

# Setting New Zealand's post-2020 climate change target

## Submission form

The Government is seeking views on New Zealand's post-2020 climate change contribution under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

You can have your say by making a submission using this form or using the online tool available at [www.mfe.govt.nz/more/consultations](http://www.mfe.govt.nz/more/consultations).

For more information about this consultation:

- Read our [Consultation on New Zealand's post-2020 international climate change contribution web page](#)
- Read our discussion document: [New Zealand's Climate Change Target: Our contribution to the new international climate change agreement](#)

**Submissions close at 5.00pm on Wednesday 3 June 2015.**

## Publishing and releasing submissions

All or part of any written submission (including names of submitters), may be published on the Ministry for the Environment's website [www.mfe.govt.nz](http://www.mfe.govt.nz). Unless you clearly specify otherwise in your submission, we will consider that you have consented to website posting of both your submission and your name.

Contents of submissions may be released to the public under the Official Information Act 1982 following requests to the Ministry for the Environment (including via email). Please advise if you have any objection to the release of any information contained in a submission and, in particular, which part(s) you consider should be withheld, together with the reason(s) for withholding the information. We will take into account all such objections when responding to requests for copies of, and information on, submissions to this consultation under the Official Information Act.

The Privacy Act 1993 applies certain principles about the collection, use and disclosure of information about individuals by various agencies, including the Ministry for the Environment. It governs access by individuals to information about themselves held by agencies. Any personal information you supply to the Ministry in the course of making a submission will be used by the Ministry only in relation to the matters covered by this consultation. Please clearly indicate in your submission if you do not wish your name to be included in any summary of submissions that the Ministry may publish.

## Questions to guide your feedback

Your submission may address any aspect of the discussion document, but we would appreciate you paying particular attention to the questions posed throughout and listed in this form. You may answer some or all of the questions. To ensure your point of view is clearly understood, you should explain your rationale and provide supporting evidence where appropriate.

### Contact information

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### Objectives for the contribution

**1a. We have set the following three objectives for our contribution:**

- **it is seen as a fair and ambitious contribution – both by international and domestic audiences**
- **costs and impacts on society are managed appropriately**
- **it must guide New Zealand over the long term in the global transition to a low emissions world.**

**Do you agree with these objectives for our contribution?**

- Yes, at least in principle, but there are numerous caveats detailed below.
- No

**1b. What is most important to you?**

That the government and the country make a genuine rather than a token effort to deal with a problem that is probably the most important that the world will face this century. This will undoubtedly be difficult and will require absolute determination from both government and all of the political parties together with genuine sacrifice from the NZ population. The absolute minimum target for reduction should be 40% below 1990 levels and that target needs to be reached as soon as possible, certainly by 2027. Expert predictions suggest that even this may not be enough to prevent unmitigated disaster. The summary section of the discussion document includes the comment “Doing more than our fair share would also impact the competitiveness of New Zealand businesses

and place unnecessary costs on households". What happened to New Zealand as a world leader, trend setter and innovator? If something drastic is not done many New Zealand businesses, particularly in the agricultural and fishing sectors, may not survive and the longterm effects of sea level rise, ocean acidification and severe and unprecedented weather events will have a significant impact on all New Zealand households. Furthermore, the result of inaction on many of our Pacific Island neighbours will be total devastation. It behoves government to consider its role as a Pacific nation when determining the level of response. Strong, committed and unswerving action by Government to minimise our emissions and set this country and the Pacific region on a fast track to sustainability and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is the prime requirement.

## 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?

Without doubt, the emission of carbon dioxide remains the most important contributor to climate change. In NZ, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions account for only a little under 50% of our total emission profile. Nonetheless we have perhaps a unique opportunity to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to an absolute minimum taking advantage of the increasing availability of renewable energy sources. These include hydro-electric and geothermal energy together with emerging technologies that harness wind, water and solar power. Mandating energy efficiency and sustainability in lighting and heating provide additional conservation measures. Promoting the use of hybrid and electric cars and, in particular, government support for the provision of infrastructure to increase the viability of the latter will assist further. Current government support for home insulation is a positive that needs to be maintained and extended. In this regard, we have a great deal to learn from Europe, especially in providing effective and suitable insulation for our considerable number of older and heritage properties.

The current government policy of encouraging oil exploration, both on land and beneath our coastal waters, is to be deplored. How can the present government claim that "To be successful in limiting the most harmful impacts of climate change all countries need to contribute to reducing emissions." when it is actively courting oil companies to find more and more of the very material that is one of the principal causes of the climate change problem?

While methane and N<sub>x</sub>O<sub>y</sub> emissions figure significantly in New Zealand's total greenhouse gas output, their effect on climate change pales almost to insignificance in comparison to that of CO<sub>2</sub>. Nonetheless the NZ led initiative for research into agricultural mitigation technologies is important and should be continued at an expanded rate. In that regard, I would question whether \$10 million annually is sufficient to adequately support this research? Indeed the increased and increasing reliance on dairy exports is of questionable value to the country. Is the recent lemming-like rush to convert most of rural NZ to one gigantic dairy farm really the way to go? Certainly recent trends in dairy prices and well researched assessments of the feasibility and overall economic "benefit" of dairying to the country's economy call this very much into question. Also, ever expanding dairy production not only impacts on greenhouse gas emissions but also has significant and deleterious implications for the health of lakes, rivers and underground water sources throughout the country.

## 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 do you think would be a reasonable impact on annual household consumption?**

This question should really be turned upon itself. The most important question that the discussion document, and presumably therefore the government, neglects to ask is “What will be the level of cost to NZ of NOT reducing its greenhouse gas emissions”. One only has to look at the costs of recent droughts to the farming community and that of severe weather events such as the floods in the coastal region of Wellington to realise that the cost of inaction will be totally unsustainable. Important here also is the signal that a significant and serious attempt by NZ to tackle the problem will send to other countries.

Viewing the scenarios outlined in the consultation document, I was immediately struck by the fact that the impact costs for the various target levels did not vary hugely. The difference between 5% and 40% reduction on the cost to be born by the “average household” was only \$530 or around \$10 per week. An increase in the total cost from \$24 to \$34 per week. Surely that is a small price to pay for such a huge benefit to the community overall? Furthermore a reduction in consumption of \$1800 p.a. is a mere 2.1% of the predicted annual household consumption in 2027 of \$85,000. Having said that, I am acutely aware that many of the disadvantaged in our community, particularly those on fixed incomes, would find \$10 per week an insuperable burden. There is no question that the better off in the country will need to offset these costs for the poor through small increases in taxes. It is a given that an issue such as this can be tackled without pain. Increasing the tax imposition on the wealthier segment of the community may not sit well with the philosophies of a National government. However, a small and barely perceptible tax increase for the wealthy, to bring lasting benefits to the nation as a whole, has to be seen as worthwhile.

### **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?**

New Zealand should aim to be essentially free from dependence on fossil fuels by 2030, particularly through the use of renewable energy sources. Ideally, the majority of these should be free from CO<sub>2</sub> emissions but we will undoubtedly have to rely to some extent on bio-diesel in this interim period. The most important technical breakthrough would be the discovery of a facile route to a hydrogen economy. This is a field that has challenged chemists and physicists throughout my 60 years as a scientist but, once the breakthrough is made, it will be revolutionary. In the meantime NZ should continue to support renewable energy initiatives, reduce the need for industrial processes to depend on fossil fuels and put increased emphasis on sustainable agriculture, increased forestry and adding value to exports of agricultural products.

## Summary

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

Positive technological developments are bound to flow from research into energy sustainability, both here and overseas. Recent advances in solar cell and battery technologies are obvious cases in point. On the basis that technologies to enhance sustainability and reduce greenhouse gas emissions are likely to improve significantly in the future, the target should clearly be set as high as possible. 40% below 1990 levels should be a minimum target and setting processes and procedures in place to achieve or exceed that target should begin immediately.

## Other comments

### **6. Is there any further information you wish the Government to consider? Please explain.**

The problem of climate change is indeed global and tackling that problem will require a concerted effort by nations across the world. New Zealand could send a hugely positive signal to the world by treating the climate change issue in a completely cross party framework that transcends political allegiances and party politics. Let us show the world at the Paris meeting that NZ is prepared, once again, to be a world leader and to do so with the backing, not only of the vast majority of its population, but also of its entire political establishment.

While this is an entirely personal submission and the views I express are my own, I am also an active member of the Wise Response group and I fully endorse the contents of their much more extensive and wider ranging submission.

## When your submission is complete

Email your completed submission to [climate.contribution@mfe.govt.nz](mailto:climate.contribution@mfe.govt.nz) or post to Climate Change Contribution Consultation, Ministry for the Environment, PO Box 10362, Wellington 6143.

**Submissions close at 5.00pm on Wednesday 3 June 2015.**