

# BTO *Executive Summary*

## *Energy- and water-conservation: action-readiness of the Dutch population scrutinised*

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The government is increasingly looking to citizens in the effort to tackle climate change, air pollution, environmental degradation, and the transition to a circular society. While the so-called active citizens and initiators of water-cycle solutions have been frequently studied, the present research is focussed on the average Dutch citizen's perspective on water and circular economy issues. What motivates people to save water and energy, and how are the different motivations and perspectives on sustainability related to actual behaviour? Based on the empirical data collected through an online questionnaire, the present research distinguishes four dominant perspectives (idealism, frugality, pragmatism and comfort). The research offers drinking water utilities insight into the variety of perspectives, motivations and action-readiness of citizens in the area of circularity and water- and energy-conservation. In order to enhance the action-readiness of citizens in this area, policy should be much more nuanced than it is today, and better attuned to the differences in the motivations of citizen groups. Drinking water utilities can play an important role in this regard.



*Citizen perspectives on circularity.*

### **Interest: insight into the perspective of the average Dutch citizen**

The government focusses increasingly on the citizen for the transition towards a circular society; however, research in this field concentrates primarily on the frontrunners among the citizens. The present research is directed at the perspective of the average

Dutch citizen. It is, after all, important to know how the widest possible group of citizens think about these subjects, and to study the extent to which considerations about climate change determine their consumption choices and, more specifically, their energy- and water-use at home.

### Approach: quantitative research through an online survey

In order to ensure that the concerns, wishes, needs and action-readiness regarding circularity issues were defined systematically, a quantitative online questionnaire was conducted, which was sent to a representative group of more than 1000 Dutch citizens.

The analysis examined the current state of environmental and climate awareness in Dutch households, and the extent to which this awareness is reflected in energy- and water-related behaviour at home, both in terms of the acquisition and use of amenities, and of energy and water consumption. The relationship between motivations and behaviour regarding water- and energy-use at home was also examined.

### Results: action-readiness and limited sense of responsibility

The research shows that the majority of the Dutch population are concerned about climate change and its environmental impact. The majority of citizens today also already have one or several water- and/or energy-saving applications in their homes. However, despite the seriousness of the problems and the challenges before us, the research generally reveals a limited concern about the environment and climate and, connected to this, a limited readiness to act.

The research further shows a clear link between the perceptions of people and their action-readiness. When it comes to motivations and behaviour in the area of climate, water and energy, four dominant perspectives can be distinguished (idealism, frugality, pragmatism and comfort).

It is striking that the motivations regarding whether or not to conserve water and energy are very similar among these perspectives, and that citizens who save water also save energy. Contrary to the old saying that 'a better environment starts with you', the great majority of respondents actually place the burden of responsibility for water and energy conservation outside of themselves: namely, with governments, businesses and other citizens. With regard to the experience of sustainability, water utilities score the highest when compared to other companies and governments.

### Implementation: enhance action-readiness through more nuanced policy

These research results provide drinking water utilities with insight into the variety of perspectives, motivations and action-readiness of citizens in the area of circularity and water- and energy-conservation. In order to enhance the action-readiness of citizens in this area, policy should be much more nuanced than it is today, and better attuned to the differences in the motivations of citizen groups. Drinking water utilities can play a key role in this regard. For example, the frugal are particularly open to switching to energy- and water-conservation when the financial side of the story is highlighted, and it is made clear that the conservation does not come at the expense of comfort. For their part, idealists find reductions of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and contributions to climate adaptation appealing. Water and energy utilities could play an important role in this context, given that they know their customers, as users of water and energy, the best.

### Report

This research is described in the report *Burgerperspectief op de circulariteit: de actiebereidheid van Nederlanders* (BTO 2019.037).