I wish to make the following submission.

1. Inadequate Consultation Process

The consultation process is seriously flawed. The time frame is too short. Publicity is grossly inadequate, so many people are unaware the consultation is taking place. The Discussion Document is garbled in that it fails to indicate the action required globally to meet the 2 degree warming target and flip-flops between asking about domestic policy and denying that is the purpose of this consultation. The MFE summary of ‘What climate change means for New Zealand’ ignores the international context – our dependence on trade and our responsibilities as a Pacific Island nation.

2. Climate change is global; so is the future of New Zealand

We have the potential as a small and sometimes independent nation to play a serious role in the international discussions, and we should seize that for our own sake: whatever we can do to delay catastrophe is to our advantage even if the catastrophe plays out overseas. We currently lag behind other small, rich countries in our sophistication on these matters.

Setting an ambitious target (40%) would signal that we ‘get it’ and have the guts to contribute to the solution. I note that Switzerland has set a target of 50%, Norway 40% and the EU 40%. Even Mexico is aiming for 25%.

3. Responses to specific questions

Q1. Do you agree with the above objectives?

No. The objectives are incoherent and their garbled phrasing betrays a lack of serious intent. The primary objective must be to show New Zealand has become serious about climate change in order to provide our negotiators with the best possible chance of leveraging international action. Talk of ‘fairness’ appears designed to excuse inaction and is laughable in the international context. ‘Fair’ would be a substantial reduction in emissions by rich countries.

Q2. What do you think the nature of New Zealand’s emissions and economy means?
We are a rich and stable country that can afford to do much more. The Government has chosen to remove price signals on agricultural emissions by exempting agriculture from the Emissions Trading Scheme, and the agricultural sector must expect in future to pay a deferred price for intensification, and undergo a more painful transition. High current agricultural emissions provide no excuse for failing to set an ambitious target.

Real change towards ‘deep decarbonization’ (the mid-century goal stated by the Americans in their INDC document) will be needed, but as a small adaptable country we are better placed to achieve this than most.

Q3. What level of cost is appropriate?

Firstly, the consultation document is deficient in not presenting the cost of climate change, so we do not have a basis for this decision. Secondly, the projected cost of the most ambitious target (40% below 1990) is surprisingly low, representing a small fraction of the projected increase in household wealth, and one that I would happily pay. Thirdly, the costing appears to be based on the expectation that we will not reduce emissions locally but rather rely on buying credits, which is completely unsatisfactory to me.

Q4. Of these opportunities which do you think...

This is a remarkably silly question, and irrelevant to the topic. Government has refused to lead and has policies on roading, fossil fuel exploration and agricultural intensification that undermine climate change goals. Change this and discussion on other matters becomes sensible. Putting a stop to prospecting for fossil fuels would be an obvious step; conversely, continued subsidisation of such prospecting undermines New Zealand’s credibility in climate change negotiations.

Q5. How should New Zealand take into account the future uncertainties?

By setting an ambitious reduction target and coordinating domestic policy and our international negotiating stance to show that we understand the global risks of climate change and are smart enough to take action. Delay is expensive.

Murray Efford