

Dutch vision on the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability

The Netherlands welcomes the opportunity to provide input in the consultation for the forthcoming Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, following the publication by the European Commission of the Roadmap as a first step towards this strategy.

This reaction should be read in connection with the joint submission of the REACH-up Member States. Starting points for the Strategy should also be the Council Conclusions of June 2019, and the policy evaluations and fitness checks mentioned in the Roadmap.

The Netherlands supports the aims outlined in the Roadmap, in particular:

- protecting human health and the environment against hazardous chemicals;
- simplifying and strengthening the legal framework;
- supporting EU's strategic autonomy in the production of essential chemicals across key sectors;
- encouraging innovation and promoting research and development for the sustainable transformation of the chemical industry.

We underline the need to uphold those ambitions as part of the socio-economic recovery in response to COVID-19, and to make even closer connections between protection of human health and the environment and socio-economic needs and goals.

More in particular, the Netherlands urges the European Commission to include the following policies and measures in the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability:

- All delayed actions announced in the 7th Environment Action Programme should be implemented as part of the chemicals strategy for sustainability. Including chemicals in the zero pollution action plan would enable the integrated approach envisaged in the Green Deal.
- This includes endocrine disruptors, nanomaterials, identification of substances of very high concern (SVHC), combined effects of chemicals, chemicals in products and, more broadly, a strategy for reduction of exposure. Gaps in legislation should be filled rapidly.
- Starting point is to avoid, as far as possible, exposure of humans and the environment to (combinations) of all harmful chemicals, from all sources: emissions to the environment, exposure of consumers via products, and exposure to hazardous chemicals at the workplace. Regulations should address combination effects of different substances and different exposure pathways, and be based on a multidisciplinary approach to ensure the inclusion of different perspectives (environment, consumer and worker).
- Links between regulations should be strengthened to increase our coordinated approach to pollution. For example, the SVHC status could trigger requirements for emission reduction in the Industrial Emissions Directive or the Water Framework Directive.
- Special attention should be paid to ensure coherence with regard to the interface of the REACH and occupational safety and health (OSH) legislation. It is key to establish a multi-annual work plan in order to prioritize and develop protective values for the workplace. Key stakeholders (social partners and governmental organisations) should be consulted when deciding on a prioritisation. Additional key stakeholders should be involved when levels of protecting (limit) values and other protective measures are being determined.
- In view of the objective to place all relevant substances of very high concern (SVHC) on the REACH candidate list by 2020, actions are needed to speed up the identification of SVHCs and the process of preparing regulatory measures (applying a grouping approach, streamlining procedures, improvement of registration dossiers etc.). Restrictions that cover SVHC in imported products are an important element within the framework.
- The precautionary principle is crucial when regulating endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs). One set of hazard-based criteria is needed for the identification of EDCs across all relevant legislations. Information requirements under REACH need to be adapted and applied across regulations in order to enable timely and consistent identification and regulation of EDCs.
- An EU action plan with restrictions is needed to eliminate all non-essential uses of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances PFAS and their emissions. These are of great concern due to their extreme persistency and their adverse effect on human health and the environment.
- Facilitate the development and adoption of safe and sustainable alternatives to hazardous chemicals, with regulatory and non-regulatory measures. This includes the promotion of R&D for Safe-by-Design approaches for chemical and non-chemical solutions through EU programs such as Horizon Europe. Safe-by-Design needs attention in different domains: prevention of

hazards for the environment, at the workplace and for consumers. Innovation in (computerised) risk assessment needs to be encouraged as well.

- To ensure more circular and non-toxic material cycles, it is vital that the recycling of materials containing or contaminated by substances of concern is addressed, making sure that the risks for human health and the environment are minimized and acceptable. Improved traceability of materials and chemicals in the supply chain is key. Furthermore, a case-by-case approach is needed to determine if recycling is preferable or if materials should be disposed of and replaced.
- Sustainable agriculture starts with resilient varieties, healthy starting material, healthy soils and Integrated Pest Management (IPM). When pests and diseases need to be controlled, non-chemical methods are preferred, such as biological pest control. Chemical crop protection should be used as a last resort.
- The accelerated availability of promising developments such as natural cropping systems, plant breeding and safe alternatives should be facilitated. This requires streamlining the approval and assessment process and increased investments into safe innovations, while maintaining possibilities for Member States to take additional environmental protection measures.
- Prevention and non-chemical alternatives need to be developed for biocidal applications, comparable to IPM in plant protection.
- In the assessment of plant protection and biocidal products the role of adverse effects on non-target biota should be strengthened, taking into account combined effects and better guaranteeing the absence of adverse ecological effects.
- It is crucial that the approval procedure for plant protection products remains science-based. If such products are required, it is preferable that these are low-risk substances used within an IPM system.
- When used in an appropriate way, the use of locally recovered resources from waste, manure and animal by-products can bring new opportunities such as high quality organic and secondary material based fertilisers which reduce harmful emissions. It is important to increase the investment and uptake of such bio based innovations.