

# Consultation on setting New Zealand's post-2020 climate change target

## Submission to Tim Groser, Minister for Climate Change Issues

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### Preamble

As a marine scientist with more than 30 years international experience, I feel well qualified to make this submission regarding the urgent need to address the root causes of climate change and associated impacts of sea level rise, extreme weather events and ocean acidification. These are all now occurring and all will increase in intensity in coming decades – centuries (see later, Concluding remarks).

The failure to act decisively by governments globally since the first IPCC report in 1991, up to the present day, has already placed enormous future economic, societal and ecological costs on humanity and the biosphere.

Hence it heartening that the New Zealand government is now facilitating public discussion and input to the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution to address climate change. Having attended the New Plymouth public meeting hosted by Ministry of Environment, and having read the Discussion Document and other related materials, I wish to make the following submission.

### Discussion Document

In my considered view, the discussion document is fundamentally flawed in exaggerating the costs on household consumption under meagre proposed reduction targets, while ignoring both the known costs of not acting decisively on climate change and the substantial indirect and direct financial incentives (perverse subsidies) given to the fossil fuel industry.

The discussion document offers no vision and no alternatives to unsustainable agriculture. Its claim of NZ being “a highly efficient producer” is unfounded, as it fails to consider the environmental impacts and associated economic costs. The emphases on technological fix (e.g. anti-methane vaccines) and international carbon offsets are not solutions to the social and environmental impacts of unsustainable practices.

In respect of the economic losses, significant costs to other industries, notably fisheries and aquaculture, and coastal infrastructure, are already accruing, and will accrue more rapidly in coming decades. In these crucial respects, the document is biased in favour of current government economic policies and lacks vision.

### NZ policy and legislation

Unfortunately, New Zealand (NZ) is increasingly perceived in the international community as being backward and unethically focused on perceived economic self-interest, the rationale for which is deeply flawed by failures in true accounting of the real costs of persisting with ‘business as usual’ in

coming decades. Government energy, agriculture and transport policies and legislation, among others, all exemplify this unfortunate reality and need a major rewrite as a matter of the utmost urgency.

Put simply, New Zealand needs to 'wean ourselves' off our dependence on fossil fuels for energy generation, transport and agriculture. The NZ government also urgently needs a major change in direction in respect of policy and legislation governing mining of fossil fuels and new petroleum exploration and mining permits. At present, policy and legislation are both highly biased in favour of this, and other polluting industries.

This simply cannot continue, and policy to encourage NZ to become a net exporter of fossil fuels in coming decades is, frankly, irrational and illogical given the overwhelming scientific consensus on the costs and impacts on future generations such a course will create. Instead, policy and legislation need to incentivise sustainable and renewable energy investments and initiatives, and the rapid application and implementation of these in agriculture and transport.

### **Emissions reduction target and policies**

New Zealand (NZ) is fully capable of reaching at least a 40% emissions reduction target by 2030 – a commitment based on science and ethical grounds. To succeed however, this must be supported by concrete policies and actions. NZ urgently needs a change in policy and legislation to incentivize sustainable agriculture and forestry promoting carbon sequestration in soils, pastures and forests. These will achieve a clear emission reduction target, increase our carbon sink, break our dependence on fossil fuels (including natural gas derived urea and nitrogen inhibitors), heal our soils, clean our waterways and benefit farmers, both small and large-scale.

NZ also urgently needs a comprehensive policy on sustainable transport, consisting largely of electric public transport, sea, rail and road freight powered by responsible biofuels (eg. waste wood), with clear contribution to emission reduction and energy independence.

NZ also urgently needs a complete rewrite of our Energy Strategy (2011-2021), replacing the reliance on growth and fossil fuels with a commitment to 100% renewable electricity by 2025 and carbon neutrality by 2050.

Hence I ask that the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC):

(i) commits to at least a 40% emissions reduction target by 2030 and a global and NZ zero carbon target by 2050 or sooner

(ii) places an immediate moratorium on fossil fuel exploration, and phases out existing extraction within a decade, with subsequent decommissioning. All subsidies, funding and tax breaks to the fossil fuel industry should also be stopped.

(iii) includes credible, transparent, cross-party plans, with a legislated, independent Climate Commission to ensure NZ meets its targets and stays within the global carbon budget

(v) includes health, fairness, and the true costs of inaction on climate change in the assessment of costs and benefits

(vi) follows a transparent decision-making process after the consultation process ends, that includes explicit recognition and adherence to commitments to other national (eg. Treaty of Waitangi) and international (eg. UNFCCC, UNCBD) obligations.

## Concluding remarks

New Zealand has great potential, arguably greater than any other nation given our high proportion of renewable energy supply, to be a global leader in setting and meeting emissions reduction targets in the overdue transition off fossil fuels and unsustainable land and ocean management practices.

New Zealand is a small nation in terms of population and greenhouse gas emissions, but it can play a major role in global leadership, if the government will is there. It seems to me, though, that at present, there is a lack of will to act decisively in a nationally and globally beneficial manner, perhaps because it's considered to be in the 'too hard basket' based on a flawed, outdated economic model, and/or because of the undue influence of lobby groups pedalling misinformation. In these respects, my submission highlights the clear scientific consensus and economic realities.

As stated nearly a decade ago by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS 2007):

*"The scientific evidence is clear: global climate change caused by human activities is occurring now, and it is a growing threat to society. Accumulating data from across the globe reveal a wide array of effects: rapidly melting glaciers, destabilization of major ice sheets, increases in extreme weather, rising sea level, [ocean acidification], shifts in species ranges, and more. The pace of change and the evidence of harm have increased markedly over the last five years. The time to control greenhouse gas emissions is now. ... Delaying action to address climate change will increase the environmental and societal consequences as well as the costs. The longer we wait to tackle climate change, the harder and more expensive the task will be."*

All credible, independent scientific academies and associations globally are in accord on these facts. Yet almost a decade has now passed with little if any real progress.

New Zealand has an historic opportunity to demonstrate true global leadership, indeed given our fortunate circumstances we have a clear duty to do so. Hence I reiterate that the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) commits NZ to at least a 40% emissions reduction target by 2030 and a NZ zero carbon target by 2050 or sooner.

Yours sincerely,

Lyndon DeVantier, PhD

3<sup>rd</sup> June 2015