Submission on setting New Zealand’s post-2020 climate change target

From: Alina Siegfried

1. We need to start investing now in the long term future of our planet, the future of food security and of our global weather systems. That means ambitious targets that don't merely follow other nations, but lead the world.

2. An emissions reduction target of 40% by 2030. It will not bankrupt the economy as you have suggested. These emissions targets are what is NEEDED. The economy can change - the climate needs to not. If you have such serious concerns about the economy, then it's the economy that you need to change - to one that is not so dependant upon fossil fuels.

3. Showing we are serious about climate change by setting ambitious targets, and investing seriously in technology for greenhouse gas reduction, will showcase New Zealand as a global leader for these kinds of technologies. NZ could become known as a space where talented technologists and entrepreneurs could test new ideas to reduce emissions - this would help New Zealand "get off the grass" and move our economy beyond primary industries.

4. The time has passed for an 'easy-as-she-does-it' approach. If the government is serious about investing in the economy, you need to look beyond the economy for the next three years, the next ten or even the next twenty. You need to look at is going to be driving our economy in 30, 40 or 50 years time. It's not going to be dairy cows, it's going to be innovation, technology and an ideas-based economy. The sooner we start this painful transition the better.

5. The vast majority of the world's scientific community have been warning of climate change for more than thirty years now. It is simply not good enough to put this off any longer. We need serious targets, serious follow-through and serious thought into how New Zealand is going to meet our global obligations. This will require a lot of outside-the-box thinking, and we need to start now.
6. There has been talk from the government of the need to stay below 450 ppm. Please revise your figure to the consensus of the scientific community who maintain that 350 ppm is the target we need to aim for to stay below 2 degrees of warming.

7. The Government's narrow fixation on the short-term costs of taking action is flawed and damaging. This is about investing in a safe and prosperous future where we're all better off. Failing to act will cost us and the World Bank warns that the longer action is delayed, the more costs will rise for the next generation. Taking action to cut carbon pollution in New Zealand creates benefits like cleaner air, less dependence on foreign oil, better human health and more liveable cities. Our existing renewable electricity portfolio is an opportunity, not an excuse for inaction. By building on this we can be a positive example to other countries, pioneer solutions the rest of the world needs, and capture new economic opportunities.

8. Carbon dioxide is the main driver of long-term climate change. The discussion document highlights that for a good chance of limiting warming to less than 2°C, the world can emit less than one trillion tonnes of CO2 from now on. At current rates of emissions, the world will blow this carbon budget by 2035. Regardless of what we do about other emissions from agriculture, every country ultimately needs to reduce CO2 emissions to zero to stop climate change and avoid blowing the global carbon budget. That means shifting from fossil fuels to clean energy and planting forests to absorb carbon.

9. In order to meet our targets we need a credible national strategy for how we can achieve them. Without a clear pathway, targets are just empty numbers. Despite existing targets for 2020 and 2050, New Zealand's emissions have continued to rise. Official projections say they will continue rising under current policies. Our international reputation can't survive that much longer - we need real results.

10. This issue needs cooperation across the political spectrum and efforts to engage all New Zealanders in the solutions. Climate policy can't go on being a political football with major policy flip-flops every time there's a change in government. We need stable climate policy that steers us clearly towards a zero carbon society. This will allow businesses to make good long-term decisions and New Zealand will benefit by attracting investment in low carbon industries and innovation.
11. Previous generations didn't understand the gravity of the problem and didn't have the technologies to solve it, but the current generation in charge has neither excuse. Delaying action makes it harder to meet our targets and lumps more costs onto young people to deal with in the future. There are many beneficial actions the Government could take now together with businesses and communities to kick-start the transition.

12. There will simply be no adequate excuses for my grandchildren (I have yet to have children), when they ask why New Zealand didn't get serious about addressing climate change. Political excuses won't wash, so PLEASE, this time round, don't play politics and make a decision based on old-school economic ideology. **Make a decision based on what we all know our planet needs.**

Thank you,
Alina Siegfried