

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?

While I do not disagree with the objective for NZ's contribution, the most primary objectives should be that our contribution;

- is one that represents effective mitigation of climate change,
- signals good will and a determination to prevent catastrophic warming to other nations attending the talks.

Our target should not be reduced to meaninglessness by a timid approach to the 'prisoner's dilemma'; that is to say- as we set targets and plans to do the right thing (even in the face of international inertia), our behaviour will feedback to the global community and may bring along even those who are resistant and claim that action is not possible.

We must follow the science, and lead the politics.

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?

The primary consideration in setting any target is whether it will result in mitigation of climate change (staying within 2 degrees or below), and the avoidance of catastrophic warming (which, for the purposes of the current submission, and following global consensus, I would consider to be 4 - 6 degrees [1]).

Our role as minimal contributors at absolute levels and high contributors per capita means that we are uniquely placed to lead the globe as innovators. The lessons we have the opportunity to learn as we pursue a meaningful target can inspire, inform and strengthen the mitigation actions of other nations.

The idea that we have any other meaningful choice is an illusion. Without action we are likely to witness 4-6 degree warming [2]: A dairy industry in such an environment is not even a possibility. This is part of the reason why comparing the costs of mitigation to the projected growth of 'business as usual' (as the discussion document appears to do) is a fallacy.

I urge our government to set a target which goes beyond what is 'fair' in a situation where the calculations of fairness are likely to be indeterminable, and set a target which is not only effective, but ambitious and aspirational.

I join others in urging a minimum target of a 40% emissions reduction in net emissions below 1990 levels by 2030 – the minimum contribution required to keep us under 2 degrees global warming.

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I would like to see a target beyond that of zero net emissions by 2050, and following this, a target for a carbon-negative economy. Those are targets which, to the best of my knowledge, are feasible, and also ambitious and potentially galvanising.

[1] Schellnhuber et al. (2012). "Turn down the heat: Why a 4 degree C world must be avoided". A report for the World Bank by Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and Climate Analytics, November 2012

[2] "Too late for two degrees?" Low Carbon Economy Index 2012, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, November 2012, p1.

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?

Cost cannot be discussed in the absence of the cost of inaction. Six degrees warming, for example, would result in nearly every economic activity being infeasible.

The cost which is therefore appropriate, is that which enables effective mitigation of warming and a 40% emissions reduction in net emissions below 1990 levels by 2030. While the costs of inaction are reportedly unknown [1], I suspect there are few households which can afford an uninhabitable planet.

We should focus on reducing the carbon impact of activities, however, such activities must also be reduced where emission reduction alone cannot bring carbon impacts to within the target. This in fact opens other opportunities, many unforeseeable from the present view point.

[1] <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/climate-change/reducing-greenhouse-gas-emissions/consultation-post-2020-climate-change-target>

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?

I view the target primarily as an opportunity. As I have made clear, in the absence of hard numbers, and in light of the catastrophic consequences likely to stem from inaction and 'business as usual', I cannot come to any conclusion other than that the costs of catastrophic climate change vastly outpace the costs of mitigation. Many cross-benefits, such as the improvement to population health that occur in walkable, bikeable and public-transport-enhanced cities are also likely to follow.

New Zealand has an opportunity to lead these talks in an ethical and moral way, and to be ambitious, innovative, and public minded. Many of our proudest moments as a nation have involved these qualities. Through setting an effective target we can not only prevent catastrophe, but galvanise and transform our way of life.

Summary

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

- 1) By viewing all costs on change in light of the likely costs of inaction and a rise of 4-6 degrees C: Namely destruction of nearly all economic activity, collapse of the ecosystem, and a potentially unsurvivable planet.
- 2) by considering the massive flexibility in human behaviour, social structure, economic systems and ingenuity.
- 3) by considering that once ambitious, galvanising and effective targets are set, the above flexible systems can and will be utilised to meet them. These resources will not be accessed without such targets. Necessity is the mother of invention.

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- 4) by viewing this crisis as an opportunity first a foremost.
- 5) by engaging the New Zealand public through democratic collaboration, and a vision which captures hearts and minds. (e.g. Carbon zero economy by 2050, carbon negative by 2070)

Other comments

6. Is there any further information you wish the Government to consider? Please explain.

The only target worth setting is one that will actually be effective in mitigating global warming. To set a lesser target is worse than pointless. at the same time we are provided with exciting opportunities with positive implications for community population health, and our moral and ethical position as a nation.

I ask the government to adopt, at least, a 40% emissions reduction in net emissions below 1990 levels by 2030. Beyond this I urge the adoption of aspirational, galvanising targets, provided as a vision for our nation's future.

In terms of formulating our targets and actions; economies and human behaviour are highly flexible. The physics and chemistry of climate change are not. Any target or contribution which cannot be reasonably expected to prevent catastrophic warming over 2 degrees is literally a recipe for disaster.

Along with others I view the 'costs' of climate change as outlined in the discussion document highly cautiously. I am unclear on how a "cost" of action can be put forward when the costs of inaction and climate change above 2 degrees are not known (as stated on the ministry website).

I support the calls for a plan and genuine action, and support the action plan put forward by GreenPeace New Zealand.

Finally, let me clear to those that represent me at the global climate meetings: that we are now contemplating actions to keep warming below 2 degrees is by no means a success. The possibility of further failure is terrifying. We are faced with a choice between a difficult future, and an uninhabitable one. As we aim for this difficult future, we must also consider our obligations to those nations affected by greatly less-responsible for climate change, as well as the most vulnerable within our own nation.