

SINCE WHEN DID WE SET OUR SIGHTS SO LOW?

SUBMISSION TO THE 2015 NZ CLIMATE CHANGE TARGET CONSULTATION

It is traditional to start a submission with thanks for being given the ability to share one's views on the topic at hand. Well, thanks for nothing.

Firstly, to be consulted on New Zealand's approach to one of the most pressing issues of our time is not a privilege, but a fundamental right. If we are to call ourselves a democracy, then we must understand that this means more than having elections every three years. We've known about climate change since the 1980s, so it's appalling that it's taken till now for the Government to ask the people what they think about it.

Secondly, when the Right Honourable Prime Minister announces that a target of 40% reduction in emissions would be "disastrous" during the consultation period, then what is the point of the whole process? What is the point if the decision has already been made?

And yet, I have put pen to paper, because this is too important an issue to ignore. Look, New Zealand's approach currently is wrong from the first objective. Apparently New Zealand's target must be "seen as a fair and ambitious contribution – both by international and domestic audiences." No, the target must genuinely be fair and ambitious. This must not a ploy for international acceptance

but a whole-hearted effort to prevent dangerous changes to the earth's climate. Pandering to those too cowardly to commit to transitioning away from fossil fuels will put human lives at risk, and those in power today will be held responsible.

The second objective states that we must consider how "costs and impacts on society are [to be] managed appropriately" when setting the target. I'm assuming we are talking about the costs of inaction here, because the negative impacts of taking action on climate change are pale into insignificance compared to the price that we will pay if we do nothing. Furthermore, the natural world and future generations will continue to suffer by our lack of action.

The final objective, that the target "must guide New Zealand over the long term in the global transition to a low emissions world" sounds commendable, in that it acknowledges that the climate crisis will not be solved instantly. However, by framing our response to climate change as a 'long term transition,' we forget that climate change is happening now. New Zealand is already experiencing harsher summer droughts and our glaciers are in retreat. Elsewhere in the world (although individual weather events cannot be solely attributed to climate change), it's worth noting that 2,300 people have died in the last few weeks as India has suffered a heat wave. Climate change is not a problem for the next government or the next generation. While transitioning away from fossil fuels will take time, the process must be completed with all urgency, and must begin as soon as possible, if not sooner.

Question Two ("What would be a fair contribution for New Zealand?") I will come back to, and Question Three ("What level of cost is appropriate for New Zealand to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions?") is insulting. When our homes, our beautiful country, and our unborn children are threatened, do we ask what level of hardship is "appropriate" to protect them? When NZ soldiers fought for our nation and its ideals in the World Wars, did they bemoan how inconvenient it was to them? No, of course not. New Zealand is the land of number eight wire, of kiwi ingenuity and 'she'll be right.' We're prepared to put up with hardship now to protect those who will come after us, and we'll continue to look for opportunities when the going gets tough. As a small economy, New Zealand shouldn't find it difficult to adapt to a carbon-neutral world. Again, the costs of inaction are much, much more significant.

Finally, there will be no technological quick-fix, and nor should we pin our hopes on one. We are the nation of David Lange and Kate Sheppard. We are known for our kiwi ingenuity, for the beauty of our natural environment. Other nations are taking their contributions to the climate crisis seriously, but we continue to make excuses. New Zealanders have pride in their nation for being a world leader. Being a so-called 'fast follower' doesn't do justice to the severity of the problem. Since when did we set our sights so low?

The only acceptable target is one of zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.