Submission on New Zealand’s post-2020 Climate Change target

Ministry for the Environment

VUWSA Executive

03/06/2015

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1. **Introduction**

1.1 The Victoria University of Wellington Students’ Association (VUWSA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Government’s post-2020 climate change target in the lead up to COP21 in Paris in December 2015.

1.2 VUWSA is the oldest students’ association in New Zealand and functions to represent and advocate for the interests of Victoria University of Wellington’s 22,000 students.

1.3 VUWSA acknowledges that as a group of predominantly young people, students have a particular interest in climate change as they will bear the brunt of its effects in years to come. Despite this, they are reliant on a largely older generation of politicians to set and implement the ambitious strategies required to avoid catastrophic climate change.

1.4 VUWSA acknowledges the wide variety of students we represent and the many particular interests each of these students have in regard to climate change. These interest include the likes of students from our neighbouring Pacific island states who will see the effects of rising sea levels first and foremost, students with families reliant on agriculture who will struggle as a result of more extreme weather events, or students who wish to put their skills toward world leading climate change solutions in New Zealand but are discouraged by a government that lacks aspiration or leadership.

1.5 VUWSA notes the specific significance of the risk that climate change and rising sea levels pose to Victoria University’s low-lying Pipitea campus.

2. **Ambition and action: investing in our future**

2.1 VUWSA stresses that action on climate change is an investment in our future. The rhetoric in section 1 of the discussion document is bold in ambition. However, the indication of our climate change targets that follows, does not reflect this ambition. The document addresses at length the costs to New Zealanders of action on climate change, but entirely fails to address a far greater cost; the cost of inaction.

2.2 VUWSA notes that the co-benefits of action on climate change are not taken into account in the cost/benefit analysis. This is a major omission, and undermines the credibility of the analysis. Co-benefits of climate change action are wide ranging and include improving air quality and therefore human health, less dependance on foreign oil, and more livable cities.
2.3 VUWSA notes that the significance of increases to global temperatures since 1990 levels has been misrepresented in the document. An increase of 2°C has been identified by world leaders as a redline figure, an absolute limit that must be avoided in order to avoid catastrophic climate change. The discussion document acknowledges so, however in an attempt to paint a picture of the affects to New Zealand of a 3.5°C increase, fails to adequately state the severity of the problems that would result.

2.4 VUWSA notes that the document takes a narrow-minded approach to our target, which suggests that our role in moving toward a carbon zero world is restricted by our small contribution to total global CO2 emissions. This attitude fails to reflect the value of leadership, on an issue that is desperate for political leaders. It fails to meet the benchmark set by many previous New Zealand Governments who have led the world on major issues despite our relative small size.

3. **Zero emissions**

3.1 VUWSA supports the view of the international science community who say that at current rates of emissions, the total amount of carbon that we can afford to burn will be exceeded by 2035.

3.2 VUWSA notes that in light of this, any emissions reductions target should be part of a strategy working toward zero emissions, which must stipulate success no later than 2050.

3.3 VUWSA highlights that emissions reductions are necessary if New Zealand is to make a genuine and credible contribution to climate change mitigation. Trading on carbon markets is not a viable solution. This is tinkering around the edges without making any reductions to net emissions. It also risky and leaves us vulnerable. For example, New Zealand’s forestry industry currently acts as a carbon sink, but when many of these trees are harvested as they are due to be in the next 10-15 years our CO2 contributions will dramatically increase.

4. **A credible strategy**

4.1 VUWSA agrees with youth led organisation Generation Zero, who call for targets to be backed up with a credible strategy that details how the targets will be achieved. Our current approach is not working: despite targets for 2020 and 2050, our emissions continue to rise and on current projections will not meet these targets.
5. Climate change law

5.1 VUWSA supports the introduction of a climate change law, as has been implemented in the UK, to legislate emissions targets. This will place accountability onto governments, and reduce the risk of a failure to meet targets. A law of this sort would require Governments to publish carbon accounts, as they publish financial accounts. A carbon budget would provide transparency, and ensure actual reductions in carbon emissions.

6. Cross partisan climate change commitment

6.1 VUWSA notes that just as climate change mitigation is an issue requiring global cooperation, at a national level it requires cross partisan cooperation. In order to adequately act on climate change, we require a solution between all political parties to ensure a strategy can be successfully implemented across governments.

7. Conclusion

7.1 The world that gets inherited by the current generation of young people will be defined by the actions of current leaders and decision makers to act on climate change. We require meaningful action, and emissions reduction targets are ultimately what informs this action. Without a target of zero emissions, a credible strategy to work toward it, and the structures in place -such as a climate change law- to ensure it, New Zealand will not achieve what is required of us by other nations, by future and current generations, and by species whom with we co-exist. Students are studying hard in order to contribute to a New Zealand they can be proud of, and by taking leadership on this issue the Government can help to fulfill this, while avoiding catastrophic global climate change.

1. Contact

8.1 We would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss submission in more detail in person. Please contact us in the event further clarification of this submission is needed, or to arrange for VUWSA to make an oral submission.

Rick Zwaan | President
Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association
M: 021 188 1705 | DDI: 04 463 6986
E: rick.zwaan@vuw.ac.nz | president@vuwsa.org.nz
W: www.vuwsa.org.nz
Level 4, Student Union Building
Victoria University of Wellington Kelburn Campus
PO Box 600, Wellington 6140.