

**SUMMARY OF COMMENTS ON DISCUSSION DOCUMENT: 'NEW ZEALAND'S CLIMATE CHANGE TARGET'
MAY 18, 2003**

JANET STEPHENSON, DIRECTOR,

CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABILITY • Kā Rakahau o te Ao Tūroa, University of Otago.

1. The government's discussion document outlines some of the costs of mitigation but fails to discuss the hugely greater costs of inaction. The costs of climate change, if left unchecked, will make it increasingly difficult to be able to afford adaptation, let alone mitigation, because it will depress economic activity. And the longer it is left before acting, the more expensive it will be to change our systems to cope. This was a point made clearly by Nicholas Stern in his 2006 landmark report *The Economics of Climate Change*. An example is the costs of drought to NZ (predicted to become more frequent with climate change) – the 2007-9 drought reduced direct and off-farm outputs by \$3.6 billion. The drought in 2012-13 reduced NZ's GDP by 0.3 to 0.6%. Once we are on an economic back foot from the impacts of climate change, it will become increasingly difficult over time to have the financial capacity to adapt systems to climate impacts, let alone reduce emissions.
2. There is a significant overlap between actions required for adaptation and actions required for mitigation. These are often discussed as binary opposites – with a strong voice in NZ suggesting that we should only focus on adaptation. But rather than seeing them as alternate actions we need to recognise that they are complementary and often involve the same or similar responses. For example, both involve the development of systems (farming, transport, etc) that are resilient, adaptable to change, not highly dependent on resources that may significantly change in availability or cost.
3. To argue that we contribute only a small portion of global emissions and therefore should not worry about taking action, is akin to me saying that I should feel OK about throwing my rubbish all over my street because I'm only one of many people who live in the street, and people with bigger houses should stop throwing their rubbish around before I do. Nonsense. We're all in this together.
4. NZers have a high per capita emissions profile and many of the goods and services that we enjoy are produced using the fossil-powered energy in the largest emitting countries such as China and the USA.
5. A low carbon future offers a huge opportunity for NZ. If we retain the view that we should only be a 'follower', then we risk being left behind in what is likely to be a rapid global transition. NZ's mix of renewable energy resource and innovation potential means that it could potentially be a leader in some aspects of mitigation – for example, in reducing agricultural GHG emissions, geothermal energy, an electricity grid running on close to 100% renewable energy, swapping coal for wood-based industrial heat, and an electric vehicle fleet which (unlike other countries which largely rely on coal and gas-generated electricity) makes a huge amount of sense in NZ.
6. I observe significant concern about our climate future, and interest and support for a low-carbon future amongst businesses, households, communities and some councils. They see benefits that include retaining NZ's clean green market status, improved resilience, improved public health, future-proofing, opportunities for innovation and new products and services. However NZ lacks clear leadership in this space (unlike UK, Scandinavia and EU more generally, for example). This means that efforts are currently fragmented and less effective than they might be if there was a more coherent and linked-up approach. NZ needs a clear government commitment and targets, and to show leadership that NZers will respond to.

7. The shift to a low-carbon future is not simple. It involves on the one hand a change in 'culture' (norms, practices, technologies) amongst households and businesses, as well as changes in the broader structures such as policies and physical infrastructure to support the change. This wider structural change needs to be orchestrated so as to ensure that they are aligned rather than working against each other, and support change at the individual and business level. Many of the changes required to achieve a low-carbon future require investment today in order to achieve change in 5-15 years time (eg mobility infrastructure) so we cannot afford to wait until climate problems are upon us. Again, this requires government leadership.
8. NZ risks being left behind if it does not adopt a credible position at the Paris talks, and sees that through with effective action domestically. On the other hand, there are huge advantages in being front-footed and actively transitioning to a low-carbon future. We have much to gain (and little to lose) from a positive and strong stance at Paris.

JANET STEPHENSON
DIRECTOR

CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABILITY • Kā Rakahau o te Ao Tūroa, University of Otago