**Estonia’s input to the Questionnaire by the Special Rapporteur on the issue of human rights obligations relating to the enjoyment of a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment**

**“Human Rights, Transformative Actions and the UN Sustainable Development Goals”**

**May 2022**

Please find below answers to some of the questions from the Questionnaire concerning SDG6 and SDG13.

**SDG6 – Clean Water and Sanitation**

1. Estonia has several future challenges related to sustainability and affordability issues in water sector. We still have too many small water companies and the remaining issues concern their sustainability and water quality. Efficiency of water utilities needs to be raised through consolidation of smaller water companies into regional ones.  Regional water companies ensure better service quality and lower price of water, efficient management and higher competence of water service. Today, we are convinced that regional water companies are the right solution to ensure sustainable water service in long term. Instead of public drinking water supply, a considerable part of the population uses their own boreholes or wells for drinking water. There is no state supervision over these private wells and they need more attention in future. Our overall aim is to connect them to the public water supply if possible or implement other remedies for water safety. A lot of investments have been made into sanitation systems and therefore, all Estonian cities are covered with public sewerage systems and urban wastewater treatment plants. However, in future, more attention should be paid to sanitation systems in rural areas.
2. Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is essential to health and the environment. Estonia is constantly investing in measures to ensure high-quality drinking water for all. In order to improve water quality, new modern water treatment plants have been built and the existing ones have been renovated. The results are obvious – percentage of population supplied with drinking water by public drinking water supply, which conforms to requirements has remained more or less stable between 98 – 99% in the last 6 years. In our strategies, we have set goals, e.g. to reduce water related health risks, modernize water status monitoring and make comprehensive information available to the consumer and update risk assessment principles. Regular monitoring and compliance checks of water quality against requirements are in place. Water and Health Safety Information System is in place for effective drinking water quality data management and is also publicly accessible. Due to implementation of improved methods and surveillance monitoring, there have been no outbreaks associated with drinking water during the past 29 years. Estonia has made an overview of water quality of individual water works (private wells), that are not under state surveillance and looked for opportunities to connect them the public water supply or implement other measures for safe drinking water. Also, guidelines for private well owners have been issued. Advice for private well owners concerning water quality is in place. Currently, we are shifting drinking water management under risk based approach, which is a globally recognised good practice to optimise drinking water management by focusing on the most critical points in drinking water chains and managing possible risks potentially affecting drinking water quality at an early stage. One of our goals is to ensure appropriate sewage collection and treatment for all the residents. According to recent data, percentage of people connected to public sewerage system is 83% in 2020. In agglomeration areas of more than 2000 pe, 97% of the population is connected to the public sewerage system. 100% of waste water treatment plants in agglomerations of more than 2000 pe meet the relevant requirements. New wastewater treatment plants have been built and existing ones have been reconstructed. Huge investments have been made into sanitation systems and therefore, all Estonian cities are covered with public sewerage systems and urban wastewater treatment plants. Since 2018, a new measure to finance households for connecting to public water and sewerage system in agglomerations over 2000 pe was launched, and it turned out to be very popular.  In 2018 – 2020, further investments were made. Guidelines on how to supervise individual sewerage systems were prepared to help the municipalities to tackle with environmental goals in water management.

1. In Estonia, national policies include actions to improve equitable access to water and sanitation by keeping water and sanitation affordable for all. There are no disparities between different population groups and a 100% access to both drinking water and sanitation is guaranteed Estonia. The prices for water services shall not be discriminatory with regard to different clients or groups of clients. Price regulation (including approving of prices) and market supervision in the fields of public water supply and sewage is implemented at national level. Recommended principles for calculation of prices for water services have been worked out.
2. Measure to support households on connecting to public water and sewerage systems in agglomerations of over 2000 pe have been set and these turned out to be very popular.
3. A lot of remedies have been implemented and investments have been made, including from the state budget, EU funds, as well as water companies own finances. The total amount of investments in 2015-2021 was M 305.4 EUR. The results of the investments into the water infrastructure sector are obvious – pollution load has decreased significantly, connection rates to drinking water and sewerage systems and conformity with environmental and health norms is high.
4. In some cases, reaching the goals is influenced by the availability of funds (e.g., raising the percentage of population provided with water from central water supply system). As Estonia is very sparsely populated country, achieving the goals has been very challenging and resulting in high investment and maintenance costs per capita.
5. Clean, healthy and sustainable environment contribute to safe drinking water, and proper sanitation leads to clean environment for the present and future generations. Water pollution hinders the enjoyment of human right to clean environment. Therefore, implementing human right to clean, healthy and sustainable environment helps to achieve SDG6 and *vice versa*.
6. We have no gender disparities in the process of achieving SDG6.

9. Businesses can contribute through enhanced engagement in the process of achieving SDG goals.

**SDG13 – Climate Action**

1. Estonia's biggest challenge and also the biggest opportunity is our energy sector. Estonian consumption and production patterns are influenced by, among other things, the extraction and use of oil shale. Therefore, transition from today's fossil fuel-based energy model to a diversified renewable energy mix with smart grids and storage, and more efficient energy management is crucial.

It is also necessary to strengthen comprehensive state planning and investment in collaboration between researchers and businesses, infrastructure, new business models, smart and environmentally friendly product and service design, and consumer awareness.

1. Estonia ratified the international Paris Climate Agreement back in 2016. The following year, 2017, a national development document on the “General Principles of Climate Policy to 2050” was used to set the long-term vision of the Estonian climate policy and industry and cross-industry policy trends. It set the goal for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 70 percent by 2030, and by 80 percent by 2050 as compared to the 1990 levels. The document outlined general, as well as sector specific policy guidelines for reaching the established goals. In 2017, the Government of the Republic approved the “Climate Change Adaptation Development Plan until 2030”. The Development Plan addresses the main issues of climate change adaptation, the future climate in Estonia based on climate scenarios, and the effects of climate change in eight priority sectors: land use and planning; human health and rescue capability; natural environment; bio‑economy; infrastructure and buildings; energy and power supply; economy; society, awareness and cooperation. The general objective of the Development Plan is to raise Estonia’s national, regional and local readiness and capabilities for adapting to the impact of climate change and sets out adaptation measures for the foreseeable future until 2030. Action plans (for the period 2017-2020 and 2021-2025) were drawn up to implement the Development Plan.

To align our ambitions with the European ones and reach climate neutrality by 2050, the Estonian Government agreed on another long-term development strategy, “Eesti 2035” (Estonia 2035), adopted in May 2021. “Eesti 2035” sets an emissions reduction target of 80% by 2035 in addition to the 2050 climate neutrality goal.

In 2019, the share of renewable energy in total final energy consumption reached 31.9%, exceeding the target set for 2020 (25%). In 2020, the share of oil shale electricity in consumption fell to 31.5% (in 2018 it was about 80%), while the consumption of renewable electricity increased to 26%. Since 2010, emissions per GDP have decreased by 50% and emissions per capita by 38%.

1. Estonia has compiled a “Just transition plan for Ida-Viru County”, the overall goal of which is to enable the transition to a climate-neutral economy in Ida-Virumaa in a way that the well-being of the local community is ensured, while supporting entrepreneurs in identifying and implementing new business opportunities related to the transition. Ida-Virumaa is the area most affected by oil shale mining and thus transition to the climate neutrality in the region can be most challenging, since nearly 40 % of the workforce depends on oil shale. Activities supported under the plan include supporting the reorganization of local economy and labour force, and supporting activities to reduce environmentally harmful activities and increase social inclusion.

Estonia is also putting great effort into increasing energy efficiency in buildings. The building stock in Estonia is energy intensive and at the time being of low quality. The majority of apartment buildings are large prefabricated reinforced concrete houses built between 1961 and 1990. Approximately 70% of all apartments and over 80% of the living space is located in such houses. The Long-Term Strategy for the Reconstruction of Buildings has been prepared by the Ministry of Communication and Economic Affairs and Tallinn University of Technology, approved in 2020. [1] According to this strategy, one of the main aims for Estonia is the cost-effective renovation of the existing building stock into nearly zero-energy buildings by 2050. By 2030, 22% would have to be renovated on the basis of the strategy, 64% by 2040 and 100% by 2050. The document highlights that in addition to single houses (14 million m2), apartment buildings (18 million m2) and non-residential buildings (22 million m2), a total of 54 million m2 of buildings, would need to be renovated by 2050. According to the strategy, the total quantity to be renovated varies year by year, starting of 4 million m2 in 2020-2025, to 11.8 million m2 in 2036-2040. The most active period for renovations would be in 2031-2045, with the peak time requiring up to five times the current renovation pace. Similarly, the investment needs will grow from M 227EUR in 2020, to B 1EUR per year in 2035. The strategy foresees that with complete renovation, it is possible to achieve energy savings of approximately 7 TWh, of which 70% from heating and 20% from electricity. It is predicted that when the renovations are complete, CO2 emissions in the building sector will decrease by 90%.

6. Estonia's biggest challenge and also the biggest opportunity is its energy sector. The low rate of recycling of waste and lack of valorisation of resources will increase the environmental burden in Estonia. Valorisation of local resources has been one of the areas of smart specialization in Estonia, but the potential is still largely unrealized.

1. One opportunity for companies would be to channel more emphasis on research and development activities and green transition. Especially in development of high-quality and low environmental burden products and services, as well as the modernization of existing products and services. Research and development and co-operation between researchers, companies and other institutions plays a key role in transformation and achieving of the SDG-s.