

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



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## Contact information

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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?

While I agree with all three bullet points and see all three as important, it is the third that is the most important from my perspective. The reason, because it is only through a global transition to a low emissions world that we can hope to ensure the sustainability of human life on Earth (as we have come to know it) long-term. There are many factors, in my view, that contribute to ensuring a low emissions world. These including a move towards green technology (including green agritech), and the elephant in the room - curbing human population growth. The latter, is a horrible subject on the face of it, and beyond New Zealand's influence – we can't hope to stem the exponential growth in human population. But it is a part of the reality of the situation. To ignore it, therefore, would be lie putting one's head in the sand. New Zealand might be able to help to at least raise the issue. Some commentators argue that the unsustainable growth in human population can be mitigated by greater investment in education and somewhat counter intuitively, via lifting people out of poverty.

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?

Whether we set a level of 5% or 10% (or some other percentage) reduction in emissions (from 1990 levels) is a different issue to the fact that almost half of our emissions are agricultural related. Understandably, we are reluctant to interfere with what we perceive as the golden goose (dairy cows), but recent falls in milk solid prices etc, should warn us that this reliance is as much an economic risk as it is unhelpful environmentally (think river water quality, methane emissions etc). As the difference in cost per NZ household is negligible between a 5% and 10% commitment, I think the higher of the two is more effective from the point of view of cost versus benefit. In reality, though, we can not expect to reduce emissions by 5% or 10% through some miracle scientific discovery that reduces animals' methane and nitrogen outputs. So, we need to incentives for better, more productive use of NZ land than milk and meat production. And whatever the incentives decided upon are, they will have to be diverse. Not just wine grape-growing and Kiwifruit - or even horticulture at all. But it would appear to make sense to include forestry in the mix given its value as a carbon sink. Over-all, we should aim to make as much of a fair contribution as we can, given our limitations -- i.e we don't have much room for emission cuts in the electricity generation sector -- and if we are serious about this, we have to take a good look at diversifying our economy away from milk and meat production; and perhaps look for gains to be made in lower carbon dioxide emitting transportation (i.e. fewer trucks, more utilisation of trains and ships between ports and main centres). Public transport in metropolitan areas is another area where some easy reductions could be made. The services are too expensive, and too infrequent. The additional cost of investing in trains (and perhaps one day a return to trams or light rail), that could be heavily subsidised by the State, should be thought of in terms of how this cost is off-set by reduced transport emissions.

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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?

It doesn't appear that there is much difference between a 5% and 10% target, for example, in terms of opportunity cost to the nation over time. Whatever is decided has to be weighed against the risk of setting a target that is too low – and which does not help to inspire other developed nations or be seen as not pulling our weight as a responsible global citizen – or too high i.e. unachievable. We should try to follow the lead of the likes of Germany, rather than the likes of the U.S, U.K or Australia. But we are limited in what we can do. Though we could build a better train and light rail network and subsidise this (off-setting the additional cost against our need to reduce transport emissions); invest in more native (as a long-term project) and exotic forestry projects – and process our wood here, rather than send it overseas as a raw commodity; and move away from dairy.

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?

The most important to New Zealand is diversifying our economy so that it is not so reliant on dairy. There is no reason that NZ could not be a world leader in green technology solutions to the problems raised by climate change...and by this, I do not only mean agricultural or horticultural related green technology. Perhaps our national identity is too rural-centric. We need to get a big part of our education, research and business sectors focussed on green urban technologies. Auckland, after-all, is a global city in our country.

Summary

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

There is no certainty that a high protein diet is sustainable beyond, say 2035 or 2050. Our focus on food production is great, and we are currently blessed with the land and climate resources needed to produce great food and beverages. But, are we planning ahead to produce the foods that will be needed in a world of 12 billion people or more, where 8 million or more may be living in this country?? Will we have enough suitable land to meet increased demand for dairy and meat products, should the demand keep growing with the human population. Eventually, we will not. What then? We need to produce food that is less resource intensive, and do so with less environmental impacts i.e. cleaner. It may be that we need to focus on producing different food products to sell to the world and feed our own nation.

Other comments

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

Please try to think long-term and creatively – take risks rather than follow what the U.K, U.S and Australia or Canada are doing. Thinking short-term is the greatest risk in terms of climate change. Yes, there is a need to keep the economy afloat and meeting climate change and other environmental obligations affects the bottom-line in the here and now. But if the projections for the effects of climate change are even close to accurate, we need to adapt and diversify fast.