



## Industry lobbying for transition policy. Evaluation of stakeholder involvement in the Dutch Climate Agreement policymaking process.

Douwe G. Truijens, TNO, The Netherlands ([douwe.truijens@tno.nl](mailto:douwe.truijens@tno.nl))

### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This presentation discusses the process of stakeholder involvement and interest representation for the Dutch Climate Agreement (2019), in which the energy transition strategy for the Netherlands toward 2050 is outlined. Which interests have been translated into this Climate Agreement, and which interests are not served? On the basis of 34 interviews with stakeholders and public actors, the study examines how the structure of the climate table negotiations determined the selection of participants, which sustainability options and related themes were and were not discussed, how much room various interest groups had to put topics on the agenda themselves, and how this process ultimately determined the outcome – the Climate Agreement.

### Introduction

What role do industry stakeholders play in policymaking that is aimed at accelerating the energy transition? The Dutch national Climate Agreement of 2019 sets out the transition strategy towards 2030 and 2050 for business and industries in the Netherlands across five major sectors (Industry, Electricity, Mobility, Agriculture and Buildings). The process through which this Climate Agreement has come about is characterised by intensive stakeholder involvement: both representatives of companies (such as Shell and Akzo Nobel) and NGOs like Greenpeace were closely involved in a 1,5-year consultation and negotiation trajectory.

By giving industry stakeholders a seat at the discussion table, policymakers – who tend to lack specific technical knowledge – may be able to develop policy that aligns well with the reality of the business or industrial sectors. At the same time, however, these stakeholders may have business interests that do not directly align with the policy goals of achieving the Paris Agreement goals. Giving stakeholders a prominent seat at the table also enables them to defend their own interests – possibly by presenting the one or other technical solution as more attainable.

This study analyses what this involvement of incumbents entailed, what their lobbying activities looked like, and how this shaped, or at least influenced, the national Climate Agreement. It examines how the structure of the climate table consultations determined the selection of participants, which sustainability options and related themes were and were not discussed, how much scope various interest groups had to put topics on the agenda themselves, and how this process ultimately determined the outcome – the Climate Agreement. Explicit attention is paid to the dynamics between incumbent industry players, NGOs, labour unions and SME actors, and to the relationship between incumbent industry players and public actors.

### Methodology

The study of how the rather explicit process of interest-group representation has shaped the Dutch Climate Agreement poses a qualitative research question, which is answered on the basis of qualitative research methods. The research focuses on two of the five sectoral negotiations tables: Industry and Electricity. This case selection is based on the observation that these two tables had the highest reduction goal, while changes in

these sectors are at the same time challenging due to high investments and slow transition trajectories. They thus arguably form high-risk-high-gain cases of the transition. Reconstructing which stakeholders negotiations have taken place and analysing how these in the end shaped the Agreement is done by means of a *process tracing* methodology.

Data collection consisted of desk research and interviews with stakeholders. Analysing the extensive minutes of the negotiations that were publicly available allowed us to determine which topics and technical transition options have been discussed. The more fine-grained questions on room for addressing topics, argumentation and evidence, stakeholder dynamics and experiences were answered by means of semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders. Interviews were conducted with company representatives, sectoral umbrella organisations, (environmental) NGOs, and labour unions. In addition, we interviewed public actors, including representatives of the responsible Ministry and chairs of the tables as well as the chair of the entire negotiations. 34 interviews were conducted in total.

## Results

**Fulfilling assignment or achieving task:** Different participants use different reference points for the analysis of the climate table consultations. Whereas some merely followed the specifically formulated assignment for each sector table as the job to fulfil, others saw the reduction and mitigation of climate problems as the task to which the Climate Agreement must ultimately contribute.

**Support:** Within the formulated assignment, there was a lack of clarity as to what kind of ‘support’ should be achieved by participation in the tables: support among the organisations’ own constituency, or broader societal support.

**Role of NGOs:** The reason for involving NGOs in the climate table consultations was unclear to some participants. According to the selection criteria for participation, the parties had to be able to contribute to the reduction target and create support in the sector concerned. Arguments about achieving broader societal support were not embraced by all participants as a reason for involving NGOs.

**Discussion points and themes:** Technical sustainability options and themes discussed at the sector tables followed a pre-determined agenda. There was no room to address new or related issues such as burden sharing and consequences for the labour market at these tables. In terms of sustainability options, focus was predominantly on measures and technologies that would lead to cost-effective reductions in the short term, and hardly on the longer term solutions.

**Representation at the table:** There was a lack of level playing field between parties at the sector tables. Differences in resources meant that smaller parties could not participate in all substructures and were also numerically underrepresented.

**Problem ownership:** The design of the climate table consultations and the involvement of a broad representation of actors increased the urgency of the issue and led to clear problem recognition among the stakeholders involved. This however did not lead to a clear assignment of responsibilities for picking up these problems *after* the negotiation process ended.

**Implementation:** Because complex issues such as governance and enforcement were not considered at the sector tables, problems with mutual dependencies and uncertainties were not resolved. The agreements made at the sector tables offer little clarity and structure for the implementation of the Climate Agreement.

## Conclusion & discussions

The central take-way of the study is that the set-up of the negotiation process significantly, and possibly intentionally, favoured incumbent interests, and that other stakeholders – most notably environmental NGOs and labour unions – had rather limited clout in the negotiations. Both the pre-determined scope and topics of the negotiations, and the numeric representation at the tables determined to a significant extent the roles that different types of stakeholders had in the process, and with that also strongly shaped the outcome of the Climate Agreement.

This finding suggests, *inter alia*, that important and impactful decisions were made in the process *before* the climate table negotiations. Follow-up research could focus on what the agenda-setting of this decision-making process looked like. Furthermore, much of the concrete impact of the Climate Agreement depends on the current executing and implementation of the still quite broad and generic terms of the Agreement. Understanding the role of, and dynamics between, interest-group stakeholders in this implementation phase thus forms another important question to address in follow-up research.