

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 place of NZ's contribution in the global setting, not only as a fair contribution from a developed nation that has built its affluence upon a large emissions base, but as an example to developed and developing nations worldwide. Our contribution should be seen as inspirational in the global effort to combat the effects of gaseous emissions that affect the climate, the oceans and other aspects of the ecosphere.

Our special position is one of privilege and should not be portrayed as one in which emissions reduction has particular difficulties.

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 quoted in Box 3 from the IPCC AR5 Synthesis report 2014, carbon dioxide is the most significant gas with respect to long term climate change and is also critically important in the acidification of oceanic and other waters. This latter effect has the potential to eliminate natural carbon sequestration in the oceans that currently occurs through the formation of calcareous shells by marine organisms. A large component of our agricultural emissions is made up of methane. This is a short-lived gas and is part of the contemporary carbon cycle, utterly distinct from fossil carbon that is emitted by burning fossil fuels and calcining limestone in cement manufacture. For these basic scientific reasons, carbon dioxide from fossil sources is the most important gas emitted by human activities and this is the component that we should target. The concentration in policy upon agricultural emissions only serves to complicate the issue of emissions reduction and makes addressing it seem more difficult than it is. It is therefore the increasing fossil carbon emissions from transport, energy and industry that we should target and we should set this level so as to direct reductions toward the level that the global carbon budget defines: zero fossil carbon emissions by 2050. A graphical straight line from the present fossil carbon emissions level is the simplest way to define this target.

This fossil carbon target is independent of any particular features of our economy that are intractable in terms of reducing emissions as it has relatively little relation to agriculture and all of the sectors that account for its present level are readily able to change to renewable sources of energy and materials with currently available technology. This is particularly the case in our technologically, socially and economically advanced condition as a country. It is inexcusable to not have a target that fits with what we can do so easily

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?

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The cost analysis is not appropriate and is very badly presented in the Discussion Document. The price on carbon, even with the wide range stated, is inaccurate. Simple calculation suggests that a carbon price of \$200 per tonne would have been required merely to offset the fall in the price of oil that has occurred recently. The presentation of escalating costs with increasing stringency of targets also suggests that the marginal cost of emissions reduction diminishes with increasing stringency as the cost goes from \$15 per percentage reduction at ten percent to \$65 for an eightfold greater reduction.

The calculations also fail to show the increasing baseline against which the 'reduced growth' will occur. ie, it does not reflect the fact that we will be only a little less affluent rather than poorer as a result of action to reduce emissions.

Lastly, there is no mention of the costs of inaction which will be manifold the cost of action to reduce emissions. We are at a stage when the cost of inaction is so devastating that the cost of emissions reduction has become essentially irrelevant.

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?

A transition to a low carbon economy will bring huge benefits.

This cannot be achieved with any certainty by indirect financial measures or broad policy measures although these may contribute. The only way to achieve that required certainty in reduction of fossil carbon emissions is by directly limiting the amount of fossil fuel that is used in the NZ economy; a cap on fossil fuel availability.

Summary

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

By using a set limit on fossil fuel availability. Technological advances will then offset the disadvantages of such limits to whatever extent they are able, maximised by normal market factors.

There is no means by which cost uncertainties can be addressed and costs are an important signal to direct behaviour and should not be interfered with except in targeted welfare relief.

Other comments

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

As above, there are two main points:

Set targets limited to fossil carbon. Agricultural methane can be legitimately offset by tree planting. (which fossil carbon emissions cannot)

Set targets according to the scientific data - aim for zero fossil carbon emissions by 2050.

Also, limit overseas purchase of offsets. This is not necessary if we afforest to offset methane emissions and is fraught with uncertainty.