

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



Copy of your submission

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Objectives for the contribution

Do you agree with these objectives for our contribution? No

1b. What is most important to you?

I agree with these objectives in general terms, but the second objective should be broadened to reflect the significant co-benefits of climate change mitigation (which are mentioned on p 15 of the discussion document), and the potentially catastrophic costs of NOT addressing climate change. I agree that costs on society need to be managed appropriately, but looking only at the 'cost' side suggests that contributing to climate change mitigation is somehow a negative thing. In fact, it is an ESSENTIAL thing - the long term future of our economy, our environment and the well being of our population depends on the success of global efforts to reduce emissions. As noted in the discussion document, New Zealand is a constructive global player and will have a significant impact on whether the Paris agreement is successful or not.

Perhaps it could be worded 'it weighs up the short and long term costs and benefits to society appropriately'.

What would be a fair contribution for New Zealand?

2. What do you think the nature of New Zealand's emissions and economy means for the level of target that we set?

New Zealand has less room for improvement in the energy sector than many other countries, and at the moment our economy is heavily dependent on the agricultural sector which produces nearly half our annual emissions. This is an argument for reducing our dependence on primary production and beginning a transition to a low-carbon economy, not for setting low targets. So far, business lobbyists have been very successful at protecting their interests and maintaining 'business as usual'. But the time has now come to recognise that minor tinkering is not going to solve the climate change crisis, and that climate change itself is a bigger threat to our economy than mitigation efforts. If global emissions continue to rise at the current rate, and droughts and extreme weather events become even more common, how viable will our 'business as usual' agricultural sector be in 30, 50 or 100 years? We have a choice - we can try to 'protect' our economy by setting low targets (thereby allowing other countries to do the same) and lock in catastrophic climate change, OR we can accept that we need to radically change our economy and our way of life, NOW.

How will our contribution affect New Zealanders?

3. What level of cost is appropriate for New Zealand to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions? For example, what would be a reasonable reduction in annual household consumption?

As noted previously, New Zealand's national calculation of costs and benefits needs to take into account co-benefits (e.g. reduced health care costs), and also consider the costs of inaction. When wider costs and benefits are taken into account, GGE reduction may be seen as an economic benefit rather than a cost.

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At the household level, the distribution of impacts is the important issue. The top 10% of households can easily reduce their buying-power by \$5,000 - \$10, 000 per year with no significant hardship. They/we might be a bit disappointed not to be able to afford that ski week, a trip to Fiji, or a new suit, but we will maintain a good quality of life with a secure roof over our heads and food on the table. However a large proportion of New Zealand households are struggling just to pay the bills and put food to the table for their kids, and it is these families that are typically the "shock absorbers" of the economy, who suffer the most when structural changes take place. NO reduction in buying power is reasonable for the bottom 20 - 30% of households. The big challenge for our domestic policies will be how to achieve emissions reductions without further disadvantaging vulnerable families, and causing flow on costs to the health and social sectors as a result.

4. Of the opportunities for New Zealand to reduce its emissions (as outlined on page 15 of the discussion document), which do you think are the most likely to occur, or be most important for New Zealand? There is already the technology and evidence-based policy options for significant reduction of GGEs in this country. What we need is the political will to enact them, and cross-party agreements and annual targets so that successive governments take responsibility and are held accountable.

As a public health researcher, I see the potential health co-benefits of climate change mitigation as the most significant and likely opportunities. For example there is good evidence from New Zealand and internationally (e.g. the World Health Organisation) that climate change mitigation policies aimed at increasing walking, cycling and public transport would save lives, improve productivity and reduce healthcare costs associated with inactivity and obesity for New Zealand. The current and projected costs of these health issues are significant. The estimated cost to New Zealand of overweight and obesity is estimated at \$8 billion over 10 years (<https://blogs.otago.ac.nz/pubhealthexpert/2014/02/19/action-needed-to-halt-new-zealands-obesity-epidemic-themes-from-big-food-symposium/>), and the cost of physical inactivity was estimated at \$1.3 billion for the 2010 year (http://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/PageFiles/25488/The_Costs_of_Physical_Inactivity.PDF). Skyrocketing public transport usership in Auckland and cycling numbers in Wellington, for example, show that there is public appetite for a move away from private car use. We need the government to take a 'whole of government' approach and think about health, transport, housing, land use and climate change as joined-up issues with joined-up solutions.

Summary

5. How should New Zealand take into account the future uncertainties of technologies and costs when setting its target?

Uncertainty has long been used as an excuse not to act. It's too late to take a 'wait and see' approach. We need firm commitments, and more importantly we need action.

Other comments

6. Is there any further information you wish the Government to consider? Please explain.
I'm confused by the statement that 'New Zealand's greenhouse gas emissions have grown by about 21% since 1990' and yet according to the discussion document New Zealand is on track to meet its 2020 target of 5% below 1990 levels (p10). How is this possible?