Discussion document: New Zealand’s climate change target

Thank you for the invitation to provide feedback on the above discussion document regarding climate change targets. The New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists (NZSA) welcomes this opportunity to provide information on our considerations and contributions to climate change, and feedback on above document.

Our interest areas are the impacts of climate change on health, including anaesthesia, and the impacts of healthcare and anaesthesia on climate change. In this submission we draw your attention to several documents relating to these two areas.

About NZSA

The New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists Inc., (NZSA) is a professional medical education society established in 1948. It represents almost 500 medical anaesthetists in New Zealand and works to foster education and research into anaesthesia, and support the professional interests of its members. Members include specialist anaesthetists in public and private practice, and trainee anaesthetists. NZSA is a member society of the World Federation of Societies of Anaesthesiologists (WFSA) and is represented at Executive level of the WFSA.

The impact of climate change on the health

It is well documented that over time climate change will affect public health and have an impact on what health services are required. I draw your attention to following (links provided below):

- Anaesthesiologists and the Environment: Can we save lives and do no harm?, 2012
- New Zealand Medical Journal article, 2014
- A Human Health Perspective on Climate Change, National Institute of Environmental and Health Sciences, 2010

These reports detail that climate change will affect health conditions including asthma, respiratory, cardiovascular and infectious diseases, compromise food security and threaten blood supply. Increased weather disturbances will have effects on public health and the health services required. For these reasons we ask that health be counted as part of climate action calculations, and that the Ministry of Health is involved in the government’s climate change work.

We support the findings of the New Zealand Medical Journal article of November 2014 and the 3 June 2015 submission of the New Zealand Medical Association on this climate change consultation.

How anaesthetists contribute to climate change

Research has been undertaken on how anaesthesia contributes to climate change, and the results and mitigation strategies have been shared with the anaesthetic community as part of ongoing professional development. The above presentation Anaesthesiologists and the Environment: Can we save lives and do no harm?, was given at the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists Annual Scientific Meeting, in Melbourne 2013, and to the American Society of Anaesthesiologists in 2012.

Anaesthetists were given strategies to reduce the impact of climate change. These included considering not using desflurane, reducing their use of nitrous oxide, and promoting the use of low flow anaesthesia. It emphasized clinicians should attempt to reduce wastage in general – reduce, reuse, reprocess and recycle.
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There has also been some research carried out in Australia on the effect of automated control of, and, reducing the use of, some volatile agents in anaesthesia. Results have indicated that reducing some agents had significant financial and environmental implications.

**Meeting climate change targets**

In setting targets for climate change we encourage the Ministry for the Environment to work with the Ministry of Health in also setting targets for public health in New Zealand.

Anaesthetists are open to finding ways to reduce our carbon footprint, and in our daily work we see opportunities to reduce waste across hospitals and health providers. Analysis suggests that changes to some health practices, for example, reducing the use of plastics and recycling could assist in reaching the targets. The Ministry of Health is a key stakeholder in leading this and we would support such work.

The anaesthetic community is happy to share information from analysis such as the *Anaesthesiologists and the Environment: report* which provides statistics on the effects of our medications and devices on climate change, and we support decision-making that will assist reducing the effects of emissions. However, in saying this we note that anaesthetists need to be consulted specifically about any proposed changes to medical devices or drugs. Many proven medical devices and medicines have been used safely by anaesthetists for some time and changing these could impact on our service or on safety.

Consultation in this way is occurring with the PHARMAC medical devices programme, where we have submitted that the cost of devices should not be the sole determinant of purchase. Similarly, we would encourage that the effect of products on climate change be one of the factors when considering the purchase of medical devices.

**Conclusion**

We support the intention of the document to set targets for New Zealand’s contribution to the new international climate change agreement. Our interest is in the effects of global warming on health, and how we can be effective in reducing emissions and the impacts of climate change on health. We ask that the Ministry counts health when calculating costs and benefits of climate action and includes the Ministry of Health in climate change work. Domestically we are interested in how health services can be structured and implemented best to address the effects of climate change.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on this important issue and we look forward to our continued involvement as work progresses on this.

Yours faithfully,

EW (Ted) Hughes  
President

**Attachments and references:**

*Anaesthesiologists and the Environment: Can we save lives and do no harm?* Dr Jodi Sherman, 2012.  


*A Human Health Perspective on Climate Change*, National Institute of Environmental and Health Sciences, 2010.  