



## HOW NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA RESPONDS TO THE CONCERNS OF CITIZENS ABOUT RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT BY FACILITATING DIALOGUE

### CASE STUDY | NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA'S ENERGY DIALOGUE

#### INTRODUCTION

This case study shows how the German state of North Rhine-Westphalia is providing a dedicated platform for dialogue and mediation on renewable energy projects at the local level. It is part of the [Energy Transition Platform](#), a global initiative supporting highly industrialized, carbon-intensive state and regional governments in developing and implementing innovative clean energy policies to accelerate the low carbon transition.

The partner regions of the Energy Transition Platform – Alberta, the Basque Country, California, Hauts-de-France, Lombardy, Minnesota, North Rhine-Westphalia, Silesia, South Australia, Upper Austria and Wales – come together to learn from their global peers, to build strong partnerships and to jointly overcome barriers to the adoption of clean energy models. The Energy Transition Platform is part of the [States & Regions Policy Innovation](#) program and was launched by The Climate Group, alongside the initiative's lead government, North Rhine-Westphalia, and Stiftung Mercator in early 2016.

**“EVEN AS AN INDUSTRY HEAVY REGION, WE STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT DECARBONIZING AND GROWING OUR ECONOMY GO HAND-IN-HAND. THERE IS A CLEAR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE TO BE HAD IN DRIVING LOW CARBON GROWTH, AND WHILE THERE ARE CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME ALONG THE WAY, THERE ARE ALSO SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES TO BE SEIZED.”**

- Johannes Remmel, Minister for Climate Protection, North Rhine-Westphalia

### COMBINING SOCIETAL AND TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION

Although the *Energiewende* (energy transition) is widely accepted in Germany – 72% of households, industries and utilities support it –, nearly half still have doubts about its ultimate success. Particularly at the local level, support for renewable energy projects is not guaranteed.<sup>1</sup> This demonstrates that the energy transition is not purely a technical issue, but also a societal undertaking, and strong acceptance by the public is required to ensure its success. State and regional governments have a critical role to play here, as they provide a link between local communities and the private sector.

Often, a lack of information and transparency about renewable energy projects leads to uncertainty and concerns within local communities. The call for more information can be a sign that citizens want to be more involved and their ideas to be taken seriously. The planning stage is crucial in gaining support and preventing conflicts by including all stakeholders and informing them about the different aspects of renewable energy development.<sup>2</sup>

During our first Energy Transition Platform Peer Forum, Tina Völker from the Climate Protection Ministry in North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany), presented the Energy Dialogue NRW (*EnergieDialog.NRW*). It is a prime example of how a state government is providing the necessary support – through dialogue, information events and consultations – to address local concerns at an early stage and reducing reservations against renewable energy projects.

## SPOTLIGHT ON NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA



**MINISTER PRESIDENT** HANNELORE KRAFT (SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY - SPD)

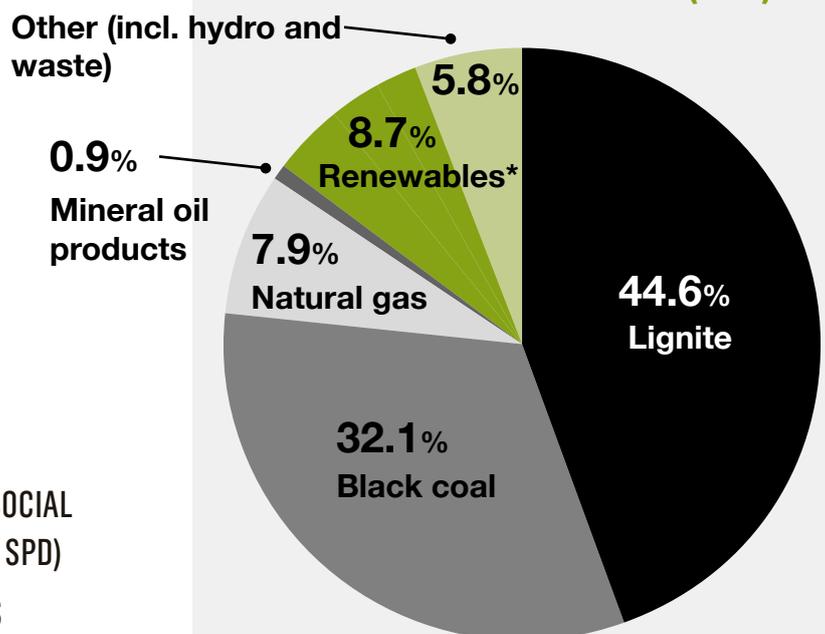
**GOVERNMENT COMPOSITION** SPD AND THE GREENS

**POPULATION** 17.5 MILLION (2015)

- a fifth of Germany's population

**SPECIFIC FEATURES** Highly urbanized area around the River Rhine, one of the busiest waterways worldwide; strong coal and steel heritage

### ELECTRICITY GENERATION MIX (2014)<sup>3</sup>



\* 3.7% biomass, 3% wind energy, 2% photovoltaics

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oliverwyman.com/content/dam/oliver-wyman/global/en/2016/mar/Energy-Journal/Power%20Disruption-online.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.energie-dialog.nrw.de/was-buerger-von-der-energieprojekt-kommunikation-erwarten-interview-mit-prof-claudia-mast-und-dr-helena-stehle/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.energiestatistik-nrw.de/energie/strom/stromerzeugung>

**ENERGY DIALOGUE NRW:** NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA HAS SET UP A PLATFORM – THE ENERGY DIALOGUE NRW – TO PROVIDE ON-THE-GROUND SUPPORT TO STAKEHOLDER GROUPS INVOLVED IN RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS (DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION). THE OFFERED SERVICES AIM TO ADDRESS LOCAL CONCERNS AT AN EARLY STAGE AND REDUCE RESERVATIONS AGAINST RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS.

### STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT

The **energy transition is partly a societal process and having the support of the public is key to its success**. The Energy Dialogue is initiating discourse at the local level and offers support to all stakeholders involved in renewable energy projects, especially wind power. It has become an **integral part of the stakeholder landscape**, mainly targeting local authorities, nature conservation organizations, citizens and citizens' initiatives, companies, and project developers.

The **team is interdisciplinary**, making sure that the different perspectives and aspects of requests and potential conflicts can be addressed holistically.

### BENEFITS AND SERVICES

- **Information, consultation and expert advice** about renewable energy deployment, spatial planning, and project development.
- **Professional mediation and round table discussions** on the ground, creating space for interaction and dialogue between – often opposing – stakeholders.
- **Presentations, talks and moderation** of information sessions.
- **Website** informing on relevant aspects and latest developments in the renewable energy sector, as well as containing an **interactive navigation tool** for spatial planning and permission processes.

### MEDIATION PROCESS

There are various ways to start a mediation process:

1. Either, one of the parties involved approaches the Energy Dialogue. Or occasionally, when a project generates a lot of media attention, or the Ministry/Energy Agency hears about difficulties, the Energy Dialogue approaches the community directly, offering support.
2. The next step is always to involve the affected municipality – without its approval the Energy Dialogue does not become active.
3. To get started, it has proved to be essential to talk to all stakeholders involved (and willing to enter into dialogue) individually, to learn about their positions, ideas and interests directly.
4. The following steps depend on specific situations and what is required. For example, a round table discussion bringing all stakeholders together can be organized, or a moderated talk can be held for council members.

### FRAMEWORK

The **Ministry for Climate Protection** was responsible for initiating the Energy Dialogue NRW. It was then **set up as a part of the Energy Agency NRW**, a service provider to the Government of North Rhine-Westphalia. This is to ensure neutrality and un-biased support, which is highly valued by stakeholders. The government generally stays in the background and does not necessarily become visible as a party involved in the Energy Dialogue.

If possible, dialogue and mediation platforms should be linked to an existing institution with a good reputation for its technical expertise and a well-established network.

### POLICY TIP

## STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAM

## CLIMATE ACTION

BY 2050



GHG reduction

BY 2020



GHG reduction



increased power generation from wind



increased power generation from combined heat and power (CHP)

First German federal state to pass legally binding Climate Protection Act in 2013, which is implemented by Climate Protection Plan developed through in-depth participatory process.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.klimaschutz.nrw.de/english/>

## INSPIRING AND LEARNING FROM OTHERS

Other German state governments have established similar platforms. Between them, they exchange ideas, latest developments and experiences.

A platform such as the Energy Dialogue can be implemented everywhere – either connected to existing structures or as a standalone unit with a dedicated budget. The specific regional needs and situation will influence which form fits best.

## NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA'S ENERGY DIALOGUE

### WHAT IS THE POLICY AIMING TO SOLVE?

One of the most important pillars of the energy transition in North Rhine-Westphalia is the deployment of renewable energy, especially from wind (on-shore). **The Energy Dialogue NRW aims to increase transparency and public acceptance of renewable energy development, as these are significant success factors for the energy transition.**

Already in the development stage, renewable energy projects often raise questions – about the planning process, protection of nature and species as well as conflicting interests in the community. In many cases, providing neutral information, knowledge transfer and targeted expert advice at a very early stage help to reduce general reservations against renewable energy projects. This also supports the process of finding joint solutions, reducing conflicts at a later stage and making sure that the concerns of citizens are being taken seriously.

### HOW IS IT INNOVATIVE?

The Energy Dialogue team interacts with communities, so the **advice and mediation takes place locally where the concerns and conflicts are, and not in the Energy Dialogue office.** Consequently, more people are able to participate in Energy Dialogue activities. The aim is to engage with citizens and address their concerns with the intention of finding solutions that work for all parties. The service of the Energy Dialogue is also open to all actors involved in renewable energy development.

### HOW LONG DID IT TAKE TO IMPLEMENT?

The process of setting up the Energy Dialogue was relatively quick, being introduced as part of the already established Energy Agency NRW. The Ministry of Climate Protection first set the framework, and the Energy Agency was then commissioned to implement the unit and find suitable staff. The process from concept to operation took about **6-9 months**. It became operational in July 2011 and has grown with continuous development.

### HOW IS THE PROGRAM FINANCED?

The main costs come from staff, offices and travel. The Energy Dialogue started with three employees; today, there is an interdisciplinary team of seven people. It is part of the Energy Agency NRW, which is partly financed by the Government of North Rhine-Westphalia from the **budget of the Ministry for Climate Protection**, and partially by the **European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)**.

In many cases, providing neutral information, knowledge transfer, and targeted expert advice at a very early stage helps to reduce general reservations against renewable energy projects and supports the process of finding joint solutions.

## LESSON LEARNED

**“THE ENERGY DIALOGUE HAS PROVEN TO BE A VERY USEFUL INSTRUMENT FOR ONE OF THE BIGGEST BUT OFTEN FORGOTTEN CHALLENGES OF THE ENERGY TRANSITION: THE QUESTION OF HOW TO TAKE ALONG CITIZENS AND SOCIETY IN THIS IMMENSE TASK.”**

- Tina Völker, Ministry for Climate Protection, North Rhine-Westphalia

The majority of citizens want to enter into a productive dialogue, and with every involved party, there are contacts that want to find solutions. Targeting the right people and building alliances with those individuals and groups that want to have constructive discussions is most effective.

**LESSON LEARNED**

**WHAT WERE THE MAJOR CHALLENGES AND HOW WERE THEY OVERCOME?**

**Gaining the trust and confidence of stakeholders involved was one of the key challenges.** The Energy Dialogue is closely related to the Ministry for Climate Protection, which sets the political framework for wind energy development in North Rhine-Westphalia. Environmental organizations and citizens' initiatives, in particular, were initially concerned that the Energy Dialogue was introduced to simply enforce the deployment of renewable energy in North Rhine-Westphalia.

This is not the case, however: it was set up to create dialogue between all groups involved in renewable energy development, and to engage all interested parties and help in finding joint solutions with support from the range of stakeholders.

**Key to overcoming this challenge was employing knowledgeable staff, skilled in diplomacy and showing keen interest in the concerns of the stakeholders.** The members of staff are required to stay neutral in all cases, making fact-based suggestions and ensuring they are approachable and accessible at any time during the process.

**RESULTS TO DATE**

Since its establishment in 2011, the Energy Dialogue has advanced its repertoire of services reflecting the experience and learnings made on the ground. The team has grown from three to seven employees and the services are widely used, as these numbers from 2015 demonstrate:

- More than 108,000 user requests for the blog on the website;
- Substantial project advice and technical presentations on more than 100 occasions; and
- 400 brief consultations.

However, the nature of the Energy Dialogue makes it difficult to quantify the benefits exactly. As the platform provides support and advice in critical moments of project development, it does not allow for a follow-up in every case. Feedback from involved parties leads to the impression that the program is certainly enhancing cooperation and dialogue on renewable energy projects, while it also helps to constantly refine the process itself.

**CONNECT WITH NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA:**

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More information on Energy Dialogue NRW: <http://www.energieagentur.nrw/energiedialog> (in German)

 [@KlimaschutzNRW](https://twitter.com/KlimaschutzNRW)

**CONNECT WITH US IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT OUR ENERGY TRANSITION PLATFORM**

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