

Appendix 1: Overview of the Paris Agreement

1. Parties under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) adopted the Paris Agreement on 12 December 2015. It commits all countries to take action on climate change. New Zealand ratified the Paris Agreement on 4 October 2016.
2. The purpose of the Paris Agreement is to:
 - keep the global average temperature well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees Celsius
 - strengthen the ability of countries to deal with the impacts of climate change
 - make sure that financial flows support the development of low-emissions and climate-resilient economies.
3. Parties to the Paris Agreement have agreed to seek to meet the Agreement's long-term temperature goal by aiming to reach peak global greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, and aiming for net zero emissions in the second half of the century.
4. Parties to the UNFCCC also invited the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) '... to provide a Special Report in 2018 on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways'. This report was completed in October 2018.
5. The report highlights a number of climate change impacts that could be avoided by limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius compared to 2 degrees Celsius, or more. For instance, by 2100, global sea level rise would be 10 centimetres lower with global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius compared with 2 degrees Celsius. Coral reefs would decline by 70-90 per cent with global warming of 1.5 degrees Celsius, whereas virtually all (> 99 per cent) would be lost with 2 degrees Celsius. These issues are of particular concern to low-lying states in the Pacific and around the world.
6. The Agreement sets out that developed countries should continue to take the lead by undertaking absolute economy-wide reduction targets. Parties have to communicate nationally determined contributions (NDCs) towards the goal in progressively more ambitious increments. We are invited to communicate a long-term low-emissions development strategy, but are not obligated to set or achieve a 2050 target, or to reconcile our NDCs or our domestic policy action with the 1.5 – 2 degrees Celsius temperature limit directly. We can use international units with environmental integrity to help achieve NDCs.
7. To maintain our standing to influence others to act, the form and level of any 2050 target we set should provide reassurance to the international community that we intend to continue meeting our Paris Agreement obligations and expectations, particularly the core requirement of setting a sequence of increasingly ambitious quantified economy-wide targets in successive NDCs.
8. By ratifying the Paris Agreement in 2016 New Zealand also confirmed it will 'plan for' and 'take action' to adapt to the impacts of climate change.