

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?

The top priority is for carbon emissions to peak within this government's term followed by annual reductions. INDC targets must include all-sector actions that centralise health and fairness, future-proof our economy, build on our clean energy strengths, improve housing and transform transport, resulting in a resilient, fair and healthy zero carbon economy and society by 2050. Agricultural greenhouse pollutants must also reduce through agricultural diversification then technology.

Secondly, NZ's contribution must be fair, ambitious, credible and sufficient – most importantly as an international citizen helping stay within the safe global carbon dioxide emissions budget. NZ's economy relies on world climate cooperation. We are also influential. Our contributions must therefore be convincing and not discourage stronger commitments by other nations.

Finally healthy people depend on a healthy climate – we can't afford not to take real climate action. Ambitious climate action is the best investment in our future. The costs of climate change are much greater than the costs of responsible action – and climate change will affect our most vulnerable households the most. The important health gains ('mitigation co-benefits') from climate action must be included in the calculations. We need to share the costs and benefits of action fairly, both between countries and within New Zealand.

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?

Current and future human wellbeing depends upon not exceeding our global carbon budget.

We need to call for a global zero carbon target before 2050 – and NZ needs to demonstrate the annual, credible steps needed from 2015 to reach this target well before 2050. Further, we need to keep up with other wealthy nations in pledging at least 40% cuts in our gross domestic greenhouse gas emissions compared with 1990 emissions, by 2030, towards at least 95% by 2050.

Importantly, the world has five times the amount of fossil fuels in reserve as we can afford to burn. We need to immediately commit to zero new fossil fuel exploration and phase out existing extraction in the next decade.

We also need to commit to cross-party agreement and national policies needed to achieve these targets.

How will our contribution affect New Zealanders?

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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?

The costs of climate inaction far exceed the costs of taking action and we need to account for this in climate calculations. The sooner we act, the more likely we will see overall gains not costs. Encouragingly, we can significantly improve short- and medium-term health and equity ('mitigation co-benefits') – especially by shifting from cars to active and public transport; better housing energy efficiency; climate-friendly home heating; reducing red meat and dairy intake; phasing out coal and lignite mining. NZ must include these co-benefits when calculating costs and benefits of action. A fair transition means policy designed to especially support changes by vulnerable households.

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 document focuses heavily on agriculture, but half of our emissions are long-lived carbon dioxide from transport, housing and other energy use which have to rapidly reduce to zero. We already have the technology and policy ideas to reduce these emissions – we need the cross-party political will to put them in place. We will also need to reduce our economic reliance on ruminant livestock farming.

Summary

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

The precautionary principle compels us to act now. Risks of further delay are very high, while we have good certainty about potential short to medium term gains of well-designed emissions reductions policies. We need government to give clear, strong, consistent signals to spur both behaviour change and technological development.

Other comments

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

Health and wellbeing needs to be at the heart of the government's climate action.

I would like to see a Parliamentary climate change and health summit; support for health sector leadership on mitigation and adapting to locked-in climate impacts on health; the involvement of public health expertise; Health (including equity) Impact Assessment (HIA) routinely used to inform key climate-relevant policies; and climate commitments that protect and promote health in the climate-vulnerable Pacific regions.