



VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF
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Climate Change Commission
PO Box 24448
WELLINGTON 6142

Attn: Submissions analysis team

To whom it may concern

Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington is a values-based university with academic expertise in climate science and climate solutions and a commitment to take strong climate action. We are in the middle of a climate crisis and creating lasting change across society and the economy is needed to address this crisis in a fair, equitable and sustainable way.

The climate crisis is a challenge for us all, and there must be a commitment to change from all members of the University community. Our own goal to reduce carbon emissions and become carbon neutral by 2030 demonstrates our commitment to sustainability. Our aspiration is that this is a path other organisations will follow.

The University values academic freedom, and many of our researchers and academics will have shared their opinions through their own individual submissions that will address some of the specific questions you have sought feedback on. From a University-wide perspective, this submission will comment on some of the big issues posed by the Climate Change Commission (the Commission) in the consultation questionnaire.

The document is very comprehensive and supported by well researched evidence. Using evidence-based decision making is critical for good policy.

Emissions budgets

Meeting the proposed emissions budgets and 2050 targets will impact all sectors of the economy, and will bring about several changes, challenges and opportunities. The emissions budgets proposed by the Commission strike a good balance between ambition and achievability. If the nation meets these budgets, we will have made an appropriate contribution, as a developed nation, to keeping warming below 1.5 degrees. While the budgets are challenging, we still have the capacity to meet them without unreasonably compromising wider environmental, social, cultural and financial wellbeing. The onus must now be on the Government to not weaken the level of ambition.

We also support the proposed breakdown of emissions budgets between gross long-lived gases, biogenic methane and carbon removals. It is appropriate to require greater reductions, earlier, from the long-lived gases – it has greater impact, the solutions are more advanced and there are fewer risks for the wellbeing of Aotearoa.

Collective response

The document maps a pathway for achieving the proposed budgets. The opportunities identified are primarily technological solutions or targeted at specific sectors. The pandemic has shown us what can be achieved when we work together for a common goal. For Aotearoa to be effective in tackling climate change, we need to reach Kiwis at a personal level, so that climate action isn't just a theoretical concept, but rather something that they connect to and value. Then climate change will be much more central to decision-making for everyone, from the decision of what mode of transport to take to work or what to eat for lunch, to business investment decisions or the forming of local government bylaws.

That level of social change is a major undertaking, but it is already starting to happen. At the University, our students are now much more engaged with climate action and we are continuously working to provide further opportunities for them to learn more and become change makers in their communities. The Government too, has a significant role to play in enabling this change through support at all levels of the education system and more general advocacy for climate action, which emphasise the value it provides.

So while the targeted and technological solutions are worthwhile, it is important to also foster wider behaviour change across Aotearoa. Many small emissions reductions are just as valuable as a few large reductions.

Transport

Air travel remains a very challenging source of emissions for the University and Aotearoa. We would support the inclusion of international aviation emission targets in climate action planning for Aotearoa. While COVID-19 and lockdown restrictions saw a temporary reduction in emissions and air pollutants, it has created an opportunity to consider how to control demand and reduce emissions beyond the lifetime of the pandemic.

Zero-carbon air travel is still a long-term prospect and the Commission's advice should include prioritising investment in sustainable aviation fuels and next-generation aircraft (such as electric or hydrogen) with incentives offered to alternative fuel producers.

Car dependence and urban growth is one of the biggest contributions to climate change. There needs to be a complete transformation to how New Zealanders get around; walking, cycling and public transport must play a bigger part in decarbonising the transport system. Also, it is critical that these forms of transport are affordable, and the University supports the recommendation to reduce fares for targeted groups.

In addition to affordable and shared transport systems there needs to be a greater focus in the report on liveable and accessible cities where infrastructure is interconnected to ensure that the way we build and plan towns and cities, and the way people and goods move around, reduces transport emissions.

Connection to Local Government

Much of the responsibility for transport planning and infrastructure, waste management and climate adaptation currently falls to local government. To date councils across the country are undertaking climate action to varying degrees with varying success, but they need to do more and all of them need additional resourcing and consistent direction from central government. The document rightly acknowledges that there needs to be more collaboration with central government to support the low-carbon transition. This point needs greater emphasis as inconsistent or poorly resourced responses from local government is a major risk for not meeting our emissions targets.

Equity

We agree that the transition to zero-carbon needs to incorporate mātauranga Māori and be managed with a sense of urgency and determination. Māori management of resources is key to equitable emissions reduction and approaches to climate action must reflect this.

While it is encouraging to see inclusion of mātauranga Māori in the report, the Commission's advice could do more to support Māori governance by recommending at least co-governance of land and water with iwi, hapū and whānau.

The Commission's advice must also recognise our context as an island nation in the Pacific. Our response and actions to address the climate crisis must consider the impacts on the Pacific region and provide support for Pacific island countries.

The report does not mention gender; yet we know that climate change disproportionately affects women. It is vital that the Commission considers research on the impacts and hazards of climate change on women and gender diverse peoples and includes this in their analysis.

Taking effective action to minimise the impacts of climate change is both an intergenerational responsibility and an opportunity. Future generations will have to live with the policies proposed and their consequences. To fully understand the intergenerational impact, the Commission should undertake meaningful youth engagement initiatives—young people deserve a seat at the table.

Land

We support the significant increase in new native forests and the assumption that no further native deforestation occurs from 2025. We agree that reforestation is an effective short-term measure to address both climate change and our biodiversity crisis. Wetlands and tussock should be recognised for their role in storing carbon and protected from destruction. We support the Commission's recommendation to reduce reliance on exotic forestry. We need to ensure that we are planting the right species in the right locations, but exotic species can still play an important role as a component of mixed-species reforestation, where the exotics provide more rapid carbon sequestration and shelter in the short-term, while indigenous forest slowly becomes dominant.

Heat, industry and power

We support the recommendations of the Commission. Aotearoa can relatively quickly make emissions reductions in this area. At the University we have improved energy efficiency by about 40 percent over the past 15 years and similar results could be achieved across the commercial and residential building sectors. The transition away from fossil fuels for heating needs to be accelerated. We have investigated the feasibility of moving off natural gas as our heat source, and while it is technically feasible, with electrification being the most effective option, it still carries a very high capital cost for the asset replacement. Further financial incentives from the Government could help accelerate this transition.

Waste

We support recommendations of the Commission but believe greater emphasis could be placed on managing organic waste streams as an easy form of emissions reduction. All landfills should be equipped with methane capture and more incentives for composting schemes at city, community and household level would deliver the co-benefits of improving soil health and increasing individual engagement.

Summary

The challenges we face in transitioning to a zero-carbon future will be shared by many other organisations in New Zealand and around the world. While the University is guiding the development of students whose critical thinking, creativity and skills will prepare them for careers to tackle the immediate and future challenges of climate change, Aotearoa New Zealand still needs better climate education, so businesses, organisations, iwi, and the wider community can confidently and knowledgeably transition to sustainable practices.

The University is contributing to public debate and engagement with climate change issues in our role as critic and conscience of society. We are reducing our own emissions and have reduced our carbon emissions by 50 percent over the past 15 years, and we are currently delivering our plan to achieve net zero emissions by 2030.

I want to take this opportunity to also acknowledge Dr Judy Lawrence and Professor James Renwick, University staff members and climate change commissioners, whose expertise and leadership in climate change and climate science must be acknowledged. Their contributions have been invaluable in this process.

Finally, Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington is encouraged by the proposed draft advice to Government. We all have an ethical obligation to manage carbon emissions to help protect future generations and the planet from the effects of climate change. This report has recognised that, and we want to support this to make it happen.

Yours sincerely

