Submission on Climate change targets

To the Ministry for the environment
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(Microsoft Word document)

From:

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Main points:
NZ needs to transition to a low carbon economy, eventually with nil net Greenhouse gas emissions, beginning now.

We should join the EU as a partner to reduce green house gas emissions by at least 40 per cent on 1990 levels by 2030.

Q1
1. It is seen as a fair and ambitious contribution – both by international and domestic audiences
2. Costs and impacts on society are managed appropriately
3. It must guide New Zealand over the long term in the global transition to a low emissions world
(a) Do you agree with the above objectives for our contribution?
(b) What is most important to you?

Comment

1. On the basis of the IPCC reports, climate change is the greatest issue facing us and our children. It is more important than how we run our current economy. It will have lasting consequences on our living standards for generations to come.

   The fairness principle ought to include the Polluter pays principle. It is only fair that those who make the mess should clean it up.

2. Sir Nicholas Stern: "*The science tells us that GHG emissions are an externality; in other words, our emissions affect the lives of others. When people do not pay for the consequences of their actions we have market failure. This is the greatest market failure the world has seen. …This externality is different in 4 key ways that shape the whole policy story of a rational response. It is: global; long term; involves risks and uncertainties; and potentially involves major and irreversible change.*"

In calculating out the costs, the timeframe is the key question. Actions taken now will incur small costs compared with the larger and possibly castastophic costs by doing too little.

According to the IPCC Working Group I Summary for Policy Makers, a least-cost pathway to limit temperature rises below 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels would involve global reductions of 40-70% below 2010 levels by 2050 on the way toward a zero-net-emission global economy by 2100. We need to achieve both zero-net-annual CO2 emissions by 2100 and along the way limit cumulative growth in emissions within a fixed budget of 2900 Gt CO2 (the number quoted in the government's discussion document, which takes into account the forcing from both CO2 and non-CO2 gases).

The prudent and wise approach is to reduce the costs by acting earlier rather than later.

3. It must be more than a guide to the long term, it must be a guide to what we do now.

   The most important thing is to develop (and enact milestones) a transition from now, to a reduction (and eventually reducing to nil) of our use of of fossil fuels and the net emissions of green house gases.

Q2.

What do you think the nature of New Zealand's em
for the level of target that we set?

Comment

NZ should not plead that it is a special case, and therefore open to exemptions or less ambitious targets. If every country pleads for exemptions, then this will amount to failure.

To date the NZ Government has given mixed messages in regard to its commitment to attending to climate change. It has continued a pathway of business as usual (BAU). In particular the development of fossil fuels, (such as oil exploration licenses,) reducing the forest sector, development of motorways). It has a short term commitment where the current BAU economy is seen as paramount. The Prime Minister wishes to compromise the RMA sustainability objective with BAU economic considerations. By its actions and intentions, the Government is giving the message that it is tied to a BAU economy.

In 2012, New Zealand's emissions per person were the fifth highest among 40 Annex 1 countries, at 17.2 tonnes CO2-e per person. The global average was 6.5 tonnes CO2-e per person (from World Resources Institute CAIT).

According to NZ's First Biennial Report to the UNFCCC: Under current policies, New Zealand's net emissions (including forestry) will increase by 12% by 2020 and 159% by 2030 relative to 1990 levels. Gross emissions are projected to increase 29% and 38% by 2020 and 2030, respectively.

Arguing a special case as grounds for inaction lacks moral credibility.

A case for action is with our rich natural resource base, renewable energy potential, ingenuity, education system and democratic institutions, we have the capacity to achieve a successful zero-net-emission economy in the coming decades that supports a high quality of life and serves as a powerful example to other countries. The fact that a zero-net-emission economy lies within our reach is what makes us unique and that is the contribution we can offer to the rest of the world.

The EU is asking for partners. (see appendix) We should be one of them.

Q3.

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

Comment

I am puzzled by your Q3 you have invited us to comment on. I am puzzled as to why you single out the institution of households to look at when my understanding of cliamte change it is and will affect all institutions in society.

Consider framing the issue in this way:
The climate change science tells us that there is a significant threat to our current way of life, that will have major challenges to our ecological systems and our human habitats. The threats can be minimised by actions taken now, but left unabated, will become increasingly more difficult, costly and eventually catastrophic.

When there are threats to our security through war, we take defensive action. Those defensive actions need to be proportionate to the threat, but nevertheless substantial enough to reduce the harms, whether actual or potential. We do what we believe is right, knowing that there is a price to pay. Sometimes our defensive actions will cost more than we originally think, but if we believe (as we did in the second world war) that the price is worth it, then we find the means as best we can.

Continuing with the war analogy, new technologies will emerge as we put our minds and resources to it. We cannot predict these in advance. Equally we cannot predict with any certainty, what the full costs of our defensive actions will be. What we do know is that we cannot continue down the BAU

pathway, that going down a different sustainable path is the right thing to do, and the future will be better as a result of it. In large part this is an act of faith. It is an act informed by the best knowledge, especially our science.

These are moral judgements we make. We do not use an accounting calculus. When my father enlisted in the Second World War, he did not do a cost benefit analysis.

Q4 .

Of these opportunities which do you think are the most likely to occur, or be most important for New Zealand?

Comment

The statement by the European heads of mission, (see Appendix) states:

"There is clear evidence that transition to a low carbon economy brings net economic benefits to all countries: new jobs, cleaner air, better health, innovation, less poverty and greater energy security."

I disagree with them when they say:
"Economic growth and action to address climate change are not incompatible."

Economic growth needs to be qualified as a particular kind of growth. We need to start doing some things, like using renewable energy, and stop doing other things, like using fossil fuels and polluting our water, air land and seas. Further economic growth measures flow not stocks. Because green house gases are cumulative, we need to take into account the stock of emissions already emitted. The measures of economic growth fail to take that into account. There are therefore more important indicators to measure, and I do not believe economic growth should be a goal.

Q5.

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

Comment

Switch to alternative technologies we have and use the technology now. Continue to experiment. If our R&D finds us new technologies then that is a bonus.

For example, we have the knowledge and the technology to substitute imported oil with biomass using non-agricultural land. (reference: Bioenergy options for NZ, Scion Energy Project April 2009, Lead authors Peter Hall and Michael Jack). We lack the political will.

What matters most is that we commit firmly to a pathway to zero; align policies, regulations, economic incentives and business action to accelerate innovation; and stop wasting investment in fossil fuels and associated technologies and infrastructure that will become liabilities to our economy under increasing global pressure to reduce emissions.

Appendix:
"EU leading way on climate change"
Dom post 21 May 15
http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/comment/68703451/eu-leading-way-on-climate-change

In December countries will meet in Paris to negotiate the future of the world's climate under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This will determine the course of global climate change policy after 2020. Global leadership is required to ensure the meeting produces an ambitious, fair and legally binding agreement.

Ahead of Paris countries are preparing Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) to indicate how they plan to manage emissions of green house gases and mitigate their impact on the climate. The European Union, United States, China, Russia, Mexico, Norway and Gabon have taken the lead by submitting their INDCs in March. We warmly welcome New Zealand's public consultations for its INDC which began on _May 7.

The EU's package represents an ambitious contribution from its 28 member states and has been widely hailed as a sign of the EU's continuing leadership on climate change. The EU's INDC creates a legal obligation to reduce green house gas emissions by at least 40 per cent on 1990 levels by 2030. This commitment keeps the EU on track to meet its goal of 80-95 per cent reduction by 2050.

The EU commitment is not a negotiating tactic. It is a strategic decision. We will do this regardless of what our international partners put forward. But the EU cannot move the world towards the goal of keeping global temperature increases below 2 degrees alone. Others must come forward with similarly resolute commitments that fairly reflect their past, present and future responsibilities and capabilities.

The EU has cut its annual per capita carbon dioxide emissions from 9 tonnes in 1990 to 7.5 tonnes today. Our 2030 Package will reduce this to less than 6 tonnes, putting us on the way to achieving our goal of 2 tonnes by 2050.
Achieving that goal won't be easy. The EU has made great efforts to become the world's most energy efficient economy. Our 2030 target will improve GHG impacts in the economy by another 50 per cent over the next 20 years. This will require the EU to more than double the share of electricity produced from renewable sources by 2030.

We hear and understand the concerns that taking action against climate change can affect economic growth. But we have found that it is a source of growth, efficiency and an incentive to innovate. The EU's leaders, now joined by the US, China and others, believe climate change mitigation can also be an investment in the economy and the planet's future. The EU will commit an estimated investment of NZ$53 billion per year until 2030. In return, this investment will reduce fossil fuel imports by a total of NZ$398 billion by 2030, and thereby increase our energy security. Resulting improvements in air quality alone are expected to save around NZ$25 billion from reduced healthcare costs.

Climate change itself burdens our economies, impacting negatively on productivity and growth rates. There is clear evidence that transition to a low carbon economy brings net economic benefits to all countries: new jobs, cleaner air, better health, innovation, less poverty and greater energy security. Economic growth and action to address climate change are not incompatible.
The EU is committed to building resilience to climate change by supporting those who are more vulnerable and less capable of mitigating climate change and dealing with its consequences. Many of these challenges will be local, and the EU is looking to work with like-minded partners with an understanding of the challenges confronting their regions.

In the Pacific evidence of climate change is manifesting itself in more frequent and intense storms, extreme heat, rising sea levels, loss of species and ecosystems. These developments threaten the existence of some Pacific island communities. We need to make sure that the voices of vulnerable Pacific communities are heard in Paris.

Paris will be a defining moment in the safeguarding of the planet for future generations. The cost of inaction is mounting and countries, businesses, civil society and NGOs, need to play an active role at Paris. Reaching an ambitious deal will not be easy. Parties will need to make difficult and complex decisions. And achieving a successful outcome will require leadership. We hope all countries, including New Zealand, will join us in this endeavour.

This article was co-signed by the resident European Union Heads of Mission in Wellington: French Ambassador Florence Jeanblanc-Risler, German Ambassador Anne-Marie Schleich, Greek Charge d'Affaires Charalampos Laftsidis, Italian Ambassador Carmelo Barbarello, Netherlands Ambassador Rob Zaagman, Polish Ambassador Zbigniew Gniatkowski, Spanish Ambassador Manuel Viturro De La Torre, United Kingdom High Commissioner Jonathan Sinclair and European Charge d'Affaires Michalis Rokas.