

## **Doctors push for strong global climate action at Cancun**

OraTaiao Media Release – 23 November 2010

Senior doctors are calling again for strong political leadership and action on climate change in the lead up to the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Cancun, Mexico starting later this month. The doctors, representing OraTaiao, a health professional organisation concerned about the health effects of climate change, say that urgent and decisive action is crucial.

There is compelling evidence the climate is changing, due to an increase in greenhouse gas emissions from human activity. It will have profound adverse effects on economic, social and cultural life and the sustainability of natural ecosystems. In other words, our changing climate threatens the foundations of health and wellbeing for human populations – and indeed our survival.

“In the face of this serious health threat, inaction would be negligence on a global scale”, says Dr George Laking, OraTaiao spokesperson and a senior clinician.

“And yet inaction is what we are seeing. We are at a defining moment in human history and have a very small window of time in which to act, if we are to avoid the most serious consequences of climate change.”

Unified commitment to meaningful cuts in emissions, particularly by industrially developed nations, will be crucial to a successful outcome in Cancun. Halving our current level of emissions within the next decade is responsible, just, and possible.

“As health professionals, we are used to making critical decisions on the basis of imperfect information”, says Dr Laking.

“Climate change, although on a completely different scale from ordinary day-to-day medical decisions, requires similar judgements. Science is rarely able to provide a complete and unquestionable understanding of an issue, but the science on climate change is certain enough for us to act against the imminent threat of irreversible damage. We can't afford to wait – we must act now on the compelling evidence at hand.

“The climate crisis did not disappear after Copenhagen; instead, a year later, the crisis is even more urgent. We urge serious constructive action at the international negotiations in Cancun, knowing the immediate threat faced by our Pacific neighbours, and that action now will not only safeguard our future but will build a healthier New Zealand,” says Dr Laking.

### **OraTaiao: New Zealand Climate & Health**

[www.orataiao.org.nz](http://www.orataiao.org.nz)

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### **Background notes**

Dr George Laking, MD PhD FRACP (Te Whakatohea) is a medical oncologist and health economist based in Auckland.

Leading medical bodies throughout the world are saying that politicians must heed health effects of climate change, doctors must speak out, and doctors demand their politicians be decisive, listen to the clear facts and act now. OraTaiao: New Zealand Climate and Health is part of this international movement, and consists of more than a hundred senior doctors and other health professionals concerned about climate change impacts on health and health services.

The incorporated society has published a number of articles about climate change and health in peer-reviewed medical journals, which can be found on its website [www.orataiao.org.nz](http://www.orataiao.org.nz). OraTaiao's messages include:

- Climate change is a real and urgent threat to the health and wellbeing of New Zealanders.
- New Zealand must be an active partner in global cooperation to reduce atmospheric greenhouse gas emissions to 350ppm CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalents by:
  - rapidly halving our own emissions by 2020<sup>1</sup>
  - paying our fair share of international investment in a global future.
- New Zealand can, and must, respond to climate change in ways that improve population health, accord with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, create a more equitable, just and resilient society, and promote a healthier economy within ecological resource limits.

Responses to climate change can actually help with other goals, including healthier people, a more equal society and a healthier economy. For example, more active travel would reverse and reduce the obesity, heart disease and type 2 diabetes epidemics, road traffic crashes, and urban air pollution, and improve mental health. Economic benefits include reduced health spending, less reliance on imported fossil fuels, and greater productivity through a healthier workforce and reduced urban congestion.

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<sup>1</sup> Metcalfe S, Woodward A, Macmillan A, et al; for the New Zealand Climate and Health group. Why New Zealand must rapidly halve its greenhouse gas emissions [Special Article]. NZ Med J. 2009;122(1304):72–95. <http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal/122-1304/3827/>.