

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?

1b. What is most important to you?

An imperative on the necessity of acting immediately, boldly, for moral and ethical reasons. Emphasis must be placed on the anticipated costs of inaction, or slow action; not on the costs of acting. Because the costs of inaction will be much worse. We know there will be costs of acting to confront climate change; unfortunately, these are only going to get higher the longer we take to make meaningful, decisive action. If we emphasis the initial costs too much, we will never make the changes necessary; which will lead to spiraling future costs (economically, ethically, environmentally) that are not going away. We can't think short-term or even mid-term with our objectives here- we need to look further ahead to where our current path is taking us and devise what we need to do from there. 'Fair' targets? It sounds like a ready-made excuse to tame back commitments. We do not need to 'compete' with other countries, and if they act leniently, this certainly does not allow us to do the same. We need to do absolutely everything we can, regardless. Because at stake are people's lives, health and homes; the survival of the world's species; the protection of the environment. These are the things that matter the most to me, not cuts in my consumption; I'm already making those. On a specific policy note, the continued exploration (by increasingly dangerous methods) for fossil fuels by a government that claims to take climate change seriously makes me sick to my stomach- how can we be taking climate change 'seriously' if we continue to look to the most environmentally lethal energy sources for income? This is completely unacceptable- especially when this creates few permanent jobs for New Zealanders (compared to the possible jobs available in a growing green sector), and when we are paid a relative pittance in royalties by international companies and yet shoulder the environmental costs. Fossil fuels are the way of the past, and it's embarrassing that members of our government continue to endorse their continued exploitation.

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?

In many ways, it is irrelevant; our economy must adapt to meet emissions targets, and not the other way around. Climate change is coming whether we like it or not, so we cannot dictate its effects to suit our economy. Old industries may need to adapt or die, which is a difficult pill to swallow, but inevitable. We therefore need to support them in making a transition to clean, long-term jobs as smoothly as possible, not stall. And why not positively embrace the chance to shift our economy to a green one? The benefits of green economies (and increasingly, the race to get their 'first') are becoming clearer each day. If our major contributors to emissions are dirty and inflexible, then we need to look elsewhere to maintain a stable economy. Even if we are to think about the industrial-scale of our farming sector (and my heart goes out to farmers)- whether we like it or not, it will need to adapt. Once droughts and flooding increase, as they inevitably will, they will be threatened; the costs to farmers, and the country, will then be absolutely devastating.

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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?

This is a terrible way of posing a question- incredibly loaded in its wording. Put like that, no-one will find 'any' reduction in their annual consumption acceptable. Of course, if there was genuine education made readily accessible to the public about the pace and realities of climate change, I believe most people (myself included) would happily cut back their excessive consumption behaviors; but it's hard to care, of course, when we hear nothing about climate change and are instead bombarded with advertising everyday and the rhetoric that growth at all costs is paramount. The Climate Change Discussion Document takes this one step further by breaking down the average cost in relation to our emissions reductions. This seems to put an incredible short-term framework around the whole issue, and puts it in a way that implies that there is an option about whether we reduce emissions or not. Sure, in the ideal world, we would be able to do nothing. But we do not have the luxury of crossing fingers and waiting for climate change to pass. Equal consideration (i.e. an anticipated annual costs break-down) needs to be given to the increasing costs that we will come to bear for not acting immediately, in a major way. The hard truth of it all, of course, is that the excessive consumption and constant need for growth that the neoliberal economic mindset engenders is not sustainable. Even without climate change, our excessive consumption patterns cause immeasurable harm to the environment. This is something we will need to accept, but acting strongly, now, will to some extent alleviate some of these pressures, as we will have more time up our sleeves to adapt. As it stands, the time to adapt is almost running out. So the answer to this question should be driven by thinking about what we are going to lose if we don't do much; that is, everything; and working backwards from there. It will not be easy, but making menial attempts at change will end up being catastrophic for my generation.

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?

The opportunities for tackling climate head on, immediately, have the potential to be immense. Economic self-sufficiency, technological development, dramatically lower harm caused to the environment (land, water bodies etc), improved health, greater community engagement... the opportunities are exciting. (A suggestion: read *This Changes Everything* by Naomi Klein for some inspiration). If we act right, the future is actually incredibly exciting and inspiring; but the window of opportunity to 'capitalise' on this is running out.

On a global scale, action on climate change has the opportunity to produce greater political stability; if resources such as seafood, clean water, ability to grow crops etc are maintained or further protected, the less scramble there will be between countries and communities to secure these for their sole purpose.

Summary

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

By focusing more on the future costs of inaction (moral, social, economic). Technology cannot be our saviour, either. It is a critical element, but a) technology cannot solve everything and b) we don't necessarily have the time to wait for technology to save us. We need to work hard to develop what we can, while at the same time working with what we already have in the anticipation that there may be no miracle 'cures'. It's difficult, but decades of stalling has left us here and now the clock is really ticking. Let's not pretend we have enough time to take another few decades to wait and see how the technology is going; we needed it yesterday. We can't put things off any longer; we need to act, with or without the certainty of technology, now. The costs are only going to increase, and with this the social ills associated with increased natural disasters, changes in food production and availability, global political instability, the spread of disease and so on. Those are, after all, the real costs we face (and are much graver than not being able to go and buy the latest smartphone).

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Other comments

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

Consider the future; your children's children. They are facing a dying world. We are already experiencing it. Don't let your current relative comfort blind you to what is happening now to others, and what needs to happen to ensure our survival on this planet. Stop thinking about your immediate community; what about those worse off? In different communities? Read up on these issues. Stop thinking short-term. Be moral. Be bold. Climate change is not going away, and we will only survive if we limit its effects and adapt to lead clean, green lives. I implore you to think about the future, and all that awaits if we do not act immediately, with meaning. We need to stand up and lead, not drag our heels, using the excuse that we, as a country, are small. Yes, we are small, but our emissions are huge in relative terms. And being small has not stopped us from sticking up for our rights before (being nuclear-free, for one). Do we value the earth? Do we value our 'clean, green' image (which our tourism industry relies on too)? Already other countries are taking this seriously, making positive changes and reaping the rewards, while we seem to drag our heels. Every day I am becoming increasingly embarrassed by my country's inaction. It breaks my heart, because my love for the land of this country, its people and its spirit cannot be put into words. But I look to the future, and I am deeply concerned. If I'm to have children in the future, which itself is becoming something of a moral dilemma, I don't want them to be left a dying world because their fore-bearers were too short-sighted and selfish to save it. Please; 100% renewable energy by 2025, no more fossil fuel exploration or subsidies, minimum of 40% reduction in net emissions below 1990 levels by 2030- with each day that passes, the threshold for how much we need to act only grows bigger.