Consultation on setting New Zealand's post-2020 climate change target

My name is Dr Barbara Nicholas. I have PhD in bioethics (following on from earlier education in microbiology and theology). I have worked as a science teacher, academic, and central government policy analyst, and served on various Ministerial ethics advisory committees (reproductive technology and animal welfare). I currently lead a team facilitating the Canterbury Water Management Strategy, and co-own and manage a commercial walnut orchard in the Selwyn District.

I am making this submission in a personal capacity.

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Having read the consultation document *New Zealand's climate change target'* I wish to make the following comments.

Two questions are intertwined in this document

a. what is a fair contribution for NZ to make to the global commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions? and

b. what should we do and/or can we do to adapt to the effects of climate change?

I think these issues need to be addressed separately and the challenges of the second issue not used as an excuse to minimise the contribution NZ makes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Implicit in the framing of the document is an assumption that any assessment of 'fairness' is related to the costs involved in reducing emissions. However:

1. Many of the costs (and opportunities) of reducing emissions are not optional. They will be required in order to adapt to climate change and will need to happen regardless of the NZ target. For example, as recognised on p.15, we need to move to a low carbon economy both to increase energy security and to ensure we remain aligned with the global transition and remain competitive and productive. The fact that some options to reduce emissions are difficult is not as an excuse to offer only a small reduction in emissions.

2. 'Fairness' also needs to take into account the benefits that we already enjoy from being a carbon rich economy. In the interests of 'fairness' I think it reasonable that developed countries (including NZ) take a disproportionately larger share of the needed reduction in emissions than those countries who have either not emitted to high levels, or whose recent emissions have been in effect 'exported' from the developed world, i.e. their high emissions are to provide for the lifestyle the developed world wishes to live.

3. I find it unacceptable that NZ 'export' its emissions to other countries via the mechanism of international carbon offsets. We should take responsibility for our own emissions.

Objectives for our contribution – do I agree? What is the most important?
I agree that our contribution should be fair (see comments above) and ambitious.

Any assessment of the issue of costs and impacts on society of our targets needs to be put in the context of the costs and benefits on all aspects of NZ life of responding to the impacts of climate change. A demanding target may well have significant impacts on NZ, but so will climate change itself.

I do not agree that the target is the guide to NZ in its transition to a low emissions world.

- The target is NZ's signal to the rest of the international community of our recognition of the seriousness of the issue, and our commitment to being a part of the solution.
- However, our guide to what we need to do to transition to a low emissions world should be grounded in an assessment of what we need to do to optimise well-being in a world that is likely to radically change in response to the reality of climate change. I see no evidence of that assessment in this document.

What do I think the nature of the NZ's emissions and economy mean for the level of the target we set?
The nature of the emissions should not be the primary determiner of the target we should set – the traget should be determined by what is a fair contribution for a developed country that has a history of benefiting from practices/economies that are high emitters.

However, the nature of our emissions should influence where our efforts need to go as part of adapting to climate change. In particular we need to prioritise finding ways to shift our economy away from methane emitting animals as well as helping that sector reduce its carbon footprint.

What level of cost is appropriate for NZ to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions eg What would be a reasonable reduction in annual household consumption?

- The figures quoted as cost on consumption may not reflect the reality given that the structure of the economy is likely to change significantly with climate change. Modelling costs based on *current* lifestyles and patterns of consumption is of extremely limited value. It would be more informative to explore a range of scenarios that model the realisation of various combinations of costs and opportunities.
- The costs of climate change are high regardless of our own emissions, and it is not clear to me that the costs are directly related to the cuts in emissions we make but rather to the success of international negotiations AND the actions we take to adapt to climate change.
- How those costs are distributed across society is a question of social policy. It is important that whatever response we make does not further aggravate social inequalities.

Of the opportunities, which do I think are the most likely to occur or be most important for NZ?.

The first two opportunities will be necessary but not sufficient. Fuel and energy efficiency, and use of renewables in additional sectors, are likely to happen regardless of NZ initiatives – we will benefit from work done elsewhere to develop those technologies.

The remaining three opportunities will require significant investment of creative thought and political courage. At present I see little evidence that our political or business leadership has given serious consideration to realising these opportunities.

However, I think that a transition to a low carbon economy is the most important thing for NZ –. In particular we need a radical re-think of our agriculture sector.

How should NZ take into account the future uncertainties of technologies and costs when setting the targets?

Climate change creates uncertainty by its very nature. Uncertainty is now a given.

What is important is that we do not use uncertainty as an excuse to do the right thing – which in this case is to commit to a courageous reduction in greenhouse gases, and then invest our expertise, ingenuity and resources to creating a society and culture that can make it happen.