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From: [REDACTED]
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To: Climate Contribution
Cc: 'Chris Peterson'
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CLIMATE CHANGE CONTRIBUTION CONSULTATION

Chris Peterson
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Kia ora

NOTHING HARD IS EVER EASY!

Today the elephant in all our rooms, which we seemingly refuse to notice or confront, is assuredly climate change. (A case of global cognitive dissonance perhaps.)

Yet steadily, indeed exponentially, over the last several decades the scientific evidence has consolidated and amassed to the point where there would appear to be an unparalleled consensus that the situation is dire and the timeframe for action extremely urgent.

Climate change is an inexorable process and, the science says, will inevitably reach a point where the process becomes unstoppable and there is no possibility of turning back from an unthinkable future. The awkward thing about such tipping points is that we may not be aware of them until after the event – which seems a good argument for operating under a strong precautionary principle.

Most thinking people worldwide then, one could assume, will have their fingers crossed that the upcoming COP21 in Paris will result in a true step change in our world leaders' willingness to put aside their national best interests and work together for the greater good of humanity and future generations, our fellow species and the stability of ecosystems.

To that end the overarching priority must be meaningful mitigation measures and critically the reduction of greenhouse gases with particular emphasis on the longer-lived carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide.

This imperative is surely, in any final analysis, more important than the everyday issues of both international and domestic politics, real or perceived, and niceties in the balance of power and trade. Short-term economic advantages or disadvantages pale in face of this issue which at its nub is whether our civilization has a future or not.

It is often claimed that NZ is well-respected on the world scene and that we punch above our weight. It is also said that small countries like ours can play a pivotal role in facilitating an acceptable way forward for the bigger powers.

The call for such leadership has, we would argue, never been needed more and many citizens would be so extremely proud if our government were now to step up to the mark and energetically pursue such a line.

We are, therefore, disappointed to perceive the emphasis in your discussion document on our post-2020 contributions so focussed on perceived difficulties, special circumstances, and the costs to our economy and consumption patterns. It is disappointing, too, to see the document touting the fact that we will be able to buy offshore credits (including shonky ones?) to get us some way off the hook in not having to take real, tangible actions here in NZ – which may be more painful but perhaps also more meaningful.

Such self serving is not becoming in such game-changing circumstances. We are, after all, a First World Developed nation with a supposed 'Rock Star' economy. We've done very well for all our history almost on the back of fossil fuels. Simply speaking, we can afford to grow a little more slowly and have marginally less disposable income. Surely our future – and our kids - is worth it. (Assuming, of course, a more equitable distribution of wealth and income. But that is a different argument).

Let us then be bold and ambitious, a leader rather than a follower whether fast or slow, at the Paris talks. Because, if we pull it off and play such a key role with a successful outcome, and the planet starts on the desperately needed rapid transition to a Low/Zero Carbon future, then NZ may end up with a 'Rock Star' reputation and our best branding ever.

We should never forget, moreover, our special obligation to the Pacific Islands who will be among the soonest and hardest hit by sea-level rise and ocean acidification.

While the endpoint is important – say, 80% emissions reduction on 1990 levels by 2050 and 100% by 2100 – it is, we understand, very important that emissions peak sooner than later. So aggressive shorter-term targets are critical and we submit going for a 40% reduction by 2030.

We accept that this will be difficult for agriculture but with new methodologies and technologies, greater R&D expenditure and continued support for the GRA, Global Research Alliance, we boast so much about, then who knows what might be possible.

There is also much we could do in moving faster to having 100% renewable electricity generation (we are repeatedly told we are so far ahead of most other OECD countries at 80%), and the possibility of alternative transport fuels and technologies seem on the near horizon.

There are, too, all the demand-side measures to reduce energy consumption such as low-energy appliances and better home insulation.

Many of these strategies will have other concomitant benefits in terms of improved health, employment, savings on expenses, and the creation of new industries. The opportunities that will come with that 'creative destruction' in the transition to a new Green Economy.

Accelerated forest plantings, better pest management on conservation lands, greater attention to soil health will be important in sequestering more carbon and will have overall complementary benefits as well. But such programmes should not be just expediciencies distracting from the real requirement – the need to free ourselves and our economy from the addiction to fossil fuels.

Much of the above is clearly in the realm of the domestic policy arena necessary to be able to achieve our INDCs. This brings us to my key request: a plea that all parties put aside their politicking and work collaboratively and consensually on this absolutely, all-important, issue of climate change. And, to this end, an independent Climate Commission and domestic climate change legislation as in the UK would seem appropriate initiatives.

Be bold, be ambitious, lead.

Thank you for this opportunity, Chris Peterson