Ruapehu District Council (RDC) thanks the Ministry for the Environment for the opportunity to submit on this matter. Council would like to speak in support of its submission.

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE RUAPEHU DISTRICT

1.1 The Ruapehu District is one of New Zealand’s largest districts by land area, of which 36% is Crown owned. It has a small and dispersed population of 11,844 scattered throughout a wide geographical area of 6,730 square kilometres. 40% of residents identify as Maori. The area is predominantly rural and includes the Tongariro and Whanganui National Parks, a large portion of the Whanganui River, and many tributaries cementing the District’s rich natural environment and history as iconic in Aotearoa’s identity.

1.2 Ruapehu’s capital value is mainly in its rural farming communities. Total capital value in the Ruapehu District is $4.82b, while the total rural capital value in the District is $2.06b; almost half (42.84%) of our capital value. Over 16% of the jobs in the Ruapehu are in the farming industry as compared to 4% of all New Zealand, and 26% of the business units are in the farming industry as compared to 9% overall in NZ. Farming is 25% of Ruapehu GDP, as compared to 4% of NZ.

The Ruapehu District  ...  where adventure begins!
RDC agrees with and supports the science behind Climate Change. We are very aware of the effects that Climate Change is having around the world, and the foreseen negative impacts in Aotearoa, our region and our District.

2  PROPOSALS

2.1  Introduction

2.1.1  Our rural sector is vital to our district and region. If the proposed targets are to be successful, the rural sector must be a key stakeholder along the way. Rural communities must be given all the resources required to be able to meet targets, as and when needed. Central Government must be accountable for empowering the rural sector on this journey.

2.1.2  The approach to Climate Change and how to successfully navigate, mitigate and adapt to it, needs a balanced and equal stakeholder approach. RDC fully appreciates the role that the rural sector will have to play in the lowering of New Zealand’s emissions, however, RDC is very concerned about the negative economic effect that these proposals will have.

2.1.3  Farming is critically important to rural New Zealand and to the Ruapehu District. Attachment 1 shows the value in dollar terms of the rural farming business units.

2.2  Proposal 1

2.2.1  RDC submits that Proposal 1 has more difficulties than Proposal 2, and that cost efficiencies will not be realised by this proposal. If the purpose is to change the on farm behavior, other incentives need to be used.

2.2.2  RDC also urges the Ministry to invest in education on emissions and how to mitigate these through a comprehensive programme that involves regional councils, and that this be funded through earned credits.

2.3  Proposal 2

2.3.1  RDC submits that Proposal 2 has more efficiencies.

2.4  Proposal – General Comments

2.4.1  Regardless of which proposal the Ministry eventually goes with, it is important that the Ministry works with and listens to the rural sector.

2.4.2  The Farmer level approach would better reward farmers who perform well in the carbon reduction area. A broader approach will produce a more average or minimum approach to it across the board unless there are additional incentives.

2.4.3  Negative emissions should include the value of conservation areas, riparian plantings, and pre 1990 forest areas. Native trees should have a higher value. The Ministry needs to invest in methods and the technology to ensure that they can accurately measure riparian plantings, small woodlots and shelter belts for carbon sequestration.

2.4.4  Additionally, any ‘costs’ or fees imposed on farmers will ultimately be another cost pushed on to the consumer. This is all the more important at a time farmed products need to remain competitive locally when incomes do not necessarily match inflation.
3 INTERIM OPTIONS

3.1 RDC supports methods to reduce on farm emissions, and submits that the Ministry must engage with the rural sector on the necessary implementation methods, and to give the sector certainty.

3.1.1 RDC would like to emphasize that the approach needs to be incentive focused. It is crucial that the process also needs to be certain and be incremental, increasing gradually as knowledge, resources, capacity and confidence in the new approach builds.

3.1.2 This is especially true as not all farms are the same. Without due care and support, some farms that have more traditional practices and limited modern expertise, may be placed under undue stress should there be a broad-brush approach.

3.1.3 This may in turn expedite the decline of already low population rural communities due to pressure of a financial and expertise nature.

4 OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 RDC agrees that more work needs to be done to look into other opportunities and the barriers around on farm greenhouse gas mitigation.

4.2 As discussed in previous submissions, RDC will support any unprofitable farming land being returned to forest (native). The Ruapehu hill country already has a significant amount of bush and native reserves, more so than the majority of the Horizons region, and is already contributing to carbon sinks though they are not recognized. There are a significant area of QE11 land. The proposal must encourage these practices to continue.

4.3 The rural sector must be provided with the tools and resources by Central Government to make their transition successful. RDC acknowledges and appreciates Central Government’s reiterated commitment to further research and development into mitigating the production and effect of methane and other short lived gases. The goal of carbon emission reduction must not just be lower stock numbers, leading to loss of income, but practical solutions of mitigation. RDC is very concerned about the negative economic effect of a stringent methane target in the medium term while these solutions are still being developed.

4.4 We urge the Ministry to work closely with the rural sector to develop other opportunities, and to recognize the generational movements do take time, and that moving too fast may have negative effects on the ability of the farming community to adapt.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 In conclusion, while RDC fully supports NZ efforts to reduce the effects of Climate Change, RDC is concerned that rural NZ is carrying a larger burden than other sectors that will cause economic hardship to the rural community. The approach to Climate Change and how to successfully navigate, mitigate and adapt to it, needs a balanced and equal stakeholder approach. RDC fully appreciates the role that the rural sector will have to play in the lowering of New Zealand’s emissions. We suggest that the rural sector should not be the sole, or main contributor to lowering emissions while other larger emitters take no leadership.
ATTACHMENT ONE

Value of Primary produce freight per annum (on access roads). The Lower value access roads are often connected to Forestry, not stock.

The Ruapehu District  ...  where adventure begins!