

Climate Recon 2050: Dialogues on Pathways and Policy

Briefing Note 03: An overview of independent expert institutions on climate

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Key Messages

- Dedicated institutions can play a key part within comprehensive governance frameworks to co-ordinate climate policy within the Government, lead stakeholder engagement activities, or provide independent expert advice.
- Independent expert institutions aim to provide evidence for climate policy-making based on the latest scientific knowledge. As such, they offer an opportunity to rise above stakeholders' potentially contrasted views on pathways for the transition, and support evidence-based decision-making.
- A dozen of climate change expert advisory councils have emerged around the world since the 1990's. Their number grew significantly around 2015, presumably in expectation of the Paris Agreement and primarily inspired by the UK's Committee on Climate Change (CCC).
- The UK's CCC, created by the 2008 Climate Change Act, has become the cornerstone of climate governance in the United Kingdom in its first decade. Some characteristics explaining its success include: a clear mandate, close links with Parliament (itself tasked with scrutinising Government's work), legal obligation of the Government to respond to its recommendations, sufficient resources to produce expertise, which establish its legitimacy and ensure its independence.

This Briefing Note presents insights from the third Policymaker Platform of Climate Recon 2050 – a project aiming to facilitate intra-EU exchange and foster the creation of know-how and networks essential to develop effective and ambitious national long-term climate strategies as a tool to guide a successful transition to a low-carbon economy.

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Context: The role of independent expert institutions within comprehensive governance framework

As observed in Rüdinger et al. (2018), the establishment of a comprehensive climate governance framework through laws and strategies usually includes the creation of dedicated institutions. These institutions can be of varying nature, depending on the existing institutional design and identified needs. In all cases, the establishment of a clear mandate (influence on the policy process or power to regulate) is crucial to ensure accountability. Three specific functions stand out:

- **Policy co-ordination institutions created within the government:** creating a specific governmental institution or committee tasked with ensuring policy co-ordination can be a highly effective means of ensuring that all government departments are adequately engaged and that climate change is taken-up as a transversal or cross-cutting priority in the different policy sectors. Inter-ministerial commissions (such as in Mexico) are an effective way to implement this type of institution.
- **Involvement of stakeholders:** in several cases, the governance framework also creates specific institutions to ensure a regular (or permanent) involvement of stakeholder groups at all stages of the policy process. This has for example been achieved in France through the creation of a National Council for the Ecological Transition, gathering representative interest groups, the Environmental Justice Advisory Committee in California, or by the Berlin Climate Protection Council. While this can be of great added value to foster political support, transparency and buy-in, it presents the same challenges mentioned above: their influence directly depends on the clarity and strength of the mandate provided within the governance framework.
- **Independent expert institutions** in many cases, independent expert bodies are created to provide additional expertise and function as “watchdogs” of the governance process. The analysis indicates however that their actual influence and added value within the policy process directly depends on the strength of their mandate, expertise and the dedicated resources to fulfil their responsibility. The comparison of the UK Climate Change Committee and French Expert Committee provides a blatant illustration: while the former has been created as a statutory body with a strong mandate and significant resources to achieve it, the latter has no explicit legal existence, no budget and a very weak consultative mandate, which greatly limits its range of influence.

This briefing note focuses specifically on independent expert institutions, also known as advisory councils. The next section provides further information on their role, emerging practices, as well as an overview of some key existing institutions currently.

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State of the art: key traits of existing independent expert institutions

A. The specific role of independent expert institutions

As with any public policy area, regular reporting and evaluation fosters accountability and transparency over the policy process, in order to strengthen compliance. On the issue of climate policy, which needs to be mainstreamed across various sector-specific or area-specific ministries in order to be effective, independent expert institutions can play a decisive role in supporting the transparency and credibility of the reporting process.

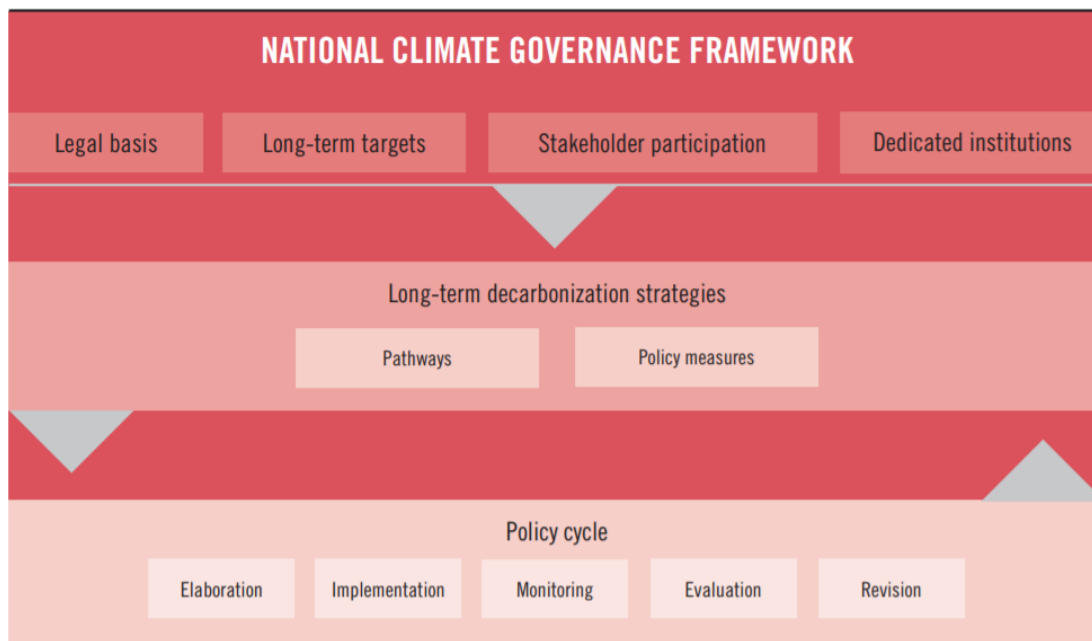
In many cases, the monitoring and evaluation of policy implementation is performed by government institutions themselves, which bears the risk of being both the judge and the subject of evaluation. Transferring this task to an external body, or at least, having an independent institution that publishes separate progress reports can therefore greatly **enhance independence and credibility of policy monitoring and evaluation**, gives politicians cover for or distance from controversial decisions and enhances the quality of policy evaluation itself. The UK Climate Change Committee appears as a best practice: as an independent statutory body, it is directly in charge of reporting activities and the UK Climate Act foresees a clear obligation for the government to respond to its recommendations (Averchenkova et al., 2018, Rüdinger and Vallejo, 2019).

To be impactful, the value of monitoring reports directly depends on the existence of clear compliance mechanisms to push for the revision of policies, if targets are not reached. In the absence of direct sanctions or penalties, the definition of clear governance processes (monitoring, evaluation and revision of action plans) thus plays a crucial role in ensuring that implementation gaps are correctly identified and acted upon. Processes should be therefore be planned as a **sustained policy cycle, including regular monitoring** (yearly or biannual progress reports), **stocktaking** (evaluation of policy implementation and identification of implementation gaps) **and regular revisions of the policy action plans** (every 4 to 5 years).

Figure 1 below presents how these institutions can fit within dedicated national climate governance frameworks and fit within a dedicated policy cycle.

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Figure 1: The role of dedicated expert institutions within the national climate governance framework



(Source: Rüdinger et al., 2018)

B. Emerging practices from independent expert institutions

As noted in Weaver et al. (2019), independent expert institutions consist mainly of top academics or otherwise distinguished experts in the field of climate change. It is crucial that their expertise reflects evidence from a wide range of sources, including stakeholders. Emerging practices regarding **stakeholder consultation** include:

- Call for evidence to gain information on a topic under consideration in the preparatory stage of writing a report, as per the UK Committee on Climate Change practice,
- Semi-formal stakeholder group consisting of representatives of relevant interest groups, to build a joint forum for input, reflection and communication on climate policy issues, as per the Danish Council on Climate Change practice,
- Drawing from ex-officio members (leads of head research institutes or governmental organisations) or liaison officers from relevant ministries, to draw on research and knowledge from government agencies, as is done by the Climate Change Advisory Council of Ireland or the Finnish Climate Change Panel.

This active approach to stakeholder consultation supports many of these institutions in producing concrete policy recommendations, e.g. on regulating solid biomass for energy purposes (Denmark), on the type of heating systems required in new homes (UK) or setting a floor price on carbon (Ireland).

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C. Overview of key existing national climate change independent expert institutions in Europe

The table below presents selected characteristics of key existing institutions in Europe.

Country	Name	Established in	Annual Budget	Mandate
Denmark	Climate Change Council-Klimarådet	2014- Danish Climate Change Act	1.2 m€	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluate the status of Denmark's implementation of national climate objectives and international climate commitments, Analyse potential means of transitioning to a low-carbon society by 2050 and identify possible measures to achieve greenhouse gas reductions, Draw up recommendations to help shape climate policy, including a selection of potential mechanisms and transition scenarios, Contribute to the public debate.
France	High Council for Climate- Haut Conseil pour le Climat	2018	2 m€	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide independent advice and recommendations on the development and achievement of France's carbon budgets and the policies put in place to combat climate change; Monitor France's progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and respecting carbon budgets and the reduction trajectory to achieve France's objectives; Conduct independent analysis in the fields of climate science, economics and public policy.
Germany	Expert Commission on Energy Transition-Monitoring der Energiewende	2011	n/a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides yearly evaluation of energy transition policies
Ireland	Climate Change Council	2015- Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act	270 k€	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advises, assesses and monitors Government policy and its impact on the behaviour of industry, agriculture, and the energy and transport sectors in terms of the country's international obligations to become carbon neutral by 2050

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Finland	Finnish Climate Change Panel – Suomen ilmastopaneeli	2015- Finnish Climate Change Act	300 k€	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gives multidisciplinary recommendations to the government on climate policy • Advises the Finnish ministerial working group on energy and climate policy • Assesses the coherence of climate policy and the sufficiency of the implemented measures to answer the challenges of climate change
Sweden	Swedish Climate Policy Council - Klimatpolitiska rådet	Implementing framework of 2017 Climate Act	1 m€	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine whether certain policies work towards or against climate objectives • Highlight the effects of decisions and proposed policy instruments from society's perspective and identify policy areas where further action is needed • Analyse how both short and long-term goals can be achieved in a cost-effective way • Evaluate the basis and models on which the government builds its policies.
United Kingdom	Committee on Climate Change	2008- UK Climate Change Act	4 m€	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides independent advice on setting and meeting carbon budgets and preparing for climate change. • Monitors progress in reducing emissions and meeting carbon budgets and targets, and conducts independent analysis of climate change science, economics and policy as it relates to both carbon budgets and adaptation

Source: Weaver et al. (2019), authors.

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