for this dynamism is a government that does not set one-sided goals, but helps civil-society parties and private-sector companies realise their ambitions. A key to this is mutual inspiration through actual practice. *From Waste to Resource* therefore includes creation of the right conditions, as well as motivation from inspiring examples. Where necessary, the government uses the dual instrument of regulation and enforcement in its approach.

At the national level, the Government has taken the initiative to collaborate with

the leaders of the RACE coalition (a partnership for accelerating the move to the new economy) to speed up the transition to a circular economy over a system-wide front. The civil-society members of RACE are The Circle Economy, CLICKNL, *De Groene Zaak*, *Het Groene Brein*, and MVO Nederland. RACE receives support from the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO.nl) acting on behalf of the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment as well as the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The themes being addressed derive from different sections of the *From Waste to Resource* programme, including circular design, high-value reuse, and seeking out new initiatives with the potential to close chains.

### **Dynamic laws and regulations**

Part of the green-growth policy is to harmonise laws and regulations using the opportunities available, while respecting the policy objectives of safety, health, and better quality of life. To achieve the policy objectives, innovative investing by entrepreneurs is essential. In doing so, however, they could run up against legal and regulatory obstacles. For this reason, the Cabinet has initiated the programme "*Ruimte in Regels voor Groene Groei*" (R2G2) to reduce the above-mentioned obstacles. The programme works by recording instances of obstacles preventing entrepreneurs from introducing innovations that go with the move to a circular economy, and then by initiating projects to implement solutions.

Other opportunities for innovation are taken up for individual chains, for example, jointly with the RACE and *Meer en Betere Recycling* coalitions.

### **International cooperation**

To speed up the transition to a circular economy, an international approach is indispensable. The Cabinet is taking this route as evidenced by proactively giving input to the European Commission, and the recently announced proposal for a package on the circular economy. The Netherlands intends using its forthcoming Presidency of the Commission to present its vision and experience of themes such as conservation of essential natural capital, chain approach, sustainable trade, and expansion of the product policy. Our goal is to generate a unified impulse for European policy.

As well as the above, the Netherlands is actively trying to ally NGOs with industry to make chains more sustainable. One example is the elevating of our Green Deal approach to the international level. And finally, the Netherlands is joining forces with the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Belgium for the initiative known as the *North Sea Resources Roundabout*. Its aim is to harmonise the interpretation of regulations and the related supervision. Greater certainty about the status and transport of a resource results in more trade and more operating certainty. In turn, this leads to more innovative investments in the circular economy.

### **Operational goals and milestones**

Using the knowledge acquired in the first year of the programme, a fresh look has been taken at its structure. The operational goals have been expanded and placed in logical order. They now include the ambitions referred to in the letter of 28 January 2014. Making the goals firm and more SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely) in terms of activities will be done in collaboration with civil-society parties.

The operational goals of the programme are:

1. Identifying, sustainably managing and utilising natural capital
2. Focusing the design and development of products on circularity
3. Increasing and disseminating knowledge about the circular economy and making it practicable
4. Encouraging resource-free business operations
5. Turning chains into cycles
6. Developing financial and other market incentives
7. Making consumption and procurement circular
8. Gearing waste policy to the circular economy, and improving waste collection and recycling
9. Developing indicators and metrics that quantify the transition to a circular economy

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Annex 1 to this letter contains a summary of all the actions, including the progress with each one. For some actions, reports have been produced. These are also included as annexes to this letter. Annex 2 contains a summary of the House's Motions and the Cabinet's commitments in connection with the *From Waste to Resource* programme.

The sections below describe the progress with each operational goal and the main results from the first year of *From Waste to Resource*.

### **1. Identifying, sustainably managing and utilising natural capital**

Natural capital provides us with resources. It also improves the quality of our living environment and contributes to our health. A familiar example of this is greenspace in cities. This results in less use of materials, less heat stress, less particulate matter, and a healthier population. To safeguard the supply of these services, this capital has to remain vibrant and be able to replenish itself in a natural way.

For this to happen, we have to know the amount of this capital, and how its size and quality change over time. The Cabinet is taking an inventory of our natural capital. In addition, it is developing instruments for companies, authorities and others for them to take responsibility for their own impact on the natural capital. In 2014, work began on creating the Digital Atlas of Natural Capital, to be launched in the spring of 2015. Over the next few years, it will be further developed with the assistance of its users. The Atlas provides authorities, companies and private individuals who undertake initiatives with information on how to use the natural capital more efficiently. It will enable zoning plans to focus on closing natural cycles at the local level. Another important point is to show what the economic value of the natural capital is. To this end, Statistics Netherlands is further expanding the natural capital accounts in 2015 as part of the national accounts.

### **2. Focusing the design and development of products on circularity**

By designing products and processes with circularity in mind, the use of sustainable and recycled resources increases, and the loss of materials at the back end of production cycles is avoided. The programme *CIRCO – creating business through circular design* commenced in 2014 as a RACE project. Under this programme, the practical application and scientific development of product design

for a circular economy are brought to a higher level.

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In addition, the Netherlands conducted a study in 2014 into the possibility of expanding the European product regulations as part of the EU's Ecodesign Directive. In parallel, a consortium comprising Leiden University, Delft University of Technology, and Erasmus University Rotterdam has been requested to flesh out the options that could help create an improved European product policy. Both results will be submitted to Brussels as input for the Commission's proposal for a package on the circular economy.

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### **3. Increasing and disseminating knowledge about the circular economy and making it practicable**

For the new round of knowledge and innovation agendas, more attention than previously is being asked for the way in which the "top sectors" tackle social challenges, the circular economy for example. Firming up the necessary research into how to make the circular economy attractive in a business sense to the "top sectors" is the next step.

Moreover, it is important that education also turns its attention to the circular economy, and that knowledge developed thus far is applied within the SME sector and other areas. Industry sectors, as well as knowledge and education centres, have formulated knowledge agendas and research questions concerning plastics, metals, and the processing of fruit, vegetable and garden waste. In 2014, the Cabinet decided to implement a grant scheme. Mid-2015 will see the start of PRO VANG ("*Praktijkgericht Onderzoek Van Afval Naar Grondstof*"), a research programme focusing on the practical side of converting waste into resources. Under the programme, colleges and companies can collaborate to have students work on technical solutions that suit a circular economy. 110 such projects will receive funding. The results will be used to create training agendas, so that the acquired knowledge spreads via higher professional education and into the business community.

Within the framework of the RACE theme "Youth & Education", the circular economy is being integrated in the curriculums for accountancy and financial education in 2015. Finally, the RACE partner *Het Groene Brein* has produced a circular economy knowledge map<sup>1</sup>. Together with the scientific partners, the Cabinet is looking into the possibility of drawing up a circular economy knowledge agenda.

### **4. Encouraging resource-free business operations**

A study was conducted in 2014 into the 22 most important critical materials for Dutch industry. On 16 June 2014, the study report "*Materialen in de Nederlandse economie – een beoordeling van de kwetsbaarheid*" (assessing the vulnerability of materials used in the Dutch economy) was sent to the House. This year (2015), the follow-up study is being conducted, this time relating to 64 metals and minerals. The study considers several questions: in which areas are the materials being used; to what degree does the Netherlands depend on importing them; what are the security of supply risks (ecological, economic, and social); what are

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<sup>1</sup> <http://hetgroenebrein.nl/in-de-pers/kenniskaart-circulaire-economie-bundelt-alle-kennis-voor-ondernemers/>

the prospects for taking action to mitigate these risks; and what is the potential for improvements in more than a hundred sectors?

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In addition, work began in 2014 on setting up an online platform and a knowledge forum specifically for the circular economy and resources. The launching will take place this year. The objective is to have all the available knowledge about resources and the circular economy in one place. Keeping the knowledge forum up to date is the responsibility of the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO.nl). This body together with the RACE coalition is building an active network of users and experts. Other features of the platform are a portfolio of circular examples, a toolbox for circular designing, and connections to international sources of knowledge.

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The results from the above study into critical materials are being used to construct a self-scan for companies to analyse their own vulnerabilities and risks relating to resources. As well as using the self-scan, companies can submit questions concerning the use of scarce materials and the outlook for taking action. The knowledge forum has wide accessibility via the Chambers of Commerce, the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers (VNO-NCW), and industry sectors.

## **5. Turning chains into cycles**

The *From Waste to Resource* programme is focused on closing chains more effectively. In 2013 and 2014, the process commenced for the following chains: concrete, food, packaging, phosphate, wood, textile, plastic, and biotic material. For each chain, the collaboration is with civil-society partners and companies, often in the form of chain covenants or Green Deals. Some significant examples are the *Kunststofketenakkoord* (Plastics Chain Covenant), *Raamovereenkomst Verpakkingen* (Packaging Framework Agreement), and *Green Deal Duurzaam Bosbeheer* (Sustainable Forest Management Green Deal). In collaboration with the RACE coalition, we performed an analysis to identify the major chains with the greatest potential for the Netherlands. RACE has committed to making three new chains more sustainable, the selection to be made in April of this year.

A recent success story of the chain approach is the thermal treatment of tar asphalt granulate (TAG). The process destroys the carcinogenic tar. The export of TAG to countries where it is used untreated fell sharply in 2014. By following a code for environmentally responsible road management, *Rijkswaterstaat* and regional road operators demonstrate their compliance with the TAG policy.

A more specific description of the actions for each chain is provided in Annex 1.

## **6. Developing financial and other market incentives**

On 1 January 2015, the existing tax on the dumping of waste was extended to its incineration. Work is currently underway on how to include the export levy in the waste tax. It will come into force by Royal Decree on a date still to be determined, with the Cabinet aiming for 1 July 2015.

To further develop the role of taxation in the circular economy, an EU approach is needed. To this end, we are looking to collaborate with like-minded Member States. This year, the Cabinet is drawing up a list of opportunities and obstacles as

regards getting a green European taxation agenda on the table during the Netherlands' Presidency of the EU.

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In 2014, the *Take Back Chemicals* Green Deal was signed. Under this system, a supplier of chemicals no longer receives payment for the amount it delivers but for the functionality of delivered chemicals, their usability in other words. This creates a financial incentive to reuse materials, leading to an alliance between suppliers and customers based on high-quality use of materials. Not only will this result in less environmental impact, but also in a stable and reliable supply of resources. The objective is to gain experience from five real-life projects. These are already underway, and will reach completion this year and next year (2016).

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## **7. Making consumption and procurement circular**

A key factor in the chain approach of the *From Waste to Resource* programme is recognition of the potential contribution of consumers to the transition to a circular economy. In order to enlist the behaviour of consumers more effectively, an approach for making their behaviour more sustainable has been defined. It goes by the title of "*Aanpak Verduurzamen Consumentengedrag*", and is provided as Annex 3 to this letter. The principal aim of the approach is to make the sustainable alternative easier and more attractive than at present. To achieve this, the Cabinet is developing and spreading knowledge, as well as encouraging civil society to adopt initiatives and smoothing the way for them. In this venture, the Cabinet is making full use of recent findings in the field of behavioural science<sup>2</sup>. For applying these findings, the Cabinet receives support from the *Behavioural Insights Network* (BIN), which has representatives from all Government departments. BIN was set up following the recommendation of the above Councils to embed behavioural science knowledge more firmly in the policy-making process.

As promised during the general meeting on sustainability on 5 February last, the action plan for sustainable procurement will be submitted to the House before the summer recess. The plan will set out an integrated implementation strategy for sustainable and innovative procurement. It will therefore encompass the principle of People, Planet & Profit, including the social aspects, as well as specific areas such as biobased and circular procurement. The new tendering directive, to be implemented as of 1 January 2016, provides additional possibilities to use "true pricing" for the tendering process.

To set a good example, the Cabinet is going to sell surplus Government ICT equipment so that it can be reused, subject to data security considerations. This concerns 95% of the PCs and laptops that become surplus to requirements each year. The equipment will be cleaned of data using certified software, so that it will not need to be destroyed. Following the data erasing, the equipment will be sold by public auction, in conformity with the regulations governing material management. The study results underlying the decision and promised to the House (in answer to Parliamentary questions from Dik-Faber and Rebel, 30 September 2013) are provided as Annex 4 to this letter.

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<sup>2</sup> Cabinet's response to advisory reports from the Council for the Environment and Infrastructure (Rli), the Council for Social Development (RMO) and the Scientific Council for Government Policy (WRR) on the use of behavioural science knowledge in policy, NR34000-XIII, No. 140, 4 December 2014

## 8. Gearing waste policy to the circular economy, and improving waste collection and recycling

The programme for slimming down regulations in the interests of green growth, "*Ruimte in Regels voor Groene Groei*", records instances of entrepreneurs encountering obstacles to introducing innovations that go with the transition to a circular economy. Steps to implement solutions are being taken, which has led to 38 obstacles being tackled under the programme. Examples include distinguishing between waste and non-waste, promoting application of the end-of-waste and by-product classifications, looking for recycling possibilities within the relevant regulations, and helping companies comply with the REACH regulation (governing the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals). The programme will continue with the recording of obstacles in 2015. They can be reported by e-mail via [info@ruimteinregels.nl](mailto:info@ruimteinregels.nl) and online at the website [www.biobasedeconomy.nl/ruimteinregels](http://www.biobasedeconomy.nl/ruimteinregels) (as from mid-2015 [www.ruimteinregels.nl](http://www.ruimteinregels.nl)).

In November 2014, *Rijkswaterstaat* introduced an online test (at [www.ishetafval.nl](http://www.ishetafval.nl)) that companies can use to assess whether a material has to be considered as waste, or is actually a resource. This makes it easier for companies to determine which regulations they have to comply with. After completing the test, a company can request a legal evaluation from the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment if it wishes.

By Ministerial Decree on 6 February 2015, national end-of-waste criteria came into force for recycled granulate. The Decree provides clarity regarding the quality of recycling products from construction and demolition waste, one third of our waste by weight. As such, the Decree makes the use of these products more appealing than previously.

On 1 April 2015, a Ministerial Decree came into force that allows the production residue crude glycerine to be qualified as a by-product instead of waste, provided the application of it is deemed responsible. The Decree has been formulated in such a way that it can easily be extended to other material flows, which will encourage their (re)use.

In order to improve recycling, collaboration was sought with waste-processing companies and the recycling industry. This has resulted in a covenant for more and better recycling, *Meer en Betere Recycling*, signed on 16 March 2015. Annex 5 to this letter contains the text of the covenant. Some twenty collaborative projects are now ongoing thanks to this covenant, aimed at achieving more recycling (higher volume) on the one hand, and high-value recycling (better quality) on the other. This can be explained, for example, by the greater efficiency of sorting processes, encouragement for innovations in waste management, and promotion of the use of recyclates. In combination with deployment earlier in the chain, there should be a 50% reduction in the loss of material, from 10 million to 5 million tonnes, over the next ten years.

In addition, agreements with municipalities have been concluded for two

programmes: *Publiek Kader Huishoudelijk Afval* and *Uitvoeringsprogramma VANG Huishoudelijk Afval*. The central aim of these programmes is to close the chains for household products and materials. As regards the principles underlying these programmes, they are that the polluter pays, companies and private citizens have freedom of action, and market failures will be remedied. With this approach, the ambition of achieving 100 kg of residual waste for each resident in 2020 will be fleshed out. Both programmes were sent to the House at the end of 2014. On 1 January 2015, a joint programme office began the implementation.

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Waste separation is increasingly becoming the norm for households. However, outside the home there is also waste that is comparable to household waste. To encourage thinking about what to do with waste, a project has been initiated to provide more non-household opportunities for waste separation. Apart from better use of the materials, this also creates more awareness of their value. Greater awareness regarding responsible behaviour towards waste has the added effect of reducing litter. The first step was to conclude a Green Deal with NS and Prorail on 23 February for the separation of waste by train passengers. This represents the start of separating waste at train stations and on trains. Agreements for more sub-areas are being prepared.

On 5 January 2015, the amended national waste management plan ("*Landelijk Afvalbeheerplan*", LAP-2) came into force. A decision was made to extend its term to 24 December 2017, and then to have it followed by LAP-3. The extension of the current plan means that the preparations for a new plan can take into account amendments to the EU waste regulations and developments en route to a circular economy.

## **9. Developing indicators and metrics that quantify the transition to a circular economy**

In conjunction with Statistics Netherlands, we are extending the Material Flows Monitor to waste-water and other flows. Consideration is also being given to producing statistics for new themes, such as the repair and reuse of products, reduction in materials used for goods and services, and recycling, substitution, and sustainability of resources.

As well as the above, Statistics Netherlands and others have produced a report titled *Reporting on sustainable development at national, company and product levels*, which focuses on measuring sustainability at these levels. The Netherlands wants to employ its knowledge of statistics to establish logical relationships between different methods used at different levels, domestically as well as internationally. At the European Environmental Agency as well as in its attempts at greening the European Semester, the Netherlands is strongly advocating the development of reliable indicators that can truly measure the transition to a circular economy. This has to be done by linking together efficient and high-value use of resources, sustainable use of natural capital, economic growth, and employment.

### **Measurable results**

The letter of 28 January 2014 about the *From Waste to Resource* programme referred to the ambition of halving the amount of material lost to the economy, from 10 million tonnes to 5 million tonnes, over a period of ten years. Achieving

this has to be done by application throughout the chain, by working on prevention, reuse and recycling from the design stage to the waste stage. One year after commencement of *From Waste to Resource* is still too soon to present tangible results. Moreover, the transition to a circular economy is of such complexity that it is not possible to measure it in kilos or euros. At the EU level, they are also trying to find reliable indicators, a matter the Netherlands will devote attention to during its Presidency. The *From Waste to Resource* programme can gain in strength by making the accountability firmer. Regarding the ninth operational objective, this is specifically geared towards developing reliable indicators for the purpose of measuring the transition to a circular economy. At mid-2017, the *From Waste to Resource* programme will be evaluated as part of standard policy assessment.

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Although it is challenging to properly measure the progress with the transition, this has not prevented specific, firm, measurable and accountable goals being set for individual actions in conjunction with civil-society partners. Examples include the target of no more than 100 kg of household waste per person in 2020, the removal of 38 obstacles to the circular economy this year, and the reuse of 95% of the Dutch Government's ICT equipment. The amount of exported TAG having fallen steeply and one-third of total waste now satisfying the end-of-waste criteria thanks to a Ministerial Decree are tangible results from a year of *From Waste to Resource*.

In conclusion, this progress report is a review by the Cabinet of the first year of *From Waste to Resource*, a year in which many activities got underway and the first results appeared, a year both challenging and instructive. The most important finding is that the circular economy concept is alive and can count on much creativity and energy from society. The Cabinet will continue this year to give this creativity and energy freedom of action, while collaborating on the goal of realising a circular Netherlands.

Yours sincerely,

THE STATE SECRETARY FOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT,

Wilma J. Mansveld

Annexes:

1. *From Waste to Resource* – progress of the actions per operational objective
2. Summary of Motions and commitments
3. Strategy for making consumer behaviour more sustainable
4. Treatment of surplus Government data storage equipment (ICT hardware)
5. *Meer en Betere Recycling* covenant
6. Market survey of the biobased economy in the vegetable, fruit and garden sector

7. Waste-stream separation – separation of 18 bulk household waste streams at municipal refuse collection and recycling centres in 2014
8. Study into the environmental benefit from sorting waste following effective separation at a refuse collection and recycling centre

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