Climate Change Contribution Consultation.

Lynne Dempsey

What does climate change mean for New Zealand?

The discussion document summarises the likely consequences for New Zealand. In the pipeline is at least one further degree C of warming even if all greenhouse gas emissions were stopped immediately. This won’t happen.

Two degrees warming since 1900 will deliver further flooding, intense storms and increased drought conditions. We are already experiencing an increase in these events.

I note that the government is loathe to attribute any of these damaging weather events to climate change. The government surely has a duty of care to inform citizens that such events are predicted by climate scientists. Statistical evidence of such increases should be put before the public.

QUESTION ONE

Three Objectives: So long as these are not weasel words which the government can easily interpret any way that suits them the objectives are sound. For example “ensure that our contribution is affordable” can easily be used to justify resistance to any policy objectives.

Most important is that our contribution is fair and ambitious on global terms and recognizes the urgency of dealing with climate change. High temperatures are already causing unbearable conditions in other parts of the world such as the heat wave in India.

There is no reference to our moral obligation to our Pacific neighbours who are already facing increased storm and rising sea levels.
QUESTION TWO: this is a barely comprehensible question.

The document is saying that as our highest greenhouse gas emissions are from agriculture (which the IPCC downplays) and as we have a high level of renewable energy generation there is little room to reduce emissions. Our electricity generation is 25% coal-fired and policies to increase this to 100% renewable energy should have been in place two decades ago. Opportunities to develop solar and wind power should and could have been supported by the government. Instead the government supported and subsidized coal mining – including the bailout of Solid Energy.

Given that the government has for decades supported the destruction of forests to allow for an increase in dairying it is hypocritical to be praising the use of forestry carbon offsets to reduce emissions.

QUESTION THREE:

This is a scare tactic question. You are asking people to estimate what they would opt for as a reduction in their living standard. Apparently the Environment Ministry could crunch the numbers to project supposed costs to households if we reduce emissions (under business as usual) – but were unable to do the same for savings generated by a low carbon economy. Nor are there any figures projecting the costs to the citizens of not cutting emissions and facing conditions in which climate chaos reigns - such as destroyed infrastructure costs, high insurance costs and soaring health care costs.

QUESTION FOUR:

If the government was serious about fuel and energy efficiency they would long ago have imposed limits on, for example, car emissions and made sure all NZ houses were insulated and had installed solar panels for water heating.

Promoting the use of electric vehicles as a way to reduce carbon emissions is fanciful as electric vehicles will only be available to the rich for many years to come. Most citizens will continue to drive the same vehicle fleet as is on the roads currently. Also there will be no
emission savings through electric vehicles until our electricity generation is 100% renewable.

Increased public transport and electrified trains will contribute to savings – once we have 100% renewable energy.

New Zealand’s ETS.
The ETS has made a negligible contribution to inducing cuts in carbon emissions. The price is pitiful and the exemptions many. It is time it was replaced by a meaningful carbon charge which would give a realistic signal to businesses to change their practices.

QUESTION FIVE:
The discussion document stresses the possibility of future technological advances. But it is not new technologies that will give us the answers but vision and leadership to develop new policies. This discussion document illustrates that the current government lacks these qualities.

SUMMARY

I attended the Auckland Consultation. Participants stressed the urgency of taking action. Climate Change is, overwhelmingly, the most critical issue of our times. We do not believe that NZ should ride on the coat tails of other countries by saying how small NZ emissions are, or that we have a high level of hydro energy generation. This is just good luck for us. Or that we are researching how to cut methane emissions from cows – this research may or may not prove useful. We need to take action right now.

Our record on curbing greenhouse emissions to date is dismal. We are ashamed of our country for not pulling its weight.

What I and others wanted to see was clear reduction targets stating how these targets would be achieved and how progress would be monitored on a year by year basis starting NOW not in 2020. This was absent from the discussion document.

The public must be fully informed by the government of the gravity of the situation we are facing with the rapid rise in global temperatures. Right now most of the population are living in ignorance. This appears to be cynical intentional government policy.
It is outrageous that the government is encouraging and subsidizing fossil fuel exploration when climate scientists warn that we cannot burn more than $\frac{1}{3}$ of proven fossil fuels if we are to prevent chaotic climate conditions which will destroy the planet as we know it. This is the question that needs answering. Why are you doing it? Are projected royalties more valuable (for keeping the government in power) than the lives of our children and the survival of the ecosphere? **NZ must stop encouraging fossil fuel exploration.**

**I want to see New Zealand commit to a 40% reduction of emissions by 2030.**

The EU’s 28 member states have created a legal obligation to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40% on 1990 levels by 2030. The EU will then be on track to meet its goal of 80 – 95% reduction by 2050.

From the discussion document one can only conclude that New Zealand intends to do as little as possible to contribute to the urgent global task of cutting greenhouse gas emissions. This attitude is shameful in the extreme.

"If we do not get our emissions under control by a rather terrifying 2017, our fossil fuel economy will 'lock in' extremely dangerous warming." Naomi Klein