



**National Council of
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Submission to the Ministry for the Environment to the Consultation on Setting New Zealand's Post-2020 Climate Change Target

Introduction

The National Council of women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella group representing 288 organisations affiliated at either the national level or to one of our 21 branches. In addition to our organisational membership, about 260 women are individual members of branches. NCWNZ's function is to promote the interests of New Zealand women through research, discussion and action. This submission has been prepared by the NCWNZ Environment Standing Committee after consultation with members of NCWNZ.

NCWNZ is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission in response to this document as we have long had an interest in the matter of greenhouse gases and climate change, from the meeting at Rio de Janeiro in June 1992 when the UN Convention on Climate Change was proposed and passed. As far back as 1994, we submitted to the Ministry for the Environment in response to a document that outlined for discussion the options for reducing net carbon dioxide emissions, and have subsequently submitted on later discussion papers when they appeared. In 1994 NCWNZ also submitted a remit to the International Council of Women on the subject of reducing CO₂ emissions.

Contributors to this submission were mostly the members of the Environment Standing Committee, as there was not enough time to circulate the document to the whole membership of NCWNZ. Some thoughts have also been formed as a consequence of members attending the consultation meetings in various locations. It should be noted that other groups have voiced concern that the time allowed for consultation with their membership is too short for properly reasoned discussion.

Pre-amble

Although the numbers of those who contributed to this submission were not large, NCWNZ can call upon its historical standpoint to say there is general agreement that serious commitment

must be made by world leaders to addressing the causes of global warming and climate change. More than two decades of discussion with little to show for it is too long; it is time that the world's leaders stopped "twiddling maybe fingers, shuffling maybe feet" and ensured that action is taken. On the day of writing this submission, National Radio broadcast news of serious flooding in Texas and an unprecedentedly heatwave sweeping over India, as well as an interview with a Californian journalist who spoke of the four years long drought presently besetting California with no respite in sight. Such events have occurred before, but they have been far between; scientists warn that the severity and frequency of such events will increase as the atmosphere warms and becomes more energetic.

New Zealand's scientists have been measuring and recording meteorological phenomena since the mid-1970s, so that New Zealand has a long-term, consistent and reliable record of changes that have occurred in air and ground temperatures, wind strength, rainfall and air pressure, leaving no doubt that notwithstanding regional and seasonal variations, there is an unmistakable trend towards higher temperatures and greater atmospheric activity.

Q1(a) Do you agree with the above objectives for our contribution?

"New Zealand's contribution is to be seen as a fair and ambitious contribution, both by international and domestic audiences." Applying the notion of fairness in this situation may be misguided, because New Zealand has naturally an unfair advantage over other nations in that we can easily utilise wind and water, renewable sources of energy, to generate electricity, whereas others would find difficulty in moving away from fossil fuels as an energy source. Surrounded by sea as we are, we could also develop technology to harness water power, with an end result of having almost entire reliance on renewable sources to satisfy our energy needs. Sustainable Business Network members already have committed to running their operations in a manner that is more sustainable than before in terms of use of energy and other resources. Their goal is to make a transition from the use of fossil fuels, to 100 per cent use of renewable energy sources.

New Zealand can and should be a world leader in setting ambitious goals for lowering carbon emissions, because of our natural advantage, but we probably need to do more than our fair share when it is a question of methane, by putting a cap on the expansion of the dairy industry. The same could apply to the coal and gas extraction industries; NCWNZ would not advocate abrupt closure of mines because of the hardship it would entail for communities whose economy rests on mining, but would recommend that expansion be disallowed.

Q1(b) What is most important to you?

What is most important to NCWNZ contributors is that New Zealand commits to moving swiftly towards lowering levels of greenhouse gases, and that at the Paris meeting in December, encourage other nations to be ambitious in their levels of contribution, while endorsing the efforts of those (such as the EU) which have made the strategic decision to lower their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2030.

Q2. What do you think the nature of New Zealand's emissions and economy means for the level of target we set?

NCWZN is pleased that public consultation has been undertaken as an essential part of the plan to develop our INDC. We hope that listening to the public will get all citizens interested in what New Zealand intends to commit to, and determined to contribute to the effort, even if it means some belt-tightening for some if not all citizens. NCWZN agrees that flexibility of design should allow more fair impact on different sectors, so that any hardship that may be suffered, will be suffered by those sectors that can best afford it.

According to the discussion paper, if the nature of New Zealand's emissions is compared with those of other countries, both developed and developing, New Zealand falls squarely into the former category, and therefore has an obligation to set its targets for greater efforts to reduce emissions than would be the case for less developed countries. In doing this, we need not fear that it would be very costly, for leaders in the EU, the member states of which have already introduced mitigating policies, have found that their economies have grown, become more efficient and embraced innovation. The change can be seen as an investment for the future of the EU and of the planet.

Q3. What level of cost is appropriate for New Zealand to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions? What would be a reasonable reduction in annual household consumption?

There would not necessarily be a cost attached to reduction of emissions, nor a reduction in household consumption. We could have the same level of consumption but obtain what we need to be comfortable by refraining from purchasing frivolously, by using services such as public transport, by walking or cycling, by purchasing locally produced goods, by buying second hand goods and by holidaying locally.

Another factor to consider here is population growth. New Zealand could set a level of population that is sustainable. More people means more demand on limited resources, more emissions, greater need for costly infrastructure and greater cost to life and property in the event of a natural disaster. Where there are greater concentrations of people and their built environment, there is a greater likelihood of destruction, injury and death from flood, earthquake or fire, should they occur.

Q4. Of the opportunities outlined, which do you think are the most likely to occur, or be most important for New Zealand?

All of the opportunities cited are possible, and it is likely that most New Zealanders would embrace the opportunity to reduce their business and domestic costs, if they could see the benefit of so doing. Likewise, if they could understand that lower emissions could lead to better health (and lower health costs), and improved environmental and social wellbeing, they would

accept that changes should be made. As is outlined in Box 9, we don't yet know what transport technologies may be developed that would allow us to carry on our lives much the same as ever, but at less cost to the environment. Innovation should be encouraged, but with plenty of forethought about possible unintended consequences; most of the problems we face today stem from unquestioning adoption of technologies that made life easier, but also more damaging to health and the environment.

Q5. How should New Zealand take into account the future uncertainties of technologies and costs when setting its target?

NCWNZ believes that of course New Zealand should take into account uncertainties and costs when setting targets, but take heart from what beneficial outcomes have already been experienced in the EU countries. New Zealand needs to be bold and not unnecessarily cautious, as it is caution in the past quarter century that has led to the present far more threatening global situation. "Nothing venture, nothing gain."

Further comments

Although the meeting in Paris, if promises made there are honoured, will bring about slowing in the rate of climate change, it will probably be at least another quarter century before this is significant, and in the meantime, New Zealand, like the rest of the world, will probably suffer the floods, landslips, heat waves, droughts and wind storms that are becoming increasingly frequent. Sea levels will rise, and inundation will be the fate of low-lying communities in this country, as with other island nations. It will behove New Zealand to prepare for such eventualities, by planning cities and towns, especially those situated close to the sea or on flat ground, with infrastructures to withstand such natural hazards. Moreover, since New Zealand has a responsibility to its Pacific neighbours, we should plan for the resettlement of those people who may be driven from their home territory by rising seas and frequent destructive storms. There is also the possibility that because more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere means that more is absorbed by the sea, with consequent formation of carbonic acid and therefore acidification of the oceans, island peoples may see their atolls crumbling beneath them as the corals succumb to acid attack.

At the Wellington consultation meeting, a Vanuatuan at present pursuing an academic career at Victoria University made some interesting criticisms of the language used in the discussion paper. It is too bland and does not emphasise the gravity of the climate change problem; no one reading the paper would be stimulated to jump into action to do something right away. Also, the language used is commodifying, sidelining all other aspects such as the moral and philosophical. Coming from Vanuatu, he will have a lively appreciation of the effects of Cyclone Pam's rampage through the Pacific Islands.

It is too late to call to account the Victorians whose obsession with progress is what began Europe's (closely followed by the US's) race toward the situation we now find ourselves in, but it

is not too late for the present generation to call a halt to the activities that generate greenhouse gases. NCWNZ members, most of them parents and grandparents, are eager to promote the adoption of measures that will lead to a reversal of climate change, so that future generations can live with enough to be healthy and comfortable.

We do not advocate the adoption of measures that would impact adversely on the security or wellbeing of any sectors of society. The writer of this submission was in Beijing in early summer, 2001, and air pollution levels were rising rapidly as small industries, after a winter slow-down, were getting going again. The authorities, anxious about the effects of pollution on the health of the people, simply closed down those small industries that were deemed to be emitting too much smoke from their furnaces, with no warning nor consultation.

Well done those Ministry for the Environment officials who facilitated the discussion at the public meetings; you listened to the speakers and did not interrupt with justificatory explanations in answer to criticism. NCWNZ trusts that you will take into account the concerns expressed as you set the target for this country's emissions reduction, and not doubt the sincerity of those who did voice concern.



Rae Duff
National President



Elizabeth Lee
Convener, Environment Standing Committee