

Setting New Zealand's post-2020 climate change target

Submission form

The Government is seeking views on New Zealand's post-2020 climate change contribution under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

You can have your say by making a submission using this form or using the online tool available at www.mfe.govt.nz/more/consultations.

For more information about this consultation:

- Read our [Consultation on New Zealand's post-2020 international climate change contribution web page](#)
- Read our discussion document: [New Zealand's Climate Change Target: Our contribution to the new international climate change agreement](#)

Submissions close at 5.00pm on Wednesday 3 June 2015.

Publishing and releasing submissions

All or part of any written submission (including names of submitters), may be published on the Ministry for the Environment's website www.mfe.govt.nz. Unless you clearly specify otherwise in your submission, we will consider that you have consented to website posting of both your submission and your name.

Contents of submissions may be released to the public under the Official Information Act 1982 following requests to the Ministry for the Environment (including via email). Please advise if you have any objection to the release of any information contained in a submission and, in particular, which part(s) you consider should be withheld, together with the reason(s) for withholding the information. We will take into account all such objections when responding to requests for copies of, and information on, submissions to this consultation under the Official Information Act.

The Privacy Act 1993 applies certain principles about the collection, use and disclosure of information about individuals by various agencies, including the Ministry for the Environment. It governs access by individuals to information about themselves held by agencies. Any personal information you supply to the Ministry in the course of making a submission will be used by the Ministry only in relation to the matters covered by this consultation. Please clearly indicate in your submission if you do not wish your name to be included in any summary of submissions that the Ministry may publish.

Questions to guide your feedback

Your submission may address any aspect of the discussion document, but we would appreciate you paying particular attention to the questions posed throughout and listed in this form. You may answer some or all of the questions. To ensure your point of view is clearly understood, you should explain your rationale and provide supporting evidence where appropriate.

Contact information

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Objectives for the contribution

1a. We have set the following three objectives for our contribution:

- **it is seen as a fair and ambitious contribution – both by international and domestic audiences**
- **costs and impacts on society are managed appropriately**
- **it must guide New Zealand over the long term in the global transition to a low emissions world.**

Do you agree with these objectives for our contribution?

Yes

X No

1b. What is most important to you?

These objectives don't actually focus on the outcome. The desired outcome is reducing our emissions. The third objective does actually have some relevance – because indirectly it will lead to lower emissions. But the first objective is more concerned with appearances than results. And the second objective seems to me to reflect the flawed economic thinking apparent elsewhere in this document. That thinking focuses on the "costs" of a contribution, but does not consider either the potential benefits of a transition to a low emissions economy or the costs of doing nothing.

We need objectives that focus on achieving the greatest reduction in emissions possible given our emissions profile and the resources we have for affecting change. We need to do the best we can

and stop obsessing about what other countries do. Lead by example; not follow reluctantly. Sure – this means individuals and businesses will have to accept lower standards of living and lower profits respectively. But are you so naive that you think that we can make this transition without any financial consequences? We are living beyond our means – locally and globally – so logically we have to stop doing so. If we don't do it now, it will only get more difficult for the next generation and that is intergenerational theft; something this government is very good at.

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?

This document obsesses about a "fair contribution", reflecting the current political will to do no more than is absolutely necessary to not look complete hopeless. It's as if we are in a race with the Canadians to the bottom of the GermanWatch rankings - please see <http://germanwatch.org/en/download/8599.pdf>. At the moment, we are one and four places respectively ahead of the world's best polluters – the US and China. Oh well done New Zealand.

What is fair? As I have said, all comparisons are odious. But any comparison should be per person, not per cost of reduction. Why should New Zealanders be allowing to pollute more than others in the world? If it costs us more to reduce our emissions, whose fault is that? Ours, not someone else's. And please don't try to weasel out and use CO2 per person. Sure methane doesn't last as long as CO2 in the atmosphere but right now, we need to focus on affecting immediate change and methane traps more heat than CO2 so stop clutching at straws and get on with reducing our emissions. And a fair contribution ought to also reflect the fact that we in New Zealand are far better off than most others in the world; ergo we can afford to make greater cuts to our emissions. That is, the reductions we make in greenhouse emissions per person should at least be the same in relative terms to those in other countries; not the same in absolute terms. That's what fairness means.

Turning now to our emissions profile, it's obvious that if we are to affect real change then we must change (1) transport (17% of total emissions), (2) energy (22%) and most of all, (3) agriculture (48%). Anything else is just pointless tinkering.

Transport.

Sorry – no more roads of National significance. I mean, how dumb can you be? Have you ever wondered why every time a country builds more roads, they just end up with more traffic on them until they are congested. So let's just learn. I know, I know. It's hard. No more money for roads. Spend that money on public transport and improving cycling and walking access. Honestly this one has been staring us in the face for decades. How is it, that where I live in Christchurch we have major satellite towns to the west and north, both with continuing subdivision, and no light rail connections into the central city? It's the Canterbury plains – how flat do you want it? There are even existing rail corridors. It is just so dumb it hurts. So provide the necessary infrastructure and send appropriate price signals. That means, the polluter pays – fuel used by individuals and businesses needs a tax to reflect the emissions that result from its use; fuel used by public transport and rail is not taxed. Simple stuff.

Energy

We may have to nationalise any power generation now in private ownership (Contact Energy). It is flawed economics to think that markets are going to provide efficient energy generation. Markets will be efficient when there are many buyers and many sellers – not a situation that is likely in New Zealand energy markets. The government needs to be able to control the price of energy, its use and storage. We are very fortunate to be able to store so energy in this country, in the form of water behind dams. Even with out nationalising power generation, there are a number of ways the government could improve the current situation. (1) Send appropriate price signals, so that the price of any generation that creates greenhouse gases reflects the cost of that pollution. (2) Increase demand side responsiveness (<http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/research-policy/ppp/2006/06-04/06.htm>) by requiring all power retailers to install smart meters that allow consumers to see their use and the current price of electricity. The Commissioner for the Enviroment has already written urged the government to do so, with the usual lack of response (see <http://www.pce.parliament.nz/publications/all-publications/smart-electricity-meters-how-households-and-the-environment-can-benefit>). (3) Reduce barriers to new generation (<http://www.treasury.govt.nz/publications/research-policy/ppp/2006/06-04/06.htm>) by requiring all power retailers to buy back power from small scale solar generators at the fixed percentage of the price they are concurrently selling that power to others. Modest changes such as these would rapidly raise the country's renewable electricity generation from 80% to 100%.

Agriculture

This report suggests to the reader that the "estimated 70 percent more food needed by 2050" somehow justifies continuing our high level of agricultural emissions. The solutions offered in Box 4 are laughable and show an intellectual short-sightedness with their focus on animal production and specifically on emissions from dairy cows and high nitrogen fertiliser use. You don't have to be very smart to see how stupid this logic is. Food does not equal milk powder. In fact, milk powder has to be one of the most inefficient foods we could produce – getting food from animals requires much more energy than getting food from plants; dairy cows create more agricultural emissions than other farm animals; and 55% of Fonterra's thermal energy is generated by burning coal. So we have to stop – even reverse – dairy intensification. Again this can easily be achieved by sending appropriate price signals: (1) everyone must pay for water (fairness requires city dwellers must pay too); (2) polluters must pay the real costs of animal and fuel emissions and ground water pollution. You cannot expect people to behave in sensible ways when the government has consistently sent the wrong price signals.

How will our contribution affect New Zealanders?

3. What level of cost is appropriate for New Zealand to reduce it greenhouse gas emissions? For example, what do you think would be a reasonable impact on annual household consumption?

The statistics provided in this report do not allow me to give a sensible answer to this question. A proper economic analysis would also attempt to quantify the likely benefits – not just the likely costs – of different targets, and include a baseline analysis set at the present value of the future costs of

doing nothing. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Present_value for a simple explanation for why present value is commonly used when making comparisons between economic alternatives.

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?

Page 15 discusses potential new technologies. Again this is more of the same refusal to face the current situation. The hope that somehow future technology will "save" us is just more of the same sort of procrastination that got us into this situation in the first place. "Since 1990, New Zealand's total greenhouse gas emissions have grown by about 21%..." – see page 10. Continuing to delay – rather than addressing problems now – in the hope that somehow future technology will allow us to continue our profligate lifestyles is just cargo-cult like behaviour. There is no rational justification for this line of thinking, so please stop trying to divert attention away from what we ought to be doing right now.

Summary

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

Assume the worst.

Other comments

6. Is there any further information you wish the Government to consider? Please explain.

This is a textbook example of how to consult when you are not actually interested in taking any notice of what people have to say. You do the following: (1) Leave it until the last possible minute. There is no exact date on the Discussion Document but it was published some time in May 2015 and submissions close on 3 June 2015. (2) You run a series of meetings that are so poorly advertised that local media are not present. In Christchurch, there was no one from The Press. Did you invite the local media and if not, why not? (3) You publish a Discussion Document that is seriously misleading. The economic analysis in this document is so inadequate that if this is the best you can do, you really shouldn't have included this. And the document is slanted to give the impression that we ought to be allowed to continue on as before with at worst some minor adjustments.

I have just now searched the internet. I am not the only person who has – independently – reached these conclusions. Hardly surprising perhaps, but it does emphasise that this exercise is a deeply cynical waste of public money. For example: (1) <http://harrychapman.nz/blog/2015/05/government-consultation-on-post-2020-climate-change-target/> and (2) <http://hot-topic.co.nz/its-deja-vu-all-over-again-nz-consultation-on-climate-target-set-up-to-be-a-farce/>.

From the second source: "I suspect that nothing anyone says in this sham of a consultation will be listened to: but at least what we do say will stand in the public record. Not everyone sank the ship. Not everyone turned a blind eye. Not in my name, Tim Groser."