

Climate Change Contribution Consultation

Climate change is one of the most urgent issues facing New Zealanders today. Failure to act now commits my generation and all those who come after us to an increasingly chaotic and uncertain future. While the current government laments the costs of taking action, they do not account for the huge economic, medical, social, and environmental costs of failing to halt runaway climate change, nor do they consider the great economic, medical, social and environmental benefits of transitioning to a more sustainable way of life.

As part of this consultation, the government states their objectives for New Zealand's contribution are that:

- it is seen as a fair and ambitious contribution - both by international and domestic audiences;
- costs and impacts on society are managed appropriately; and
- it must guide New Zealand over the long term in the global transition to a low emissions world.

Fair and ambitious contribution

With regards to the first objective, on a per capita basis New Zealand is the 5th highest emitter of greenhouse gases among industrial nations worldwide.¹ Therefore, in order to pull our weight in the global arena, we need to commit to significant reductions in our greenhouse gas emissions.

I propose that the government sets a target for New Zealand to produce zero carbon emissions by 2050 or sooner, with a minimum interim target of a 60% reduction in gross domestic greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 levels by 2030.

Costs and impacts on society

With regards to the second objective, the government should include the true costs of inaction and benefits of taking action when assessing the societal impacts of reducing New Zealand's carbon emissions.

The costs of not taking action include, but are not limited to:

- increased healthcare costs due to the arrival of tropical diseases in New Zealand and injuries and fatalities from unpredictable weather (including storms, heat waves, floods);
- damage to our agricultural industry due to increased droughts and storm damage;
- damage to our tourism industry due to degradation of our natural areas.

The benefits of taking action include, but are not limited to:

- reduced dependence on foreign oil imports in an increasingly unstable market;
- benefits to our tourism and agricultural export sectors due to bolstering our "clean green" image;
- developing global expertise in green technologies such as geothermal power generation, harnessing energy from the ocean, and research into reducing emissions from livestock;
- a shift towards greater use of public transport, walking and cycling will bring with it increases in physical and mental wellbeing concomitant with a more active and social lifestyle;^{2,3,4}

- cleaner air from burning less fossil fuels; cleaner waterways from taking actions to reduce our agricultural emissions.

Guide New Zealand over the long term

With regards to the third objective, the emissions reductions targets set out in response to the first objective should be accompanied by a plan for action with measurable goals and milestones. Actions that New Zealand can take to play our part in reducing carbon emissions include, but are not limited to:

- Immediately halting all new exploration for fossil fuels;
- Phasing out existing fossil fuel extraction by 2025;
- Phasing out all funding, tax-breaks and subsidies to the fossil fuel industry by 2020;
- Shutting Huntly coal and gas fired power station by 2020;
- Committing to 100% of our electricity coming from renewable sources by 2025;
- Committing to 100% of our transport and heating energy coming from renewable sources by 2050;
- Investing in infrastructure for better public transport, cycling and walking to reduce our dependence on car-based transport;
- Investing in rail and water-based freight to reduce our reliance on fossil fuel powered trucks for freight;
- Prioritising the replacement of the existing vehicle fleet with electric and hybrid vehicles and investing in the associated infrastructure requirements (e.g., fast charging points);
- Replacing the ineffective Emissions Trading Scheme with a revenue-neutral Carbon Tax;⁵
- Implementing policies to incentivise farming methods that are proven to reduce methane and nitrous oxide emissions from the agricultural sector, including reduced mineral fertiliser inputs, and improved management of solid wastes from livestock;⁶
- Investing in research and innovation to further reduce agricultural methane and nitrous oxide emissions;
- Implementing legislation to hold the New Zealand government accountable for taking real, measurable steps to reduce our carbon emissions;
- Including *all* benefits of action and costs of inaction when assessing the societal impact of taking action.

Action needs to start immediately; the longer we wait, the more costly it will be to act and the more likely we are to blow the global carbon budget.⁷

I look forward to the government setting an ambitious target for New Zealand's greenhouse gas emissions and an accompanying plan that commits to immediate and ongoing emissions reductions.

References

[1]

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[3] http://www.nzherald.co.nz/transport/news/article.cfm?c_id=97&objectid=11391754

[4] <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-29175088>

[5] <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/climate-consensus-97-per-cent/2013/jul/30/climate-change-british-columbia-carbon-tax>

[6] http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/programmes/en/lead/toolbox/indust/GHGas_EA.htm

[7] <http://www.sciencemediacentre.co.nz/2014/09/22/global-carbon-budget-experts-respond/>

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