

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



Copy of your submission

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Objectives for the contribution

Do you agree with these objectives for our contribution? Yes

1b. What is most important to you?

It is imperative that New Zealand sets an ambitious contribution, even if we are responsible for less than 0.2% of global emissions (1,2). New Zealand's target for 2020 is to reduce emissions to 5% of 1990 levels. However, the 2020 targets globally will not be enough to limit warming to 2 °C (3). Therefore all countries, including New Zealand, must aim for a much higher target.

As well as environmental damage, climate change causes substantial economic harm (4). Reducing emissions at the present time is both more beneficial than the long-term cost of inaction (5), and is cheaper than reducing emissions in the future (6). Delaying comprehensive emissions reduction by another 15 years would push a 2 °C warming target completely out of reach, and if developing technologies such as carbon capture and storage do not become available, we do not even have as long as 15 years until 2 °C of warming becomes unattainable (6).

Costs and impacts on society must indeed be managed appropriately – and so why do the Government intend to exclude the agriculture sector from their attempts to reduce emissions? As noted in the Discussion Document (7), agriculture is responsible for approximately half of our gross emissions. Given that domestic gross emissions must be reduced sooner or later, it seems short-sighted to exclude one of our biggest polluting sectors.

New Zealand's target should clearly signal the path (for industry and consumers alike) to a low emissions future, in which we trade off our "100% pure" image to grow our economy.

References:

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4. Revesz, R. L. et al., Global warming: Improve economic models of climate change, *Nature*, 508, 173-175, doi:10.1038/508173a, 2014.
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What would be a fair contribution for New Zealand?

2. What do you think the nature of New Zealand's emissions and economy means for the level of target that we set?

To international audiences, anything less than a 25% reduction in emissions will appear weak. The European Union and Norway have set targets of a 40% reduction in emissions compared to 1990 levels by 2030 (8). Switzerland, which is responsible for approximately 0.1% of global emissions (i.e. less than New Zealand), has set a target of 50%. Even Canada and the US, which respectively withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol and failed to ratify it, have set targets to reduce emissions to 30% and 26-28% of 2005 levels. In order for New Zealand to build a low-carbon economy whilst trading off our "100% pure" image, we must be seen to be doing more than our fair share for climate change; therefore the Government should set a target of no less than a 40% emissions reduction by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.

How will our contribution affect New Zealanders?

3. What level of cost is appropriate for New Zealand to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions? For example, what would be a reasonable reduction in annual household consumption?

4. Of the opportunities for New Zealand to reduce its emissions (as outlined on page 15 of the discussion document), which do you think are the most likely to occur, or be most important for New Zealand?

Summary

5. How should New Zealand take into account the future uncertainties of technologies and costs when setting its target?

We should not rely on future technologies to address emissions. Whether new technologies arise or not, we still need to reduce emissions to play our part in avoiding 2 °C warming. Carbon capture and storage may be one promising technological option once it becomes cheap enough, and so long as the Government legislates that polluters must pay for it.

Other comments

6. Is there any further information you wish the Government to consider? Please explain.
As an atmospheric scientist, I understand the science underlying climate change and the pressing need to take action. I also understand the many political difficulties in translating the scientific need into reality. It is my hope that the current Government will embrace, rather than avoid the challenges presented by climate change, and go down in history as the government that put New Zealand on a clear path to a low emissions future.