

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Dutch Minister of Agriculture Nature and Food Quality Resigns

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Report Category: Agriculture in the News, Climate Change/Global Warming/Food Security, Livestock and Products, Poultry and Products, Dairy and Products

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Report Highlights:

On September 5, 2022, the Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality, Henk Staghouwer, resigned after he informed the Dutch Cabinet and Parliament about his Ministry's delay in providing a plan for the future outlook of the Dutch agricultural sector and after he failed to obtain Brussels' permission to continue to exceed caps on how much manure farmers can return to their fields. The Ministry will temporarily be helmed by Minister Staghouwer's predecessor, Carola Schouten (currently the third Deputy Prime Minister of the Netherlands and the Minister for Poverty Policy, Participation, and Pensions), until a permanent replacement is identified.

General Information

On September 5, 2022, the Dutch Minister of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality, Henk Staghouwer, announced his resignation after nine months of duty. He announced that he recently came to the conclusion he “was the wrong man for the job.”

Dutch agriculture has been under considerable pressure in recent months as the government aims to reduce nitrogen greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions stemming from Dutch farms. On June 10, 2022, the Dutch government presented a report which laid out objectives for the reduction of nitrogen GHG emissions.¹ The report included a map identifying the nitrogen reductions that are to be realized, by area, in the Netherlands² -- ranging from 12 to 70 percent.³ In areas located by “[Natura2000](#)” nature reserves, the government aimed to reduce nitrogen emissions by 95 percent or more. For additional information about the Dutch nitrogen reduction policies, see [Government Presents National Program to Reduce Nitrogen Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Rural Areas](#). In a subsequent press conference, Prime Minister Rutte made it clear that the Dutch agricultural sector will “look different” in the future, or as the report stated: “there is not a future for all [Dutch farmers] within this approach.” This gave rise to a series of Dutch farmer protests in the summer of 2022. For more information see [Dutch Farmer Protests Against New Nitrogen GHG Emissions Reductions Policies](#).

As a result of the social unrest surrounding reducing nitrogen emissions, Johan Remkes was appointed to serve as a mediator between the farmers and government, at the request of the Dutch House of Representatives.⁴ On Monday, September 5, 2022, Minister Staghouwer informed the House of Representatives that Mr. Remkes will present his findings in the second half of September and noted that these findings will have a direct impact on the future for Dutch agricultural entrepreneurs.⁵ Accordingly, Staghouwer noted that he would like to include Mr. Remkes’ findings in his own plan for the future outlook of the Dutch agricultural sector, and, in turn, could not present his plan by the established deadline (i.e., before Prinsjesdag - September 20, 2022 - when the Dutch government’s annual budget is presented).

In addition, on September 5, 2022, it was reported that the Netherlands had lost its ability to exceed caps on how much manure farmers can return to their fields.⁶ A draft derogation decision that the European Commission shared with European Union Member States noted Dutch farmers can still apply for a full derogation for the spreading of manure in 2022. However, a gradual phasing-out will take place in the following years until 2025. In 2026, Dutch farmers will no longer be provided an exception to spread more manure than 170 kg per hectare, a so-called derogation.⁷ Staghouwer commented:

“The intensive and months-long negotiations with the European Commission about granting a derogation were not easy. Ultimately, in the coming years, Dutch farmers will have to reduce the

¹ See [NL2022-0035 Government Presents National Program to Reduce Nitrogen Greenhouse Gas Emissions in Rural Areas](#)

² <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2022/06/10/startnotitie-nplg-10-juni-2022>, p. 33

³ These objectives are based on a model that calculated current nitrogen deposition in soils. The goal behind the plan is to reduce overall Dutch nitrogen GHG emissions by 50 percent by 2030. In addition, 74 percent of the Netherlands’ “Natura 2000” areas will have to be at “a healthy level” by 2030.

⁴ <https://nltimes.nl/2022/07/03/many-people-support-farmers-cause-method-remkes-appointed-mediator>

⁵ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2022/09/05/keuzes-voor-de-toekomst-van-de-landbouw>

⁶ <https://www.telegraaf.nl/nieuws/805878562/nieuw-onheil-voor-boeren-dreigt-mestbeleid-definitief-op-de-schop>

⁷ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2022/09/05/financiele-transitietegemoetkoming-voor-afbouwen-derogatie>

scope of derogation for spreading manure to the user standard of 170 kg per hectare. I understand that this is a tough message now that the sector is on the eve of the great agricultural transition.”⁸

Dutch media reports, according to insiders, that Staghouwer felt the House of Representatives did not have sufficient confidence in his actions in tackling the nitrogen crises.⁹ Staghouwer commented to the media, “I have asked myself whether I am the right person to lead the tasks that lie ahead. Last weekend I came to the conclusion that I am not.”

Some Notable Reactions to Minister Staghouwer’s Resignation

Member of Parliament, and Chair of the burgeoning Farmers Citizens Movement political party, Caroline van der Plas, called Staghouwer's departure inevitable, noting she believed “he was totally unsuitable for the job.”¹⁰ The Chairman of the Netherlands Agricultural and Horticultural Association (known as the LTO) pointed out that Staghouwer had little support in the Dutch Parliament. The Chairman added, “I did know that he was struggling with the question of whether he could sketch {a} perspective for the farmers.”¹¹ According to LTO, it is crucial that a new Minister of Agriculture is appointed quickly -- “{w}e want a minister who stands for agriculture, stands up for agriculture and gives direction.”¹² Bart Kemp of the Dutch farmers’ organization Agractie stated,

“{w}e know him as a somewhat bland person and have seen little concrete vision in him. He also faced an impossible task, creating perspectives against market forces and international treaties. And that at a time when more and more people are having great difficulty to pay for the daily shopping.”¹³

Jan Paternotte of government coalition party, Democrats 66, called Staghouwer a “director with a warm heart,” adding “{h}e took the risk of politics, knowing that the task would be difficult. The openness with which he explains his decision deserves praise.”¹⁴ Sophie Hermans of the government coalition party, People's Party for Freedom and Democracy, commented, “{w}hat a tough personal decision.”¹⁵ Derk Boswijk of the government coalition party, Christian Democratic Appeal, thanked Staghouwer for his efforts and said that he had a lot of respect for Staghouwer’s decision.¹⁶

What’s Next for the Ministry of Agriculture, Nature, and Food Quality?

The Christian Union party, the political party of Staghouwer, is expected to look for a fitting replacement for the Minister’s position. For the time being, however, the portfolio will be managed by [Carola Schouten](#), Staghouwer’s predecessor, who is also the third Deputy Prime Minister of the

⁸ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/actueel/nieuws/2022/09/05/financiele-transitietegemoetkoming-voor-afbouwen-derogatie>

⁹ See, e.g., <https://nos.nl/artikel/2443445-staghouwer-stapt-op-als-minister-van-landbouw-ben-niet-de-juiste-persoon>

¹⁰ <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/dutch-farm-minister-resigns-protests-pollution-89391419>

¹¹ <https://www.nporadio1.nl/nieuws/politiek/e58945d5-d3ab-4aa6-8127-f2c0bda2d096/lto-en-agractie-verrast-door-vertrek-staghouwer-van-der-plas-bbb-vond-hem-ongeschikt>

¹² <https://www.nporadio1.nl/nieuws/politiek/e58945d5-d3ab-4aa6-8127-f2c0bda2d096/lto-en-agractie-verrast-door-vertrek-staghouwer-van-der-plas-bbb-vond-hem-ongeschikt>

¹³ <https://nltimes.nl/2022/09/05/agriculture-minister-resigns-first-departure-ruttes-fourth-cabinet>

¹⁴ <https://www.rtlnieuws.nl/nieuws/artikel/5331332/staghouwer-minister-landbouw-vertrek-reacties>

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ Id.

Netherlands and the sitting Minister for Poverty Policy, Participation, and Pensions. Ms. Schouten knows the nitrogen dossier and Dutch agriculture well and negotiated extensively with Dutch parties on the approach to reduce nitrogen emissions during the previous cabinet. However, insiders report that the chance remains small that Ms. Schouten will return to her former position for the long run.

Attachments:

No Attachments.