



Sustainable Strategies

SOCIETAL PERSPECTIVES IN BIOMASS JOINT FACT-FINDING

Integrated Assessments for Environmental Policy in a 'Post-Truth' Society

George Wurpel, Oct 6 2022

A TIMELINE OF THE BIOMASS DEBATE

Energy agreement (Sep 2013)

KNAW vision (2015)

Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences

juni 2019

Klimaatakkoord

Climate agreement

jan 2020

Joint fact-finding

mei 2020

PBL report

Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency

juli 2020

SER advice

Social and Economic Council of the Netherlands

okt 2020

Letter to Parliament: sustainability framework biomass

apr 2022

Government policy bio-resources

- stringent sustainability requirements
- encouraging high-value applications
- phasing out low-value applications



AN INCLUSIVE PROCESS

Stakeholder engagement

 **6**
months

 **247**
persons informed

151
active participants

Motivation for an inclusive process

1. Interdisciplinary
2. Distributed knowledge
3. Trans-scientific
4. Practical knowledge is relevant

enquête
 **97**
respondents

 **31**
interviews

 **3**
meetings

Stakeholder engagement alone will not give convergence =>
Independent assessment by PBL

Results

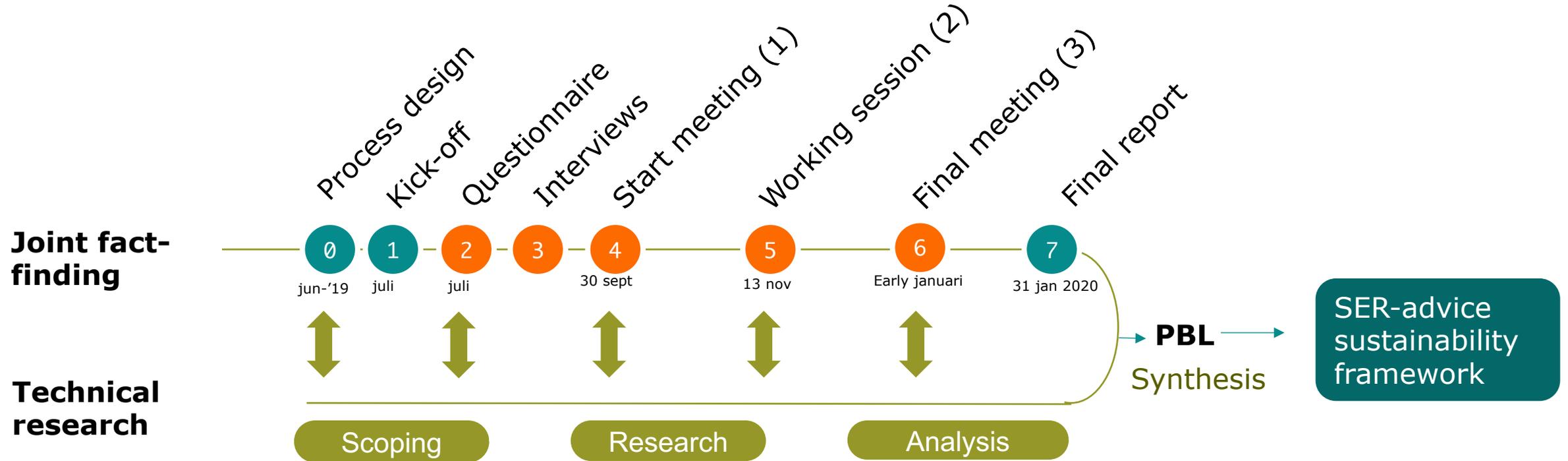
 **273**
studies

 **9**
issues

 **87**
arguments

 **5**
perspectives

THE JFF PROCES IN RELATION TO OTHER PROCESSES



STARTING POINT

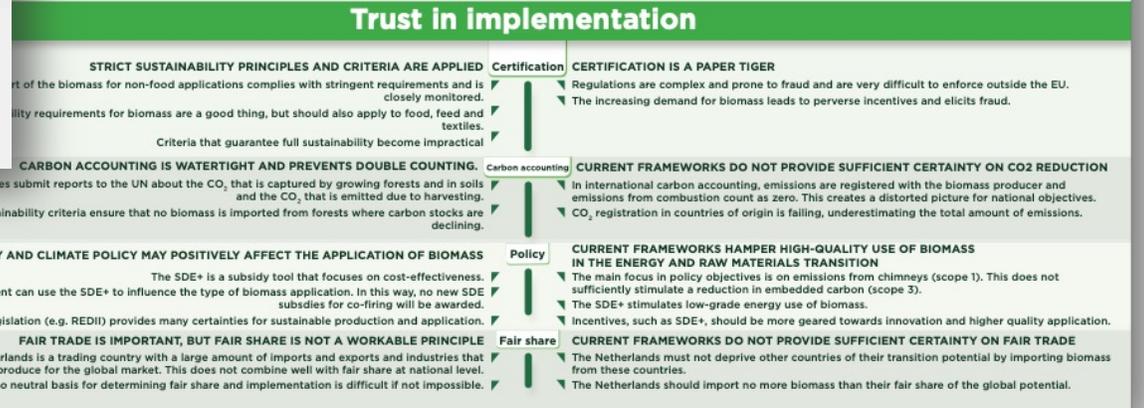
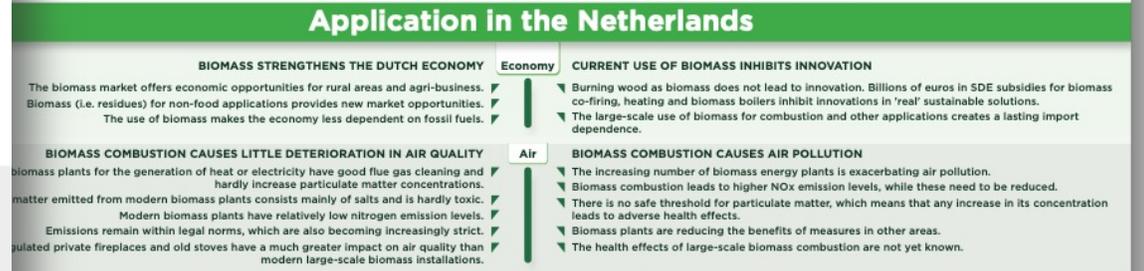
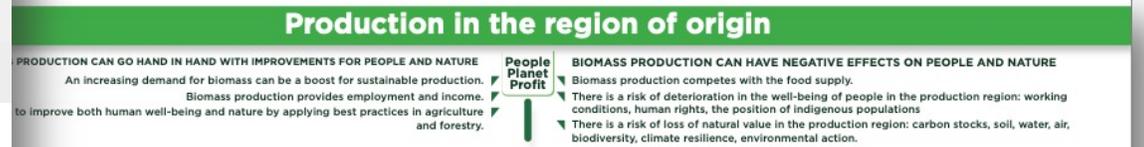


- The types of issues and the extent to which they arise depend on the value-chain (wood for heat and power, biofuels, materials, residuals).
- The necessity of biomass for energy usage is most strongly questioned.
- Agriculture and forestry evoke very strong emotions.
- Agreement over the desirability of a scale between high-value and low-value applications of biomass.
- Because a lot of (public) money is involved in biomass deployment, interests are high and stakeholders choose positions strategically.
- Knowledge on emission registration and certification varies widely.



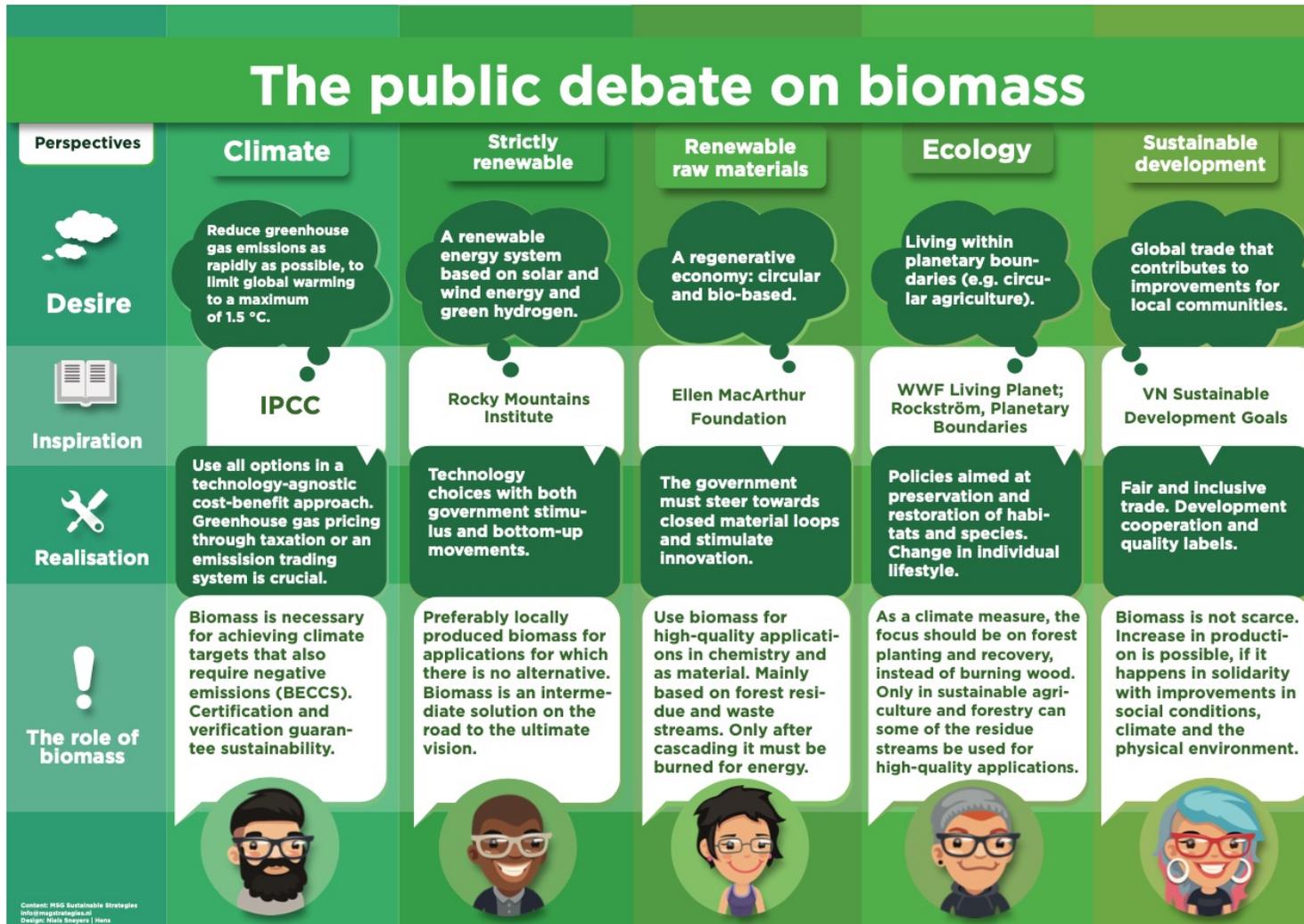
ANALYSING THE DEBATE

At the level of arguments. This helped guiding research



ANALYSING THE PERSPECTIVES

Trying to move past the pro-contra biomass frame using a pragmatic approach



Perspectives

- Give idealized sustainable futures
- Are an expression of underlying values
- Include a theory-of-change
- Are not mutually exclusive

AND BROADENING THE DEBATE

To include multiple value chains

Wood

- Highly polarised: conflicting perspectives
- Fierce social & scientific debate

Biofuels

- Conflicting perspectives (currently) give less polarisation
- Debate among specialists and experts

Materials and Resources

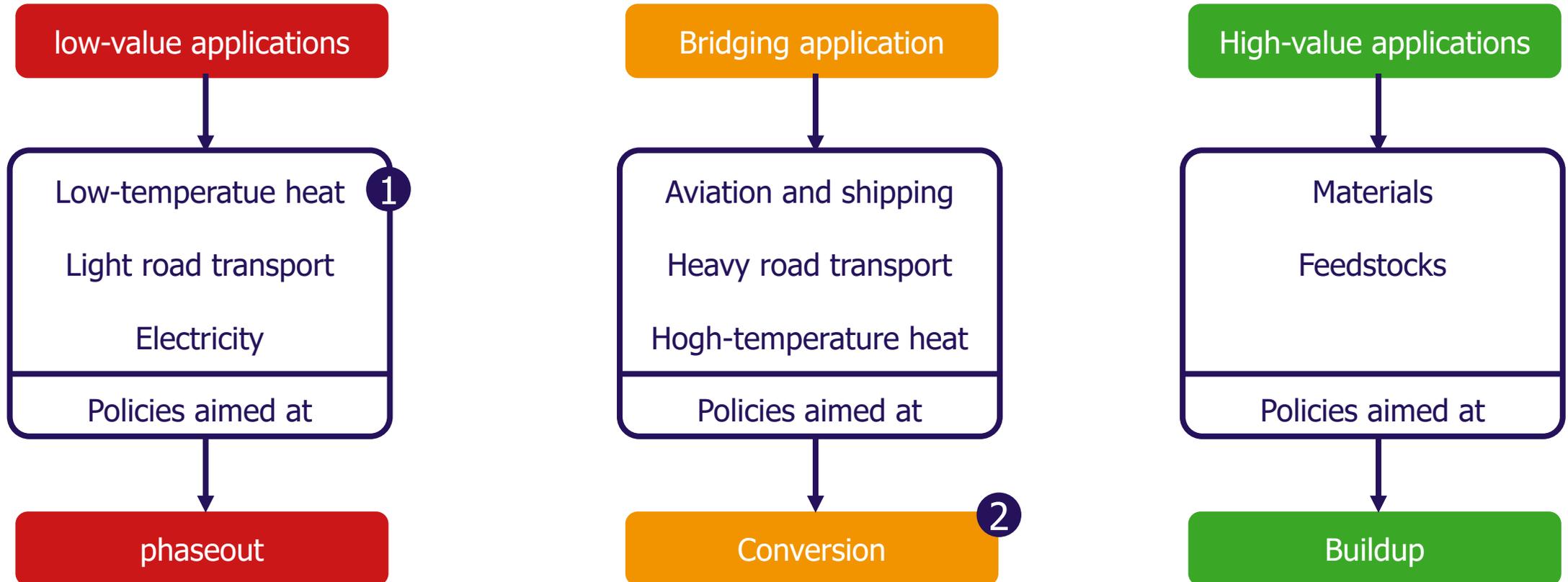
- Discussed more in terms of opportunities than as risk
- Gets little attention in public debate

Residuals

- Sustainability risks seen as relatively low
- Debate: ambiguity on definitions; confidence in origins

SER ADVICE

Employers, employees and NGO came to a joint advice to implement a transition perspective for biomass



1. Possible bridging application for: flexible capacity, heat via existing heat networks and peak load

2. Conversion to bioresources, followed by conversion to renewable alternatives

SURPRISES?

1. The consequences of a battle between professors

A debate between professors turns into accusations over independent science and conflicts of interest



Action groups accuse scientists of lobbying..



...and threaten with legal actions



SURPRISES?

2. Les extrêmes se touchent



Partij voor de Dieren @PartijvdDieren · 8 mei

Nee #PBL, duurzame #biomassa is een sprookje waar niemand meer in gelooft. Leidt tot:

- natuurvernietiging
- CO2-uitstoot
- fraude

Klimaatdoelen halen en natuur redden doe je door minder vlees te eten en minder te vliegen.



23 119 273



Forum voor Democratie @fvdemocratie · 22 u

Het PBL publiceerde vorige week flutconclusies over #biomassa. Wetenschappelijk oordeel zou niet kunnen. Onzin. KNAW deed dat wel. Bomen als brandstof? Waanzin!

Tijd voor een debat! Of wordt dat weer tegengehouden door coalitie en @GroenLinks, zoals afgelopen jaar? 📌



71 281 771

WHERE DO WE CURRENTLY STAND?

- More balance in the debate
- NGO's satisfied with phaseout in subsidies for wood-fueled biomass plants
- Green chemistry happy with the recognition of their relevance
- The public support remains problematic for new initiatives
- Current energy crisis will refocus the perspectives on biomass



SER-advies brengt balans in debat biograndstoffen

Nieuwsbericht | 08-07-2020 | 13:33

Duurzame biograndstoffen zijn noodzakelijk voor een CO₂-neutrale en circulaire economie. Wel moeten de grondstoffen zo hoogwaardig mogelijk worden ingezet en voldoen aan heldere duurzaamheidseisen. Dat staat in het SER-advies Biomassa in Balans.

Biomassa is splijtzwam, maar klimaatbeleid kan niet zonder

nrc.nl/nieuws/2020/05/07/biomassa-is-splijtzwam-maar-klimaatbeleid-kan-niet-zonder-a3999079

Biobased Versnellingsdag in Zeeland:

“Iedereen wil biobased grondstoffen”



SUCCESS AND LIMITATION

What were the success factors?

What were the limitations?

WHAT WERE SUCCES FACTORS?

Overall process

- A well-timed combination of stakeholder engagement, research, and polder-agreement to guide policies
- Intensive process in a relatively short period – the same actors from beginning to end
- Strong commitment by all parties involved

The stakeholder process

- Being able to elevate the conversation: starting with an inventory of knowledge, and arguments going to perspectives. This created shared understanding of the point of view of othe actors
- Practical and direct approach, leaning strongly on personal interactions: interviews, dialogue sessions. Always ask, never assume.

WHAT WERE LIMITATIONS?

Inclusiveness

- No direct inclusion of citizens. Mainly professional stakeholders.
- Part of the scientific community was very vocal in the media, but could not be persuaded to actively engage with other stakeholders in a public setting (they were interviewed).

Formulation of the research question

- The research question was a starting point of the process, rather than a jointly formulated question of all stakeholders involved

DISCUSSION

GENERAL APPLICABILITY

What are the strengths and weaknesses of this approach?

What is a good moment to start a stakeholder process?

What kind of problems form a niche for this type of approach?



Sustainable Strategies

Thank you for your attention!

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