

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



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## Contact information

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## Objectives for the contribution

Do you agree with these objectives for our contribution? No

1b. What is most important to you?

The Government's Discussion Document correctly states that under business-as-usual emission scenarios, we can expect average global surface temperature to rise by about 4 degrees C by 2100. This is a dramatic change in the Earth's climate system. Indeed, there are no good analogs in the geologic record for warming of this rapidity and magnitude. Although there are considerable uncertainties about the specific impacts of such a temperature increase, there is good reason to believe this would be disastrous (IPCC Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability, 2014; Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change, 2006).

Emissions reductions are not an optional luxury for those who can afford it. Preventing 4 degrees C warming is a necessity. The Earth's climate system doesn't care whether our emissions targets are seen to be fair and ambitious; it only cares about the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. Why is perceived fairness and ambitiousness an objective for the Government's climate policy? The primary objective of climate policy should be to prevent catastrophic climate change, not to 'keep up with the Joneses'. Our choice of emissions target should reflect this.

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?

As a developed country, New Zealand is in a far better position than most to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions. Consequently, we should accept a reduction target that is at least on par with what is required to limit warming to 2 degrees C. To accept anything less is to unfairly shift the burden to countries less affluent than ourselves.

Given that approximately half of New Zealand's greenhouse gas emissions come from agriculture, it is unfortunate that agricultural emissions are challenging to reduce. However, this should not be used as justification to set a lower target in international negotiations. Crucially, we should avoid establishing a precedent that relatively affluent countries can shirk responsibility based on the perceived challenges specific to their economies. As a country, New Zealand profits greatly from agriculture; it is only fair that we should pay for the external cost associated with our agricultural emissions.

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?

The appropriate cost is the cost required to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to a level that will limit warming to 2

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degrees C. The appropriate reduction in annual household consumption is the reduction required to limit warming to 2 degrees C. To allow lower costs and higher emissions is to burden future generations with far greater costs from projected climate impacts. Most people do not accept that the lives of their children and grandchildren are intrinsically less valuable than their own. Climate policy should reflect this; we should not unfairly burden future generations with disproportionate costs.

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?

## Summary

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

Uncertainties of technologies and costs should not affect New Zealand's target. The target should be determined by climate model projections and our obligations as a developed country to bear the costs of mitigation.

## Other comments

6. Is there any further information you wish the Government to consider? Please explain.  
As a scientist who studies planetary atmospheres and has published on recent climate change, I am acutely aware of the reality of anthropogenic global warming. It is true that New Zealand's greenhouse gas emissions are a small fraction of the global total. However, New Zealand's voice and influence in international forums is often far greater than its population would suggest. Consequently, it is important that we lead by example and set an emissions target consistent with what the science tells us is necessary. If an affluent, democratic country like New Zealand can't get its act together and set a serious emissions target then what hope is there for the rest of the world?

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