



Submission

to the

Ministry for the Environment

by

Sustainable Ōtautahi Christchurch

on

New Zealand's Post 2020 Climate Change Target



Sustainable Ōtautahi Christchurch

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Public Consultation on New Zealand's Post 2020 Climate Change Target

SOC's Aim: Long-term sustainability - We all have our basic needs satisfied so we can live in dignity, in healthy communities, while having the minimum adverse impact on natural systems now and in the future.

Sustainable Ōtautahi Christchurch (SOC) supports the concept of Strong Sustainability as outlined [here](#) by Sustainable Aotearoa New Zealand. We are a Treaty-based, membership organisation working through education and partnerships to advance our aims.

Foundational to our thinking is the understanding that all of life relies on the integrity of the Earth's natural systems. Human communities are a component of the natural world and are dependent upon that natural world. Economic systems are just a component of the human systems and are man-made and therefore adjustable. Natural systems support human systems which have developed economic systems. There is a hierarchy that must be respected.

Climate change, whilst appearing as one of the most urgent existential threats faced by civilization is in fact no more than a symptom of the greater underlying malaise that comes from the lack of respect shown by decision makers at all levels for the true long term needs of individuals and communities and for the wider natural systems that support all life on Earth.

Whilst SOC advocates for strong, sustained and urgent action to tackle climate change we recognise that to treat the symptoms without addressing the underlying illness will not result in genuine sustainability.

Recommendations and suggestions in this submission should be regarded as being essential but not sufficient to bring about true strong sustainability in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Christchurch has experienced significant physical, structural, and social upheavals in recent years as a result of the earthquakes. Through that time SOC has worked for a more sustainable future for our city. We have learned how natural disasters tend to impact most significantly on those who are already disadvantaged, and how the expressed wishes of the community can be overlooked or disregarded by external decision makers. Democracy has been the primary victim of earthquakes in Canterbury. Since an inevitable consequence of accelerating climate change is the increased frequency and severity of adverse weather events, SOC is particularly keen to see that when disasters strike elsewhere in the country, the failures of the disaster recovery in Christchurch should not be repeated elsewhere.

The Discussion Document

We were very disappointed with the tone of the discussion document. There is a clear failure to give credence to the urgency and severity of the threat that we face. For the Government to embark on a genuine “national conversation” it is vital that the public be given full information.

Similarly, there is an implication that whatever changes are needed to reduce emissions can be accommodated within the existing economic paradigm. As already mentioned, SOC has observed that the prevailing economic paradigm is itself a source of the malaise that takes the form of Climate Change. To attempt to deal with climate change without challenging the underlying premise of neoclassical economics is certain to fail.

We will address each of the questions that have been raised in the submissions pro-forma.

1. Objective (i) Fair & Ambitious

For New Zealand to take its proper leadership position on dealing with the threat of climate change we will indeed need a target which is “fair and ambitious”.

Fairness will need to acknowledge the benefit that has come to NZ society from the use of fossil fuels – benefits that have been denied to many other communities in the world, especially our Pacific neighbours. It would be fair, then for New Zealand to reduce emissions to zero and below as rapidly as possible.

Plans and policies that are introduced with a view to reversing the trend of NZ emissions need also to respect the ideas of fairness. As was mentioned above, we have seen that fairness has not been a prominent feature of the Christchurch recovery and we would not want to see those mistakes repeated.

In determining what might constitute “ambitious” we are guided by figure 1 of the discussion document which implies that the current rate of use of fossil fuels would see the world breach the “safe limit” by 2035. An ambitious target would therefore see zero emissions from this country and many others by that date.

New Zealand does not emit a lot of GHGs in global terms, though our per-capita emissions are high. We need other nations to reduce their emissions to mitigate the effects of GHGs on our climate. Our call for other nations to reduce emissions will have no weight unless we aggressively reduce our own.

Objective (ii) Costs

Typically, as the Christchurch experience has shown, the costs of natural disasters are borne disproportionately by those who are least well off. We strongly support any costs which arise from climate change avoidance to be borne fairly, i.e. by those who use most fossil fuels and by those who have most benefited from their use.

Objective (iii) Guide

Any plans and programmes must inevitably be informed by the target that is agreed upon and by the data that results from monitoring for that target. There will be other guides and these should not be overlooked. In particular, SOC favours the concept which has underpinned much of the effective work done in Denmark. There the phrase “**every family, every farm, every factory**” has come to signify that no sector in society can be removed from the responsibility to bring down emissions. The phrase reminds us that, while individual

and community action is vital, it can only be successful if it is in harmony with similar actions in other branches of society. The role of the government is therefore to motivate and mandate such actions.

2. Fair Contribution

In order for the NZ target to meet the test of being fair and ambitious it must state clearly that there will be zero net emissions (any GHG) by 2050.

A plan to reach that target will have milestones along the way and we suggest that a 40% reduction from 1990 levels by 2030 would be both appropriate and in line with international expectations.

We stress that since atmospheric CO₂ levels are currently well above the safe level for a stable climate it is vital that New Zealand contributes to the global effort to absorb CO₂. So when the 2050 target has been reached we will need new targets to take us into the realm of negative emissions.

3. Cost

It is primarily this question and the assumptions and analysis behind it that cause us to doubt the Government's sincerity to actively tackle the causes of climate change. Action absolutely must be taken, whatever the cost. If it was felt that this position needed further support then the discussion document should have included an analysis of the costs of inaction. Similarly, it would be appropriate to consider the benefits to society (which may or may not be economic) from taking actions which are necessary anyway.

4. Opportunities

It has been suggested that proposals for policies, plans and programmes will form a secondary phase of public consultation. Yet we note that suggestions were specifically solicited at the recent public meeting which many of our members attended. The following are intended as a contribution to that ongoing conversation.

1. Amend the RMA to require consideration of the effects of proposals on climate change.
2. Replace the ETS with a "fee and tariff" system with a high and predictably rising cost on carbon.
3. Mandate the green star standard for all new residential and commercial buildings.
4. Increase the funding and political standing of the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority.
5. Accelerate the move to 100% renewable electricity by building those projects which are currently consented.
6. Plan for the closure of all NZ coal mining operations as each one reaches the end of its current consent.
7. Close the plants which are generating electricity from fossil fuels as the renewable options come on stream.
8. Immediately stop all onshore and offshore oil and gas exploration.
9. Halt the sale of prospecting / exploration rights for fossil fuels.
10. Transfer funding from the Roads of National Significance programme to urban active and public transport.

11. Prohibit further expansion in the dairy industry.
12. Require statutory organisations (e.g. schools, hospitals, council facilities) to convert their energy supplies to renewables such as electricity and wood waste.

In light of the urgency of action, SOC strongly suggests that wherever possible these changes be established before the international meeting in Paris. Our national credibility is at stake and a recent track-record of meaningful action would be to our advantage.

The New Climate Economy Report released in 2014 by a team of internationally renowned economists, led by Lord Nicholas Stern, found that countries can improve their economic performance while cutting emissions. The Chair of the Bank of America, the head of the ECD, the World Bank, the Vice Chair of Deutsche Bank, and many others, endorsed this finding.

5. Future

Uncertainty is a core consideration of anyone who opts to look to the future. We are uncertain what actions will be taken in other countries and we are uncertain how people will react as climate change impacts become more widespread and more hard-hitting. But there is no uncertainty of the need for action and of the leadership that will be required globally and at all levels in our society. SOC acts as a thought-leader in Christchurch but we look to the government to provide the moral and motivational leadership that will be needed as we transform our society into one that is compatible with maintaining a stable climate. Technologies will not be lacking in the future, and we fervently hope that leadership will not be lacking either.

Sustainable Ōtautahi Christchurch thanks you for the opportunity to submit. We look forward to all submissions being made public so that there is clarity about the way that New Zealand's contribution to limiting climate change is decided.

J. Adams, M. Ainsworth, J. Peet, K. Peet, D.Evans

On behalf of the Executive Committee

Sustainable Ōtautahi Christchurch

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