

Chapter 1

Strategy and policies for Better Regulation

Regulatory policy may be defined broadly as an explicit, dynamic, and consistent “whole-of-government” policy to pursue high-quality regulation. A key part of the OECD’s 2005 Guiding Principles for Regulatory Quality and Performance is that countries adopt broad programmes of regulatory reform that establish principles of “good regulation”, as well as a framework for implementation. Experience across the OECD suggests that an effective regulatory policy should be adopted at the highest political levels, contain explicit and measurable regulatory quality standards, and provide for continued regulatory management capacity.

Effective communication to stakeholders is of growing importance to secure ongoing support for regulatory quality work. A key issue relates to stakeholders’ perceptions of regulatory achievements, and how progress can be effectively communicated (business, for example, may continue to complain about regulatory issues that are better managed than previously).

Governments are accountable for the often significant resources as well as political capital invested in regulatory management systems. There is a growing interest in the systematic evaluation of regulatory management performance – “measuring the gap” between regulatory policies as set out in principle and their efficiency and effectiveness in practice. How do specific institutions, tools and processes perform? What contributes to their effective design? The systematic application of *ex post* evaluation and measurement techniques can provide part of the answer and help to strengthen the framework.

E-Government is an important support tool for Better Regulation. It permeates virtually all aspects of regulatory policy from consultation and communication to stakeholders, to the effective development of strategies addressing administrative burdens, and not least as a means of disseminating Better Regulation policies, best practices, and guidance across government, including local levels. Whilst a full evaluation of this aspect is beyond the scope of this exercise and would be inappropriate, the report makes a few comments that may prove helpful for a more in depth analysis.

Assessment and recommendations

Development of Better Regulation strategy and policies

There has been steady progress over a number of years and across successive governments in the development of Better Regulation policies. The Netherlands was one of Europe’s pioneers with the development of Better Regulation policies in their own right, starting in the 1980s. Better Regulation has been consciously used to drive important

structural changes, economic performance and more recently, to address social and public sector issues. Today, Better Regulation appears to have found a sustainable place in the government's broader policy agenda, reflected in, and providing support for, key elements of the Coalition Agreement. It also engages a growing range of stakeholders – including not just the business community, but also citizens, and local levels of government – a factor that will help to secure long-term sustainability.

Recommendation 1.1. Efforts to engage a wide range of stakeholders beyond the business community should continue to be actively pursued, in the interests of consolidating the broadest possible support base for the future promotion of Better Regulation policies.

A range of policies are now in place, alongside the flagship programme to reduce regulatory burdens on business. These include a reform programme for inspection and enforcement, a programme to address administrative burdens on citizens and regulation inside the administration, further work on the legal quality framework for developing new regulations, including the assessment of alternatives to regulation, and a strong and sustained engagement with the EU institutions over the development of Better Regulation at EU level.

Achievements so far have been significant in the programme to reduce burdens on the business community, and considerable by international standards. This is one of the most longstanding programmes so it is perhaps not surprising, albeit also testimony to effective leadership and management. An updated action plan sets a quantified 25% net reduction target for 2011, additional to the reductions that have already been delivered over the last few years. The policy has been significantly broadened to include other cost factors and quality of regulatory services for businesses. There appears to be no loss of momentum in the inner core of government for driving this policy forward. This, however, is not always reflected elsewhere, with worries about how the latest target will be achieved, and what the substance of the programme should now cover.

Other policies and programmes reflect significant efforts to extend Better Regulation beyond central government and beyond the Netherlands. These include new policies and structures for enforcement, the work to support Better Regulation at the EU level, and not least the engagement of local levels of government. The Framework Vision Programme for reform of inspections and enforcement appears to be well conceived and advancing steadily. Work to raise consciousness of the need to further develop Better Regulation at the EU level is particularly striking given the relatively small size of the country. Dutch leadership (alongside a small number of other countries) at the EU level is commendable. Considerable effort is also going into developing the interface with local levels of government on Better Regulation.

A significant weakness is the failure so far to implement an effective policy for the ex ante impact assessment of new regulations. The “poor relation” in Dutch regulatory management today is the absence of any clearly anchored and rigorous process for an evidence based approach to the development of new regulations. This issue was already picked up in the 2007 OECD report on administrative simplification, which noted in effect that whilst the burden reduction programme had been a strong and necessary motor for putting Better Regulation on the map, a broader focus would be needed in the longer term.¹ Fragmentation of the institutional structure (addressed in the next chapter) has not helped.

Box 1.1. Comments from the 2007 OECD report on Administrative Simplification in the Netherlands: The balance of the Dutch Better Regulation strategy

The Netherlands have been a main driver in the trend towards more evidence-based programmes to reduce administrative burdens on companies and was among the first to launch a 25% burden reduction programme. A similar exercise has been undertaken to reduce administrative burdens on citizens. In both domains, the Netherlands is seen as a front-runner and has inspired other countries.

The linkage between the burden reduction programme and other programmes and initiatives for public sector modernisation and reform is (however) rather weak. This may lead to a loss of possible synergies and difficulties of co-ordination and communication. The e-Government programme is an example of a related programme with a high correspondence in goals, tools and target groups, which has not been linked to the programme for the reduction of administrative burdens. Problems of co-ordination are also seen in the relationship between central and local governments, the relationship between ministries, and programmes seem to have been suffering from a lack of integration.

Recommendation 1.2. The development of a new policy for the *ex ante* impact assessment of new regulations should be taken forward (Chapter 4 gives more detail).

Two other challenges are apparent, relating to consultation on new regulations and some aspects of EU management. These are the slow progress toward more modern and open forms of consultation for all regulations (not just those which happen to be part of the programmes to reduce burdens on citizens and businesses). The framework for addressing issues of substance arising from EU regulations also needs further attention. Some helpful systems are already in place. The impact of EU regulations on the national market is taken into account in preparing the negotiating position. The Regulatory Reform Group (RRG)'s work to address substantial regulatory burdens on business arising from EU regulations includes big efforts to identify and address these in the negotiating process (see Chapter 8). This is helpful but does not address all angles (other stakeholders, the benefits of new regulations). The handling of the transposition of EU-origin regulations remains weak.

Recommendation 1.3. Efforts should be pursued to strengthen public consultation on new regulations. The overall management of EU regulations should be evaluated with a view to building on the RRG initiatives, and in particular to ensure that transposition of EU – origin regulations is effectively managed.

The development of an integrated policy perspective including all the elements of a balanced Better Regulation agenda would help to give Dutch Better Regulation a long-term perspective and vision. It is beyond the scope of this report to comment on what a longer term vision might consist of, but we would encourage the Netherlands to start discussing this internally, and with other likeminded countries. Highlighting the links between what is already being done, strengthening the weak parts, and showing how the different elements combine to support and promote high-level policy objectives for the economy and society would increase the long-term sustainability of the Better Regulation agenda. It would also demonstrate inclusiveness, by showing that Better Regulation is about new as well as existing regulations, and not (just) about deregulation, nor is it just concerned with the business community. Back in the mid 1990s, the MDW programme set out a broad vision of Better Regulation and what it could do for public policy goals. The time might be ripe for a “millennium” update. A white paper could be a useful vehicle for starting the process.

Recommendation 1.4. Consideration should be given to developing a strategic perspective for the development of Dutch Better Regulation over the longer term.

Communication on Better Regulation strategy and policies

Public communication on Better Regulation is covered by a number of specific strategies and processes. Communication and public documents on Better Regulation tend to be focused on specific programmes. These are essential and need of course to be structured so as to reach their specific target audiences. The most prominent communication strategy is the one established by the RRG for the business burdens reduction programme. The communication policy for the project to reduce administrative burdens on citizens is also well developed. The RRG communication strategy has a broad reach and in some respects acts as the vehicle for communication on overall Better Regulation policy in the Netherlands. Some aspects of policy could, however, be given greater prominence, for example the important new policies on enforcement. As well as the more targeted communication programmes, a more integrated communication of Better Regulation policies might help to highlight the extent of the work carried out, and could also be used as a vehicle for bringing together the different parts of the institutional framework that contribute to Better Regulation.

Recommendation 1.5. As well as the initiatives to communicate on specific programmes, consideration should be given to developing a more integrated communication strategy, so that stakeholders (both within the Netherlands and beyond) can appreciate the complete picture of what is being taken forward, which extends well beyond programmes aimed at the business community.

Ex post evaluation of Better Regulation strategy and policies

Many of the programmes are covered by forms of ex post evaluation but the approach is not systematic. A number of evaluation processes are in place or under development for specific Better Regulation programmes. *Ad hoc* evaluations also take place and the Netherlands Court of Audit has been active. The approach needs to be strengthened in order to ensure that *ex post* evaluation is not overlooked and is an automatic part of all Better Regulation programmes. Internal mechanisms for *ex post* evaluation are also a necessary complement for external evaluations from bodies such as the OECD and the World Bank.²

Recommendation 1.6. Ensure that *ex post* evaluation processes cover all the relevant policies, are systematically applied, and that there is adequate investment in this.

E-Government in support of Better Regulation

E-Government capacities, a key support for business and citizen burden reduction initiatives, have been steadily developed over time; monitoring and evaluation may need to be boosted. The Netherlands started early, in the 1990s, and has built up a range of projects as well as an institutional framework which reaches out to the local levels of government. A full evaluation of e-Government is beyond the scope of this review. However it seems that initiatives to monitor the large number of projects for their practical effectiveness need to be encouraged.

Background

Economic context and drivers of Better Regulation

The evolution of Dutch economic performance over the last three decades has been closely paralleled by policies aimed at putting Better Regulation on the government's policy agenda, as a means of combating structural and other issues that stood in the way of a stronger growth rate.³

The real start of Better Regulation was triggered when the Netherlands faced a severe economic crisis in the 1980s. This forced a wide ranging stock taking of post-war economic policies and the corporatist system of public governance, under which the state shared public policy development with organised labour and business. The system had developed rigidities and the dominating role of insiders, often reflecting producer interests in protected markets, made it difficult to encourage economic development based on more open and competitive markets. The regulatory framework reflected this, with complexities that had accumulated over time from efforts to accommodate interest groups, a lack of transparency and slow decision making arising from the constant search for consensus.

Various commissions and reports from the mid 1980s onward drew attention to these issues, culminating in the launch of the so called *MDW* programme (*Marktwerking, Deregulering en Wetgevingskwaliteit* – Market Forces, Deregulation and Legislative Quality) in 1994 which sought to improve the regulatory and structural environment for more open markets. Dutch governments at this time sought a new balance between “protection and dynamism”, by means of increased competition, regulatory reform and market openness. Pressures to accommodate the emergence of the Single European Market also promoted change.

Regulatory reform gathered momentum through the 1990s, and specific programmes emerged to give the new regulatory management a clearer shape. Part of the *MDW* programme was to streamline regulations to return to “what is strictly necessary”, and this included the reduction of administrative burdens. In 1993 it was estimated that the aggregate costs of administrative burdens on companies was more than 2% of GDP. This was also a decade when significant efforts were made to develop a stronger policy for the development of new regulations, including *ex ante* impact assessment, to avoid the problems of the past.

A second phase can be identified starting in the late 1990s, with growing emphasis on the reduction of administrative burdens for business, which was given policy shape through increasingly detailed and wide ranging programmes based on quantification of the burdens and of targets for reduction. Better Regulation's link with economic performance was re-emphasised in the Coalition Agreement that guides government policy making today, which emphasises the promotion of a more innovative, enterprising and competitive economy.

A social aspect has also emerged, partly reflecting the Coalition Agreement's emphasis on social cohesion as well as economic progress, but also as means of supporting public sector reform. The 2003 government launched a major programme for public sector reform, consisting of four action lines: the government will improve its services to citizens; the government will regulate less, and differently; central government will organise itself better; and the government will reform its relations with the local levels of government.⁴ Important and emerging aspects of today's Better Regulation policies (such as enforcement, local level Better Regulation, and burdens on citizens) are linked to this broader strategy.

Main developments in the Netherlands Better Regulation agenda

The main staging posts are set out in Table 1.1. The Netherlands was a pioneer in the development of Better Regulation as a distinct policy field, and Dutch regulatory policy goes back a long way, starting in 1984 with a wide ranging report on the (then) weaknesses of the Dutch administrative and legal system. Various efforts were made over the next ten years to address the issues raised, including a tightening up of processes for the development of new regulations and the introduction of an impact assessment process. The next major milestone was the 1994 *MDW* programme which drew attention to the need for better functioning of markets, the importance of legislative quality, and the need for deregulation, including not least the need to set up a programme to reduce burdens on business.

This marked an important strategic swing toward administrative burden reduction as the main (though not the only focus) of Dutch Better Regulation policy. The *Slechte* Committee in 1998 further emphasised the importance of administrative burdens, and laid the groundwork for today's approach, setting in motion a succession of increasingly focused action plans for business burden reduction.

The last few years, however, have also seen the development of other important policies. These include reform programmes for inspection and enforcement, from 2001; the programmes to address administrative burdens on citizens and burdens of regulation inside government, started in 2003; further work on the legal quality framework for developing new regulations, including assessment of alternatives to regulation; and a growing engagement with the EU institutions over the development of Better Regulation at EU level.

Generally, as in some other OECD countries, it can be said that Better Regulation has finally emerged as a strong policy field in its own right.

Table 1.1. Milestones in the development of Better Regulation policies in the Netherlands

1984	<i>Geelhoed</i> Commission report argues that the corporatist elements of the Dutch administrative and legal system bear major responsibility for an excessively complex, onerous and overbearing regulatory structure. The directives on legislation (rules for the development of regulations) are expanded to include a wider range of legislative quality issues not only related to technical law-drafting.
1985	<i>Grapperhaus</i> Commission report on compliance costs and proposes further reforms, including the introduction of a requirement for regulatory impact assessment. Council of State identifies major regulatory quality issues that need to be addressed including institutional law / policy-making relationships, inter-ministerial co-ordination and the recruitment and development of law-drafting experts.
1987	Commission on Assessing New Legislative Projects (CTW).
1991-92	Quality framework to guide the development of new regulations is established. Directives on legislation are further revised.
1993	General Accounting Office completes review of regulatory processes, concluding that most of the problems identified by the Council of State in 1985 were still unsolved.
1994	Launch of <i>MDW</i> programme (<i>Marktwerking, Deregulering en Wetgevingskwaliteit</i>), which becomes a formal part of the government's overall policy programme. This targets the functioning of markets, deregulation and legislative quality. One of the aims was to streamline regulations to return to "what is strictly necessary", leading to the first programmes aimed at reducing administrative burdens. The programme also led to an overhaul of regulatory impact

	assessment requirements. <i>Van Lunteren</i> Commission examines taxation on SMEs and new enterprises.
1998-99	New coalition agreement establishes “MDW 2”. <i>Slechte</i> Committee report presents 60 projects for the reduction of administrative burdens on business, and confirms the business focus of the programme, as well as the adoption of a narrow definition of compliance costs (to depoliticise the programme).
2001	Launch of the first formal reform programme (Framework Vision) for inspection and enforcement, following the Enschede fireworks disaster.
2003	Launch of a major programme for public sector reform (<i>Andere Overheid – A Different Government</i>) following the election. This consisted of four major action lines: the government will improve its provision of services to citizens; it will regulate less, and differently; central government will organise itself better; central government will reform its relations with local municipalities and provinces. Within this context, launch of the first citizens’ administrative burden reduction programme and development of an action plan for the reduction of administrative burdens at local level.
2003	Launch of the administrative burden reduction programme for businesses
2005	Launch of the programme to simplify permits (including <i>lex silencio</i> – silence is consent) Launch of the second Framework Vision for inspection and enforcement.
2004	Dutch EU Presidency: high-level political prioritisation of the economic character of Better Regulation on the EU agenda, with a strong emphasis on administrative burdens for businesses in particular. Several initiatives are developed, such as the conference “Simple is better”, the <i>EcoFin</i> paper “Fostering economic growth by reducing administrative burdens for businesses in the EU” and the co-ordination of 300 simplification proposals for the EU administrative simplification programme. The Netherlands, in co-operation with other EU presidencies, also promotes long-term planning of the Better Regulation Agenda by agreeing on priorities and policies with four – later expanded to six – consecutive presidencies.
2007	Following the election, establishment of a revised and expanded action plan for business administrative burdens, a revised programme for reduction of burdens on citizens, professionals and inter-governmental burdens, and an updated Framework Vision for inspections and enforcement. Further development of the action plan for the reduction of administrative burdens at local level.

Source: Dutch government.

Guiding principles for Better Regulation

As for most other OECD countries, there is no single strategy document that currently sets out the entirety of the Dutch Better Regulation agenda. The context for the different elements of the agenda can be found by reference to the broader framework of government policies reflected in the Coalition Agreement. This emphasises (among other issues) public sector reform aimed at a smaller and more efficient central government, the promotion of a more innovative, enterprising and competitive economy, and an active role in Europe and beyond. Specific strategy papers frame each element of the Better Regulation agenda. These include for example the Framework Vision for inspection and supervision, and not least, the Regulatory Reform Group’s White Paper setting out the current action plan for the reduction of regulatory burdens on business.

Following the November 2006 election, a Cabinet White Paper set the scene for a substantial broadening and update of the programme for the reduction of administrative burdens on businesses. The broader scope of the new programme is reflected in the fact that reference is now to “regulatory” burdens on businesses (*i.e.* not only administrative burdens). The policy also includes a local level dimension via improvement in the level of service by municipalities. It also provides for a reduction in the supervisory costs of

inspections, aimed at promoting a more efficient, flexible, user-friendly and risk-based approach to enforcement.

Main Better Regulation policies

The reduction of regulatory burdens on businesses remains the focal point of the current agenda. The 2007-2011 programme adopted by the Cabinet after the last election is structured around three principles which it has defined as:

- *Less* annoyance for businesses from things that irritate them.
- Make things *simpler* for business – for instance, with faster and better service.
- Ultimately, by decreasing the regulatory burden and making it easier for businesses to comply with the obligations imposed by government, there will be less regulatory burden in the *perception* of business.

These principles have been given effect in the June 2007 Regulatory Burden Action Plan via concrete “3x4 objectives” of “Less, Simpler and Tangible”, which yield twelve indicators against which progress will be measured, and which will be the subject of integrated reports on a regular basis through to 2011 (the end of the current Cabinet term of office). The objectives are:

- A quantitative 25% net reduction target for 2011 for administrative burdens on business, additional to the reductions that have already been achieved under previous programmes.
- Reduction in regulatory compliance costs, where they are disproportionately high for business relative to the public interest served by the regulations.
- Reduction in the costs of supervision across selected domains (after consultation with business representatives), the aim being an average of 25% in each domain.
- Reduction in the management and implementation costs of all existing national government subsidies to business, while continuing to guarantee their legitimacy.
- Acceleration of procedures for the issue of permits, by combining permits and, where possible, by the greater use of *lex silencio* (silence is consent).
- Faster and better services to business, by improving the professionalism and client orientation of services provided by the government.
- Improvement in the provision of information to business, as far as possible through a single channel, with the introduction of common commencement dates for new regulations and readable forms.

The Netherlands Better Regulation agenda also includes the following aspects:

- *Improved law making and impact assessment of new regulations.* Policies for impact assessment of new regulations have been in place for many years, closely linked to, and overlapping with, a wide ranging framework for promoting legal quality, including the use of alternatives and attention to downstream compliance and

enforcement. Efforts are currently being made to develop a stronger and more integrated impact assessment policy.

- *Reduction of administrative burdens for citizens, reduction of regulation inside government and reduction of inter-governmental burdens.* A revised programme is in place following the last elections. This is based on a qualitative approach, with the identification of the “top ten” most irritating burdens for citizens and the development of “life analysis” (to pinpoint the administrative issues that different categories of citizen are confronted with in the bureaucracy. A part of this programme addresses regulation inside the administration, notably for professionals in public services such as hospitals and schools, and between levels of government.
- *Local governments.* An Action Plan for the reduction of administrative burdens at local level links up central government and the municipalities in a shared effort to address, in particular, administrative burdens, and to promote best practices.
- *EU level Better Regulation.* An important part of the policies addressing burdens on business and citizens in the Netherlands is a sustained effort (in tandem with other likeminded EU countries) to encourage progress at EU level, where an increasing number of regulations are developed.
- *Consultation on new regulations.* A policy to boost transparency and consistency of consultation approaches on the development of new regulations, via the Internet, is under development.

Communication on the Better Regulation agenda

Reflecting the fact that there is no single overarching Better Regulation strategy document (apart from the very broad-based Coalition Agreement, which is presented to the general public), as well as the need for tailored approaches to each programme, public communication on Better Regulation is covered by a number of specific strategies and processes. Regular reports to the parliament are made on the main programmes and these are posted on the parliament’s website. Reports are also available on the government’s website⁵ and circulated directly to stakeholder networks.

The most prominent communication strategy is the one established by the Regulatory Reform Group to convey and discuss developments in the programme to reduce administrative burdens on business. This to some extent (because it does not cover all the initiatives, and the main target stakeholders are businesses) acts as a general focal point for informing stakeholders about Better Regulation. The RRG’s communication strategy is based on a broad public relations framework, as well as business sector specific communication. Business “ambassadors” are used to explain and discuss important developments, not only to the business community but also to other stakeholders and opinion formers. The communication strategy is regularly revisited and reinforced. The 2009 Communication Strategy and Public Relations Plan includes activities in the local, regional and national press alongside specific communication sector specific communication using editorials, a monthly digital newsletter on Better Regulation and portals to access information, as well as business ambassadors.⁶

ACTAL (*Adviescollege Toetsing Administratieve Lasten* – Advisory Board on Administrative Burdens) is a particularly important general ambassador and communicator for the government of its Better Regulation strategy. Not only is this part of its role, but it is

engaged across the main Better Regulation policy “fronts” (burden reductions for business and citizens, EU level work, development of new regulations and impact assessment).

Ex post evaluation of Better Regulation

Evaluation processes have been embedded in or are being developed for some of the specific programmes that make up Better Regulation in the Netherlands. Notably, the programme on administrative burden reduction for businesses has been the subject of regular audits commissioned by the RRG, including from the World Bank and the OECD. The RRG notes that it intends to perform or commission regular evaluations of specific aspects such as the communications strategy, and progress in tackling larger administrative burdens. Progress on local Better Regulation initiatives (reduction of burdens, simplification of model regulations) has also been evaluated. For example, the effect of the work on model regulations for reducing administrative burdens has been evaluated by an external consultant. Evaluation of communication activities overall is part of the RRG communication strategy using a “perception monitor”. The different activities are also evaluated separately. For instance the commercial campaign is evaluated by a specialised research company. There have also been some *ad hoc* evaluations of specific topics, for example the evaluation by ACTAL of awareness and capacities within government for tackling administrative burdens. There has not been any formal evaluation of the policies on law quality and on impact assessment for the development of new regulations.

The Netherlands Court of Audit (NCA) steps in with relevant audits on an *ad hoc* basis. It has evaluated the business burdens reduction programme twice, in 2006 and again in 2008 (when it also looked at the citizen programme). The NCA, which checks whether government policies represent “value for money” and which decides for itself what it should audit, chose to review this programme because of its cost, the political attention that it attracted, and its ambitious reach. It may carry out a further audit of the programme and its progress in achieving the latest 25% target. It has not yet carried out any evaluation of impact assessment, because it is a less obviously developed programme and not (as yet) very resource intensive.

The RRG has noted that evaluation of Better Regulation policy needs more investment. The aim is to take this forward with the introduction of “*het integrale afwegingskader beleid en wetgeving*” (integrated assessment framework for policy and legislation). This framework integrates the multitude of checks, guidelines and evaluations that have been developed over time with respect to specific elements of policy and legislation. The goal is to simplify the application of these checks, as well as promote their use, thus reinforcing their impact. The aim is to let this approach evolve gradually so that it becomes a comprehensive structural framework for evaluation.

E-Government in support of Better Regulation

The Netherlands have been formulating policies and programmes on e-Government since the mid-1990s, which makes them one of the early leaders in this field. E-Government is seen as a key lever of change in the bureaucracy and for Better Regulation.

The first step, the “National Action Plan on Electronic Highways” was set up in 1994. This was followed by a comprehensive programme in 1998 (focusing on provision of electronic access to government, quality of services to citizens and businesses, efficiency of service delivery through ICT usage). A dedicated unit was established in the Ministry of Interior and Kingdom Relations in 2001. The new cabinet in 2002 launched a new action plan, the so-called B4 (*Beter Beleid voor Burger en Bedrijf* – Better Government for Citizens and Businesses). The focus broadened from front-office activities to back-office

infrastructure and the need for horizontal and vertical co-operation. In 2005 “Better Performance with ICT” was launched, with seven priorities: once-only data provision; electronic ID; faster on the Internet; trust and security; standardisation; consumer policy and ICT. An important development in 2006 was a strategic declaration which brought together the Ministry of Interior and the other levels of government – local authorities (VNG) the regions (IPO) and the water boards under the headline “Better Service, Less Administrative Burdens with Electronic Government”. In 2007, the reference architecture “NORA 2.0” was published to underpin the aim of achieving a 65% target for the processing of public services in the provinces and municipalities.

The Ministry of Interior is responsible for overall co-ordination. Together with the Ministry of Economic Affairs, it shares responsibility for e-Government. The state secretaries of both ministries meet regularly to discuss common issues. Meetings also take place between civil servants on an *ad hoc* basis. The Interior State Secretary chairs a working group in which municipalities, provinces, and other relevant bodies are represented.

Reduction of administrative burdens has been described as the most important and tangible driver for the programme, and conversely, an essential component for the success of both the business and citizen burden reduction programmes. The XBRL project is one of several interesting and useful developments (Box 1.2).

Box 1.2. The Dutch XBRL Taxonomy Project

The standard electronic communication language XBRL is used for business and financial data (preparation, analysis and communication). It allows companies to prepare their data just once, but for it to be used several times over (data re use). The reporting company determines the scope of data to be prepared and transmitted on a case by case basis. XBRL provides the means to present the data to be prepared and transmitted in a structured manner and for processing to be automated. The advantages for “consumers” of financial data (investors, analysts, financial institutions, regulators) lies in the fact that it yields just one format of data, which aids evaluation, and reduces costs.

The first version of the XBRL taxonomy and technical infrastructure was available for reporting by business in the financial year 2006. After a hesitant start, business use of the system took off. Since January 2007, businesses and intermediaries can report their financial data using XBRL to various government entities (Chamber of Commerce, Tax Department, Statistics Netherlands).

An interesting development is applications in a broader context, for example credit reporting for the banks, and the development of simplified tax returns by tax consultants. The project can be seen as a laboratory for ideas to reduce further the burdens on businesses, and help to meet the 25% reduction target.

Another important development is a central portal for businesses, citizens and the public administration itself to access information and services (including regulations, licences, and public statements on regulatory and public service developments).⁷ A search engine allows the user to browse the site, which also includes an “e-counter” (*Overheidsloket*), a one-stop shop for some interactive and transactional services.

However, it was also pointed out to the OECD review team that the use of ICT does not automatically support simplification – its value needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. The framework for the development of e-Government was generally considered to be an effective one. However, other comments to the team suggested that there was a need for more central management to frame a large number of projects (perhaps too many?), and the need to show results, given the resource intensiveness of many projects. The development of e-Government is acknowledged by the Dutch government to be a “work in progress” (as

it is in all countries). Although the government has been active in the field for many years, coherence and complexity may be issues, and the extent to which projects and policies are effectively implemented on the ground, especially at local level. Recent conclusions of a commission (*Commissie Postma/Wallage*) were that infrastructure needs attention; there is a lack of consistency between ministries, and between the national and local levels. Proposals included making at least part of the infrastructure compulsory, to increase financial resources, and to monitor projects. Some of these conclusions echo the findings of the 2007 OECD report on e-Government (for example the need for more systematic monitoring and evaluation). Most of the commission's recommendations have been adopted by the government (OECD, 2007).

Most recently, a focus on projects has been put into a common e-Government programme, led by the Ministry of Interior. All levels of government (central government, provinces, local authorities and water boards) have committed themselves to have implemented a specific package of e-Government building blocks and services by 2011.

Notes

1. The 2007 World Bank report also raised the issue: "It is important that continued efforts to reduce administrative burdens are put in a context of other and often more significant regulatory impacts and risks".
2. This also provides external reviewers with valuable supporting evidence in their work.
3. For more, see the 1999 and 2007 OECD reports.
4. *Andere Overheid* – A different government.
5. www.rr.nl.
6. www.rr.nl and www.antwoordvoorbedrijven.nl.
7. Overheid.nl.