

New Zealand's climate change target

Submission from Graeme Loh [REDACTED]
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Summary

- Burning more fossil fuels to support our lifestyle and economy is a significant threat to all dimensions of our continued well being.
- Government needs to lead reductions
- We need to make substantial reductions: **at least to 50% below 1990 by 2030**
- We need to demonstrate ability by making some significant steps before the Paris meeting
- We are way behind meeting our 2020 pledge
- I am prepared to play my part in further reducing my needs for fossil fuel use.

Why I Live in Dunedin.

I was brought up in Sydney where I suffered a variety of discomforts and ills.

When I moved to Dunedin and settled I found the environment much more comfortable:

- No mosquitoes to disturb sleep and the enjoyment of outdoor evenings.
- No hayfever.
- No skin rashes.

A two degree mean warming will challenge all these comforts and there really is nowhere to go further south to get cooler. Only the isolated ghost town of Port Pegasus in the south of Stewart Island is two degrees cooler in a coastal setting. Or climb into the mountains with all their hazards and inconveniences.

Needless to say I also enjoy Dunedin's physical environment and the wealth of wildlife and foods for hunting and gathering. As I understand it, there will be threats to the abundance of wildlife with the changes happening to the ocean chemistry. It is this assessment of my personal environment that informs some of my response to your discussion document.

But it is the wider survival issues that are the reason where I expect the government to take leadership. We live in a country that is astride the Roaring Forties, storms and weather events are regularly newsworthy and have a great effect upon our infrastructure. It is my perception that our country is vulnerable to storms, we have a significant amount of infrastructure and built investment in hazard zones, and that climate change will add to the intensity of storms and damage to that infrastructure.

Recently I travelled from Dunedin and Blenheim and was struck by the vulnerability of both the highway and the railway to storms. The wreckage of seaweed that had washed across the highway was obvious. Climate change will make things worse for our economy because we shall be forever fixing our infrastructure. There is a great risk that such immediate crises will disable our ability to take a longer view and plan for a future where the damage will be greater unless we stop building in hazard zones and have an economy that is dependent upon long distance transport. We need to plan and respond now. Including by doing everything we can to reduce the burning of fossil fuel.

I am disappointed in the discussion document. It seems to invite a response that we should do as little as possible. It is poorly referenced, statements of substance are unsupported and arguable. Here follows my response to the questions.

Response to the Questions posed.

Q1 Do you agree with the objectives for our contribution? What is most important to you?

I do not agree with the objectives for our “contribution”. I suggest the following objectives could be :

- Make effective changes to the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere to minimise an existing and developing catastrophic problem.
- Stop mining and using fossil fuels
- Reduction of the reliance on products with a high embedded carbon content.
- Repay our environmental debt.

What is important to me is to fix the mess that we have created and benefitted from. Just like monetary debt, our current wealth is also based upon an environmental debt created by exploiting fossil fuels. We need an aggressive “repayment” plan led by Government.

Q2 What do you think the nature of NZ emissions and economy means for the level of target that we set?

Fairness certainly dictates that we have more responsibilities than most countries and peoples. CO₂ is the central problem to address. The nature of our emissions and economy is such that modifying ‘business as usual’ will be ineffective if our response to date is an example. The vital statement in the preamble to this question is “The sources that have contributed most to increase were CO₂ from road transport”. We need to acknowledge that and reverse it. The level set should not be compromised to allow continued carbon extravagant transport practise.

We should not participate in the carbon market. It is not an effective in reducing fossil fuel burning. However the carbon accounting approach is useful and should be used to assess the fossil fuel component of imported products.

I would be interested in an assessment of the fossil fuel component of our dairy production. We should not plead a special case of our cows and it is facile to suggest that our dairy production is part of feeding a needy world (box 4, para 2). I suspect a NZ food production economy focussed upon the survival needs of humans would not need much dairy.

Q3 What level of cost is appropriate for NZ to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions? For example what would be a reasonable reduction in annual household consumption?

The document has not supported the cost statements with credible and transparent information and workings. I believe that the effective cost to a household can be managed by good government management of the economy. The current consumer economy is massively wasteful of fossil fuel energy. The quality of life needs to be protected, not the quantity of consumption. Economic analysts critical of ‘business as usual’ and its failure to attend to CO₂ pollution have produced compelling proposals that can accommodate a developed society within halting the net production of CO₂.

I am not satisfied that this document dispassionately presented the facts upon which to base a submission. In my own house and life I have reduced my use of fossil fuels since 1990. My work

place has not. Most of the things that would make a difference are outside my control. That said, I would need to make further transport reductions to make the necessary reductions in fossil fuel use.

Q4 Of these opportunities which do you think are the most likely to occur, or be most important for NZ?

Further efficiencies are readily available. Personal transport will need to be substituted for by public transport and a reduction in transport intensive activities. The ETS is very problematic. Purchases of carbon reduction overseas are very dubious in nature. The market approach seems divorced from the goal of reducing the actual consumption of fossil carbon. I recommend scrapping the ETS and going to fossil carbon taxation. There is plenty of scope for the Government to adopt regulations and if necessary rationing to make practical reductions. Clearly the carbon pollution dimension of development proposals needs to be within the ambit of the RMA.

Q5 How should NZ take into account the future uncertainties of technologies and costs when setting its target?

We should work within the existing knowledge and technologies to fix the problem. We cannot lose with that approach. If a fix comes along we will still be in a better position. Many technological fixes have been proposed. Few seem feasible, fair and actually better than carbon neutral. Carbon capture and storage seems to have little credibility. It would be much better not to burn the carbon in the first place. Nuclear fusion power supply is miles off and of the wrong scale for NZ. Pursuing biological management of ruminant methane production is worth some investment, but the overall carbon inputs to intensified animal agriculture need to be accounted for. Perhaps our stock could not produce so much methane if the carbon inputs were more modest?

Our Negotiating Credibility

We have not made useful progress on reducing our reliance on fossil fuels. Promise what we may, we need to demonstrate ability to achieve. There are a few months before Paris. Lets undertake some actions to demonstrate commitment. Government could easily:

- Not issue any more oil exploration licences
- Remove subsidies to coal mining
- Let the aluminium smelter close
- Adjust the immigration settings to reduce the number of immigrants from countries other than the Pacific Islands.

These can save money and demonstrate commitment and fairness. In addition we need to get on with meeting our 2020 target. We are on the wrong path with increasing CO2 production at present and a massive carbon content in many of our imports.

Please set in train significant reductions in our use of fossil fuels and set an example that will encourage other countries to contribute.

Thank you

Graeme Loh