

## **GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC PROCUREMENT IN THE NETHERLANDS: AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH**

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper details a survey of the present state of green and sustainable public procurement in the Netherlands. The author checked for the presence of sustainable criteria in 120 tender documents published in the Netherlands in the period of 19 December 2007 to 22 April 2008. Based on this data he then developed a system to classify those contracts according to the degree in which they included criteria relating to sustainability. This paper also discusses several studies that have been carried out into 'green and sustainable public procurement' in recent years. The author found that these studies are hampered by some limitations. In this study he aims at removing these limitations.

### **INTRODUCTION**

On the European Commission's website on the environment ([http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/gpp/index_en.htm)) Stavros Dimas, EU Commissioner for the Environment, introduces green public procurement as follows:

Green Public Procurement is much more than just purchasing recycled paper for offices. It is about tapping into a huge market where the environmental impact related to the production, transportation, use and disposal of goods and related services can be reduced.

Public authorities in Europe have a purchasing power equivalent to 16% of the EU's gross domestic product. By using their

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leverage to opt for goods and services that also respect the environment, they can have a major influence on suppliers and stimulate the production of more sustainable goods and services. Examples include more energy efficient school buildings, energy-saving streetlights, catering services offering organic food, and less polluting public transport. By giving a clear signal to all parties involved in the procurement process, public authorities can draw new environmental technologies into the marketplace that in turn have the potential to strengthen the competitiveness of European industry.

Green Public Procurement will also help EU Member States meet obligations for energy-efficiency in buildings, energy services and reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The potential of this instrument is enormous and I recommend that public administrations, at all levels, turn policy into practice and demonstrate their willingness to 'green' Europe.”

By the end of 2006, 10 EU Member States had adopted draft national action plans and 10 more Member States are still working on it. The document ‘National GPP policies and guidelines’<sup>1</sup> contains a comprehensive overview of the state of affairs in the EU-25. Some Member States have set specific goals for 2010. Of these Member States, the Netherlands perhaps has the most ambitious plans.

On 30 June 2005 the Dutch Lower House adopted a motion<sup>2</sup> to include sustainability as a *major* requirement for 100% of all public procurements by 2010 at the latest. Further to this, on 12 November 2007, the Dutch municipalities and Central Government concluded the ‘Climate Agreement 2007-2011’. It was agreed that Dutch municipalities are to include sustainability as a *major* requirement for 75% of all procurements by 2010 at the latest.

These are ambitious objectives, and the year 2010 is rapidly approaching. This then is the perfect time to examine to what extent the Dutch civil servants’ approach to procurement has kept pace with the ambitions on paper.

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<sup>1</sup> European Commission (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Koopmans and De Krom motion, no 130 (29800-XI).

### **THE EXACT MEANING OF “GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT” IN THE NETHERLANDS**

‘Green procurement’ is usually associated with environmental aspects. This also goes for ‘sustainable procurement’, although the latter entails social aspects as well. The Netherlands is geared towards ‘sustainable procurement’. The agency SenterNovem<sup>3</sup> has been officially designated by the Dutch Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment to provide government departments and municipalities with incentives and facilities to shift towards more sustainable procurements. On its website ([www.senternovem.nl](http://www.senternovem.nl)) SenterNovem gives an extensive definition of the term ‘sustainability’:

Even though the word ‘sustainability’ has by now slipped into common usage, it is not always clear what exactly is meant by sustainability. The Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) makes use of the following definition: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”

SenterNovem ties in with this definition relying on the much cited Dutch definition of sustainable development: “Sustainable development initiates developments in which social and economic, ecological and culture aspects are in dynamic harmony with one another and as a result future generations will have the same opportunities to meet their needs as the present one.” In short: sustainability is a social and economic, ecological and cultural balance.

Sustainable development (and its derivative sustainable public procurement) does not focus exclusively on the environment. It is about finding a sound and well-structured balance between social and economic development, the natural environment and social welfare. Thus, aside from environmental aspects, sustainable development comprises all kinds of issues in the field of human rights, such as counteracting child labour and promoting minimal requirements for acceptable working conditions. In practice, the term sustainable development refers either to specific activities or to fields for special attention. For

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<sup>3</sup> SenterNovem is an agency of the Dutch Ministry for Economic Affairs.

example, sustainable business practices, sustainable investments, sustainable climate control, sustainable constructions, etc. Sustainable public procurement is one of those fields.

Senter Novem relies on the following definition of sustainable public procurement: “Applying environmental and social aspects in all stages of the procurement process to ensure that it results in the actual delivery of a product, service or work in line with such environmental and social aspects.

### **Previous Studies**

Over the past years various studies have been carried out into ‘green and sustainable public procurement’. Below the most recent studies are discussed, first by focusing attention on some international studies, followed by a brief examination of some Dutch studies.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: EU AND GLOBAL FINDINGS**

In August 2006, a group of 5 environmental organisations<sup>4</sup> published the ‘Green Public Procurement in Europe 2006’ report<sup>5</sup>. This report outlines the state of green public procurement in 25 EU member states. Two measurements were performed for this study: based on the response to questionnaires and by analysing the use of environmental criteria in actual tender documents. Of the 8,787 questionnaires distributed, 865 were completed and returned (a response rate of not more than 11%). Of the 2,328 requests to be permitted to have a closer look at the actual tender documents, 1,099 requests were granted (a response rate of 47%).

In this study the researchers counted how many environmental criteria they found in the tender documents. The tender documents were classified based on the actual number of environmental criteria present in the texts. The presence of four criteria suffices to qualify for the highest class, also known as ‘Solid Green’. The presence of one to three criteria accords the ‘Light Green’ status on the contract. Based on a survey of more than 1,000 tender documents, the researchers concluded that 36% of purchases by EU member states are either Light Green or Solid Green.

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<sup>4</sup> Virage, the Netherlands; Centre for Environmental Studies, Hungary; Global to Local, United Kingdom; Macroscopio, Italy and SYKE, Finnish Environmental Institute.

<sup>5</sup> Bouwer, M. (2006).

The analysis of the completed questionnaires, on the other hand, suggests something completely different. Of all the questionnaire respondents 67% perceive that they use environmental criteria when purchasing. The latter percentage is almost twice as high as the former. Evidently, the information gained from questionnaires is not entirely trustworthy. The researchers themselves also conclude as much:

Interesting is that the results gained from the tender analysis differ from the answers given in the questionnaires. It is clear that organisations perceive that they are implementing green public procurement more than they are actually doing it.

The report also provides detailed information on the Netherlands. Within the Netherlands the researchers initially requested 76 tender documents. Eventually civil servants only made 60 documents available of their own accord. Based on that number the researchers drew the following conclusion for the Netherlands: 30% of the tenders are light green and 10% are solid green.

The researchers, however, confined themselves to examining environmental criteria. Thus the report does not reflect on the presence of social criteria in the tender documents. It also remains unclear whether the voluntary character of providing the tender documents may have influenced the score. Ideally, the researcher ought not to be dependent on the courtesy of civil servants. The required tender documents should simply be freely accessible to the researchers.

The classification method used by the researchers is also open for debate. The classification ought not to depend solely and exclusively on the actual *number* of criteria present. The number should ideally be viewed in the light of the nature and complexity of the contract. Thus in some cases it is possible for a contract to qualify for the highest class after meeting only a single criterion. For example, when tenders are invited for the supply of a simple official vehicle demanding compliance with the 'Euronorm 5'<sup>6</sup> label. At the same token, tenders may well fall in a lower class even if they tick more than one box. For example, a complex contract comprising several lots, such as a contract to provide business trips including air tickets, hotel accommodation, lunches, dinners and car rentals.

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<sup>6</sup> Currently the strictest environmental norm within the EU.

Classifying a contract according to the number of criteria present is a useful method, but only if the nature and complexity of the contract are taken into account as well.

In 2007 the international comparative study ‘Sustainable procurement practice in the public sector’<sup>7</sup> was published by Stephen Brammer and Helen Walker of the University of Bath, UK. The report, according to the authors, provides the first systematic and comprehensive insight into the state of sustainable procurement practice globally. For this study more than 1,500 public procurement professionals from 25 countries were contacted and asked to fill in a questionnaire (on a voluntary basis). 283 questionnaires were returned to the researchers (a response rate of not more than 18%). In the questionnaire the respondents could grade themselves of up to a maximum of 5 points. The public procurement professionals gave themselves an average score of 2.82.

It remains unclear how this score reflects on the actual state of sustainable public procurement in the 20 countries that were reviewed. The research in any event fails to provide an answer to the question of whether sustainability was included as a *major* requirement in public procurement. It is also unclear how the voluntary character of the questionnaire may have influenced the score. Given the findings of the aforementioned report ‘Green Public Procurement 2006’ this would seem a cause of concern. In the report itself Stephen Brammer and Helen Walker note the following in that regard:

The study suffers from a number of limitations that future work might seek to remedy. First, inherent to the survey method is the fact that our respondents are volunteers and hence may to some degree be more interested in or engaged with sustainable procurement.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW: DUTCH FINDINGS**

In 2004 SenterNovem<sup>8</sup> published the report ‘Sustainable Procurement, Measurement 2004’<sup>9</sup>. For this study 192 Dutch government

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<sup>7</sup> Brammer, S., Walker, H., “Sustainable procurement practice in the public sector: An international comparative study”, University of Bath, UK, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> SenterNovem is an agency of the Dutch Ministry for Economic Affairs.

organisations were contacted and asked to fill in a questionnaire (on a voluntary basis). The answers should shed light on the state of sustainable public procurement within those organisations. The response rate was no less than 69%. The respondents indicated that in 23% of the cases, on average, they actually included sustainability criteria in the procurement process. Whether they were included as *major* requirements can however not be ascertained. Nor is it clear, once again, to what degree the voluntary character of the questionnaire influenced the score. As stated earlier, this is likely to be a cause of concern.

In October 2006 an interim report 'Benchmark Sustainable Procurement 2006/2007'<sup>10</sup> was published. The report was prepared by COS Nederland<sup>11</sup>. The report compared over 100 Dutch municipalities. Municipal civil servants were asked to fill in a questionnaire (on a voluntary basis). The questionnaire asked, for example, to what degree the organisations had developed adequate parameters and facilities for sustainable procurement policies. The response rate is unknown, but the respondents give themselves an average score of 32 out of 100. How this score mirrors the actual state of sustainable public procurement within Dutch municipalities is unclear. And the voluntary character of the questionnaire may, once again, have influenced the score.

In February 2007 a report was presented entitled: 'Monitor Sustainable business operations of public authorities 2006; Study of the extent of sustainable business operations of public authorities'<sup>12</sup>. The report was prepared by consultancy and research agency Significant. They contacted 222 Dutch government institutions asking them to fill in a questionnaire (on a voluntary basis). The answers should provide a picture of the state of sustainable public procurement within those organisations. 142 institutions returned the questionnaire (a response rate of 64%). Once again, this study asked the respondents to grade themselves up to a maximum score of 100%. The respondents rated themselves, on average, at 48%. It is difficult to infer how this score reflects on the actual state of sustainable public procurement within the Netherlands. The study in any event does not comment on the question as to whether, in practice, sustainability was included as a *major*

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<sup>9</sup> Thijssen, G. (2004).

<sup>10</sup> Van Leeuwen, R. (2006).

<sup>11</sup> Association for centres of international cooperation, the Netherlands.

<sup>12</sup> Blom, M. (2007).

requirement. As with the other studies the fact that the questionnaire was voluntary casts doubt on the representative nature of the figures.

In April 2008 the BECO Groep published the report 'Looking for the best approach.'<sup>13</sup> They asked 155 Dutch municipalities to fill in a questionnaire (on a voluntary basis). The answers should supply information on the state of sustainable public procurement within Dutch municipalities. 52 municipal authorities completed the questionnaire (a response rate of 34%). The study concluded as follows: "At this juncture less than 25% of the purchases made by most Dutch municipal authorities are sustainable purchases."

Once again, it is unclear to what extent this result mirrors the actual state of sustainable public procurement within Dutch municipalities. Nor does the study comment on whether or not sustainability is in practice included as a *major* requirement. And, as with the other studies, the outcome may have been influenced by the voluntary nature of the questionnaires.

### THE RESEARCH STRUCTURE

The studies that have been carried out to date are burdened by a few limitations. Many researchers asked civil servants to collaborate of their own accord by filling in a questionnaire. It is however evident from the findings of the aforementioned report 'Green Public Procurement in Europe 2006' that such a research method may produce somewhat flattering figures. A more objective method is to analyse the actual tender documents. However, in gathering the required tender documents, the researchers ought not to have to depend on the courtesy of civil servants. Ideally, the required tender documents should be freely accessible to researchers. The studies also show that it is difficult to develop a sound classification method. In this present study I seek to remedy these limitations.

The research method utilised in this study does not depend on the bias-prone voluntary questionnaire, but instead on an analysis of the actual tender documents. The required tender documents were retrieved from the website [www.aanbestedingskalender.nl](http://www.aanbestedingskalender.nl): a Dutch public site on

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<sup>13</sup> Reinhoudt, J. (2008).

which public organisations may post public contracts<sup>14</sup>. The public contracts on the site vary from very small to major public contracts. A special aspect of the site is its direct link to the online version of the Supplement to the Official Journal of the European Union<sup>15</sup>. What makes the site also special is that it offers free downloads of all the required tender documents. Hence, no-one's voluntary collaboration is required, making it the ideal site for this kind of survey.

Of the many thousands of public contracts posted on the site, this survey focused on a randomly selected period: 19 December 2007 to 22 April 2008. From this period 120 tender documents were downloaded and analysed. They were retrieved in two clusters, also selected randomly: one period of a couple of weeks at the start of the research period and a similar period towards the end of the research period. The following two clusters were surveyed:

- 60 tender documents from the period 19 December 2007 to 14 January 2008.
- 60 tender documents from the period 28 March 2008 to 7 April 2008.

It is important to note that in these two clusters *all* the published documents were examined. Thus the tender documents published in these two clusters were not spot checked.

The often voluminous tender documents were examined, one by one, to check whether or not they included sustainability criteria. Every document was searched twice. The first round relied on the automatic search function. Key words such as "social" or "environment" quickly produce the section on sustainable aspects. Or not. The automatic search was based on 63 different key words regarding environmental and social aspects.

All documents were searched using the automatic search function in the 'Adobe Reader' programme, more in particular the advanced search options in this programme. By introducing a list of key words it is

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<sup>14</sup> Although contract notices may also be published elsewhere (e.g. on the tendering party's own website or a national newspaper) practice has learned that contracts are usually posted on this site.

<sup>15</sup> This site lists invitations to tender from all EU members, published according to European legislation.

possible to search a document on the presence of one or more of the words on that list in one go.

In the second round every document was examined by slowly scrolling through the document and manually scanning the document for relevant information. Usually, this produced the same results, although in a few cases new sustainability criteria were found.

### **Valuation**

A summary was prepared of the sustainability criteria encountered in the individual tender documents. Based on this summary every contract was classified, by the auteur, according to one of the following four sustainability classes:

- sustainability class 0: no indications were found that sustainability was included as a *major* requirement.
- sustainability class 1: in relation to the nature and complexity of the public contract; relatively few indications were found that sustainability was included as a *major* requirement.
- sustainability class 2: in relation to the nature and complexity of the public contract; relatively many indications were found that sustainability was included as a *major* requirement.
- sustainability class 3: in relation to the nature and complexity of the public contract; all indications pointed towards the conclusion that sustainability was included as a *major* requirement.

The research did not extend to an analysis of whether the found criteria actually influenced the final purchase decision. It is therefore possible, in theory, that contracts included a whole string of sustainable criteria in the tender documents, which in the end were forsaken in the decision-making process. This however seems unlikely. The fact is that the level of legal protection of the tenderers is quite high in Europe. The European tender law's principle of transparency guarantees a transparent decision-making process. Thus tendering parties can signal any irregularity in the tender procedure and quickly and effectively submit complaints to the court.

### **Data Processing**

A laptop with internet connection was used to download the tender documents. The detected data was incorporated in a spreadsheet

programme by first classifying the titles of the 120 examined contracts by date. Next, a summary of the sustainability criteria found was added to the title. The final column then stated the sustainability class<sup>16</sup>.

### **Some Examples from the Dutch Public Procurement Practice**

In this section we look at some examples from the Dutch public procurement practice. Let's start with a contract entitled 'Delivery and maintenance of central and decentralised multifunctional printers' published by the Municipality of Almere on 23 December 2007. The following sustainability criteria are found in the tender documents pertaining to this contract:

- they request an environmental care system/environmental policy plan;
- they declare applicable a paragraph on non-child labour;
- they refer to Dutch environmental legislation;
- they request double-sided printing;
- they request safe/environmentally friendly packaging and/or disposal measures;
- they refer to Dutch working conditions legislation;
- they request general safety measures in relation to substances that might be harmful to the environment and also to the workers;
- they request general environmental measures;
- they request general energy-saving measures;
- they request recycled materials and/or recycling of materials.

In view of the nature of this contract the list of sustainability criteria is quite extensive. This contract is therefore classified as a class 3 contract; the highest classification.

The second notable contract is entitled 'Review of risk equalisation 2008' published by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport on 8 January 2008. Not a single sustainability criteria was found in the tender documents.

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<sup>16</sup> Full data can be retrieved from [www.gogreenpublicprocurement.wetpaint.com](http://www.gogreenpublicprocurement.wetpaint.com).

Although it is perhaps not customary to include sustainability criteria in research-oriented contracts, it is certainly not impossible. For example, they might have enquired about the extent of sustainable business operations of the research agency itself. Does the agency use environmentally friendly office equipment? Do they use a lot of paper or rely more on electronic mail? Do the field staff members use public transport? Does the agency perhaps create work experience positions for the long-term unemployed? And what about the use of general terms and conditions containing a clause which obliges suppliers to observe environmental laws and regulations and prohibits the supply of products resulting from child labour or slavery. None of these initiatives were included. This contract is therefore classified as a class 0 contract; the lowest classification.

The third contract of interest is entitled 'The construction of a bus lane', published by the Municipality of Utrecht on 14 January 2008. The tender documents listed the following sustainability criteria:

- the Social Return protocol is declared applicable to the contract (i.e. part of the contracting sum should be used to offer those looking for work or juveniles a job or internship);
- they request the reduction of noise;
- they refer to Dutch environmental legislation;
- they refer to Dutch construction materials legislation;
- they refer to Dutch working conditions legislation;
- they request general environmental measures;
- they request general safety measures.

Given the nature of this contract, the list of sustainability criteria is meagre at most. Such major work is a perfect opportunity to lay down stringent environmental requirements. They failed to do so. A reference to national legislation may seem significant, but such legislation would apply anyway, hence a reference in the tender documents does not add anything. Also, the requirements are for the most part confined to social aspects. This contract is therefore classified as a class 1 contract.

A fourth contract that catches the eye is called 'Grower of medicinal cannabis for the supply to pharmacists', published by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport' on 26 November 2007. The tender documents

state no sustainability criteria at all. However, the contract is accompanied by an ‘opium exemption’ which includes two interesting instructions:

- personnel should be protected from contact with poisonous or potentially allergy-causing plant materials by means of adequate protective clothing;
- the use of chemical pesticides is permitted, but such use should be confined to the ‘minimally effective dosage’.

Given the nature of the contract, the list of sustainability criteria is found wanting. The contract would have been perfectly suited to an extensive set of sustainability criteria, such as ecologically growing. No such luck. The contract is therefore classified as a class 0 contract.

The fifth example was published by the joint Municipalities of Bergeijk, Cranendonck, Heeze-Leende and Valkenswaard on 5 December 2007 and was for the supply of four emergency services vehicles with diesel engines. A striking requirement is that the vehicles should satisfy ‘Euronorm 5’. This is currently the strictest norm. The emission of harmful substances is minimal. The tender documents also list the following sustainability criteria:

- they declare applicable a paragraph on environmental protection;
- they request general working conditions measures;
- they request general environmental measures;
- they refer to Dutch environmental legislation;
- they refer to Dutch working conditions legislation;
- they request general safety measures.

The municipalities indicated that two vehicles should be fitted with a soot filter, while, curiously, no such requirements applied to the other two. It then turns out that the stringent ‘Euronorm 5’ was subsequently replaced by the more lenient ‘Euronorm 4’ during the tender process. This is evident from the summary of additional information and changes. The summary learns that one of the interested suppliers had asked for a reduction of the Euronorm and that this request was granted by the joint municipalities. The list of sustainability criteria is nevertheless quite impressive. The contract is therefore classified as a class 3 contract.

Interesting about this case is the ease with which the sustainability criteria are amended.<sup>17</sup> Evidently, it is quite simple for external parties to exercise influence on the sustainability criteria drawn up by the tendering service. In this case obviously for the worse, but it might also be for the better. Thanks to the internet most Dutch public procurement documents are now available for public inspection and everyone can therefore request the tenderer to tighten the criteria. Can it really be that simple? And if so, this would be a very easy and cheap way for the Dutch Government to see to it that all Dutch tender documents include sustainability as a *major* requirement. All the Dutch Government has to do is set up an office with one or two reviewers who, every day, check the newly published tender documents<sup>18</sup> and take immediate action if necessary. This way the Dutch Government is assured of meeting their target by 2010.

The sixth and final example is a contract entitled 'Plane tickets and package trips' published by the Province of North Brabant on 20 December 2007. The province is looking for a travel agency to supply plane tickets, book hotels and organise lunches and dinners for foreign business trips. No sustainability criteria can be found in the documents. The following instruction is the one and only indication in the document of some environmental awareness: 'If trips are shorter than 100 kms, the travel agency also lists the alternatives by train.'

Given the nature of the contract, the absence of sustainability criteria is rather poignant. This kind of contract would justify an extensive set of sustainability criteria, e.g. sustainable tourism/hotel accommodation, green plane tickets and organic lunches/dinners. The documents remain silent on all counts. The contract is therefore classified as a class 0 contract.

## THE RESULTS

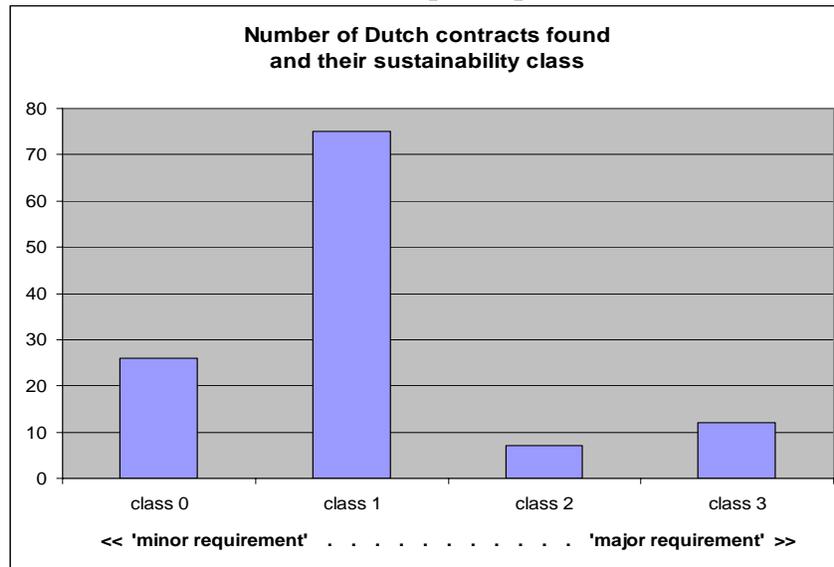
A graphic representation of the results of the analysis is in the Figure 1. Contracts on the right side of the scale should be qualified as contracts

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<sup>17</sup> It is debatable whether or not this is permitted; the fact is that during the tender process the essence of the contract may not be modified.

<sup>18</sup> The number of new tender documents posted on [www.aanbestedingskalender.nl](http://www.aanbestedingskalender.nl) roughly averages around five a day.

**FIGURE 1**  
**State of sustainable public procurement**



in which sustainability is included as a *major* requirement. Contracts on the left side of the scale should be qualified as contracts in which sustainability is included as a *minor* requirement.

The results are sobering. Only 16%<sup>19</sup> of the contracts examined in this survey fall in sustainability class 2 or 3. This number is a long way off target, i.e. meeting the objective that 100% of all public procurements (75% of all municipal procurements) are to include sustainability as a *major* requirement.

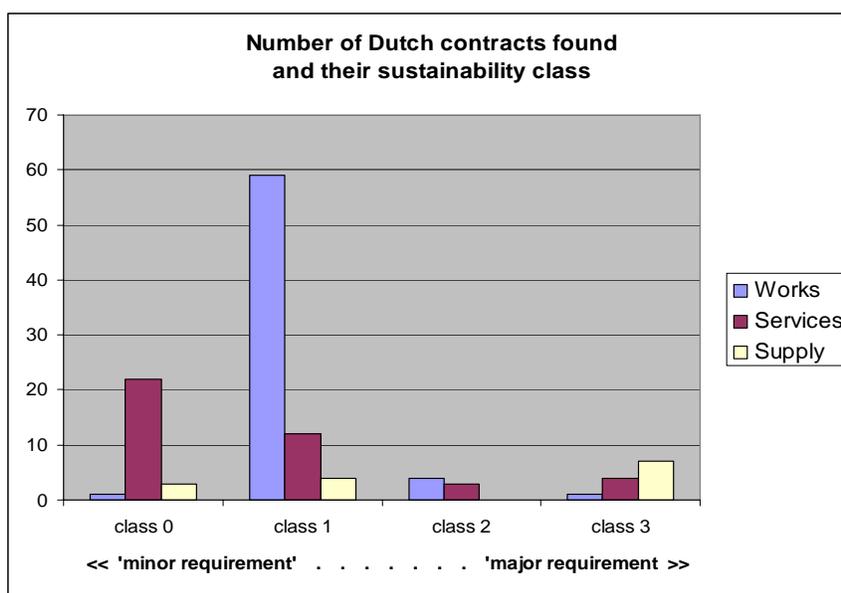
This survey shows, on the one hand, that it is not impossible to include sustainability as a requirement of major importance. In fact, several parties do so and are quite adept at doing so. However, the survey also shows that, at present, this is the exception rather than the rule. It would therefore not be much of a stretch to qualify the findings of this study as 'An Inconvenient Truth'.

<sup>19</sup> 7 class 2 contracts and 12 class 3 contracts.

### Further Analysis

The above graphic is slightly at odds with the ideal picture of the bell-shaped curve. The unexpected peak in class 3 is striking. A closer look reveals that the 120 surveyed tender documents consist of three kinds of contracts, i.e. Works, Services and Supply contracts. Figure 2 highlights the share of each of these.

**FIGURE 2**  
Further analysis by type of contract



This graphic shows clearly that the unexpected peak in class 3 is caused for the most part by a relatively large number of supply contracts. And the Municipality of Amsterdam plays a relatively prominent role in this due to the fact that in April 2008 the local council awarded a series of three supply contracts including sustainability as a *major* requirement. Those three contracts were awarded in the same, relatively short space of time. A coincidence? It turned out that the local council had recently appointed an environmental coordinator who was closely involved in the three tender procedures, thereby shifting the scales towards more sustainable procurement.

A more detailed analysis of the collected data produced more information. For example, on the criteria applied. Annex 1 includes an overview of the most popular sustainability criteria used for works contracts. Annex 2 lists the ten most popular criteria used for supply contracts, while Annex 3 does the same for service contracts.

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Thus even though Dutch civil servants included some sustainable criteria in their tender documents, the present state of sustainable public procurement falls short of the targets set for 2010. Given this rather disheartening conclusion, the question remains: what can we do about it? Considering that the Netherlands is commonly regarded as one of the best performers on green procurement in the EU<sup>20</sup>, this is unlikely to be an exclusive Dutch problem. Perhaps we should therefore look for a solution at European level. Should we not devise a clear and effective European plan? But how? Should we provide civil servants with more training opportunities? Should we impose severe sanctions? Who comes up with a suggestion?

We might, for example, take a leaf from the book of Arent van Wassenaar and Coen Thomas, both lawyers at Allen & Overy LLP, Amsterdam. They recently launched a wiki<sup>21</sup> in order to develop, together with the online community, an entirely new generation of building contracts for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The wiki concept seems a most appropriate tool for shaping a common trajectory throughout the European Union, towards a more sustainable public procurement practice.

#### Introducing the Wiki

At the occasion of the International Public Procurement Conference 2008, held in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, the following wiki was launched: [www.gogreenpublicprocurement.wetpaint.com](http://www.gogreenpublicprocurement.wetpaint.com).

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<sup>20</sup> According to the report 'Green Public Procurement in Europe—State overview', European Commission, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> A wiki is a software tool that allows users to create, edit, and link web pages easily. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites. For example, 'Wikipedia' is often considered one of the best known wikis. Quick collaborations on the web are the essence of the wiki concept.

On its launch the wiki is divided into the following sections:

- Countries and their national action plans
- Research, benchmarking and other studies
- Required supporting processes
- Sustainable aspects
- Organisations developing and issuing sustainable labels
- Product groups and criteria that may be requested
- Trade associations
- Consultancy firms (environmental, procurement, legal)
- Suppliers

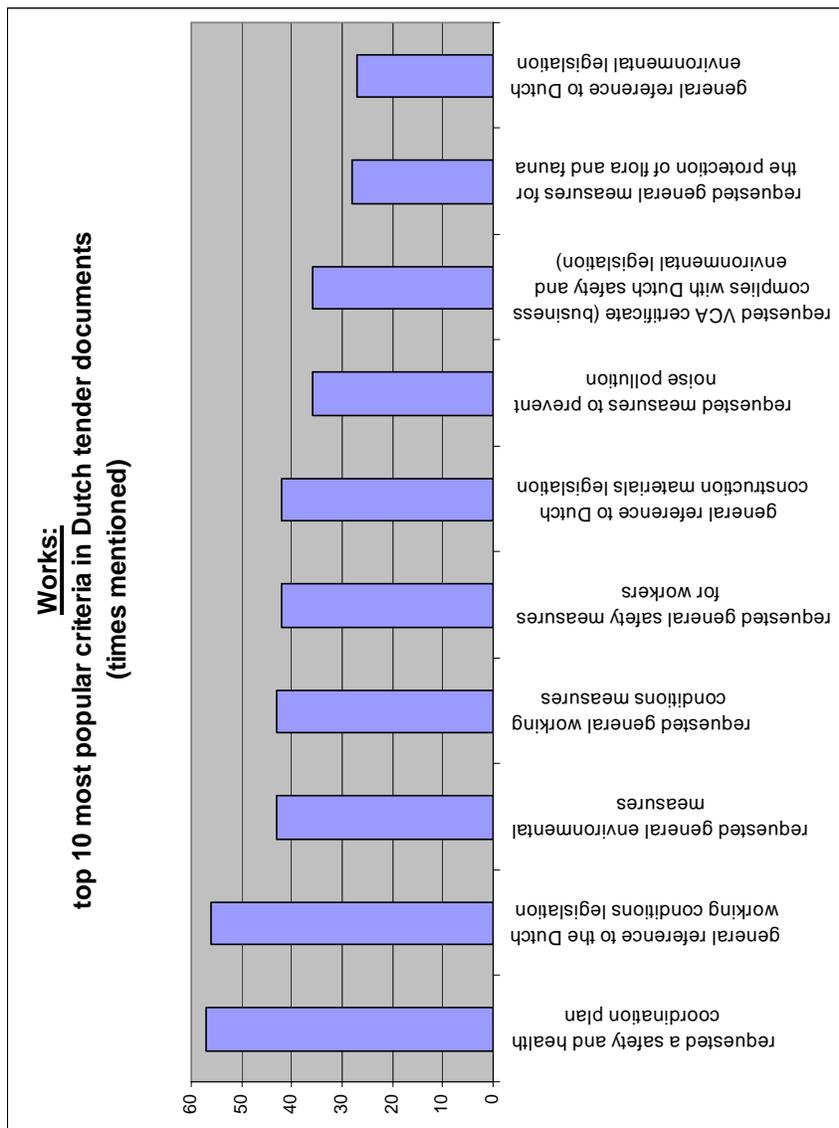
I hereby call on all public procurement officers, policy officers, researchers, suppliers, trade associations, consultancy firms and organisations developing and issuing sustainable labels to visit the wiki and join forces in order to outline a trajectory towards a more sustainable public procurement practice.

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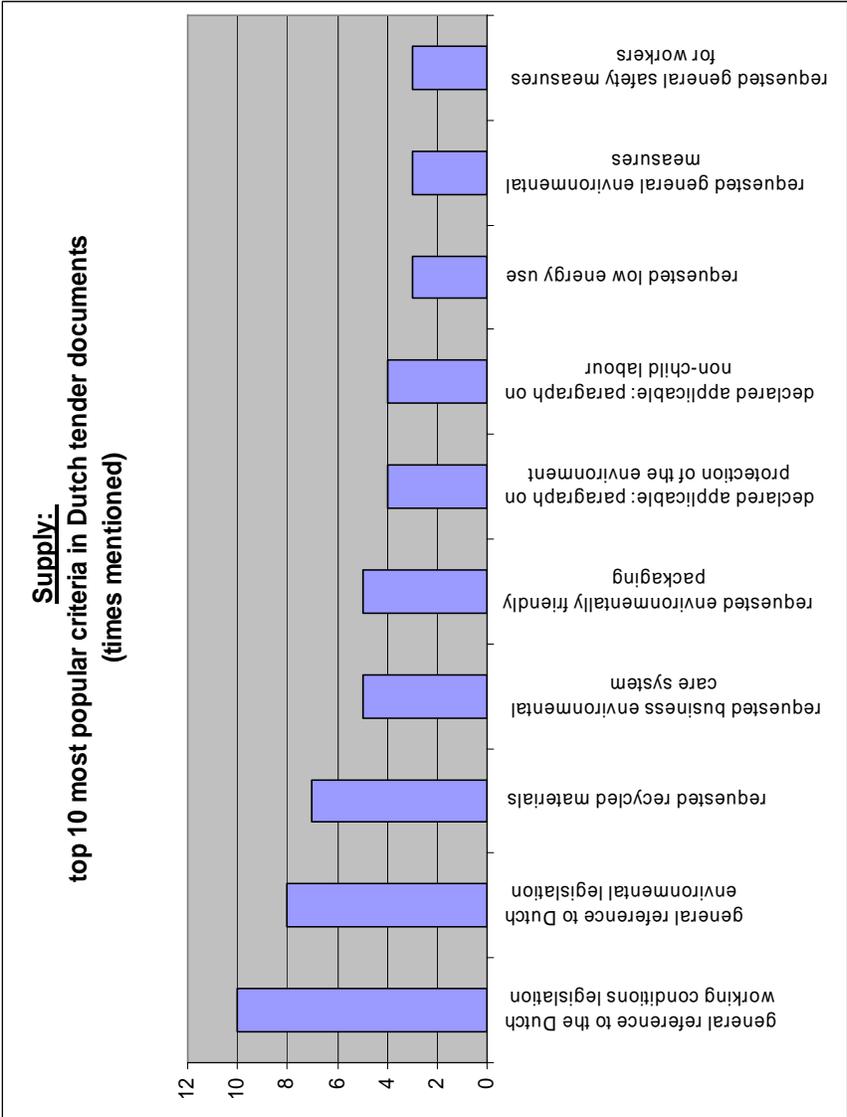
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### Annex 1



Annex 2



Annex 3

