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27 February 2011

2050 Emissions Reduction Target Consultation

Ministry for the Environment

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By email: 2050target@mfe.govt.nz

re: NZ Emissions Target

I operate a blog, the Climate Conversation Group, whose well-informed readers over the past four years have had thousands of conversations about climate, climate changes, their causes and likely effects. We oppose the Minister's intention to gazette the country's 2050 target reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. These are our objections to the gazetting.

Noting that 39 years remain in which to achieve these so-called "reductions", the gazetting strikes us as primarily a marketing exercise rather than a sincere attempt to influence the climate. The Government's intention to achieve mere public relations purposes is confirmed when the Minister denies even the possibility of influencing the climate and in the same breath talks instead about our reputation.

New Zealand alone cannot have much impact on global climate change. . . As a trading nation, New Zealand depends on its international reputation and its strong clean and green image.

Who is to say whether the natural course of New Zealand's emissions during the next 39 years will be upwards or downwards? It could be that the emission levels specified here will at some time in the future be achieved only by increasing our emissions. Who is to say what technological innovations will improve our ability to generate energy without GHG emissions? What if we embrace nuclear power generation? What if the climate cools? Nobody knows what will happen over the next 39 years. However, since 1992 our emissions have already risen about 30% (matching our population growth) and right now, reducing emissions to 50% of 1992 would remove a huge 65% chunk of our industrial and agricultural output, an unacceptable sacrifice which the government should be ashamed to suggest. Just to maintain our image!

No references are given to justify the claimed "international agreement" that future global temperature increases should be held to 2°C or less, nor is the treaty document named in which New Zealand signed up to such an agreement, nor is the Hansard or Gazette record cited in which our government ratified such a treaty.

No references are given for believing that the measures taken by all nations will achieve the stated restriction in future global temperature rise. Yet without that belief, why should we offer what appears to be merely an expensive form of moral support?

There has been little consultation on this plan to "fight climate change" and no public debate. Anyone trying to raise scientific matters with Nick Smith in his promotional meetings has been answered with platitudes and obstruction. His minders quickly ignore the raised hands of those who ask awkward questions. Last month, with perhaps six weeks to go (but all of 39 years to achieve the cuts), the Minister hurried us up by claiming: "Your view on gazetting New Zealand's 2050 emissions reduction target is important to the Government." Note the Minister does not invite us to comment on the emission reductions themselves. Why not? Could there be a more cynical expression of **not** caring what we think?

We get the impression that the international process of “fighting climate change” is out of control, and that the proper representatives of New Zealand stand helpless before the independent and politically correct efforts of a plethora of public servants and NGO do-gooders, who promulgate measures and commit the country to programmes willy-nilly, not because there is evidence these things will achieve a good result and are affordable, but because they fit their prejudices and agendas so they sound like a good idea.

The Minister’s position paper *Gazetting New Zealand’s 2050 Emissions Target* opens with the statement:

Multiple lines of scientific evidence show that climate change is happening, and humankind’s emissions of greenhouse gases are very likely the cause.

This two-part statement is significant, because the subsequent assertions and the very reason for the gazetting depend on it. But it is banal, ambiguous, evidence-free and leads the Minister to an unsound conclusion.

First, we’re sure that the Minister and his department will agree that a modern, highly-educated populace such as ours hardly requires “multiple lines of evidence” for this banality. The climate changes? That is as self-evident as the sun going missing at sunset.

The second clause, after the comma, is ambiguous; it could be saying that “multiple lines” of evidence indicate our emissions are the cause of climate change, or it could mean that the Minister simply suspects our emissions are the cause. Certainly, the presence of the words “very likely” destroys our confidence in the truth of either reading. The words express doubt while avoiding commitment to a definite meaning.

If it is only his suspicion that humanity’s actions cause climate change, then his decision to gazette reductions in our country’s emissions must be re-examined and either justified on other grounds or abandoned.

But, if the second clause claims instead that “multiple lines of scientific evidence” show our GHG emissions cause climate change, then that reading gives rise to quite different considerations.

Because it is a matter of no controversy among climate scientists that human activities alter the climate. On a small scale, some warming or cooling is commonly associated with land use change, such as planting a forest, or cutting down a forest. Replacing vegetation with buildings and extensive paved areas causes changes in local temperature and precipitation. Surely there are wider regional and even global effects from these activities?

If there are, they have yet to be detected. After the expenditure of some \$US50 billion in climate research over the last 20 to 30 years, we have yet to detect a human signal in the global temperature data. There is an absence of evidence of any human effect on warming, much less that the effect might be dangerous.

So much for land use. As far as our GHG emissions are concerned, there is evidence that they increase the temperature a little. But the warming effect of carbon dioxide is a reducing one, meaning that as its level increases, more and more CO₂ is required to produce a unit of warming. More and more CO₂ will not warm the planet more and more, but less and less.

As a matter of fact, there is no evidence in any published, peer-reviewed, scientific paper that human emissions have caused or will in the future cause dangerous warming of the climate.

If the Minister or the department knows of such evidence, they should release it now. There is no better time. If the Minister knows of such evidence but fails to release it, he palpably endangers the public welfare. If the Minister does not know of such evidence, he palpably misleads the public of New Zealand.

There are three possibilities concerning the evidence and the good Minister. The evidence either exists or it doesn't (remember, he claims it does). So, first, he might keep it from us, which would be preventing us from saving ourselves.

Second, if the evidence doesn't exist, he might still claim to have good reasons to reduce our productive capacity (through a carbon tax or forcing a reduction of emissions) and therefore reduce our standard of living, which would be misleading or even fraudulent.

In either case, he would act contrary to the oath of office as an Executive Counsellor, wherein he undertook to give his best counsel to the Governor-General "for the good management of the affairs of New Zealand."

Either case would embroil him and his Government in unsavoury and unprecedented allegations of ministerial misconduct. If no evidence of dangerous human warming exists, the conclusion that our GHG emissions should be reduced is unsound.

So, in his position paper the Minister claimed evidence of a dangerous human influence on the global temperature, yet, in several years of searching, the Climate Conversation Group has found no evidence; he should reveal it now or abandon the gazetting. That is the third possibility.

All he needs to do is cite the paper containing the evidence. He should not cite the IPCC Assessment Reports, since what could they credibly assert that was not already in a peer-reviewed paper?

The paper giving evidence of a dangerous human influence on the global temperature contains, we're sure the Minister will agree, evidence vital to substantiate this proposed gazetting. Indeed, it is the only evidence which could possibly justify the gazetting.

Members of the Climate Conversation Group cannot imagine the gazetting proposal going forward without such evidence and equally we cannot imagine any reason not to mention what the evidence is.

And without evidence, why should we suffer any restrictions?

Yours sincerely,

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Climate Conversation Group