Climate Change Contribution Consultation

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1a. The three objectives.

I agree with a target that is fair and ambitious.

I agree with the impact and cost being managed appropriately.

I agree that the target must guide NZ policy in all areas, so that it is achieved.

However these objectives are open to a very wide interpretation. What is fair, ambitious, appropriate? And is the wording of the third objective actually intended to weaken the commitments of the first two?

1b. Carbon sink by 2030.

What is important to me is that we lead the developed world. We are a small population in a well off country. We need to show that a transition to a carbon negative economy (nett emissions below zero) is possible and can be achieved rapidly.

It will take land use change, transport use change, cultural change and large changes in the contributors to our economy (shifts in agricultural focus, reduction in new building to more effective use of existing buildings, move away from sale of consumer goods to sale of experience and time).

Land use will have to change away from emissions intensive agriculture to carbon capturing agriculture. Dairying is emissions intensive, particularly when you include the transport (daily truck movements) and processing. Other livestock are less intensive, and long term production such as forestry are positive contributors. A focus on local horticulture providing food to local areas to reduce transport costs and provide occupation.

Transport will have to change away from cars, to foot, bikes and mass transit. This cannot just be a shift to low emission vehicles. The emissions from manufacturing a replacement car fleet would themselves be too large an impact.

Cultural shift will have to be dramatic. In an ambitious and fair target, there is no room for tourism driven by cheap flights, no room for constantly increasing production and purchase of consumer goods, no room for building large houses. Employment and economic growth based on these activities is a dead end. We need to accept that the way we live in 2030 will have to be radically different to how we live today – but see that as an opportunity to move to a more satisfying life that isn't dominated by consumer gratification.

We need to refocus on what people need to be happy in life: food, shelter, society, opportunity to contribute. We need to reduce material expectations. The consumerism of today is advertised as the path to happiness. But this has been proven false time and again. There is no correlation between wealth and happiness. Happiness is achievable when you are able to reliably provide the basic needs of life, and that that position is secure for the future. More than that is excess driven by
consumerism.

If we realign our ambition to achieve a universally happy and content population, collectively we do not need to work as much as today. Working hours can reduce and the required work can be distributed more evenly across the population. Leisure time can increase.

Where we will struggle is international relative wealth. With the desire for new technology, particularly in the field of health, we need the ability and financial wherewithall to trade. In defence of our country we need a strong enough economy to fund an adequate armed service. In these areas international access, and therefore relative wealth, is important.

This means that NZ will have to stay in track with other nations to some extent, while aggressively preparing for the dramatic changes to come.

The alternative (business as usual, or limited global reductions (eg: less than 80% reduction)) is unthinkable. The true impact of climate change will be dramatic – the direct cost of infrastructure remediation due to see level rise, alone will be huge. If it is undertaken as infrastructure replacement and upgrade, then the construction itself will contribute to the problem.

The loss of amenity has not been brought home to people in this country yet. All of our existing beaches will be underwater at high tide. Consequent erosion will reestablish beaches in time, but at the cost of existing land – much of which has been developed as high value coastal property.

Climate induced weather events will be hard to predict, but expectations are for normalising of extreme events. So regular damage to our agriculture industry from floods and droughts will be normal, offsetting any productive benefits of warming and rainfall. Unpredictability is the enemy of good horticulture and agriculture. Extreme events are only part of that.

I don't believe that the present consultation has sufficiently explained the true impacts of climate change on New Zealand.

But these costs will be nothing compared to the global conflagration that is the most likely outcome. Climate change will induce desperation in many areas where existing habitable land becomes uninhabitable. Desperation will lead to movement of vast populations, usually to neighbouring land which will also be becoming marginal. These seismic population movements will not be held back by paper borders. If the richer developed countries make self serving decisions now on emissions, then these population movements, and the conflicts they create will devolve into regional wars and as these impact on larger, wealthier nations, into global conflict at a scale unseen since WW2. Any study of economic impact of global climate change needs to contemplate the cost in life, misery, environmental damage and economic resources of being drawn into a significant global war.

The rich countries of the world are responsible for nearly all of the historic emissions and have received the economic benefits of those historical emissions. This can only be measured on a per-capita basis, and on that basis it includes NZ. An argument that New Zealand is small and its contribution is therefore insignificant misses the point entirely. The only fair measure is per-capita carbon equivalent output.

Famine, war and genocide are predictable outcomes of climate change. The rich countries of the world bear the responsibility for these outcomes.

It is morally repugnant to focus only on the internal impacts of climate change and of emissions reduction.
We, the rich countries, bear the responsibility of immediately reducing our impact on the world, and of acting compassionately and generously in relation to the poorer countries – to help them deal with the effects of climate change.

2. Fair contribution for NZ

This is a global problem.

NZ will find it easy to meet any emissions target, compared to other countries. We can readily move from emissions intensive agricultural land uses to carbon storing agricultural land uses, while still having an excess of production sufficient to feed our population. Our population is relatively small and can be redistributed more evenly across the country to bring people closer to the source of products essential for life (food and shelter).

Consequently we need to set a globally ambitious target of being a nett carbon sink by 2030.

This will need leadership to move away from entrenched positions. For example: dairy is an emissions intensive food product – when compared with other food products. We need to reduce our reliance on exporting anything that is essentially a luxury manufactured item (there won't be demand), or relies on air freight. Exports of superyachts, perishable fruit, flowers, crayfish (and many others), which are presently seen as having a high value, will need to be rethought. Or we will need to find ways of exporting perishable products by sea. Air travel will need to fall dramatically, so we need to stop promoting international tourism and concentrate on local tourism – and we need to discourage “the world's greatest travellers” from travelling so much.

3. What impact can we live with?

Whatever it takes.

There is no room for compromise unless we want to participate in a continuous sequence of global conflict, and gift our children or grandchildren (should they survive) a world that bears no resemblance to the utopia that we have enjoyed, and watch billions on our planet wear the consequences of our greed.

We face a pivotal decision. The change we need to make is akin to an individual finding out that the only occupation that they know is now redudant due to new technology. But individuals, communities, cities and countries have faced these challenges before - when it has been forced upon them.

We have the opportunity to manage the transition. If we do it by choice now, we will be in a better position going forward – both economically, and morally.

However the cost of this transition need not fall on the poorer parts of our community. The cost should be born at the source of the emissions. That is fair to non-emitting businesses and to consumers. This is the way to ensure that the entire economy rebalances to the new-normal and is in a position to lead the world in low-emission commerce.

4. Opportunities to reduce emissions

New Zealand must adopt a target that will make a meaningful difference. This must have a substantial impact on the way we live and to the balance of our economy. The reductions that are
necessary do not allow any semblance of the status quo for anyone in the developed world.

The opportunities will show themselves if the government implements a broad based emissions tax which rises over time and stabilises when the emissions target is in reached.

5. New technology and future uncertainty

The ambitious target must be set and regulatory mechanisms put in place that will inevitably meet the target.

To allow technology and cultural change to share in a market driven solution, then you can think in engineering terms. Establish an economic feedback loop (which electrical engineers are highly familiar with) that will drive the change. For example, establish an emissions tax regime where the tax levels inexorably rise until the emissions target is in sight, and then adjust to level out and hold emissions at the target.

Revenue from emissions taxes should be used in climate change mitigation, including contributions to less developed countries.

It is then unnecessary to speculate on the impact of future technology. The technology change and the cultural change will follow the money.

6. Further information.

I wish to see strong leadership, with a target of being a net carbon sink by 2030.

This will require change that many people would regard as radical.

This requires regulatory and legislative flexibility. It will step on toes. It will provoke cries of anticipated pain – as did removal of subsidies and trade tariffs. In reality, market driven fluctuations in our financial markets have much greater impacts in New Zealand than any change to government regulation has ever had.

Ironically, the new round of trade agreements, such as the TPPA, seek to limit sovereignty in the interests of international financial freedom. Making the changes necessary to combat climate change will not be possible if every decision is hamstrung by claims of compensation from foreign investors.

Action on climate change will need to be wide ranging and will affect every area of the economy. It will impact every business operating in New Zealand and every financial investment into New Zealand.

Corporations are amoral. Pursuit of profit is the only motive allowed by our company legislation. Directors of polluting companies will seek to weaken action as long as possible, and take as small a share of the burden.

As a consequence they need to be forced into action by regulation, but that becomes impossible if every adverse regulatory impact must be compensated. We must not sign up to any more agreements which give foreign investors rights to compensation for regulatory change.