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Waimea Inlet Forum Working Group submission on Climate Change.

The Waimea Inlet Forum working group appreciates the opportunity to submit its views on New Zealand's role in combating climate change through the Ministry of Environment's public consultation process.

The Forum represents many groups concerned with the well-being of the Waimea Inlet. At 3,500ha, it is the largest estuary in the South Island and is on the north facing coast of the Nelson Province. Moturoa Island lies across the seaward entrance and there are several smaller islands within the bounds of the inlet.

The Forum's primary concern is for the healthy functioning of the inlet which provides habitat for many coastal and wader bird species, some in the threatened category. The estuary in pre-settlement times occupied extensive areas to the south of flat marshy land that was subsequently drained so that there is very little marsh left for the estuary to retreat into when sea levels rise.

The Waimea Inlet has already suffered degradation along stretches of the margins and there is diminishing cover where birds such as marsh crake and variable oystercatchers can find high tide roosts.

We consider that New Zealand's approach to climate change to date has been inadequate. Science has established that the burning of fossil fuels and deforestation are the main causes of climate warming. The reduction of the use of carbon dioxide and fossil fuels should be a priority and communities encouraged to plant native trees and forests as a positive step towards achieving a target of minus 40% emissions by 2030.

New Zealand seeks leadership roles within the global political sphere but has balked at playing a leading role in the reduction of carbon emissions because of creating a possible economic disadvantage. It is likely though that those countries moving quickly to alternative energy sources will have an economic advantage. Given our relative abundance of renewable energy sources there is no reason for coal to continue to be used and we should begin now to move towards 100% renewable sources.

We support a rapid change nationally to non-fossil fuels so that New Zealand plays its part in keeping the world's temperature rise to less than 2 degrees. The carbon pricing policy already in existence needs to work and provide an incentive for people to change with respect to their choice of energy. Native afforestation should be accelerated, making the rewards for carbon mitigation practices worthwhile.

Climate change is the biggest threat to New Zealand's coastal habitats. We believe that action against climate change should be bipartisan, agreed to by all political parties. We urge that New Zealand's politicians take their responsibilities seriously and formulate an agreed approach to reducing New Zealand's greenhouse emissions. There is the possibility it could lead the world in new technologies.

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