

Submission

to the

Ministry for the Environment

on

Climate Change Contribution Consultation

The effective struggle against global warming will only be possible with a responsible collective answer, that goes beyond particular interests and behaviour and is developed free of political and economic pressures.

Pope Francis to UN climate change conference in Lima, Peru in December 2014

Summary of main points

- The threat to human wellbeing and even existence posed by climate change is real.
- The Paris climate summit may be our last effective opportunity for global agreement on the action required to keep global temperature rises below 2 degrees Celsius
- We cannot approach this opportunity with a “business-as-usual” model, or seeking the minimum compromises necessary to preserve our status quo, while seeking large changes from others.
- New Zealand needs to be a bold and ambitious thought leader, not a timid and responsive follower
- The primary objective of New Zealand’s contribution should be to ensure the world collectively takes the action required to reduce emissions and eliminate the threat climate change poses for our planet and all its peoples.
- The discussion document defines fairness too narrowly, in terms of our national circumstances, previous commitments and comparison to other countries. It needs to take into account our historical contributions and the benefits we have derived over time from fossil fuel use.
- There are benefits and opportunities for New Zealanders in making our farms and transport more sustainable
- The discussion document discusses the financial costs of different emission targets, but fails to analyse and explain the human, environmental and financial costs of doing nothing.

Introduction

1. Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand is the Catholic agency for justice, peace and development. We are mandated by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference to undertake advocacy, education, development and humanitarian programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Pacific, Asia, Africa and the Middle East.

2. Caritas advocates for environmental justice that prioritises the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable members of our international community, as well as future generations who have no voice in the current negotiations to cut our carbon emissions. Our work is informed by Catholic social teaching which provides a useful ethical framework to consider this and other complex social questions. The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference has spoken out about the need to take action on climate change at political and personal levels, and Catholics and the wider community are currently awaiting Pope Francis' anticipated encyclical on the environment within the next month.
3. Catholic social teaching principles particularly relevant to climate change matters are:
 - **Stewardship:** We are responsible for caring for and protecting the gifts God has given us, including the natural environment, which is a gift for all humanity to share in.
 - **Solidarity:** We are members of one human family, and look out for the wellbeing of others, including future generations.
 - **Preferential protection for the poor and vulnerable:** We need to especially watch out for the poor and vulnerable people in our midst and in our world, and how public decisions affect them.
 - **The universal destination of goods:** The earth and all it produces is intended for every person. We are responsible for using resources wisely, so that all people in the world and future generations can live in dignity.
4. Climate change is a global symptom of our misuse of our global home. As long ago as 1972, when both the Church and the world were waking up to the threats to our global environment, Pope Paul VI expressed the hope, in his letter *A Hospitable Earth for Future Generations* (addressed to the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment), of seeing "the human family gathered round a common project" to protect our common home.
5. That project is now lying before us in the challenge of an ambitious, visionary and practical global agreement to address human-induced climate change to be determined in Paris 2015. All countries have their part to play. We need to identify what we need to do to achieve an agreed global goal, then how we need to re-order our world and our national economies (domestic 'households' in our global 'home') to achieve it.
6. Climate change is already drastically affecting the world's poorest peoples, including our neighbours in the Pacific Islands. Caritas research on environmental issues last year (through *Small yet strong: Voices from Oceania on the environment*) and this year is highlighting how many Pasifika peoples are already struggling against the impacts of climate change: facing coastal erosion and sea inundation, threats to fresh water and food from sea level rise, changing weather patterns and more extreme weather.
7. We must recognise the ethical and moral dimensions to climate change. We cannot rely on, nor just hope for, technological changes that will enable us to continue 'business as usual'. A great deal of damage has been caused to our environment because of exploitative attitudes, in which short-term profit has been allowed to take priority over the long-term wellbeing of all, especially the poor and vulnerable, as well as future generations.

8. Climate change is one symptom of a disordered development model focused on unending economic growth, that too often benefits the rich at the expense of the poor or marginalised. We need to support new models of development and lifestyles that are climate compatible, bring people out of poverty, and address inequality.
9. The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference (NZCBC) in their document *A Consistent Ethic of Life: Te Kahu-o-te-Ora* (1997)¹, says our approach to life “places the sacredness of creation and the need to protect and enhance all human life, and the life of our planet on which we depend, as a basic and central moral point of reference.” In their 2006 statement on Environmental Justice², the New Zealand Catholic Bishops said the existence of extreme poverty and environmental destruction in our world are not natural forces, nor acts of God, but result from human behaviour. “That behaviour is driven by values, priorities and decisions which do not see human life as a paramount concern.”

Overview

10. We appreciate this opportunity to comment on New Zealand’s contribution to the new climate change agreement. We agree that climate change is a significant threat to the future of our earth and all its peoples. This is not just a future problem but a current reality for many of our Pacific neighbours, as well as in many other parts of the world.
11. New Zealand must approach this question not just from consideration of our own narrow self-interests, but with the determination and commitment to global peace and security that we must bring to our role on the United Nations Security Council and to international fora on human rights. We must approach it as a Pacific neighbour, and as a global citizen.
12. The discussion document lays out well the challenge climate change presents to our global community, and this is a welcome and useful statement which may guide many New Zealanders who are not yet aware of the urgency of this matter. We agree with a number of statements in the document outlining the scope of the problem facing us and it is worth reinforcing them:
 - ***Climate change is truly a global problem...all countries need to contribute to reducing emissions:*** New Zealand, as much as every other country, needs the world to find a binding agreement on reducing emissions. The document emphasises the potential costs to households of reducing our emissions, but is silent on the longer term costs and impacts if the world fails to achieve agreement. We especially need large developed and developing nations to set ambitious targets and achieve them – this will be to our benefit, as much as any other nation. New Zealand needs to approach this as a bold and courageous thought leader, rather than as a timid follower waiting to see what others are proposing.
 - ***To date, action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across the world has not been strong enough:*** The global community has not yet found a way that will lead to significant enough change to prevent a catastrophic climate shift with potentially devastating consequences.

¹ New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference: *A consistent ethic of life – Te Kahu-o-te-ora*, 1997
<http://www.catholic.org.nz/news/fx-view-article.cfm?ctype=BSART&loadref=51&id=94>

² New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference: *Statement on environmental justice*, 2006
<http://www.catholic.org.nz/news/fx-view-article.cfm?ctype=BSART&loadref=51&id=62>

- ***The United Nations climate change conference in Paris (COP21) represents a real opportunity to deliver a response that is effective in getting all countries to act:*** Scientists; development practitioners; and business, religious and political leaders met in a conference convened by the Holy See in April and confirmed that human-induced climate change is a scientific reality, and the Paris conference may be the last effective opportunity to negotiate arrangements to keep human-induced warming below 2°C.
- ***The global response...will involve large scale changes in the way the world produces energy and uses land...so far the international response has not been sufficient:*** We cannot approach this issue with a “business-as-usual” model in our heads, or look for the minimum steps required of us while expecting large scale changes from others. If we do not change now, large scale changes will be forced on us by circumstances.

13. In light of these statements, we are therefore disappointed by the limited vision and narrowness of view taken by the discussion document in a number of areas; especially with what appears to be a ‘wait and see’ approach to the detail of the agreement in Paris, how much other countries will contribute, and a ‘hopeful’ approach to what new technology may offer to help us cut emissions.
14. The discussion document is low in ambition in not addressing the moral obligations we owe to the rest of the world and future generations to *do whatever we can* to cut emissions, discourage greed and waste, and live in a balanced way on this earth. The document does little to explain how different target reductions could be achieved, focusing only on ‘costs’ to households, and not being clear how those costs are calculated. A major problem of the discussion document is the failure to analyse and explain the cost of doing nothing.
15. The discussion document asks us what is important to us in determining our climate change contribution, so we set out below our concerns and key points in response to the questions posed.

Question 1: New Zealand government objectives for our contribution

16. The most important objective should be that our contribution, together with those of other countries, achieves the goal of ensuring that **the world collectively takes the action required to reduce emissions** and to eliminate the threat that climate change poses for our planet and all its peoples. This should be the priority of New Zealand’s negotiating team prior to, during and after the Paris climate summit.
17. We agree that our contribution should also meet the document’s three stated objectives:
- It should be **fair and ambitious** – but the document has too narrow a definition of “fairness” (addressed further under question 2)
 - **The costs and impacts on society should be managed appropriately**, particularly in regard to ensuring that the poorest and most vulnerable – whether in New Zealand or overseas - are not unduly burdened with the financial costs of adjustment to climate change. However, the costs and impact of acting to reduce emissions must be balanced against the costs and impacts of doing nothing, not against the current status quo (addressed further under question 3)

- It must guide New Zealand over the long term in **the global transition to a low emissions world**. As well as the matters signalled in the discussion document, this also needs to take into account the need to support people in New Zealand through transitions that need to be made, such as moving from valued, but eroding coastal communities to safer accommodation; from private to public transport use, or different forms of transport; from one form of farming or agriculture to another. Some of these transitions may be forced by climate change itself, as well as by our need to change to reduce emissions to prevent even greater environmental damage.

18. Currently, the world's governments have agreed to try to keep global average temperature rise to no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels. The document gives no guidance as to what kind of reductions will be required to achieve this. The 2°C target must be an absolute bottom line for New Zealand, and there must be no further compromise in this goal.

19. However, in view of the very significant impacts climate change is already causing, and the predictions of the even more severe impacts as temperatures rise, we add our voices to those calling for the global temperature increase be kept below 1.5°C, even if there is some "overshoot" initially. This is needed to protect communities already suffering the impact of climate change, especially in the Pacific and in coastal regions. Strong, coordinated mitigation measures will be required to achieve this.

20. A 1.5 degree Celsius goal was the request of the Pacific Leaders Forum of Smaller Island States in July last year, as well as of the aim of Alliance of Small Island States who have lobbied for this since 2008 and reiterated their call at Lima last year. It is also the position taken by a range of environmental groups, including Climate Action Network International and the Global Catholic Climate Movement, together with the Catholic Bishops present in Lima last December.

Question 2: What would be a fair target for New Zealand?

21. The document too narrowly defines fairness in terms of our national circumstances, previous commitments and comparison with other countries. 'Fairness' must also consider New Zealand's historical contributions to Green House Gas (GHG) emissions and the benefits we have derived over time from fossil fuels. What is more fundamental to consider are the basic human rights to life, food and water for the poor and future generations.

22. Some of the poorest people and communities on the planet have contributed the least to climate change, and stand to be the biggest losers.

23. We also need to take into account what we gain. Although some benefits of taking action to reduce emissions are noted on page 15 of the discussion document, they are not addressed in the section on fairness. To those already listed we wish to add:

- **The value to our natural environment of making farming more environmentally sustainable:** Reducing the carbon footprint of New Zealand agriculture is not only about technological changes that may combat bovine flatulence. Caritas has heard from members of our community, including Taranaki dairy farmers, about changes they have made to improve the sustainability of their farms, such as planting trees alongside waterways. This has not only contributed to lowering the carbon footprint of their farms, but has the additional benefits of improving water quality and offering shelter to livestock.

- **The long term sustainability and viability of our agricultural exports:** As international consumer awareness grows about the carbon footprint of various products, meat that is produced on farms operating under the status quo and requiring high “carbon mileage” to reach markets in Europe and Asia will become less attractive to many consumers. New Zealand needs to make changes for many reasons, including the long term viability of agricultural exports.

Question 3: How will our contribution affect New Zealanders?

24. The document too narrowly sees our climate change contribution as a financial cost to households. There is no consideration of the costs of doing nothing or not doing enough to counter climate change. It does not consider the huge costs in human lives, and a sustainable earth and ecosystems for future generations. It does not consider the costs to people outside New Zealand, including the Pacific. It also does not consider the costs that will flow to New Zealanders from global changes resulting from inaction.
25. For example, some of the costs of inaction not calculated include:
- **The cost of responding to increased weather related emergencies,** both within New Zealand and overseas. This includes the disruption to employment, education and transport, as well as the costs of rebuilding homes, roads and other forms of infrastructure. We have seen a taste of this in the increasing number of severe weather related emergencies in our region, with Category 5 cyclones causing devastation in the Pacific earlier this year and the Philippines in recent years. Within New Zealand we have also seen the impact of floods, landslides and tornados. If we do not take global action to reduce emissions, these occasional extreme weather events will become routine. As we have seen with the flow-on effects from the Christchurch earthquakes, the increase in insurance costs alone will have a significant impact on New Zealand households and communities.
 - **The cost of absorbing increasing numbers of environmentally displaced people,** especially from the Pacific, with the subsequent flow-on effects of increases in house prices and other necessities.
 - **The cost of responding to international conflict over scarce resources:** Our current geo-political and ideological battles may be displaced by conflicts over resources such as water and arable land. New Zealand’s geographic distance from 20th century Middle East, European and African conflicts will not shelter us from the necessity of responding to conflicts over resources in our region.

Question 4: New opportunities

26. New Zealand needs to not just ‘wait for’ new technology but to actively encourage use of and further investment in the development of renewable energy including for transport. Improving the infrastructure for public transport and actively encouraging people to use it would improve the lives of New Zealanders as well as decreasing our carbon emissions, as would other environmentally and socially beneficial initiatives in New Zealand and Oceania.
27. We need to move towards 100% renewable energy by investing more in these forms of energy instead of continuing subsidies, financial support and encouragement to the oil and gas industry. The 2014 United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change synthesis report said the world has already used up two-thirds of its “carbon budget”(the maximum amount of CO₂ that can be emitted) to have a likely chance of avoiding 2 degrees of warming. While the World Bank says that extreme heat events (and other severe impacts) may already be unavoidable because

the Earth's atmospheric system is already locked into warming close to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. We cannot afford to keep searching for more oil.

28. Because of New Zealand's historical benefit from fossil fuels, and our responsibility towards our Pacific neighbours, as well as the Pasifika base within our own communities here – New Zealand needs to increase funding for climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction projects in the Pacific, prioritising those that benefit the most vulnerable communities. While provided through the New Zealand Aid Programme, such funding needs to be *additional* to prior government intentions for overseas aid.
29. In light of the urgency of the task, and the current inadequacy of our Emissions Trading Scheme in significantly reducing our emissions, it is surprising that consultation on domestic options and action to achieve our climate change target is happening later, rather than in conjunction with this round of consultation.

Question 5: Taking into account the future uncertainties of technologies and costs when setting our target:

30. We appreciate there are complexities in setting our target in the current circumstances, where much is unknown. We believe this is best addressed by focusing not so much on what New Zealand might **lose** from the upcoming negotiations before, during and after the Paris climate summit, but rather what we need New Zealand and our global community to **gain**.
31. We stand at a significant moment in history. Our grandchildren and great-grandchildren will not thank us if we take a narrow view of New Zealand's immediate and short-term interests over the long-term wellbeing of our planet. We need to approach the climate summit seeking the best interests of New Zealanders and all other human beings through bold, ambitious and binding commitments, not hesitant and tentative compromises which primarily protect the status quo.
32. As a result of climate change, life for New Zealanders and all our human family will change whether we want it or not, and whether we are prepared for it or not. This is our opportunity to take charge, not to be passive followers and victims of circumstance, but to be leaders of the change we wish to see.

*Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible,
and suddenly you are doing the impossible.*

St Francis of Assisi