

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



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Objectives for the contribution

Do you agree with these objectives for our contribution? Yes

1b. What is most important to you?

That we humans do not render the world relatively uninhabitable for ourselves and the other animals and plants with which we have co-evolved and on which we depend. because of short-sighted greed and addiction to comfort; that we humans retain the meagre knowledge and wisdom we have accumulated during the last 12 or so millennia, and that the costs and cutbacks necessary are borne by those most able to bear them: those who have more than most.

What would be a fair contribution for New Zealand?

2. What do you think the nature of New Zealand's emissions and economy means for the level of target that we set?

We (the world) should determine how much we can emit in order to limit the catastrophic effects of climate change. That will be our "Global Carbon Budget". Divide that by the number of people in the world and that's each person's carbon budget. Obviously the wealthy will want to emit more, at least initially, to ease the transition (we currently create a disproportionate quantity of emissions) so I propose we can buy unused carbon quota from others. I propose that the price for each unit traded should be based on the wealth and income of both the individual purchaser and the seller. (the richer the purchaser, the higher the price; the poorer the seller, the lower the price) This creates a natural redistribution of wealth without compromising on climate change and among other things it will allow less developed nations (where the majority of the world's poor reside) to finance low carbon infrastructure and raise their standard of living. (Possibly a certain fraction of each person's carbon budget could be allocated to regional and national pools for collective projects.) The individual's carbon budget could also be a kind of parallel price or currency: as well as the existing money price, things should also have a carbon price (500g of meat costs 30 kg (or whatever) of carbon, an air trip from Auckland to LA costs 3 tonnes (or whatever) of carbon. A person cannot spend more carbon than is in their annual budget.) I cannot envision a fairer system: every person on the planet starts with exactly the same.

How will our contribution affect New Zealanders?

3. What level of cost is appropriate for New Zealand to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions? For example, what would be a reasonable reduction in annual household consumption?

Any cost is appropriate and reasonable if it prevents or minimises the chance of catastrophe. Again, some will be able to bear more of the cost than others but it is likely that those same people have also disproportionately benefited from carbon emissions until now.

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4. Of the opportunities for New Zealand to reduce its emissions (as outlined on page 15 of the discussion document), which do you think are the most likely to occur, or be most important for New Zealand?

We should have fewer ruminants. There are limits to, and high uncertainties in reducing the emissions from the existing number of animals with technology. In contrast simply reducing the size of the herds will have an immediate effect.

By my calculation, reducing the herds by 1/2 will reduce NZ's emissions by about 14000kt (1/2 of 72.6% of 39Mt) which will put national emissions close to 1990 levels without any other changes.

This will also benefit animal welfare and reduce NZ's dependence on a single source of income. Notice also that the price of a lab-grown hamburger was recently reported to be \$10, down from \$393,000 in around 2 years: the bottom is about to fall out of the meat market and I would not be surprised if milk were to follow. In addition, growing animals for food is a fairly inefficient way of producing food for people. Vegetable sources use less land and (for the most part) produce fewer emissions. There are also health benefits from a diet with less meat and dairy. Obviously we must replace those cows and sheep with something. As well as more fruit and vegetables, grain and nuts I suggest hemp: a source of both a useful fibre and a valuable seed oil, which grows reasonably well on more marginal land. Forestry may also be useful since it will lock up carbon in semi-permanent form. Since transport is another big contributor to our emissions, sensible cheap integrated public transport and in particular trains for national travel, and walkable cities, ought to be a priority. We should also de-emphasize tourism since air travel is currently carbon-intensive.

Summary

5. How should New Zealand take into account the future uncertainties of technologies and costs when setting its target?

We should assume no significant new technologies. If some appear, well and good, we can apply them after careful consideration. Depending on yet-to-be-developed technology such as carbon capture is a cop out from the choices we do have today. We should prioritise simple changes which are based on existing technology. Reduction (fewer cows, fewer cars, smaller houses, etc) is always desirable because it is certain.

Other comments

6. Is there any further information you wish the Government to consider? Please explain.

Business ought to be de-prioritised as a means of distributing goods and services. The profit motive conflicts with more important goals, such as the actualisation of each person's potential, and with hard physical limits, of which climate change is just one. (Even now, the oil companies are trying everything they can think of to thwart what most people can see is an urgent existential project.) Business aims for both artificial scarcity (privatised water supply) and illusory abundance (\$3 tee-shirts) and a mechanism so divorced from reality will only lead us in to a series of disasters.