

Press Release

Council of Experts reviews projection data: Compliance with climate target for 2021 to 2030 not confirmed

Berlin, June 3, 2024 – Today, the Council of Experts on Climate Change presented a special report commissioned by the German Federal Government to review the 2024 projection data describing the future development of German greenhouse gas emissions. The reason for the commission is the amendment of the Federal Climate Change Act, which has yet to be ratified by the Federal President. The amended Climate Change Act provides for the Expert Council to assess the data regarding their compliance with the total annual emission levels permitted for 2021 to 2030.

Review raises doubts about projected target achievement

According to the 2024 projection data, the emission budget specified in the Climate Change Act for the period 2021 to 2030 would only just be met. The missed cumulative targets in the sectors transport and buildings would be compensated for by overfulfilments in other sectors, particularly the energy sector and, to a lesser extent, industry. The Expert Council has analysed the projection data both in total and by sector based on a multi-part review framework, focusing on methodological approach, currentness, and plausibility.

The projection of future emissions inherently carries uncertainties. However, the projection data does not contain information on the probability of the projected emissions pathway. For a summarised assessment of the results of its review, the Expert Council uses a presumed benchmark pathway that is just as likely to be exceeded as undercut by all possible future emissions pathways. Overall, the Expert Council has come to the conclusion that such a benchmark pathway is likely to lie above the emissions pathway of the 2024 projection data - to such an extent that it should not be assumed that the target will be achieved.

Chairman Hans-Martin Henning states: “After reviewing the data, the Expert Council confirms that total emissions will decrease substantially by 2030, albeit probably less sharply than determined in the projection data. We consider the projected emissions in the energy, buildings and transport sectors as well as - with restrictions - in industry to be underestimated.” The Expert Council attributes this to, among other factors, current developments that were not taken into account when the projection data was compiled. These include the cuts in the Climate and Transformation Fund, but also changes in market expectations for gas prices and CO2 certificate prices in the EU ETS. Methodological limitations also contribute to possible underestimations.

Henning concludes: “Overall, we cannot confirm the cumulative target achievement for the years 2021 to 2030 shown by the 2024 projection data; on the contrary, we assume that the target will not be met.”

Timely consideration of additional climate policy measures recommended

The amended Climate Change Act stipulates no immediate consequences for the Federal Government if targets are missed for the first time. Neither do the projected and confirmed failures to meet the targets under the European Effort Sharing Regulation from 2024 onwards, nor the 65 percent target by 2030, oblige the Federal Government to take further action. “Against this backdrop, we recommend not waiting for the target to be missed again, but instead considering the implementation of additional measures. This is all the more important as we had already identified such a target breach last summer in our review of the 2023 projection data,” notes Deputy Chair Brigitte Knopf, adding: “The focus here should be on the two sectors

relevant to the European Effort Sharing Regulation, buildings and transport, which also show the most significant target overshoots.”

The Expert Council also sees a need for action when looking at the period beyond 2030. According to the projection data, the targets would be missed in the period from 2031 to 2040 and greenhouse gas neutrality would not be achieved by 2045 and not even 2050. The LULUCF land use sector would significantly miss its targets set out in the Climate Change Act. Instead of becoming an increasing greenhouse gas sink, the sector would even be a source at times. “Overall, there is no long-term strategy for the period beyond 2030 and for how the goal of greenhouse gas neutrality can be achieved,” summarizes Knopf.

Recommendations on process requirements, governance and responsibilities

Given the significance of the projection data as the new criterion for triggering the adoption of additional climate policy measures, the Expert Council has also addressed the process of their compilation and identified new requirements for it. These concern the handling of uncertainties in connection with projection calculations, aspects of the data and models used, and the process for commissioning and generating the projection data. The Expert Council sees potential for improvement in all these areas and provides recommendations.

In the Expert Council's view, there is also a need for clarification regarding the responsibilities and roles in implementing the amended Climate Change Act. “As the amendment to the law transfers responsibility for action to the Federal Government as a whole if targets are not met, we see a need to clarify who in the Federal Government is in charge,” says Henning. The Expert Council therefore recommends that the Federal Government quickly specify through regulations exactly how the process between the determination of the necessity of measures and the corresponding resolution should proceed.

The special report in German is available here: <https://expertenrat-klima.de/publikationen/>

Further information

The Council of Experts on Climate Change (ERK) is an independent panel of five experts from different disciplines. It was appointed in September 2020 and is mandated by Sections 11 and 12 of the Federal Climate Change Act (KSG). The council consists of the five members Prof. Dr. Hans-Martin Henning (Chairman), Dr. Brigitte Knopf (Deputy Chair), Prof. Dr. Marc Oliver Bettzüge, Prof. Dr. Thomas Heimer, and Dr. Barbara Schlomann.

Further information can be found at <https://expertenrat-klima.de>

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