NEW ZEALAND’S CLIMATE CHANGE CONTRIBUTION CONSULTATION
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Introductory remarks
As far as I am aware the discussion document represents the first formal opportunity that New Zealanders have been given to express their views on climate change. The document sends a welcome signal that the New Zealand Government intends to take action on climate change and thereby make a global contribution to environmental management. This important step has given me considerable encouragement and hope for the future.

- Many people already recognise that current lifestyles and practices are unsustainable.
- Many accept that our society needs to change and are already adopting new ways of living.
- Many of these people are frustrated that their current efforts to reduce their environmental footprint are cancelled out by those who either don’t care or else are uninformed. Important conclusions need to be drawn by Government from this.
- Strong government is the crucial driver that will lead citizens and businesses as a whole to make the necessary changes to their behaviour and operations.
- The paradigm shift that is needed to make a real and effective difference can only come from national leaders who are prepared to drive and inspire widespread change in how we manage resource use, waste minimisation, population size and lifestyles.
- It is no longer acceptable that governments defer their responsibility to inform and lead a national response to climate change.
- Current quantitative growth models need to be replaced by qualitative growth models where beneficial growth is chosen in favour of unwise and harmful growth.
- ‘Good growth – bad growth’ evidence will emerge when environmental accounting is used to ensure that climate change costs are included alongside current accounting methods in balancing New Zealand’s books.
- It is crucial that environmental accounting costs be allowed to convert into prices, with subsidies being used as a means of last resort to facilitate transition and climate change responses.

Question 1: Objectives for the contribution
The Objectives set important targets for New Zealand. However, they contain defensive clauses which provide opt-out excuses based on New Zealand’s “unique” circumstances, on family and business “affordability”, and on impacts on “competitiveness”.

- The present wording of the Objectives sends a signal that New Zealand wants to be a part of global initiatives but is going to argue hard to do as little as possible. This is not the sort of approach that will inspire global trust and social change in New Zealand. It seems to invite people and businesses to plead special reasons why they should not have to make change rather than how they could help.
- The use in Objective 3 of the words “must guide New Zealand over the long term” are unacceptable and again underline the defensive nature of this section of the discussion
document. If Government wants to be taken seriously on its climate change response the Objective 3 should be reworded to “must guide New Zealand now and in the future”.

- The “Objectives for the contribution” set a poor tone for the very good discussion points that follow in this document.
- To be blunt, the current Objectives lack both force and vision.

Recommendation:
Rewrite these objectives to show strengthened Government resolve to address New Zealand’s climate change responsibilities both recognising the challenges and showing preparedness to lead.

Question 2: The nature of New Zealand’s emissions and targets
Few New Zealanders will have the skills and understanding to provide meaningful input to this question, and I’m not one of them.

I have no other comment than these:

- It is vital that New Zealand urgently builds the technical capacity to guide the way forward, to make effective plans, to innovate, and to build and put in place effective and affordable climate change responses.
- This needs to be led by Government and actioned at both national and regional levels. Central and regional government, supported by science and technical agencies (public and commercial), should be guided and encouraged to re-prioritise their plans, efforts and operations to help meet government targets.

Recommendation:
Increased capacity building and planning should be initiated by Government immediately.

Question 3: What level of cost is appropriate for New Zealand?
The Discussion Paper rightly attempts to provide an estimate of the $$ cost to New Zealanders of meeting climate change targets. However, the discussion paper should have made clear that climate change costs need to be viewed against a far bigger backdrop. Context is needed. For example:

When considering climate change cost at global level it is impossible to ignore:

1. The environmental and human costs of doing nothing
2. The current lack of environmental accounting in how we measure our economy
3. The vagaries of current markets, and in some cases their fragility (e.g. 2008-2009)
4. The changing supply and reducing reserves of world resources
5. The instabilities and unrest associated with nations over-populated in relation to their resource wealth.

And when, at last, climate change costs are properly accounted for and they affect price, we will, at local level, without having to think too hard:

1. Change our behaviour, perhaps without even realising it
2. Reduce our consumption in a myriad of ways without compromising our welfare
3. Adjust our lifestyle without compromising our happiness
4. Hopefully, work at a rewarding job that society values in a company that is likewise in the process of adjusting and embracing new ways of doing things.

Summarising:

- For the last 50 years we have chased growth targets that are known to be unsustainable as though there were no tomorrow. Well, tomorrow is here. We are reaching limits and we must urgently avoid tipping points. These are the true costs that we have not properly accounted for and which we ignore at our peril.
- These costs must be allowed to, and made to, flow into price. It’s that simple!
- Faced with changed prices or changed salaries, people will adjust without necessarily being less fulfilled, less healthy and less happy.
- Competition and innovation will ensure that businesses adjust and innovate, or fade away and be replaced.
- Life will go on; it will just look a bit different. The actual $$ costs of climate change will soon merge unidentifiably into the general costs of day to day life.
- The technologies already exist to solve the climate change problem (and associated ecological and biodiversity problems). More are being found year on year.
- Strong political leadership is the key missing ingredient. Changes are necessary and Government must lead them.

My Statement to Government:

- Why do you fear change when the rest of us do it all the time through our working lives?
- Start to think, plan and operate past the three-year election cycle.
- Start to act collegially in Parliament rather than adversarially.
- Bite the bullet, do what’s right, not what supports the status quo, and take responsibility for your end of things.
- Put a stake in the ground and lead the solutions to climate change, and go to bed and sleep easy at night while we do our bit - and do it we will.

Question 4: Which opportunities are most likely to occur or be important for New Zealand

The opportunities listed are all relevant, as are many more unlisted ones. They have a huge part to play and it’s good to detect a sense of immediacy in the discussion paper.

What’s missing is an overview of the ways in which New Zealand citizens will play an important part in climate change responses by modifying their lifestyles and expenditure.

- Consumer choice is a key element that needs to be managed and monitored by Government.
- Wise consumer choice requires education and sometimes subsidies, coercion or direction.
- We are already comfortable with Civil Defence and Health guidance; I believe citizens will respond well if given Climate Change-related Guidance by a Parliament that shows unity on meeting our targets.
- A range of welcome domestic policies are listed but it is disappointing that these appear to lack urgency or sufficient funds.
Recommendation:

- Begin a process to better understand and manage consumer choice and start immediately to increase effort in this area.
- Begin a related process for industry.
- Substantially increase the budgets to build and implement domestic policy tools.

Question 5: How should New Zealand take account of future uncertainties of technology and costs

The key principles to be observed when addressing uncertainty are maintaining flexibility, diversity and responsiveness. New Zealand has generally been good at flexibility and responsiveness but has serious past and current weaknesses in diversity.

- Intensive dairying has been allowed to dominate the agricultural scene in capital investment and in land use, and has now become one of our main concerns in meeting climate change targets. It is also unclear what the true climate change costs of dairying are because it now depends on large amounts of palm oil and other feed that is grown overseas on land recently cleared of native forest. The more sustainable ryegrass-clover model appears to have been replaced.
- The current boom and bust nature of dairying is both a threat to our economy and seems to have serious problems in its environmental sustainability. We need to examine carefully how this happened and what needs to be done differently in future.
- We need to celebrate the many land uses that contribute significantly to our wealth and at the same time are highly sustainable environmentally, for example, grapevines that have greened the dry plains of Hawkes Bay and Marlborough; and kiwifruit, pipfruit and avocados that trap and maintain significant amounts of carbon above and below ground.
- We need to be concerned that dairying has actually displaced significant arable cropping in some areas.
- We need to ensure that our forestry methods are sustainable long term.
- We need to assert at global level that New Zealand’s extensive retirement of high country land from pastoral use makes a significant and valid contribution to its reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Recommendation:

That Government:

- review current land uses in New Zealand in relation to their environmental sustainability and climate change impacts
- seek to increase land use and primary industry diversity and opportunities
- set guidelines for land use intensity, and for importation of livestock food that is replaceable by arable or other farming methods in New Zealand
- seek to maintain or increase primary produce returns from a diverse and flexible farming industry while at the same time reducing climate change and other environmental impacts
- seek to ensure retirement of land and restoration of indigenous vegetation is counted as a valid contribution to our emission targets.