

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Submission on setting New Zealand's post-2020 climate change target

To whomever it may concern,

Targets:

Overall, I would like to see New Zealand's target emissions set at a 50% reduction from 1990s levels in transport and electricity generation emissions and a 30% reduction in agricultural emissions before 2030.

Below I have outlined key issues for consideration and some ideas of ways to get there.

Native forest collapse

Climate change gases are leaking out of our native forests, which should otherwise be carbon sinks.

Across Northland, where I live, the lion's share of native forests in management of DOC, in private trusts, Maori land and private freehold title are in a state of freefall collapse.

Possoms arrived in Northland in the late 1950s/early 1960s. They reached saturation point in the late 1970s with many native bird species becoming locally extinct or regionally extinct such as pateke, kakariki and kaka. But there has been no 'balance reached'. A look across the canopies of Russell Forest, Whangaroa Forest, Herekino Forest, Maungataniwha, Otangaroa Forest, Warawara Forest, Tangiwahine Forest and many more shows dying or dead native forest trees.

These forests look grey cast, not green. This is problem is not confined to Northland.

Over the past decade we have noticed that every time a severe droughts hit, more trees die. Around seven years ago it was taraire, a large leaved tree, the cousin of tawa which is naturally found in the north. Both taraire and mamaku tree ferns died across the north in broad swathes. In the last two droughts more taraire, titoki, rewarewa and ancient forest giants, puriri, pohutukawa and totara, died.

This was due to the dual impacts of severe possum density and drought.

Possoms consume leaves, buds and new shoots and turn them into possum faeces instead of these leaves naturally becoming forest leaf litter. Over decades this has made the leaf litter become thinner and thinner, sometimes to the point of the forest floor appearing bare.

Trees have been dying because they can't photosynthesize enough to survive and the thinning leaf litter means moisture which would normally be trapped, giving the forest a buffer during dry times, has evaporated. This combination of factors has left the forest more susceptible to the impact of droughts that has amplified the die off.

As the trees die they release carbon dioxide and methane, which fuels more climate change and associated extreme weather events. Across Northland this climate feedback cycle turns what should be massive carbon sinks into climate change contributors.

This same effect is endemic across the country. Now the most southern native forests of Fiordland are currently facing a moving front of their first possum invasion. We know what follows...

We can't spend years assessing and evaluating native forests in freefall collapse and how much greenhouse gases they are emitting.

We already have a key tool: 1080 cereal baits that can be dispersed by helicopters.

The Government needs to clearly communicate the climate contribution of collapsing native forests and take responsibility by seriously increasing funding to DOC and expanding aerial and ground 1080 use. This will also help our international commitments to biodiversity protection and turn native forests back into carbon sinks.

Reforestation:

Separately, the Government must encourage and use incentives that support massive re-forestation of locally-sourced manuka to expand the beekeeping trade, stabilise eroding areas, provide waterway protection and become carbon sinks for this century. Planting trees is the key proven way of locking up carbon fast.

Agriculture:

The impact of palm kernel expeller (PKE) and the deforestation of rainforests across the tropics that allow for its production, must be factored into the emissions of New Zealand agriculture. The use of PKE also allows further unsustainable intensification of farming and the increase of greenhouse gases.

Often we hear that palm kernel is a by-product. It is not. It is one of many products produced from turning rainforests into oil palm plantations and the earning made from it help fund more rainforest destruction and conversion. New Zealand's intensive dairying and the rainforest destruction of Indonesia and elsewhere are inextricably linked and contribute to climate change.

Agriculture must not be given any more extreme exceptions that allow farming industries to sidestep their greenhouse gas responsibilities. It is essential to encourage land use changes and farming practises which grow soil carbon and use methane digesters to create biofuel to be used on site where possible.

I would like to see the phase-out of PKE use.

Farmers must also contribute to research into how to reduce methane and other greenhouse gases from their industry.

Industrial Fishing

The corporate fishing industry was given an exemption from cutting their greenhouse gas emissions in the last commitment period. It was a disgrace that allowed more fossil-fuel burning destructive deep sea bottom trawling to continue and associated greenhouse gas emissions. Exceptions for bottom trawlers or the fishing industry overall must not be repeated for this coming commitment period.

Transport

The rise of electric vehicles is going to help us change our transport emissions profile.

Government support for EV charging infrastructure and support of EVs (eg changing the Government vehicle fleet to EVs as current vehicles are retired) is a key step that will contribute.

EV Car Construction at Tiwai Point

A giant step that would help reduce our own and international carbon emissions and help our economy, would be to invite/discuss with Tesla or another EV-producing company to set up and utilise the proximity and source of electricity from Tiwai Point to produce EVs in this country. That would mean EV produced there would have lower GHG emissions inbuilt into the construction of the vehicles, unlike those whose electricity generation comes from burning fossil fuels.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to action on these urgent issues.

Yours sincerely,

Dean Baigent-Mercer

