

Your submission to Zero Carbon Bill

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Clause

1. What process should the Government use to set a new emissions reduction target in legislation?

Position

The Government sets a 2050 target in legislation now

Notes

There are myriad pathways, globally, to take emissions from their current levels to levels that have e.g. a 75% likelihood of keeping global mean surface temperatures within 2°C of pre-industrial levels. Those, typically, require emissions to go to zero, or close to zero, by 2050. The government should not only set a target for 2050. 5-yearly emissions targets need to be set and achieving them needs to be legislated. Those targets should be communicated to the international community through 5-yearly revised NDCs. My recommendation would be that the New Zealand government selects one of the 'middle of the road' global emissions scenarios (in units of Gt CO₂ equivalent/year) that keeps global mean surface temperatures within 2°C of pre-industrial levels and then scales that by New Zealand's population as a fraction of total global population. That would give a sense of what New Zealand should do in terms of emissions reductions, given the size of its population and all else being equal. But all else is not equal. New Zealand is a prosperous first world country and so I think it would be only fair for annual emissions reductions identified through the process described above to be doubled to create annual emissions targets for each year from 2020 onwards.

Clause

2. If the Government sets a 2050 target now, which is the best target for New Zealand?

Position

Net Zero Emissions - Net zero emissions across all greenhouse gases by 2050

Notes

The target for 2050 must be zero net emissions. But what also needs to be clearly defined, as part of the legislation, is the pathway to achieving that target i.e. 5-yearly emissions targets, culminating in a zero target by 2050, must be defined.

Clause

3. How should New Zealand meet its targets?

Position

Domestic emissions reductions (including from new forest planting) and using some emissions reductions from overseas (international carbon units) that have strong environmental safeguards

Notes

While the preference should be on domestic emissions reductions, in the short-term any internationally agreed on mechanisms, within the framework of the Paris Agreement, should be considered e.g. those articulated through the global transparency mechanism. Buying junk carbon credits, or 'creative accounting' of emissions as was done to officially meet Kyoto Protocol targets, must absolutely be avoided. The most obvious path is to bring agriculture into the ETS and re-level the playing field so that forestry becomes financially competitive with dairying. Domestic industries that focus on value added products from forestry should be encouraged through tax incentives.

Clause

4. Should the Zero Carbon Bill allow the 2050 target to be revised if circumstances change?

Position

No

Notes

No. This creates a 'get out of jail free' card that could be played because 'circumstances have changed'. I would only support a bill where conditions for revising the 2050 target were very clearly articulated and very highly constrained.

Clause

5. The Government proposes that three emissions budgets of five years each (i.e. covering the next 15 years) be in place at any given time. Do you agree with this proposal?

Position

Yes

Notes

Yes, I agree with the 5-year budget approach as long as: 1. Those budgets are consistent with New Zealand contributing what would be considered reasonable given its population and economic status. 2. Those budgets are consistent with the international goal of keeping annual mean global mean surface temperatures within 1.5°C of pre-industrial temperatures.

Clause

6. Should the Government be able to alter the last emissions budget (i.e. furthest into the future)?

Position

Yes - the third emissions budget should be able to be changed but only when the subsequent budget is set

Notes

Yes, the government should be able to alter emissions budgets but only to make the reductions more aggressive than had previously been committed to, never less ambitious.

Clause

7. Should the Government have the ability to review and adjust the second emissions budget within a specific range under exceptional circumstances? See p36 Our Climate Your Say

Position

No

Notes

The more often the Government is allowed to revise emissions budgets, the more uncertainty this creates in industries looking to capitalize on the opportunities that firm emissions budgets create.

Clause

8. Do you agree with the considerations we propose that the Government and the Climate Change Commission take into account when advising on and setting budgets? See p44 Our Climate Your Say

Position

Yes

Notes**Clause**

9. Should the Zero Carbon Bill require Governments to set out plans within a certain timeframe to achieve the emissions budgets?

Position

Yes

Notes**Clause**

10. What are the most important issues for the Government to consider in setting plans to meet budgets? For example, who do we need to work with, what else needs to be considered?

Notes

Clearly there are multiple tensions that need to be balanced in setting emissions reductions targets including: 1. Ensuring that New Zealand remains competitive with its key trading partners. 2. Ensuring that New Zealand is seen to be pulling its weight as an economically and technologically advanced first world country in regard to emissions reductions. 3. Ensuring an inter-generationally equitable loading of responsibility for emissions reductions i.e. don't kick the can down the road. 4. That the transformation of New Zealand's economy from a primary produce economy to a green economy is done in a way that minimizes social upheaval. This is a huge challenge. Creation and analysis of socioeconomic-environmental scenarios, based on the best available science to date, not just within New Zealand but internationally, needs to be the bedrock for decision-making. First and foremost, however, the Government must lead i.e. make the hard decisions. The fact that this Bill is being proposed is a good start.

Clause

11. The Government has proposed that the Climate Change Commission advises on and monitors New Zealand's progress towards its goals. Do you agree with these functions? See p42 Our Climate Your Say

Position

Yes

Notes

Government must retain the decision-making responsibility. It is essential that the Climate Commission in no way undermines the democratic decision-making process in New Zealand.

Clause

12. What role do you think the Climate Change Commission should have in relation to the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (NZ ETS)?

Position

Advising the Government on policy settings in the NZ ETS

Notes**Clause**

13. The Government has proposed that Climate Change Commissioners need to have a range of essential and desirable expertise. Do you agree with the proposed expertise? See p45 Our Climate Your Say

Position

Yes

Notes**Clause**

14. Do you think the Zero Carbon Bill should cover adapting to climate change?

Position

No

Notes

No. The Bill should focus exclusively on emissions reductions. Adaptation should be handled through entirely different legislative mechanisms. Keep the Bill focused and avoid bloat.

Clause

15. The Government has proposed a number of new functions to help us adapt to climate change. Do you agree with the proposed functions? See p47 Our Climate Your Say

Position

Yes

Notes**Clause**

16. Should we explore setting up a targeted adaptation reporting power that could see some organisations share information on their exposure to climate change risks?

Position

Yes

Notes**Clause**

Do you have any other comments you'd like to make?

Notes

A Zero Carbon Act is important to me because it is clear to me that to avoid increasing global mean surface temperatures by more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels, that there is a fixed amount of carbon that can be added to the atmosphere – there is no such thing as a ‘sustainable level of CO2 emissions’. Therefore, ultimately, emissions must go to zero, and likely need to go negative some time in the next few decades to avoid that 2°C threshold. It is imperative that by the time my children are my age we are no longer adding carbon to the atmosphere. The process for achieving that goal must start now. The best way to implement that process is through legislation. I am therefore 100% in support of the Zero Carbon Act goal of zero emissions by 2050.