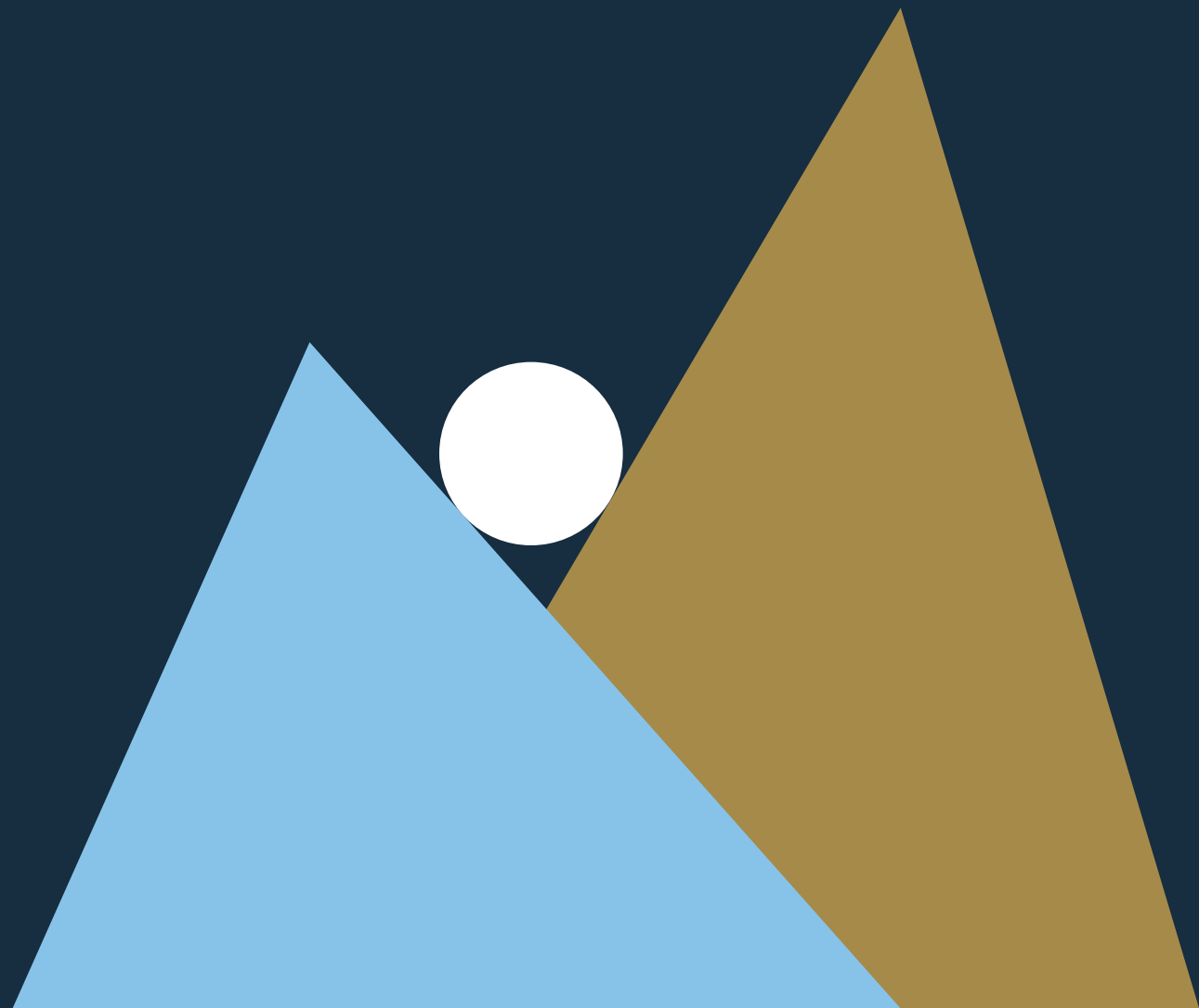
Lessons for science advice in a next crisis

ESAF meeting 30 November 2021



WRR | KONINKLIJKE NEDERLANDSE AKADEMIE VAN WETENSCHAPPEN

The virus is still with us, but we cannot wait with drawing lessons

- Evaluation and lessons in general
- Lessons for the structure of science advice
  - E.g. what we saw in the early days: ad hoc structures seem to be just as effective
- Lessons for its way of working and communicating
  - Type of expertise (scope); type of experts (who is the expert?);

Lessons not just for this crisis - climate

- Of course there are differences
  - long(er) tradition of science advice on climate change
  - often part of existing science advice infrastructure
- But here as well:
  - Questions as regards: structure (institutional infrastructure) of science advice; scope of perspective and scope of expertise; how to communicate

Some examples of first (critical) observations

- Switzerland: unworldly expertocracy
- Austria: epistemisation of politics
- UK: groupthink, not open enough to appraches taken elsewhere
- Netherlands: not following all international expertise (WHO)
- Sweden: no justification for choosing measures dismissed in a previous wave

Similar observations on science advice

- Narrow perspective
  - Monodisciplinary
  - Containing the outbreak, not the wider consequences
- Role division
- Room for alternative experts/ expertise

Two challenges

1. Broadening the perspective -> Different phase: different science based advice

2. Room for additional or alternative expertise

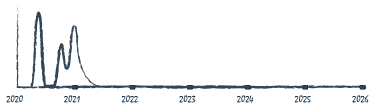
Joint advice from WRR and KNAW

WRR-KNAW advise *Navigating and anticipating in uncertain times*

- Focus: long term – strategic perspective
- Ambition: broaden the dominant policy perspective
- Effect: Dutch cabinet stimulated by parliament and experts to work with our scenarios

SCENARIOS FOR THE POSSIBLE COURSE OF THE PANDEMIC

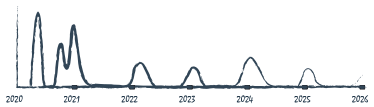
Scenario 1
Return to normal



COVID-19 is eliminated.

Policy focus is on recovery and eliminating backlogs in healthcare and education. All restrictive measures can now be phased out.

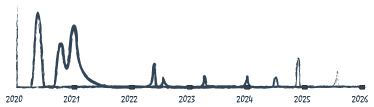
Scenario 2
Flu +



COVID-19 becomes endemic, with annual waves.

Upscaling of healthcare capacity necessary. Less room voor recovery. Seasonal restrictive measures might be necessary.

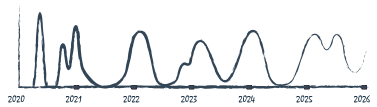
Scenario 3
External threat



COVID-19 is under control in wealthy countries, threat of reintroduction.

Strict border control. Disruptions international trade and travel. Temporary local measures will be needed in case of outbreak.

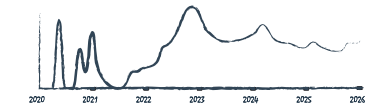
Scenario 4
Continuous struggle



COVID-19 continues to escape immunity and vaccines through new mutations.

Trade-off between protecting public health and the broader societal impact of the pandemic measures is permanently on the table.

Scenario 5
Worst case



COVID-19 claims more victims annually.

Social and economic disruption. Policy focuses solely on core tasks and preventing the most serious harm.

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Broader implications of the pandemic

HEALTH CARE	**SOCIETAL COHESION**	**ECONOMY**
SUSTAINABILITY	**DIGITALISATION**	**GOVERNANCE AND LAW**

Main recommendations

- Anticipate
  - .. e.g. in using the instrument of scenario-thinking
- Aim for broad societal resilience
  - and in doing so: capitalize on a variety of expertise and experts
- Link the scenario's also to long term policy issues
  - recovery requires more than health care problems that had to wait
  - rebuilding society in many different ways

Lessons for science advise

- Enormous need for information – but sometimes information & knowledge is not articulated as needed (scenario-thinking)
- Need for broader science-based expertise and insights; counterweight to groupthink (or correction of mistakes)

But…

- Stick to your expertise and role (danger of role confusion)