Your submission to Zero Carbon Bill

(Sarah Meads)

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Submitter Type: Individual

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

Position
The Government sets a goal to reach net zero emissions by the second half of the century and the Climate Change Commission advises on the specific target for the Government to set later.

Notes
On balance, I support setting a 2050 target in legislation now. Setting a target will promote political accountability, clarity, and long-term certainty. There are, however, some good reasons to seek advice from the Climate Commission about the 2050 target. In particular, it might be a good idea to ask the Commission to provide expert advice on complicated parts of the 2050 target, such as the “sustainable level” for short-lived greenhouse gases. Setting separate targets for the different greenhouse gases is an option that should be considered by the new Climate Commission.

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
I support a 2050 target which is ambitious, clear, and science-based. Accordingly, I support the most ambitious option: net zero emissions across all greenhouse gases by 2050. However, not all gases are equal. Science recognises the difference between long-lived greenhouse gases (such as carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide) and short-lived greenhouse gases (such as methane). I support a differentiated approach to managing these two groups. Therefore, achieving a net zero 2050 all gases target would mean: Combining the mitigation of long-lived gas reductions with carbon sinks (through forestry and carbon sequestration in soil) to achieve negative long-lived emissions by 2050; and Reducing short-lived gases to low, sustainable levels. This would balance out to net zero across all gases, but in the most impactful way possible. Short-lived gases do not need to be reduced to net zero to stop temperature rise. They only need to be stabilised. New Zealand should aim for a sustainable level of short-lived emissions which fits with the Paris Agreement goals to keep global warming well below 2°C, striving to 1.5°C. Long-lived emissions, however, contribute to global warming until they are reduced all the way to zero. Because these gases exist in the atmosphere for millennia, finding ways to absorb more of these gases from the atmosphere than the amount we are emitting (known as “negative” emissions) is the most ambitious and impactful contribution New Zealand could make to counteract global warming. Accordingly, the Zero Carbon Act should prioritise reducing long-lived emissions to net zero, and then to negative emissions, by 2050 or sooner.

Clause
3. How should New Zealand meet its targets?

Position
Domestic emissions reductions only (including from new forest planting).

Notes
I support NZ reducing emissions domestically - not using international carbon credits to contribute towards emissions reductions. Domestic reductions are an investment in our own economic and social development as we transition to a carbon neutral future. Relying on international carbon credits (even if the credits have integrity) creates uncertainty about what reductions need to be achieved in New Zealand and does not create the right signals to business and others about their activity. I prefer a transparent approach which separates international contributions from our domestic Zero Carbon Act targets. This would not stop New Zealand from purchasing international carbon credits as an additional contribution to global mitigation efforts. Purchasing credits helps other countries finance their transition to a zero carbon economy, especially developing countries.

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

Position
No

Notes
The 2050 target should only be revised in exceptional circumstances. The purpose of the Zero Carbon Act is to provide accountability, certainty and flexibility. It will provide accountability and certainty by setting clear, legally-binding emission reduction targets. It will retain flexibility by permitting different governments to use different policies to meet these targets, in response to changing circumstances and new technology. Despite the importance of accountability and certainty, there are some situations where it is appropriate to change the 2050 target. For example, if there is a significant change in scientific knowledge or international law (such as the Paris Agreement becoming more ambitious). Any revision should require input from the Climate Commission and approval by Parliament. I do not support being able to revise the 2050 target in response to “economic changes”. The opportunity
cost of investing now in transitioning will be significantly higher the longer we delay.

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
I support this proposal. Legally-binding budgets, set 10-15 years in advance so that three budgets are in effect at all times, at a level recommended by the Climate Commission and approved by Parliament, are a cornerstone of the Zero Carbon Act.

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

Position
No - emissions budgets should not be able to be changed

Notes
I don't support budgets being changed. Budgets should only be revised in exceptional circumstances. If an incoming government was able to alter the budget, it would create too much uncertainty and instability. A new government can introduce different policies to meet the upcoming target.

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
Yes

Notes
Under exceptional circumstances, yes. For example, it might be appropriate to change an upcoming budget after an extreme natural disaster (such as a major earthquake). Revising a budget in this situation would not mean changing the long-term 2050 target.

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
I generally agree with the proposed list of considerations to take into account when setting emission budgets: scientific knowledge about climate change technology relevant to climate change economic circumstances and, in particular, the likely impact of the decision on the economy and the competitiveness of particular sectors of the economy fiscal circumstances and, in particular, the likely impact of the decision on taxation, public spending and public borrowing social circumstances and, in particular, the likely impact of the decision on fuel poverty energy policy and, in particular, the likely impact of the decision on energy supplies and the carbon and energy intensity of the economy the government’s obligations under the Treaty of Waitangi the three government objectives for climate change policy: sustainable economy, global and local leadership and creating a just and inclusive society.

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
I support the Zero Carbon Act having a strict time frame for setting out policy plans. This time frame should be 6 months after an emission budget has been set.

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
The Government’s policy plans to meet emission budgets should be comprehensive, fair, cost-effective, environmentally sustainable, and reflect a commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. For an explanation of these principles, see the section above about “Zero Carbon Act principles”.

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
Yes.
I support the Climate Commission having two functions: (a) providing expert advice, and (b) monitoring our progress and holding the government to account. The Commission should not be a decision-making body.

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

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

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

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

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

Clause
Do you have any other comments you'd like to make?
Notes
I support NZ taking responsibility for our global emissions and the climate impacts that we have contributed to. It’s very important that all New Zealanders have their say on how we make the shift to a zero carbon future here in New Zealand but we must also help the world’s most vulnerable communities across the Pacific adjust to the impacts on climate change. To ensure that the Zero Carbon Bill is transparent, I support the Bill including a requirement to produce annual reports about New Zealand’s international climate change contributions in order to ensure that the Pacific countries get the support they need and can plan to adapt to their changing environment.