

Climate Change Contribution Consultation

Submitter: Judith McDonald

Address: [REDACTED]

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Investment in our Future

The discussion document appears to pay no attention to what the cost of NOT dealing with climate change may be. Focusing on the apparently huge worry of reducing what Mr Groser states is the average New Zealand household **expenditure** (not income) of \$73,000 per annum by as much as \$1400 to achieve an emissions target of 20% below 1990 levels is an insult to the intelligence of the general public. This represents 2% of that household's expenditure. We need to think about the cost of dealing with a climate that is 3°C warmer than the one we have now: the cost of flood damage, drought and storms could be colossal and families could find themselves uninsurable after a single catastrophe. The fate of Christchurch residents could become common – homeless while the insurance companies argue about the payouts. The increase in insurance premiums, if you could even get a policy, could well be more than \$1400. It is worth remembering the huge increases in home insurance costs (in some cases probably already over \$1400) that hit all New Zealanders after the Christchurch earthquake. A few more major natural disasters should put home insurance out of the reach of all but the most wealthy. Farmers could in fact be the worst hit: imagine what mortgage insurance on a farm might cost under circumstances involving regular floods and/or droughts. The longer we delay in addressing climate change issues, the higher the costs will be – probably a lot more than 2% of the average household income.

New Zealand should be a world leader in dealing with climate change: we occupy a position of considerable environmental privilege and we are wasting it, messing about with trivia and heading in the opposite direction to what is needed. For a supposedly first-world country to be wasting vast sums of money on road-building while ignoring all forms of public mass transit (trains and buses) and efficient freight movement (rail and ship) verges on criminal, and might be compared to the legendary and increasingly apt description of Nero fiddling while Rome burned. The New Zealand government needs to act now, and decisively, to ensure the country has a future. "Business as usual" is a guaranteed disaster. We need to totally change our outlook on transport, and on our major polluter, agriculture.

We also need to take extremely seriously the risks to New Zealand's exporting future when China, which is taking climate change very seriously and doing a considerable amount itself in this regard, starts to impose trade tariffs on countries that are not pulling their weight in controlling emissions. Such "level playing field actions" could cripple our dairy industry almost overnight. If we aren't prepared, compliance could take a long time to achieve.

Reducing agricultural emissions

We need to stop ignoring the elephant in the room – or in this case the herd of cows. We have an appalling reliance on dairy products and no-one in government seems prepared to consider any alternative, even in the face of world gluts and declining dairy prices. Dairying is dirty; via methane emissions, through nitrogen and phosphate contamination of waterways, and by gobbling up land that can be much more productively used for other types of food production. Yes, it may be ‘nice’ to be able to eat beef and consume milk and cheese (though half the world lacks the enzymes to deal with lactose and is merely given diarrhoea by our milk products) but it’s not necessary, and not the most efficient way of feeding the planet’s population by a considerable margin.

In addition to the up-front emissions caused by dairying, there are some hidden ones: most of our coal production apparently goes to power large milk powder driers, primarily located in the South Island.

Converting dairy land back to plant-based production has the potential to be at least ten times as productive as dairying and with far lower emissions (done well it should in fact be a carbon sink). Agricultural production also has the potential to solve another of New Zealand’s major problems: unemployment, especially among our young people and even more particularly amongst Maori young people. Many iwi actually have the land available but currently face huge problems with young people being lost to the cities.

By supporting horticultural initiatives, which are labour intensive and train people in useful skills, New Zealand could vastly increase its food production and improve its citizens’ quality of life. Crops can include all forms of tree crops (fruit and nuts) and a wide range of vegetables. Organic growing, or where necessary the use of sophisticated integrated pest management could produce high-quality food which would create a burgeoning export market as well as supplying local needs, and simultaneously increase our soil quality. Chickens can be run in orchard environments to provide additional protein supplies and contribute both fertiliser and weed control functions.

Agriculture can mean many things other than dairy farming: yes, we probably need some dairying, but we do not need to be introducing it in wildly unsuitable areas like the Canterbury plains. We can do much better with a little foresight and relatively small expenditure, relative to the costs waiting for us twenty or thirty years down the track if we continue with the status quo. Intensive dairying is not, as Mr Groser seems to believe, the answer to our prayers, and nor is there “no alternative”: it’s more like the path to ruin in the way it is currently being practiced, and there are indeed alternatives, which will not destroy New Zealand’s economy. They may in fact improve it.

We need a zero carbon dioxide emission target, now

Carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxides are driving temperatures up, rapidly. Yes, New Zealand is a small country, but our emissions record is poor, and our international reputation of being

“clean and green,” which is responsible for much of our premium agricultural product prices, is rapidly eroding. We could restore international faith in our slogans and help lead the way for all countries by calling for a global zero carbon target, and committing to putting our money where our mouth is as a nation by seriously starting work on reducing emissions of all greenhouse gases. We could start by paying science and technology graduates to stay and work on the problem rather than lumbering them with student debt and driving them out of the country.

We need to stop throwing pitiful amounts of money in random directions (\$10 million annually for ‘new agricultural mitigation technologies’ – really? We’ve just spent more than that to placate a Saudi sheep farmer), and develop a concerted plan for dealing with emissions.

For a money source, an immediate one would be to stop the ridiculously wasteful expenditure on Roads of National Significance, and invest the billions that would be saved into reinstating our rail services and coastal shipping services, thus getting many vehicles off the existing roads. The savings on road deaths and injuries would further add to the available funds, as would the reduced road maintenance costs once thousands of heavy vehicles were removed from them.

We need laws to keep government committed to the process

New Zealand’s government needs to be committed and accountable for its actions on climate change. We therefore need laws to enforce this, and an independent Climate Commission to advise on government climate change policies and hold the government (whoever it may be) accountable for its actions. The UK Climate Change Act could be used as a model.

Do something useful!

The government document “New Zealand’s Climate Change Target” is a list of reasons why nothing can change. It is a pitiful excuse for a consultation document, which offers no consideration of alternative pathways: New Zealanders should be extremely angry about it. We deserve much better from our elected representatives.

If we don’t act now – within the next five years or less – there may be no way back. By that stage, fretting about losing \$1400 per year from one’s household income is going to look very, very silly.