



Parnell, Auckland

Social Justice Group

Response to Climate Change Commission January 2021 Proposals

Commission Question One: Guiding principles

We generally agree with the Principles set out but do have concerns about Principle 4 about “unnecessary cost” as this can be used by interest groups to delay and possibly stop changes that are vital to New Zealand achieving the 2030 and 2050 targets. Assessing if a particular cost is necessary or unnecessary is very subjective. The cost of not acting also needs to be included in all assessments of the costs of proposed actions to achieve our targets.

When looking at so called stranded assets it will be necessary to look at when the investment decision was originally made. For example, the major contribution of fossil fuels to climate change have been known to the oil companies since the mid-1980s, thus it would be unnecessary to consider the impact of “stranding” of any assets acquired since then.

We suggest this principle be reworded as follows:

Principle 4 Assessing the costs of action and inaction

In assessing costs of proposed actions to achieve the 2030 and 2050 emissions targets estimates of the cost of not taking action will be included in the assessment. In assessing the economic impact of closing down assets that contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and any possible recompense the owners of the asset may receive consideration shall be taken of the date the investment was made and the knowledge available at that time about the adverse impact the investment would like to make.

Commission Question Two: Emission Budget levels

Yes

Commission Question Three: Breakdown of Emission Budget

This table is a bit confusing. Why is the target for methane higher for 2025-30 than for 2021-2024? And the target for 2035 is above 2024? We do support the splitting up of the various greenhouse gases particular methane and the major source of methane is clear and will require specific mitigation policies.

Commission Question Four: Limit of off-shore mitigation for Emissions Budget

We strongly support Aotearoa resisting going to offshore sources to mitigate our onshore emissions even by 2050. We need to plan and achieve carbon neutrality for ourselves without exporting some of our problems even if it means major changes to our way of living.

Commission Question Five: Cross-party support for Emissions Budget

Whilst cross party support for actions taken to mitigate climate change is important, it is more important that each political party's position on the policies required to mitigate climate change are clear and on the record. We support the Commission's position.

Commission Question Six: Coordinated efforts to address climate change across Government

We support your recommendations in particular the recommendation that a Vote Climate Change be used that encompasses all expenditures to mitigate climate change. We would also suggest that in presenting Vote Climate Change the government also indicate the likely cost of not acting.

Commission Question Seven: Genuine, active and enduring partnership with iwi/Māori

We strongly support the involvement of Māori in all aspects of the Commission's work including the recommendations the Commission makes to Government. No recommendation should be made without Māori support.

Commission Question Eight: Central and local government working in partnership

We support this recommendation.

Commission Question Nine: Establish processes for incorporating the views of all New Zealanders

The issues raised by the Commission in this question are important and the methods chosen by both the Commission and Government to ensure wide involvement by New Zealanders is important. The concept of some form of Citizens' Assembly as recommended by the Commission needs to be developed by the Commission as no other arm of government is likely to do it.

Commission Question Ten and Eleven: Locking in net zero

We strongly support the concept of "locking in net zero" and would support moves towards negative greenhouse gases emissions from 2050 onwards.

Moving to planting native trees and away from exotic forests makes great sense and we support the recommendation. We would assume that much of the land suitable to planting native forests is already government controlled. This should enable reasonably quick action. It may be worth investigating some form of incentive for privately owned land, including Māori land, to be planted in native trees. The long term increase in native forests in Aotearoa will also help increase biodiversity.

Commission Question Twelve: Our path to meeting the budgets

The information in Box 3.1 is complex and in some areas contradictory. This makes it difficult to comment constructively. We would be very concerned at any slowing of the move away from fossil fuelled vehicles to electric and hydrogen powered vehicles and would recommend that the importation of fossil fuelled vehicles after 2028 be banned. This would still leave a large number of relatively cheap fossil fuelled vehicles available to persons unable to afford electric/hydrogen vehicles. It would also mean that more second-hand electric vehicles would be available.

Has the Commission considered the impact on greenhouse gas emissions of converting all rail operations to electric? Electrifying all of Aotearoa's existing rail network and twin tracking the main trunk line between Auckland and Wellington would appear to have a very positive long-term impact on greenhouse gas emissions.

We suggest that the Commission needs to be significantly more ambitious when it comes to long term change in farmland usage.

Commission Question Thirteen: An equitable, inclusive and well-planned climate transition

Agree

Commission Question Fourteen: Transport

As we have already said in our answer to Question 12 we believe that imports of fossil fuelled cars, buses and trucks should cease by 2028 rather than the 2035, or possibly 2030 dates the report recommends. The earlier banning of FF vehicles still leaves sufficient time, in our opinion, for the importers and distributors of vehicles to adjust. Vehicle distributors are already handling electric vehicles including hybrids without any major issues. One way to speed up the transition would be to impose a graduated tax on imports of FF vehicles from say 2024 through to 2028 starting at say 5% and raising to 25% in 2028 when imports would be banned.

A rapid and orderly transition to electric and hydrogen powered vehicles including trucks, buses and farm vehicles must be a key element of our climate crisis mitigation policies.

As far as the rail system is concerned, we have already commented in our answer to Question 12 that electrification of the rail system should be a high priority and we strongly recommend that the Commission includes such action in its final recommendations to Government at the end of 2021.

Overall we support the actions outlined in the various Necessary Actions included in this section but urge the commission to go further.

Commission Question Fifteen: Heat, industry and power sectors

Whilst here is much that we support in the Heat, Industry and Power section of the Commission's report we are concerned that there is no mention of solar power as an energy source for domestic, commercial and industrial activities. The cost of solar cells has dropped dramatically over the last 5 years and is likely to become more and more economic as a source of electricity.

We suggest that changes be made to relevant legislation to require all new buildings from, say 2024, to include solar cells and suitable batteries to be included in all new residential, industrial, government and commercial buildings. At the same time changes to the way that the electricity generation and distribution industry allows for electricity generated by solar cells to be connected to the national grid will be necessary. To insure that the necessary changes can be made it could be necessary for the Government to seriously consider reversing the privatizing of the electricity supply industry. It would have been much simpler to move to a 100% renewable electricity generation situation under the NZ Electricity Department and local power boards arrangements.

Commission Question 16: Agriculture

This is potentially one of, if not, the most contentious climate change issue Aotearoa faces. The Commission's proposals appear to be the bare minimum, with little margin for error and the potential for significant continuing methane emissions beyond 2050. We believe that the time has come when serious consideration needs to be given to the overall mix of agricultural products Aotearoa produces and exports. Considerably more greenhouse gases are produced as a result of meat and dairy farming compared to cropping and horticulture. Increasingly the consumption of meat products, in particular, is being questioned worldwide. It would be good if the Climate Change Commission could initiate a constructive debate on this issue as soon as possible.

Emphasis is made, correctly in our view, of the impact of freshwater policies on agriculture. However, it should be remembered that the widespread conversion to dairying, particularly on the Canterbury Plains, was primarily the result of widespread irrigation in the late 1990s early 2000s. The farming industry demonstrated an ability to make rapid changes in farming methods, in this case from cropping to dairying, and we see no reason why the industry cannot make changes to reduce methane emissions in particular. The rapid increase in dairying during this time resulted in an more than doubling of cow numbers with the inevitable more than doubling of methane emissions.

Commission Question 17: Forests

We support the Commission's proposals for forests and particular support the planting of indigenous trees on both government owned conservation land and private land; if necessary some subsidies could be provided to private landlords who plant and manage indigenous forests.

Commission Question 18: Waste

We support the recommendations of the Commission as far as they go. We believe that much more could be done and in shorter time frames. We recommend that the Commission looks at strengthening this section.

Commission Question 19: Multi-sector strategy

There is a lot in this section, whilst we have not seen anything we would object to we do think it could be divided up into specific sections. With major changes to the Resource Management Act being signed by Government we would expect the Commission to not only monitor the proposed changes but be involved in the process.

Commission Question 20: Rules for measuring progress

Yes

Commission Question 21: Reporting on and meeting the NDC

It would be helpful if, in using terms such as NDC, that the full wording be used when the term is first used for those unfamiliar with the term. As far as the recommendations of the Commission are concerned we do not believe that Aotearoa should depend on overseas emission credits to meet its National Determined Contribution (NDC) but we do agree with the Government reporting annually on how we are going to meeting the promises we have made as a country.

Commission Question 22: Biogenic methane

Whilst we do not disagree with the Commissions recommendations we question if they go far enough. Methane emissions have risen over the last 30 years faster than Carbon Dioxide as the national dairy herd has over doubled in size.

General Comments

The report overall is a particularly useful document with much detail that will be invaluable as we, collectively, determine how we are going to do our part in keeping temperature rise to less than 1.5degrees. Our Government has shown, with the Covid 19 pandemic, that it is prepared to be guided by science. As we tackle the climate crisis following the science will be even more important.