Climate Change Contribution Consultation

Setting New Zealand’s Post 2020 Climate Change Target

Summary
In setting a target for reduction in greenhouse gas emissions the Government needs to set a stretch target for reduction in emissions of 30% less than 1990 levels by 2030. This should be viewed as an insurance against the huge costs of the effects of climate change that will arise in New Zealand if the world does not limit global temperature rise. In New Zealand these costs will arise particularly from the effects of sea level rise and the adverse effects of climate change on our agricultural industries.

Sea Level Rise

New Zealand is an island nation with a long coast-line. Sea rise will have a dramatic effect on our shore-line. We have major cities and smaller cities with suburbs located near the coast as well as smaller coastal communities. A rising sea level and possibly more severe storms on top of that would require defensive works at large expense and possibly abandonment of coastal strips. We will have a dramatic illustration of the effects of our emissions visible to us nearby if the Antarctica ice sheets melt significantly and will rue our lack of action.

A sea level rise will also impact greatly on some Pacific Islands to the extent that they may become refugees. It seems inevitable if this occurs that New Zealand will be called on to house quite some number of refugees from the Asian region.

Agriculture

The temperature rise will impact on weather and temperature of the sea. Change in rainfall patterns, particularly drought, will force changes in agriculture which will be expensive and disruptive for farmers and may make us less competitive. Rises in sea water temperatures and changes in currents have the potential to disrupt fishing and aquaculture.
International Responsibilities

The current Government proposal suggests we can do less than say European countries. But we are one of the developed countries of the world and should take up our full share of the change. To add to that moral obligation, we have recently raised our profile with a term on the Security Council. We need to play a full part of the international effort to address this critical issue.

Proposals

The fact that the current New Zealand emission control regime has been ineffective and allowed a large increase in emissions must not deter us from undoing the effect of our negligence. We need a panel of experts who can make proposals for technology change appropriate to the New Zealand situation and advise the Government on centrally organised infrastructure in industries such as housing, and transport. This could be under the oversight of the Government’s Science Adviser or some other eminent technologist. It is important we start making changes soon. Changes could be funded from the receipts from a carbon tax. The change will have benefits in creating jobs and new functioning technology.

Our Planet

Recently I watched a documentary on the building of the earth (R Hammond, BBC). Our world has been built over billions of years and we hold this treasure in our hands. The sea, land and atmosphere are inter-twined and we need to limit our impact. I trust the effort New Zealand makes will be comparable with the challenge we face to remodel our technological and economic systems, for the sake of our children and grand-children.

A J Baldwin

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