

From: [REDACTED]
To: [Climate Contribution](#)
Subject: Submission 10996
Date: Wednesday, 3 June 2015 10:48:44 a.m.

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

Background

Climate change, and the dependency of climate on greenhouse gas concentrations, has been acknowledged for several hundred years and has been extensively studied since the 1850's (Huxley, Tyndall etc). It is unequivocal that anthropogenic sources of greenhouse gases now form a clear threat to the ecosystems that are responsible for stabilising the atmosphere. Humanity must now develop a large-scale, collaborative approach to stabilise the concentration of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere if we are to maintain a climate that is suitable for the continuation of biological systems. The impact of increasing greenhouse gases isn't one of 'turning up the thermostat' so much as destroying the mechanism of that thermostat.

The New Zealand government, like many, has shown a profound lack of leadership on this issue. There is a clear need to inform, encourage, motivate and mandate the changes that our communities must take if we are to tackle climate change.

The document produced by the Ministry for the Environment is disingenuous. Although it correctly implies that targets need to be ambitious, this is tempered with warnings of perceived economic costs and obfuscation over what those costs are covering. As there is no correlation between economy and climate, it is unacceptable to suggest that action to reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gases will be only taken to the point of an arbitrarily set economic cost. The point is to hold changes to climate to a sustainable level; our task is to protect our global ecosystem, not the economy. The economy can be remodelled into a sustainable form that is consistent with this.

The tenor of the questions raised throughout the discussion document is prejudiced towards the cost to families of meeting set carbon trading targets instead of protecting climate. The nature of the questions asked is leading, and lacks critical information required in order to inform a decision.

Target emission levels

The accepted level of damage that can be sustained by global biological systems is a net temperature increase of 2 degrees. The level of certainty of this is given at 66%. Given that, it is essential that New Zealand begins moving towards a zero net emission target now. Delaying action on carbon emissions now will demand increasingly difficult rates of reduction in the future. I contend that an aggressive approach now is necessary in order to avoid the 2 degree climate change target. Delay, or further posturing, will increase both the cost and unlikelihood of achieving sufficient action in the future.

I contend that the use of the phrase "long term" in the document discourages the view

that urgency is necessary. Action on climate change needs to begin immediately.

Strategy

Emissions targets by themselves are worthless unless they are backed up by a sound, sustainable plan to meet them and sustain them in the future. A fair, equitable scheme is needed to meet those targets.

Costs

I challenge this question. The economic modelling in the discussion document is clearly flawed and should not have been used. The MfE document does not provide anticipated costings for failing to meet the emissions targets, nor the cost benefits of a net-zero-carbon economy, nor does it say that the bulk of its stated costs are due to inaction by successive governments to date. Until the costs and benefits of action are appropriately balanced with the costs of inaction, public cannot make an informed decision regarding this.

Recognition of the validity of the science of climate change

Credence needs to be given to the science behind increasing greenhouse gases and climate change. The science is neither new nor controversial, but has been politicised to the extent that a significant portion of society still does not accept that human activities are profoundly influencing climate.

Setting targets

I submit that the easiest and cheapest means of limiting anthropogenic damage to climate is by:

- a. a linear decrease in net carbon dioxide emissions, beginning now, to achieve a zero net value by 2050;
- b. a zero net emissions by 2050 target for methane and nitrous oxide emissions;
- c. net absorption of all greenhouse gases after 2050;
- d. accurate monitoring of both levels and effects are undertaken to validate actions taken, with results made public.

These targets are ambitious, but meet the best estimates we currently have of limiting damage to a sustainable level. Failure to do so has a very high probability of passing the 'tipping point' threshold of widespread, catastrophic and unrecoverable damage. These levels are based on the upper limit of what is considered tolerable by the best science available to us.

Action

The document offers no specific strategies for achieving emissions targets, merely the costs of carbon trading. This is misleading, and disappointing. Action is required regardless of emissions trading or the outcome of the forthcoming Paris negotiations. The goal is a stable climate, irrespective of politics. Strategies for meeting net emissions targets should include:

- protection and development of carbon sinks;
 - promoting and encouraging public measures to decrease emissions;
 - promoting and encouraging industry best practice;
 - encourage the development of industries that produce sustainable energy sources;
- replacing the Emissions Trading Scheme with a “fee and tariff” system with high and predictably rising cost on carbon;
 - transfer funding from the Roads of National Significance programme to 'Urban Active' and public transport;
 - amending the RMA to require consideration of the effects of proposals on climate change;
 - plan for the closure of all NZ coal mining operations as each one reaches the end of its current consent;
 - halt the sale of prospecting and exploration rights for fossil fuels;
 - reducing New Zealand's dependency on the dairy industry and prohibiting its growth;
 - mandate the 'green star' standard for all new residential and commercial buildings;
 - take a governmental lead in statutory organisations, with the conversion to renewable energy sources wherever appropriate.
 - accelerate the move to 100% renewable electricity by building those projects which are currently consented.

Looking ahead

As models have tended to underpredict rates of change with carbon dioxide emissions, the urgency and severity of the need to take action on climate change cannot be understated. The best information that we have tells us that the current trajectory will cause permanent damage to the climate and life of our planet. We must now acknowledge that the atmosphere is strongly coupled to climate and climate is strongly coupled to life. New Zealand needs strong leadership to take an active role in protecting our climate. The failure of this government to acknowledge that change is necessary must be reversed.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit.

I look forward to hearing that the New Zealand government is taking active steps to limit climate damage irrespective of the outcome of the Paris negotiations or the cost of meeting our obligations under a carbon trading scheme.

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