

Protecting New Zealand's environment and economy for current and future generations

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Context:

In 2007 several major global environmental assessments provided a stark warning on the continued deterioration of most ecosystems that, if unheeded, could imperil all life on earth by the end of this century. **In that year, the New Zealand Ministry for the Environment released their State of the Environment report for this country, indicating socio-economic problems ahead unless we urgently address our deteriorating water and soil resources, and our burgeoning greenhouse gas emissions.** The Churches have over the past few years been strongly advocating bold actions by the people of New Zealand, as good stewards of God's world, to commit themselves to managing and offsetting our greenhouse gas emissions. Ethics and the environment are closely linked. **Now we are about to join 190 other nations in Copenhagen** to respond to the urgent need to stabilize atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations. In the face of the spectre of the environmental crisis, **the churches applaud the steps the Government has taken but urge greater action as current policy initiatives on climate change, including changes to the Emissions Trading Scheme, do not appear to reflect the urgency for action required by the latest scientific evidence.**

Church and the Environment:

The Christian faith and our religious tradition have much to offer the world at this time. The Genesis account of creation is one in which God created the world in beauty and balance, "God saw it was good." According to our tradition, human beings were charged with the stewardship of the earth and all living creatures. Because we are stewards and not the owners of creation, we are summoned by God to "watch over and care for it". This implies the principle of sustainability: our uses of the Earth must be designed to conserve and renew rather than to deplete or destroy.

Climate change and the economy:

- Global analysis of the economic costs of extreme weather events by IPCC show that they rapidly **increased from US \$4b in 1950–1960 to over US \$45b in 1990-2000.** Accelerating economic costs were a major theme of the Stern Report to the UK Government in 2006, which emphasised that **urgent action now, using existing technologies, would be far less costly than delaying action** until later this century.
- **In New Zealand, we see a similar trend in costs from extreme weather events** that are projected to worsen in coming decades. The

potential for **indirect economic costs for New Zealand** are just as real, as we have seen **growing resistance to purchasing our export products in Europe** from an increasingly discerning market worried about food miles. **Our 'clean green' image is also under increasing pressure**

- The Churches are concerned about these rising economic costs, because they impact disproportionately on the poor and weak in our community, and globally on people in the developing countries, including the small island states in the South Pacific. However, it also concerns us that rarely do we hear from the Government and the media about the economic costs of doing too little, and the benefits from cleaning up the environment, and of tackling climate change. **The principal causes of the rapidly accelerating carbon dioxide emissions since 2000 are economic growth (65%), increasing carbon intensity and decreasing ocean and land sinks.**
- Clearly, we must heed the calls from the IPCC and others to change current economic systems and development paths. The IPCC Chair recently stated "we have six years to bring about a major change in the way we have been doing business all over the world" to avoid catastrophic climate change later this century.

The human costs of climate change:

- **Communities around the world are already experiencing the human costs of global warming**, and not only in the developing world. Europe has experienced heat-waves; around the globe forest fires are becoming a feature almost every summer and there has been a marked increase in category 5 hurricanes. In the developing world, where people are more vulnerable and less able to adapt, human costs from climate change are widely evident.
- The rapidly retreating Himalayan glaciers have been identified in several studies as a potential cause of "water wars" in only 20-30 years as countries in the Asian sub-continent struggle to meet their water needs. The US military has recently declared climate change as a major security Issue.
- Closer to home, **our Pacific Island neighbours face an uncertain future** from the effects of sea level rise, now accelerating, and the associated effects of storm surges as these become more severe. Pacific people, like Inuit in the Arctic Circle, are among the first indigenous peoples to experience the effects of global warming. This poses a serious threat to their health and welfare, and highlights their rights under International Human Rights Law for comprehensive resettlement. **In many cases, New Zealand will likely be where they resettle.** Future resettlement of hundreds of millions of migrants around the world is estimated to cost billions of dollars.
- In New Zealand, we are also vulnerable to new pests and diseases as temperatures increase. These include mosquito-borne diseases like Dengue Fever, already well established in the Pacific Islands, Australia and Asia, that would add millions to our already stretched annual health costs.

- New Zealanders have a range of views about climate change. **A survey taken in 2007 in New Zealand on climate change** showed that 8% believed it was not a problem, 13% saw it as a future problem, **42% believed it was a problem now, and 35% saw it as an urgent and immediate problem**. A combination of factors, including lack of reliable information, no coordinated public education programs, a largely ill-informed media, and indifference, all contribute to New Zealanders being generally less well informed about climate change than people in most other developed countries.
- Many of the costs would fall on future generations, raising inter-generation equity issues. Why should we enjoy profligate lifestyles now, knowing that this will inevitably lead to hardships for the next and subsequent generations, when **we could change now to more sustainable development paths** e.g., for “green” infrastructure, transport, energy, and food production?
- Finally, there are considerable benefits to be gained from changing development paths, as some countries are already finding. For example, President Obama’s Clean Energy bill passing through the Senate promises **large numbers of “green” jobs from switching to clean renewable energy sources**. Some countries, including Denmark, are already moving down this track, with **significant economic, social and environmental benefits**. The churches recognise that Government assistance to better insulate houses is a small but useful step in this direction here in New Zealand, but a much more coordinated effort is now needed.

Request to Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister:

We commend the Government for the steps it has taken, and respectively request the Government to take bolder steps in leading New Zealand’s efforts to curb our burgeoning greenhouse gas emissions, taking account of our unusual mix of emissions dominated by agriculture, by:

- Striving for a new global climate agreement (at Copenhagen or shortly after) covering mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer and finance. New Zealand has responsibility to argue for an evidence-based response - in the interests of future generations, our Pacific neighbours, and our longer-term national self-interest.
- Adopting emission reduction targets that are more consistent with what the science is telling us and especially if we can get a comprehensive global agreement.
- Employing a cross-party approach so the public of New Zealand is given a clear unequivocal message about the seriousness and urgency of this issue and effective actions (to provide certainty beyond the three year parliamentary term for investment in new “green” businesses).
- In policy development, acknowledging the needs of, and our responsibilities to, future generations.

- Establishing a new administrative body charged with representing the interests of future generations, such as the Commissioner or Ombudsman for Future Generations.
- Heeding the call of Pacific Island countries for the development of resettlement protocols as their island states become uninhabitable.
- Increasing our aid budget to cover our contribution to the cost of adaptation to climate change.
- Undertaking realistic cost–benefit analyses of taking firm action on climate change now, which include costs of inaction (delaying action until later) and the potential benefits from e.g., new or emerging technologies, and job creation in “green jobs”.
- Establishing “green” GDP measures that reflect changes in the value of environmental goods and services, accounting for the harm or good we have done to our environment over a given year.
- Mounting a concerted education campaign to better inform all New Zealanders of the risks from climate change, and the opportunities of addressing climate change, including actions they can take as individuals to reduce their carbon footprints.