

# Finnish National Commission on **Sustainable Development**

Towards a globally and nationally sustainable Finland



# Long-term guidelines in sustainable development policy

The roots of sustainable development reach back to the 1980s. An extensive set of programmes and commitments were approved at a high political level at the UN's Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The primary responsibility for implementing the Rio commitments was delegated to national governments, which were obliged to make national political decision-making participatory and transparent. In order to ensure progress, in this regard, a decision was made to establish national commissions on sustainable development.

Established in 1993, the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development (FNCSD) was one of the first in the world. The Finnish Commission is considered unique because it is based on open dialogue between the Government, public administration, business and industry, and civil society. The Commission has initiated national debate on several important themes, influenced the content of Government Programmes, and helped to build mutual political understanding concerning sustainable development issues.

Sustainable development is a learning process for the entire society. Although we are still learning, we are also making progress. Experience has helped us to develop the contents of the sustainable development concept in order to achieve a common view of how our society and lifestyle should be changed.



LEHTIKUVA OY / PRIME MINISTERS OFFICE

Tarja Cronberg, Chairperson, Minister of Labour

The Government set a new five-year period for the current Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development in February 2008. The work of the Government and the Commission will be guided by the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, approved in 2006. It is a genuine national view of the development of our society that has been jointly produced and approved by various societal actors.

Development is sustainable when the well-being of citizens and society is assured within the limits of the carrying capacity of nature nationally and globally. We have to take responsibility for preserving the natural resources of the entire planet. This is quite a challenge. Mankind's consumption of natural resources exceeds the annual production of ecosystems earlier and earlier each year. In 2008, over-consumption of natural resources began on 23 September, meaning that we will be living in debt for the rest of the year.

Public administration must be a pioneer in everyday life, eco-efficiency and climate action. The Commission monitors, reports on and assesses how the ministries succeed in this task. The Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development encourages actors in various sectors to engage in open cooperation.



Tarja Cronberg, Chairperson, Minister of Labour



Paula Lehtomäki, Vice-Chairperson, Minister of the Environment



Paula Lehtomäki, Vice-Chairperson, Minister of the Environment

# The National Strategy for Sustainable Development – a challenge to change



The foundation for the work of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development is the National Strategy for Sustainable Development entitled “Towards sustainable choices. A nationally and globally sustainable Finland”, which was completed in June 2006.

The Strategy combines the sustainable use, management and protection of nature with citizens’ well-being and a sound society

so that the outcome is a competent and sustainable Finland.

Well-being is assured within the limits of the carrying capacity of nature nationally and globally. Sustainable development has to be created in a safe and pluralistic society that promotes participation and that encourages all people to take responsibility for the environment. The objective guides both short- and long-term activities and encourages various actors to select solutions based on sustainable development.

Realisation of the objectives of the Strategy in accordance with the principles of sustainable development will require the balanced consideration of ecological, economic, social and cultural viewpoints. Political decision-making should be based on consistent policy, science, and assessment of probabilities. Citizens must be

provided with the prerequisites needed to make sustainable choices.

From the Finnish perspective, the most significant development trends and challenges of sustainable development are associated with climate change, adaptation to rapid changes in the global economy, and changes in population structure. In addition to climate change, the key challenges on a global scale are poverty, inequality, and population growth. Resolution of these challenges in a sustainable manner requires simultaneous and mutually supporting short- and long-term policy actions at the national, European Union and global level.

The Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development ensures that the strategy objectives are implemented and that sustainable development is reinforced as a prevailing way of thinking and activity. This requires concrete changes in Finnish society, for example, significantly reducing the use of fossil fuels, halting the growth in overall energy consumption, preventing dependency on cars, improving the capacity of the ageing population, and transferring environmental and social impacts to product and service prices.

Implementation is supported by the Government Decision-in-Principle approved in December 2006, according to which the administrative sectors committed to long-term cooperation with various actors and local administrations. The Government Programme of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen’s second Cabinet (2007) also requires that the National Strategy for Sustainable Development be implemented in cooperation between the administrative sectors.

**VISION:**  
Assuring well-being within the limits of the carrying capacity of nature nationally and globally

**OBJECTIVE:** A good life in a sustainable society

Balance between the use and protection of natural resources

- Limiting greenhouse gas emissions
- Increasing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy
- Adapting to the adverse effects of climate change
- Safeguarding biodiversity
- Promoting sustainable production patterns
- Changing consumption habits
- Improving the state of the Baltic Sea
- Maintaining the cultural significance of natural resources

Sustainable communities in a sustainable regional structure

- A polycentric and networked regional structure
- Functionally diverse and structurally sound communities and a good living environment
- Ensuring a vital rural region and the necessary services
- The transport system and information society services are a precondition for a functional society and interaction

Citizens – well-being throughout the entire life span

- Balance between individual and societal responsibility
- Quality of working life
- Cohesion between different generations
- Preventing social exclusion and poverty
- Promoting healthy lifestyles and functional capacity and preventing health threats
- The national identity and a multicultural Finland
- Promoting civil activity

The economy as a safeguard for sustainable development

- Ensuring employment and Finland's competitiveness
- Ensuring services and income transfers that are essential to a welfare society

Finland as a global actor and bearer of responsibility

- Finland's operational principles in international cooperation
- Development of neighbouring regions
- Influencing European Union policy
- Finland as a global bearer of responsibility

Supporting sustainable choices

- Education to promote sustainable development
- Research and development, know-how and innovations
- Economic policy instruments



# Sustainable development as the leading idea for national policy

The most important objective of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development is to make sustainable development part of national policies and administrative practices. Finland's public sector has to be a pioneer in making sustainable development a part of everyday life.

The Commission supports and promotes the work and dialogue between various societal actors in sustainable development issues. It also initiates discussion on matters of major significance from the perspective of national or global sustainable development and on issues where a national viewpoint is needed.

The Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development also participates in international sustainable development cooperation. National strategy work is closely linked to the implementation and evaluation of the European Union Sustainable Development Strategy.

The Commission is actively involved in two European sustainable development networks. European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) is a network of national sustainable development coordinators. European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC) is a cooperation network of advisory councils operating as scientific communities and non-governmental organisations.

## Commission tasks:

- To promote, evaluate and monitor implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development, and provide information on the results.
- To obtain commitments from various societal actors to promote sustainable development policies in their own activities and to strengthen the dialogue particularly with the Finnish Parliament.
- To serve as a high-level sustainable development partnership network in relation to the government.
- To link national sustainable development policies closer with the sustainable development work of the United Nations, European Union and the regions.
- To cooperate with European sustainable development networks.
- To cooperate with other national preparation and monitoring working groups.

# All spheres of society represented in the Commission

The Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development was established in 1993. Its terms are five years in length and they are staggered with the four-year Parliamentary election terms. This ensures that the Commission's tasks are not too closely linked to the work of different Governments and also allows the Commission to take a long-term approach to important sustainable development issues.

The Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development appointed by the Government in February 2008 has 43 members, representing the Government, Parliament, public administration, business and industry, municipalities and regions, trade unions, the educational sector, non-governmental organisations, science and research, the arts, and the churches.

The Commission convenes approximately four times per year for theme meetings. It also arranges seminars, tailored workshops and joint meetings.

The Commission will address the following issues, among others, during the 2008–2012 term: sustainable development in Finnish development policy, the economic impacts of Baltic Sea pollution, sustainable natural resource policy, sustainable development in climate and energy policy, ecological and social innovations, and education to promote sustainable development.

The Secretariat General of the Commission works within the Ministry of the Environment. In addition to the Secretariat General, the work of the Commission is prepared by a network secretariat appointed by the Ministry of the Environment, which is made up of the sustainable development contact persons for various ministries.

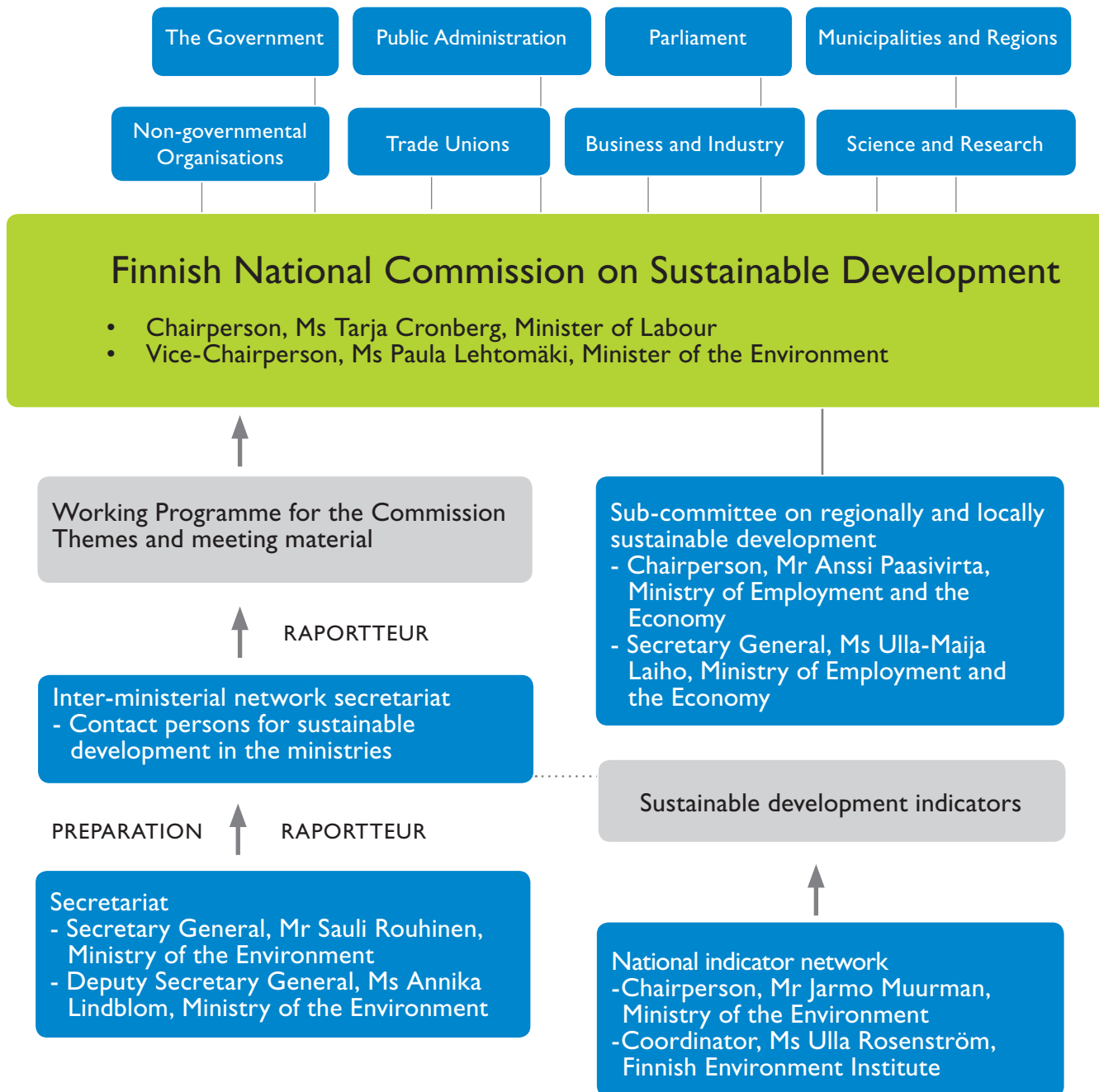
## Sub-committee on regionally and locally sustainable development

In June 2007, a sub-committee on regionally and locally sustainable development was established under the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development. Its mandate is to promote cooperation and support regional and local implementation of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development.

The sub-committee has members from different administrative sectors, lobby groups, non-governmental organisations, churches, and the Sámi Parliament. Mr Anssi Paasivirta, State Secretary from the Ministry of Employment and the Economy, chairs the sub-committee. The sub-committee's term of office continues until the end of 2012.



## Organisation and functions



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# Monitoring and assessment of progress in sustainable development

The objective is for representatives of the public and private sector, as well as civil society actors, to take the guidelines and recommendations presented in the National Strategy for Sustainable Development into consideration in their programmes and strategies.

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development is assessed every two years, and this will be linked to the European Union's assessment process. The first progress report was completed in autumn 2007.

## Indicators as monitoring tools

The success and progress of sustainable development is monitored by means of indicators. In Finland, such indicators have been under development since 2000.

The national indicator network, which includes members from different administrative sectors, develops and updates the national sustainable development indicators in cooperation with the Commission. A total of 34 indicators were published in conjunction with the national strategy. The indicators were selected to describe and assess societal development trends, such as energy and natural resource consumption in relation to economic growth, proportion of household expenditures on services, the development of public and passenger car transport, expected

retirement age, structural unemployment, appropriations for public development cooperation, and research and development expenditures.

A more extensive list of monitoring indicators has also been compiled to support the assessment process. Complementary indicators include, among others, ecological footprint, leisure time residence, children placed outside the home, and environment certificates for educational institutions.

## Assessment of sustainable development impacts

The National Strategy for Sustainable Development requires an assessment of the Government's sustainable development programmes and policies.

Finland has launched a development project for the assessment of sustainable development impacts. The aim is to develop a tool with which the administrative sectors can assess the social, economic and environmental impacts of sustainable development objectives in their own sector and gain an understanding of how the diversity and long-term aims of sustainable development challenges can best be taken into account in planning. The work is also intended to illustrate which issues are most critical to sustainable development in Finland's national economy.



SUOMEN KESTÄVÄN  
KEHITYKSEN TOIMIKUNTA

FINLANDS KOMMISSION  
FÖR HÅLLBAR UTVECKLING

FINNISH NATIONAL COMMISSION  
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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