

## Submission on Aotearoa New Zealand's Climate Change Contribution under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

To the MFE:

Thank you for providing this opportunity to submit on climate change targets. We are facing a pivotal moment in history and the challenges presented by anthropogenic climate change are nothing less than an existential threat to civilisation.

### **Limited timescale of consultation process problematic**

The short amount of time allowed for discussion, meetings and preparation of submissions has been deeply inadequate for a matter of such grave importance. In my region, there has been little dissemination of information on the consultation process in the normal media outlets, and in our largest city, Palmerston North, there has been no public meeting. This omission is even more notable and unfortunate in light of the fact that the Manawatu is a principal hub of farming and primary production as well as being a centre for research and innovation in the agricultural sector, with the presence of Massey University and several important Crown Research Institutions in the vicinity. On a nationwide basis, the short timeframe has curtailed effective dialogue on the most critical issue of our time in environment, public health and economic terms. I can only express profound disappointment on this matter and leave aside speculation as to any motive for the scheduling.

### **The precautionary imperative**

With a global surface temperature rise of less than 1 C over the twentieth century<sup>1</sup>, we are already witnessing profound and accelerating changes in weather patterns, ice mass, and sea levels. There is perhaps no better place to look when correlating extreme weather events and losses than to the reinsurance industry, and this is where the rising cost of inaction can best be quantified. As of 2011, researchers at Munich Re had clearly identified that payouts for large-scale climatologic, meteorologic and hydrologic events were increasing on a scale directly correlated to rising global temperature<sup>2</sup>. There is no question that the costs of doing what have have done to date (nothing) are increasing and will soon pose a major threat to the way of life for most of the world's population. The question revolves around whether we are content to apply half measures to reducing our carbon footprint and pay this mounting bill at the same time we are undergoing equally or more expensive adaptation tactics, or commit to a strategic rethink and shift completely away from our carbon intensive economy to one which achieves mitigation and harm reduction.

This question is best answered on moral grounds by extending the precautionary principle: When faced with an unknown risk (the cost of doing nothing and dealing with the consequences of catastrophic and irreversible climate change) and the fact that we don't have a control for this experiment, the only response can be an immediate and full-scale builddown of carbon emissions along with the development of carbon neutral or negative technologies to meet our energy, transport and food requirements. To paraphrase Nassim Nicholas Taleb, harm is in the dose. If the rise in atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> since the dawn of the industrial era from 280 to 400 ppm so far has produced an exponentially increasing amount of economic damage in the form of extreme weather events, a further increase from the current level, even a slight one, could be more than we are able to deal with. This creates what Taleb calls “the precautionary imperative”<sup>3</sup> and lays out the argument for aggressive policies which address mitigation and adaptation.

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1 <http://www.ipcc.ch/ipccreports/tar/wg1/005.htm>

2 <https://ieta.memberclicks.net/assets/EventDocs/FallSymposium2011/carl%20hedde.pdf>

3 <http://nassimtaleb.org/2015/05/statement-on-climate-models/>

## **Size is not an excuse**

Many commentators on Aotearoa New Zealand's responsibility to lead on climate change matters cite the country's relatively small size as a disincentive for bold action. This ignores our huge potential to adopt policies which would turn our nation into a world leader in carbon sequestration. With our climate and soils, it would be very feasible to turn large portions of marginal farmland to the task of forestry specifically targeted for conversion to fossil fuel replacements and perdurable carbon. We could be turning our hill country into a massive carbon sink and retaining a quality of life that Kiwis are comfortable with, and exporting the technology worldwide. Pyrolysis and capture will drive the carbon negative economy.

I am willing to speak to my submission.

Phil Stevens

