

Setting New Zealand's post-2020 climate change target

Submission from Brent Cherry:

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I am submitting to this consultation motivated primarily for my daughter and step daughter who are likely to live with the serious consequences of our collective inaction over climate change. I however believe my submission is informed by my 2010 Post Graduate Qualification in Environmental Studies, my employment as a sustainable transport planner and my involvement with Transition Towns and 350 Aotearoa (Wellington).

Climate change has been described as the largest environmental issue facing humanity, and one of the most critical issues of any kind confronting us in terms of planetary 'management'.

We have already increased the average global temperature by .8 degree C, with further warming in the pipeline even if we were to stop all carbon emissions immediately. The real life consequences of climate change are already seriously impacting the environment and many human lives. Current analysis is suggesting that we may have already reached tipping points, with the possibility of now unstoppable melting of West Antarctic ice sheets and glaciers with metres of sea level rise now in the pipeline and the rapid melting of Arctic summer ice, reducing the Earth's reflectivity and risking the thawing of permafrost and frozen methane stores, further accelerating global warming.

Although we have been collectively warned about the dire consequences of climate change, we have been unable to agree on a global plan to reduce emissions. At each international failure primarily Kyoto and Copenhagen, instead of critiquing our failure and shame, we magically re set a new goal, now a maximum warming of 2 degree C, knowing that this is a very risky gamble. A level of warming that will still leave major sacrifice zones, for example Pacific Islands and other low lying states becoming inundated with sea level rise, and the African continent becoming over heated and more arid.

We have over listened and privileged various stake holders such as the fossil fuel industry, rather than react to the over whelming scientific evidence, as New Zealander's continue to live our highly consumptive and unsustainable life styles. The problem isn't that we continue to do nothing, but have in fact been actively doing exactly the wrong things, building motorways and continuing to drill for oil and mine for coal. Internationally global emissions

have risen 61% since 1990. "Clean Green" New Zealand, has previously set what were once declared as unconditional targets, like reducing our emissions to five percent below 1990 greenhouse gas emissions levels by 2020 and yet our net greenhouse gas emissions have increased 111 percent between 1990 and 2012. In 2013 we produced 21 percent more emissions than in 1990.

The argument is made that we are small country so our emissions matter very little on the global scale, however this excuse hides how high our per capita emissions are in comparison to other countries, nearly twice those of a person in the UK and seven times the amount of a person in India.

Action must be immediate:

We only have a very small window of opportunity to have any chance of keeping global warming to below 2 degree C (even though this is still a dangerous target). Some have stated that it will require a Marshall Plan for the Earth if we are truly going to maintain a habitable planet.

Internationally we must have a collective agreement to have net zero (or near zero) CO₂ emissions by 2050 (alongside reductions in other greenhouse gas emissions). We know, that there is a very well understood maximum amount of CO₂ emissions that can be released into the atmosphere, a so called carbon budget, if we are to keep global average temperatures below 2 degree C. Beyond 2 degree C we risk catastrophic climate change. All national targets must clearly keep our emissions within this budget. This means, we will have to make some very tough decisions, for example, 80% of the known fossil fuel reserves will need to be left in the ground and become stranded assets.

Every commitment from each country has to be viewed against this budget and the clear understanding that emissions will need to reach zero by 2050. Every country will need to ask itself this question - Does your target make the goal of net zero CO₂ emissions by 2050 more or less likely?

Realistically New Zealand like most developed countries will need to commit to a 40% reduction in CO₂ emissions below our 1990 emissions by 2030 to give us any chance of transition to a carbon free economy by 2050. It is noted that Norway and 28 countries in the EU have committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030.

Critique of consultation process:

The process has been rushed and the public meetings poorly advertised with only public servants and no Ministers of the Crown in attendance unlike the consultation prior to Copenhagen.

The Consultation Document privileges economic discourse over environmental, ethical, social and moral discourses. It is significantly slanted to support a mediocre response that protects some sectors at the expense of

others. Instead of being a document that inspires and engages action it plays up the costs of actions and downplays the costs of inaction.

Its primary solutions in the document focus on market tools rather than exploring the need for regulation.

The document uses language that minimises and “invisibilises” the gravity of the climate crisis we face. Surprisingly this is a document that has been prepared by the Ministry for the Environment but barely mentions the environment appearing more like a document having been prepared by Treasury.

It does not acknowledge that with the ever increasing CO₂ emissions the world's oceans are both warming and acidifying faster than expected and this will have significant implications for food production and security in regions dependent on fish protein. The costs to New Zealand's aquaculture and fishing industry are not included in the discussion document, nor the increased cost in the surveillance of our territorial waters.

There is no acknowledgement of the procrastination penalty – for every year we continue down a path of protecting certain interests and carrying on a business as usual model, rather than transitioning to a net zero CO₂ economy, we significantly increase the costs that occur when a country has to rapidly reduce its emissions. This significant increase in costs has already occurred with out collective and ongoing procrastination.

There is no acknowledgement of the costs if consumers or other governments take some form of action against New Zealand (boycott our exports) if we were perceived to not be doing enough to reduce our emissions, especially when people become cognoscente of our very high per capita emissions.

What could be the cost to the economy if New Zealand's clean green image is seen as a fallacy?

It does not look at the co-benefits of reducing emissions especially in the area of increased health and social outcomes. For example the health benefits of active travel and warmer homes or the wellbeing of living in more connected communities.

New Zealand should feel proud of its high level of renewable energy, but it has created a difficult problem to resolve with its lack of public transport infrastructure/options, safe active travel routes and its ever expanding urban sprawl interconnected by ever increasing motorway infrastructure. Getting to a net zero CO₂ emissions will not happen, if the only options are exempting electric cars from road user charges until 2020, introducing fuel economy labelling and investing \$42 million in biofuel research. This transition will require a significant exploration of our urban design, our transport infrastructure and policies that rapidly incentivise the uptake of electric vehicles.

Most importantly the Discussion Document is almost entirely absent of a detailed pathway towards a low carbon, net zero CO2 emission economy. To have a target one needs a plan, that can be monitored and enforced.

Zero net CO2 emissions by 2050 will require:

We need to create an inspiring story that will trigger innovation, engage people in both the challenges and gains of this rapid de-carbonising of our economy. If we accept as a global community that we must act we can then collectively respond and create just and fair actions that will set in motion a society that can transition towards a net zero CO2 economy. In New Zealand it will need to include a combination of the following:

- A clear target, that has a monitored action plan that can be enforced.
- It will require a national strategy that is agreed across the political spectrum.
- The formulation of Climate Law in New Zealand.
- An Independent Climate Commission.
- Not signing Trade Agreements that privilege corporate profit over reducing emissions.
- The use of regulation to prevent fossil fuel extraction.
- Ways to increasingly penalise CO2 use and rapidly incentivise emission free alternatives.
- A significant exploration of our urban design, our transport infrastructure and policies that rapidly incentivise the uptake of electric vehicles.
- Sustainable agriculture and farming practices.
- The reforestation of significant areas of New Zealand.

In conclusion to realistically get to net zero CO2 emissions by 2050 New Zealand will need to have committed to reducing our emissions by 40% below 1990 levels by 2030.

Thanks

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