

## In a nutshell: the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE)

As of April 2017

The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) is an advisory body mandated by the German Federal Government. Chancellor Angela Merkel has appointed 15 public figures for a three-year term of office beginning on 1 November 2016. The Council was first convened in April 2001 by the Federal Government under Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

### Tasks

The German Government has entrusted the RNE with the following tasks:

- developing contributions to the German Sustainable Development Strategy
- suggesting specific areas for action and projects
- promoting public discussion on sustainability

The RNE advises the German Government and may also initiate projects and dialogues of its own.

### Chair

The RNE has been chaired by Marlehn Thieme since 29 February 2012. Marlehn Thieme is a member of the Council of the Evangelical Church (EKD) in Germany, Chair of the ZDF Television Council, and Chair of the Supervisory Board of KD Bank, a church and social welfare bank. Olaf Tschimpke, President of the Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (NABU), is the RNE Deputy Chair. The RNE was previously chaired by Dr Volker Hauff, Professor Klaus Töpfer, and Hans-Peter Repnik. The Council members elect the Chair from among their ranks at the inaugural meeting at the beginning of each term.

### Co-option of further experts

The members of the RNE co-opt further experts at their own discretion to work on particular projects as Council members. The following experts have been co-opted to date: Jochen Zeitz in his former capacity as CEO of Puma; futurologist and education researcher Professor Gerhard de Haan, and social psychologist Professor Harald Welzer from the futurzwei foundation and the University of Flensburg's transformation programme.

## Mission statement

Sustainable development entails putting environmental aspects on an equal footing with social and economic aspects. Part of the RNE's mission is to promote this approach. Future-oriented business practice means that we must leave behind a globally intact environmental, social, and economic system for future generations. One cannot be achieved without the others.

The RNE sees sustainable development as one of the key areas of action. It encourages citizens to lead a sustainable lifestyle and promotes broad public debate on sustainability. It urges businesses and institutions to make their economic activities sustainable, to face the challenges posed by sustainability, and to harness the opportunities it offers. The RNE seeks to broaden the discussion on sustainability within society and to make the outcomes of this discussion more effective and more binding. It believes that culture and art, knowledge and values should play an appropriate and hence much greater role in the sustainability debate.

## Current topics and projects

Key topics addressed by the RNE as part of its current work programme include: digitalisation and the opportunities it creates for sustainable development in our society; the funding of sustainable development (Green Finance); sustainable towns and cities; and strategies for practical action on sustainability. The Council also deals with governance, i.e. the political steer for the implementation of the Government's Sustainable Development Strategy. Agenda 2030 with its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the German Sustainability Strategy provide the framework for the Council's activities.

In the context of Agenda 2030 and its global sustainability goals, the RNE has recommended a new sustainability architecture and greater links between global and national responsibility. It has detailed this in a statement made to the German Government dated May 2015 titled 'Germany's Sustainability Architecture and the SDGs' and in a statement of June 2016 titled 'For bolder, not just moderate changes!'

The RNE adopts a process-based approach. The way in which dialogues and networks, the scientific basis for decision-making, critical interventions and suggestions are advanced is playing an increasingly important role. The network idea also covers international cooperation with similar institutions, insofar as capacity allows.

In cooperation with representatives from companies, civil society, and the capital market, the RNE developed the **Sustainability Code**, a frame of reference for future-oriented business practices. Since October 2011, the RNE has been recommending that it be used voluntarily by companies and organisations. The Code was revised in 2015. In collaboration with the Bertelsmann Foundation, the RNE has drawn up guidelines for small and medium-sized enterprises. Industry-specific agreements on the Code have been reached with the housing sector and with the Sparkassen- und Giroverband (German Savings Banks Association). In one of its statements, the RNE recommends the Sustainability Code as an important principle and minimum standard for the binding

introduction of reporting obligations. The Sustainability Code website lists current declarations of compliance and provides further information.

The **Sustainable Shopping Basket** (nachhaltiger Warenkorb) is updated every year and provides reliable guidance for interested citizens on the sometimes confusing array of product labels along with general tips and information about sustainable consumption. The most recent policy recommendations by the RNE address the revision of the German Sustainable Development Strategy, the global sustainability goals, organic farming, and the energy transition; they call for binding rules on energy efficiency, stabilisation of the financial markets, farming geared towards the principle of sustainability, active soil conservation, and a new beginning in the recycling sector.

As a platform, the RNE supports the mayors of German municipalities who are making sustainability a top priority in the **dialogue on sustainable urban development**. This work has resulted in brochures, studies, and a dialogue with Germany's 100 youngest local politicians. At the request of the German Government, the RNE organised a critical analysis of Germany's sustainability policy by international experts (peer review). The peer review was conducted in 2013 for the second time. The German Federal Government has commissioned the Council to organise a further peer review in 2018. The results of the review are the topic of extensive consultations by parliament and government.

Every year, as part of the **sustainability project**, the RNE recognises particularly promising ideas and initiatives from the heart of society. It is one of the partners responsible for awarding the **German Sustainability Award to companies and local authorities**.

### **Political dialogue**

The RNE plays a key role in revising the German Sustainable Development Strategy through critical dialogue with the German Government and with stakeholders from politics, business, and society. It submits policy recommendations and statements to the Chair of the State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development, Federal Minister and Head of the German Chancellery Peter Altmaier. In addition, the RNE cooperates closely with political leaders in the federal ministries, parliament, and the sustainability initiatives of the private sector and civil society.

### **Public politics**

The RNE has established the political Sustainability Summit. It invites the Federal Chancellor, senior politicians, business representatives, and sustainability experts from civil society to its annual conference. The RNE is a member of the European Environment and Sustainable Development Councils (EEAC) and is also active in other networks.

### **Publications**

The RNE publishes its statements, recommendations and studies. RNE publications can be ordered and downloaded online free of charge at [www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de](http://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de). The fortnightly RNE

newsletter can also be subscribed to here. In addition, the RNE publishes press releases and provides information on its website.

### **Statements and publications since 2013 (selection)**

- For bolder, not just moderate changes! The government's draft on sustainable development falls short of the requirements. Statement on the government's draft of 31 May 2016 on the German Sustainability Strategy, June 2016
- Länder in Entwicklung. Globale Nachhaltigkeitsziele ('Countries under development. Global sustainability goals'), 2015
- Germany's Sustainability Architecture and the SDGs, May 2015. Statement provided by the German Council for Sustainable Development to Federal Minister Peter Altmaier in accordance with Sect 1 (2)b RNE Rules of Procedure
- The Sustainability Code – Benchmarking sustainable economy, revised edition 2015
- Mehr Nachhaltigkeitspolitik! ('More sustainability policy!'), October 2014. Statement on the status of the indicators of the national sustainability strategy 2014
- Der nachhaltige Warenkorb ('The Sustainable Shopping Basket') (revised version: November 2016)
- Für ein politisches Signal zur Stärkung der Rolle des ökologischen Landbaus in Europa ('For a political signal to strengthen the role of eco-farming in Europe'). Statement by the German Council for Sustainable Development, 1 February 2013

### **Chair**

**Marlehn Thieme**, Chair of the RNE, Chair of the ZDF Television Council, member of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)

**Olaf Tschimpke**, Deputy Chair of the RNE, President of Naturschutzbund Deutschland e.V. (Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union – NABU)

### **Council members**

**Professor Alexander Bassen** (Professor of Capital Markets and Management at the University of Hamburg)

**Ulla Burchardt** (former Member of the German Bundestag)

**Kathrin Menges** (Executive Vice President Human Resources, Henkel AG & Co. KGaA)

**Alexander Müller** (former Assistant Director-General FAO, former State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Managing Director TMG, Think-Tank for Sustainability and Study Lead TEEBAgriFood)

**Katherina Reiche** (former Parliamentary State Secretary, former Member of the German Bundestag, Managing Director of the German Association of Local Utilities – VKU)

**Professor Lucia A. Reisch** (Copenhagen Business School, Chair of the Advisory Council on Consumer Affairs)

**Dr Werner Schnappauf** (former Bavarian State Minister of the Environment, Health and Consumer Protection, former Managing Director of the Federation of German Industries – BDI)

**Dr Imme Scholz** (Deputy Director of the German Development Institute – DIE)

**Professor Ulrich Schraml** (Forest Research Institute of Baden-Württemberg, Freiburg)

**Professor Wolfgang Schuster** (former Mayor of Stuttgart, Chair of Deutsche Telekom Stiftung)

**Achim Steiner** (UNDP Administrator; Director of the Oxford Martin School/University of Oxford)

**Professor Hubert Weiger** (Chair of Friends of the Earth Germany – BUND)

**Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul** (former Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, former Member of the German Bundestag)

The Office headed by **Secretary General Professor Günther Bachmann** also supports the Council.

## Contact

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