



31 July 2009

Hon Dr Nick Smith  
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by email: [nsmith@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:nsmith@ministers.govt.nz)

Dear Dr Smith

**Re Climate Change Targets**

Thank you for your invitation for submissions on climate change targets for 2020.

In addition to responding to your invitation, this submission also:

- Urges the use of a range of techniques to reduce emissions, in addition to the Emissions Trading scheme
- Notes the additional health benefits of reduced emissions and energy conservation
- Urges that any approach ensures there is fairness

Attached is our submission. We would be very happy to meet with you or officials to discuss any aspect of our submission.

Yours sincerely

G.M. Keating  
National Executive Officer

## **Submission on climate change targets 2020**

### **From the Public Health Association of New Zealand**

#### *Who we are*

The Public Health Association of New Zealand (PHA) is a voluntary association which provides a major forum for the exchange of information and stimulation of debate about public health in New Zealand. Membership of PHA is open to individuals interested in public health. Members belong to the public, private and voluntary sectors. In addition to membership fees, donations and other earnings, the PHA has a contract with the Ministry of Health to encourage and facilitate informed debate on key public health issues. The PHA is a member of the World Federation of Public Health Associations.

Public health is defined as actions to improve, promote and protect the health of the whole population ‘*through the organised efforts of society*’<sup>i</sup>.

#### *The health impacts of climate change are significant.*

The PHA adopted a position on climate change in 2001, in which we noted the significant health risks posed in New Zealand and internationally from climate change. Research since then has confirmed the risks to humans posed by global warming.

Climate change is the biggest global health threat of the 21st century<sup>ii</sup>. The World Health Organisation has described climate change as the defining issue for public health for the 21st century<sup>iii</sup>. The British Medical Journal insists that health benefits be included in decision-making.<sup>iv</sup> More recently<sup>v</sup> The Lancet noted the major threats to global health from climate change through changing patterns of disease, water and food insecurity, vulnerable shelter and human settlements, extreme climatic events, and population growth and migration.

#### *PHA applauds government commitment to reduce emissions*

We are therefore enormously pleased to see that you are committed to mitigating climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Choose an ambitious target for 2020**

There are several reasons that the PHA supports an ambitious target for reduction of emissions by 2020, in addition to those outlines in the discussion pamphlet and meetings.

#### *Major international action is needed*

Unless there is significant action very soon a likely global temperature increase of well over 3°C can be expected. The consequences of such a level of average temperature change are likely to be so significant that major changes must be made as soon as possible.

### *Intergenerational equity*

A significant reason we need to have an ambitious target for 2020 is the lack of action in the past decade. If we do not adopt an ambitious target for 2020 the target for the 30 years to 2050 will be even more onerous.

Consistent, coherent pressure for GHG emissions across several decades is preferable to less action followed by a panic. This is in line with research on leading effective behaviour change.

### *International equity*

New Zealand has such high per capita emission rate that we are obliged to make substantive cuts, immediately. We are also one of the developed, higher income countries and are more able to afford an ambitious target.

It is worth considering the Responsibility and Capability Index approach, instigated in the Netherlands<sup>vi</sup>. Oxfam International<sup>vii</sup> has combined the emission reductions globally to limit change to 2 degrees with countries' responsibilities (cumulative pollution) and capability to mitigate (wealth).

### *Support NZ science and technology*

New Zealand is now paying for the use of energy conservation technologies developed in other countries.

At this stage, no other country has such a great pressure to reduce agricultural emission as New Zealand. We need to have the technology as soon as possible. The high quality of New Zealand scientists will enable us to develop the technologies for our immediate use. Then as other countries subsequently focus on their (relatively smaller) agricultural emissions New Zealand will be able to benefit from having been first to develop effective responses.

## **Use a range of approaches**

The evidence on achieving significant social behaviour change (such as safer drinking of alcohol) is that any complex social problem responds best to a series of complementary approaches, targeting different interventions for different situations.

So, using a range of approaches, in particular energy conservation and reforestation in addition to the Emissions Trading Scheme, will be more effective than relying on a single intervention.

Active government support for energy conservation (such as the wildly popular housing insulation and heating subsidy) would be likely to mean that the cost for an ambitious target would be lower than the current estimates for Emission Trading scheme intervention alone.

Other key factors for success are clear and consistent intent, a sense of fairness, and enabling easy-to-implement changes.

### *Learning the lessons (so far) of swine flu*

The current swine flu pandemic has several lessons for climate change.

- International health threats kill New Zealanders even though we are relatively isolated at the bottom of the south Pacific
- NZ health services can be swamped by events originating internationally, and regular services such as waiting list surgery for eyes, heart and joints can be squeezed out
- Planning and preparation, on the basis of science, across time, irrespective of the party in government, can significantly improve outcomes for New Zealanders
- New Zealand scientists are at the forefront of world knowledge
- Media (and consequently the people) need proactive information management and support to understand the emerging science and live through uncertainty
- However people will readily change their behaviour if the personal cost is not too high, if the reason is clearly explained and if imposition and burden is seen to be shared fairly on all of us
- Communities that are vulnerable to poor health (in the case of swine flu, Pacific peoples) can be worst affected, and increase inequalities.

### *Reducing emissions can be made easier*

The World Bank is clear that building a domestic policy environment conducive to the delivery of more effective environmental legislation key to effectively implementing change<sup>viii</sup>

With these factors in mind the PHA has urged previous governments to give consideration to increasing public acceptability of carbon user charges by: (i) using the revenue gained to fund energy efficiency initiatives such as improvements in public transport; (ii) lowering income tax rates for low-income citizens at the same time as any new carbon user charges were introduced; (iii) better educating the public about the current and potential adverse impacts of the current unsustainable use of fossil fuels.

There is considerable scope for central and local government continue to pursue strategies to promote energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from New Zealand such as:

- Improving public transport and promoting cycling and walking (with appropriate cycle ways and paths). Further subsidies for public transport should be considered where this is efficient (eg, where such services reduce air pollution and time wasted due to traffic congestion in urban settings).
- Continuing to make buildings and housing stock more energy efficient (through regulations and possibly economic incentives).
- Providing funding for routine emissions tests on vehicles at the time of the Warrant of Fitness check.
- Raising fuel efficiency standards for all new and used vehicles (and funding the enforcement of these standards).

- Providing greater funding for research into energy efficiency in the New Zealand context.

## **Fairness in implementation**

New Zealand has significant health inequalities<sup>1</sup>. As with other health issues, infectious diseases and injuries, is likely that the burden of death and disease associated with climate change will not be equally spread. We can anticipate, from research and severe weather events elsewhere<sup>ix</sup> that Maori, Pacific peoples and poor families will suffer the most.

As these groups of New Zealanders currently benefit the least from our high-emissions economy and are likely to suffer the most consequences it is unfair to expect these families and communities to pay disproportionately for emissions reductions.

## **Health benefits of reducing emissions reduces overall costs**

With implementation of the Emissions Trading Scheme, in particular if supported by active government support for fuel efficiency, there is likely to be less use of fossil fuel for transport. In particular, reduction in private car use has health benefits from

- reduced injury and death on the roads in the long-term
- reduced premature mortality from air pollution<sup>xxi</sup>
- greater rates of walking and cycling as transport options (with associated health benefits<sup>xii</sup>).

Greater use of insulation and energy efficient home heating will result in warmer, drier homes and better health. Improvements in the efficiency of home energy will reduce mortality and morbidity<sup>xiii</sup>

As the health costs of injury, respiratory and heart disease are not trivial they need to be considered when the overall costs and benefits of emission reduction is considered.

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