

**Low Carbon Kāpiti Submission to the Climate Change Response Act (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill 2019.**



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

LCK is an incorporated society representing approximately 200 Kāpiti Coast residents who are concerned about the climate crisis. Our purpose is to work at a local level to do all within our power to stop climate heating. One of our recent and successful endeavours was to present the Kāpiti Council with a petition, signed by 1,500 local residents, asking the Council to go carbon neutral by 2025. The Council subsequently voted unanimously to do so. This response reflects the fact the Kāpiti District will be strongly impacted by the climate crisis as it is especially vulnerable to sea level rise, as noted in the recent Greater Wellington Regional Council Sea Level Rise Charts.

It is also within our aims to take action on a national level and it is for this reason that we are making this submission.

The climate crisis is clearly the most significant issue that humanity will have to face in the coming years and unfortunately New Zealand is part of the problem. At 18 tonnes per capita of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions, we are fifth highest emitter in the OECD, a ranking of which we should be deeply ashamed. New Zealand has an obligation to take responsibility for its contribution to this crisis.

We cannot expect others who produce far less than us per capita to take the lead. The poorest half of the world's population is only responsible for 10% of all carbon dioxide emissions, yet it is the developing countries which will bear 75% of the costs of the climate crisis. For example, Ethiopia is facing devastating drought and Bangladesh will be severely impacted by rising sea levels yet they both have emissions of less than one tonne CO<sub>2</sub>e per capita. The micro island states of the Pacific Ocean, New Zealand's near neighbours, also have an uncertain future, with sea level rise an imminent danger. For reasons of global justice, we must take action to avert this crisis.

Intergenerational equity is another pressing concern. Many young people - children, teenagers - could still be here in 2100. What will their world look like then? It is hard to say. If we manage to keep heating to 1.5 degrees centigrade, as recommended by the IPCC, then the situation will be bad. Worst case scenarios with 3 degrees centigrade of warming or more will be catastrophic, and we must keep in mind that if all countries who signed up to the Paris Agreement keep their pledges we can still expect three degrees of warming.

But, why are we in this situation? Because we, the generation that has benefited most from the carbon economy have not been prepared to take the necessary action.

The Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill is New Zealand's chance to do its fair share. After years of procrastination, this bill finally starts the ball rolling and will get New Zealand on the right track. It includes many positives. It creates a 2050 target of zero net emissions for all greenhouse gases with the exception of biogenic methane which must be reduced by at least 24 to 47 per cent. It creates a framework of five year budgets, providing certainty as to what must be achieved. It establishes a Climate Commission which will provide advice on what our targets should be and how to achieve them. It requires us to start planning now for climate adaptation. Therefore, LCK applauds the introduction of the Bill into Parliament.

However, LCK feels that the Bill needs to be strengthened and improved, to ensure New Zealand makes ambitious, effective, enduring, and equitable progress towards carbon neutrality.

### **1) Methane targets**

In our initial submission in July 2018, Low Carbon Kāpiti asked for a target of net zero emissions for all greenhouse gases. In the present Bill, biogenic methane has been separated out, presumably at the request of the farming sector and based on the fact that it is a short-lived gas, with three quarters of its 100 year warming potential occurring within the first 17 years and then gradually diminishing after that.

LCK is prepared to accept this approach, but only if methane is cut rapidly and deeply, starting now. In the short term, methane is a much more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. When first released, it produces a very powerful spike of warming, some 120 times greater than a similar quantity of carbon dioxide. The fastest action New Zealand can take to slow the rate of warming is to cut methane as it currently contributes one third of our warming emissions

Robert MacLachlin of Massey University argues that a 2050 target of 47% should be “relatively straightforward”, achievable through reducing livestock stocking rates, retiring the least profitable sheep and beef farms and by improving efficiency in the dairy industry with fewer animals but increased productivity on the remaining land. Longer term options include methane inhibitors, selective breeding, and a possible methane vaccine.

Therefore, LCK supports demands for a single clear target of 47% reduction in biogenic methane.

### **2) Target timelines**

Having a 2050 target is good, but what is even more important is the path we take to get there. Politicians will be under massive pressure from vested interests and carbon-heavy sectors of the economy to delay, but delay means more emissions in the atmosphere. This must be avoided at all costs. The earlier the emission cuts, the more valuable they are.

Therefore, the Zero Carbon Bill needs to have clauses which avoid delay by ensuring rapid cuts in our greenhouse gases. This can be achieved by having strong 2030 targets as well as the 2050 targets. “The lower the emissions in 2030, the lower the challenge in limiting global warming to 1.5°C after 2030” [IPCC].

### **3) Enforceability**

As the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment observes, New Zealand has had a history of developing sophisticated policy tools but has not been “prepared to deploy them in a way that will ‘bite’”. The ETS has been “dialled back” resulting in gross emissions increasing by 24% since 1990. This must not be allowed to continue. At the moment, section 5ZJ prevents any remedy in a court of law. Russell Norman of Greenpeace argues that this section “negates” everything the Bill sets out to do - if targets are not reached, public pressure is the only compulsion. A major concern for LCK is that the temptations and pressures to procrastinate and delay will be strong and a reluctant government could get away with doing nothing. This must be avoided at all costs.

Also, it should be noted that the Bill focuses on how emissions budgets, targets and plans will be set up. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment points out that “a very low carbon price within an uncapped ETS, along with reliance on forestry sequestration and the purchase of offshore credits, has meant little sustained attention has been paid to domestic emissions reductions.” An effective and falling cap on emissions must be implemented along with a rising price on carbon. The Emissions Trading Scheme must be strengthened.

Therefore, the Zero Carbon Bill must include stronger remedies if a future government should fail to meet the targets that have been set.

### **4) A Fully Independent Climate Commission**

LCK considers it extremely important that the Climate Commission be fully independent from the government and that it has adequate powers, thus guaranteeing that emissions budgets will be based solely on the best available science. The Commission has to be able to hold the government to account, pointing out where the government has not met targets; it needs to be “a robust, durable, non-political mechanism for our zero carbon transition”.

### **5) Protection of Vulnerable Communities**

An inevitable consequence of transitioning to a zero carbon economy is that lives will be disrupted. People working in carbon intensive industries will lose their jobs, creating stress, insecurity and a negative attitude to the change. For example, in Taranaki, many people are concerned about how the move away from the oil and gas industry will impact their personal futures and the regional economy. Farming communities too will have to make major changes which will require support “in the form of research and on-farm initiatives”.

In addition, as Oxfam notes, “Those who will feel the impacts of climate breakdown the most are those who are already experiencing discrimination, poverty or socio-economic inequalities.” We must ensure that the poorer communities within New Zealand get the support and assistance they require.

Disruption is an inevitable part of any transition of this nature, no matter what the cause. Therefore, a good social support system is essential to help individuals adjust to the change.

## **6) Te Tiriti o Waitangi**

LCK believes the Bill must honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi by giving effect to meaningful partnership between iwi and the Crown, actively recognising the tino rangatiratanga of iwi and hapū, and acknowledging the centrality of tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori, and Māori worldviews to Aotearoa New Zealand’s climate change response.

## **7) Use of mechanisms that actually reduce carbon**

### **a. Restrict forestry offsets**

LCK supports the planting of as many trees as possible, especially native trees. However, there is a tendency to imagine that the targets can be reached just by planting more trees, rather than pursuing the substantial changes needed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. LCK is concerned that the excessive use of forestry offsets may water down efforts to reduce carbon. Also, overly relying on trees is risky as trees are not permanent - they can be lost to fire, pests, climate impacts and harvesting.

### **b. Prohibit international credits**

The Bill in its present form states that targets must be met “as far as possible” domestically. This is “vague and unhelpful”. New Zealand needs to drive domestic action and innovation from local communities and businesses, rather than allowing us to pay other countries to do our work for us. In the past, the New Zealand ETS has been abused, with carbon producing enterprises being allowed to continue producing greenhouse gases through the purchase of fraudulent carbon credits from the international market. Any reoccurrence of this sort of activity must be stopped.

## **8) Targets should include all sectors**

A complaint from the farming sector is that they are doing all the “heavy lifting” in relation to reducing emissions, whereas the non-farming sector is doing nothing. They point out the contribution that aviation too makes a significant contribution to carbon emissions and argue that tourism is a far greater threat to global warming than dairying. All sectors must do their fair share.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, it is very heartening to see this Bill progressing through Parliament. However, there is still room for improvement if we are to have legislation that is strong, effective, enduring and fair.