

Consultation on setting New Zealand's post-2020 climate change target



Copy of your submission

Contact information

Name Bernie Warmington

Organisation (if applicable)

Address [REDACTED]

Telephone

Email [REDACTED]

Objectives for the contribution

Do you agree with these objectives for our contribution? Yes

1b. What is most important to you?

It must be fair and ambitious, and it must be effective and enforceable. We are one of the richer countries, with abundant resources, so we can do more than many countries which are struggling to develop and have large populations to house, feed and employ.

What would be a fair contribution for New Zealand?

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

Our emissions per capita are among the highest in the world. We also have abundant renewable energy sources, good opportunities for applying efficient technologies which already exist or are developing (e.g. electric vehicles, biomass and better home energy efficiency / home insulation) and a relatively low population in relation to our land area and renewable resources. We are also a leader of sorts in the Pacific (being the second largest economy) many of whose countries are greatly threatened by climate change and sea level rise. To me this means that we can and should set a much more ambitious emissions reduction target than other countries. 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 could be achievable.

The current positioning by our Government seems to interpret "the nature of NZ's emissions and economy" in terms of it being very difficult for us to be ambitious because (e.g.) we have high agricultural emissions, we already have a high % of renewables in our electricity source, we are a small population in relation to land area, etc. Then there's the non-argument that because we are a small % of global emissions why do much at all? All of these arguments can be turned on their heads to demonstrate opportunities, and should be.

- Agricultural methane has a short life so we don't really need to wring our hands about it too much, in the long term we will find solutions to it, by which time today's methane will be long gone from the climate system
- If we have high agricultural emissions which are hard to decouple from production then we should accelerate our efforts to decarbonise our energy supply.
- We have achieved 70 - 80% renewable electricity without really trying, as renewables were the cheapest source for us. Compare that to the massive efforts in Europe and the USA to promote renewable sources (feed in tariffs, offshore wind subsidies, smart energy grids) and it's clear we could go much further if we tried. 95% should be quite possible
- As a small country with abundant resources we could easily lead the way in showing how it is possible to minimise gross emissions, rather than trail along reluctantly doing as little as possible.

I completely disagree with the statement "Overall, due to our national circumstances, New Zealand has fewer low-cost options to reduce our domestic emissions compared with other developed countries". That is just making excuses. We have massive renewable resources, we are wealthy, we have mild weather so heating and cooling are

Consultation on setting New Zealand's post-2020 climate change target



Copy of your submission

not such an issue as in, say Europe. Is there any country going into this negotiation round saying "It will be really easy for us to reduce emissions"? I suggest there is nobody saying that, it is hard for everyone, and it's a bit embarrassing to hear NZ's representatives continually saying how hard it is for us when it's probably easier for us than almost any country.

How will our contribution affect New Zealanders?

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

The cost, while important, is a secondary consideration. We need to do what is required to keep the planet liveable and productive, regardless of the cost to people today (and not forgetting that we are currently benefiting from a massive fossil fuel subsidies to our lifestyles).

I would say 3-5% of overall output would be a small price to pay for ensuring the continuation of the planet's life support systems (as well as other countries did their share also). In the end it would probably cost us much less. The current energy market is not necessarily 'rational' or the best of all possible worlds in economic terms. It is just the market we have and are used to, with all its massive imperfections. If we want an alternative involving less waste of fossil fuels it will not really take much nudging. E.g. tax breaks on hybrid and electric cars would help people take the plunge, then once it becomes the social norm and the infrastructure is established the subsidies won't be required any more. Same for building cycle lanes to promote cycle commuting, superinsulating buildings etc. The costs are short term, the benefits are long term. This makes much more economic sense, as long as your accounting of costs and benefits is sufficiently inclusive and your time horizon is medium to long.

In terms of the figures the discussion paper presents, the total cost for achieving a 20% reduction from 1990 levels (\$1400 per household or 2% of current household income) seems a pretty small price to pay, given the stakes are so high. That's about \$3.80 per day, or the price of a small cup of coffee per household. Not much to save the planet is it? A 40% reduction would be about \$5 per day which is completely affordable.

4. Of the opportunities for New Zealand to reduce its emissions (as outlined on page 15 of the discussion document), which do you think are the most likely to occur, or be most important for New Zealand?

We must focus on actual emissions reduction, not rely on buying overseas credits or offsetting emissions against pine plantations which must one day be harvested. There should be a cap on each of these approaches, maybe 10-20% for each, so that the focus is kept on reducing gross domestic emissions.

A carbon tax is the obvious way to incentivise change quickly and fairly as the price signal is direct and can't easily be evaded. Trading systems have tended to fail around the world, including here (I'm sorry but \$5 per ton is not a meaningful incentive). Political special pleading by established energy intensive industries and offshore credit purchases subvert the original purpose of the schemes until they become largely window dressing and do not drive any appreciable change in behaviour.

Much greater domestic energy efficiency is achievable at a good rate of return on investment, but people need encouragement and support to remove the barriers to investment.

Solar PV has great potential as equipment prices come down and technology improves.

Electric vehicles would use our offpeak baseload from hydro generation, especially when / if the aluminium smelter leaves and frees up Manapouri's output.

Biofuels for transport and industry have huge potential, given our abundant land and good growing conditions for a range of energy crops. We should invest in the production and distribution infrastructure (the research is mostly

Consultation on setting New Zealand's post-2020 climate change target



Copy of your submission

already done) and insure ourselves against the next oil price shock. A carbon tax would help to encourage biofuel use and some of the proceeds of the tax could be used to support the infrastructure.

Clearly research into reducing agricultural emissions should continue, it took decades of research to create our highly productive agriculture and may take decades to find solutions to methane and nitrogen oxides. The good news is that we could develop solutions that can be applied globally which is a massive opportunity and a chance to leverage our capabilities.

Summary

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

Going by past experience we can assume that future technology developments will tend to massively improve effectiveness, and reduce costs and risks. There will be incremental improvements in energy efficiency and clean energy technologies, and there will also be breakthrough technologies we have not yet imagined. The main uncertainty may be around the chance of sudden 'jumps' in the climate system caused by triggers / tipping points such as loss of ice sheets or changes in ocean circulation. We can be pretty sure these will be negative for us, not positive, given the tendency of natural systems change slowly and then to shift state suddenly, and in light of the several centuries of carbon load we have poured into the climate system with relatively slow changes to date. So these uncertainties are a reason for acting very quickly and decisively, not a reason to 'wait and see what happens'.

Other comments

6. Is there any further information you wish the Government to consider? Please explain.
Please be a positive, constructive, ambitious and global thinking negotiator, not a negative, self-interested and small minded one.

Remember the big issues and hardships are not about us in the rich world needing to change to a smaller car or pay more for our flights. We can do that with no real loss of wellbeing. It is about ¾ of the world's population in poorer countries being affected by drought, loss of food and water sources, temperatures too hot to work in (e.g. India in the last few weeks) and massive ecological damage and species loss. These things are already well in evidence, and our time to react is getting very short. Please do the right thing.