

Submission on New Zealand's Climate Change Target

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Overview: the need for action

Climate change threatens the future survival of humanity. There is overwhelming consensus in the scientific community of the need to take action. We are at risk from severe weather events including drought and flooding, and from rising sea levels. Biodiversity is threatened by climate change. In short we do not know the full extent of the dangers we face. The fifth Assessment Report of the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2014) on Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability states;

Impacts from recent climate-related extremes, such as heat waves, droughts, floods, cyclones, and wildfires, reveal significant vulnerability and exposure of some ecosystems and many human systems to current climate variability (very high confidence). Impacts of such climate-related extremes include alteration of ecosystems, disruption of food production and water supply, damage to infrastructure and settlements, morbidity and mortality, and consequences for mental health and human well-being. For countries at all levels of development, these impacts are consistent with a significant lack of preparedness for current climate variability in some sectors. (p14).

We are already experiencing these impacts in New Zealand and the Pacific. Over the last five years summer pasture production in New Zealand has been reduced due to drought. Severe storms have wrecked devastation throughout the Pacific.

Key recommendations

We need to set an effective emission target (Intended National Determined Contribution) and put into place policies which will allow us to meet this contribution.

1. Aim to reduce per capita emission from 17 to 8 tonnes and then to 2 tonnes per capita. Our aim should be to reach a zero carbon target by 2050.
2. A moratorium on the opening of all new coal mines and fossil fuel extraction including a moratorium on fracking. An immediate end to all government subsidies, tax breaks and incentives for the fossil fuel extraction industries.
3. The abandonment of the failed Emission Trading Scheme which has proved to be totally ineffective as an economic instrument in reducing emissions and the implementation of a Carbon Tax used in such a way as not to be punitive to individuals on low incomes.
4. The closing of the Huntly Power station.
5. The establishment of an Independent Climate Commission to ensure honest reporting of our emissions and compliance with our own emissions targets.
6. A massive education programme to raise public education on climate change and the need for a transition to a low carbon economy.
7. The immediate implementation of fuel efficiency standards for all vehicles entering the country with higher standards set for newer vehicles. Promote the use of public transport.

8. More incentives and guarantees for the maintenance and creation of Permanent Carbon Sinks to stimulate new tree planting.

The Consultation Process and Consultation Document

Finally, I would like to express my great displeasure at the lack of professionalism of the consultation process and the poor quality of the consultation document.

Our Climate Change Target is a serious matter which requires full and frank discussion. The pitiful time given for the public to meet and consult with the Ministry for the Environment, coupled with the lack of political accountability as government ministers chose not to meet the public whose interests they serve was disheartening. The consultation document is seriously flawed—it fails to propose any emission target and is orientated around a consideration of costs to individual households. There is no recognition of the grave challenges ahead or of the severe consequences—outlined in detail by the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change—of inaction. The risks of not transitioning our economy into a low carbon state or the potential economic opportunities of innovation presented by the need for such a transition are entirely absent.