

Written submission on New Zealand's post-2020 climate change target

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Climate change is an immense problem that will affect not only our environment, but also the economic, social and physical wellbeing of everyone, everywhere. As a medical doctor, I am deeply concerned about the likely effects of climate change on people's health. These include changes in temperature-related and infectious diseases, mental illness and water and food shortages, in addition to health impacts related to sea level rise, heat waves, droughts, fires, floods and tropical storms. Vulnerable populations are expected to be the worst affected. All of the above have serious social and economic consequences, in addition to the effect on health and wellbeing.

Question 1

(a) Do you agree with the above objectives for our contribution?

Objective 1: It needs to *be* a fair and ambitious contribution, not only to *be seen to be* fair and ambitious.

Objective 2: Costs and impacts on society do need to be managed appropriately, but *all* costs and benefits, both short and long term, need to be considered, as well as the cost of *not* reducing emissions.

Objective 3: It must guide New Zealand towards a zero 2050 carbon target.

(b) What is most important to you?

The most important thing is that greenhouse gas emissions are reduced, beginning in the current government's term, so that future generations will live on a planet that is able to sustain their health and wellbeing.

Question 2: What do you think the nature of New Zealand's emissions and economy means for the level of target that we set?

As noted in the discussion document, 48% of our greenhouse gas emissions are from agriculture. However, the document gives less emphasis to the 52% of emissions that come from other sources. While we already have a high level of renewable energy, we still have a large proportion of emissions (22%) coming from energy. We can greatly decrease our emissions in areas other than agriculture, particularly energy and transport, but also industry and waste. We have the knowledge, the technology and the means to do this. In addition, we can do what we can to minimise agricultural emissions, including through diversification of farming. We need to set an ambitious target, despite the challenges. There is too much at stake not to.

Question 3: What level of cost is appropriate for New Zealand to reduce its greenhouse gas emission? For example, what would be a reasonable reduction in annual household consumption?

There are many costs and benefits which are not mentioned in the discussion of cost:

- 1) The economic costs of *not* reducing emissions have not been considered.
 - a) The short term costs of reducing emissions are far smaller than the long term economic costs if we do not reduce emissions.

- b) The costs of reducing emissions become higher the longer we wait.
 - c) Industries such as agriculture and fisheries are very sensitive to climate change. New Zealand's economic dependence on such industries means that the economic impact of climate change on New Zealand would be huge.
 - d) Climate change will lead to large financial costs associated with the health and social impacts outlined earlier.
- 2) There are major non-economic benefits to minimising climate change through reducing emissions, particularly health and social benefits.
- 3) A significant proportion of actions that would reduce emissions have direct co-benefits in other areas, for example, active transport and housing insulation directly impact both health and carbon emissions.

Question 4: Of these opportunities which do you think are the most likely to occur, or be most important for New Zealand?

All are important, and there are many other opportunities that were not mentioned. Which are most likely to occur depends on government policies.

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

Uncertainties and assumptions should be clearly stated. While there are uncertainties around future technology, there is also much that we can do that does not depend on new technology.

Recommendations

The decisions made by today's politicians will greatly impact the wellbeing of future generations. The longer we delay in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the more difficult our situation will become. All countries have a part to play, but as a developed nation, we bear increased responsibility.

I strongly urge the New Zealand Government to:

- 1) Take into account the costs and benefits to health.
- 2) Take into account long term risks, costs and benefits, as well as short term ones.
- 3) Focus more on what New Zealand *can* do, than on what we can't do.
- 4) Commit to a zero 2050 carbon target, both globally and in New Zealand, with annual steps to achieve this.
- 5) Commit to at least a 40% decrease in gross domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, compared with 1990.
- 6) Commit to substantial action in this government's term.
- 7) Place an immediate moratorium on fossil fuel exploration.
- 8) Work constructively with other political parties and include cross-party plans in the INDC.
- 9) Establish an independent Climate Commission to ensure we meet our targets.

I hope that New Zealand will set a responsible and courageous post-2020 climate change target.

Yours sincerely,

Eline Thomson