

OraTaiao Media Release – 10 December 2010

Doctors urge New Zealand to stop harming climate action at Cancun

Senior doctors are urging the Government to help, not harm, closing the emissions gap at Cancun's international climate negotiations.

The negotiations, which end tomorrow (Saturday 11 December) NZ time, are showing little sign of progress on the global climate crisis. And according to OraTaiao, a health professional organisation concerned about the health effects of climate change, New Zealand is part of the problem.

"The Minister Hon Dr Nick Smith has just announced that New Zealand's already inadequate 2009 offer of 10-20% greenhouse gas emissions reductions is off the table unless the rules change on how to measure forestry emissions," says Dr Alex Macmillan of OraTaiao.

"Forestry loopholes would make New Zealand emissions appear better than they really are."

This may seem a canny economic move for New Zealand in the short term, but it will create a loophole for countries to destroy native forests and wetlands and increase emissions by up to 1 billion tonnes – equivalent to one tenth of the world's annual emissions.

Dr Macmillan says this latest move by New Zealand makes as much sense as a doctor fiddling blood pressure or other heart disease indicators so patients are falsely reassured.

"Playing around with numbers like this is a blatant refusal to play our part in dealing with the atmospheric health crisis the world faces. Our country's future economic resilience is also being put at risk, as we deliberately increase our dependence on climate-damaging transport and exports of coal, oil and dairy. Ignoring the numbers and the risks is not in the interests of future wellbeing globally or in New Zealand."

The senior doctors are urging the New Zealand Government to instead listen to the New Zealand Youth Delegation currently in Cancun speaking out against New Zealand's efforts to 'cheat' on emissions measurements.

"Our government representatives must stop putting New Zealand's short term financial interests above the global common need for a healthy climate future," says Dr Macmillan.

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