



## **Submission for the Climate Change Contribution Consultation To the Honourable Tim Groser, Minister for Climate Change Issues**

**From the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand**

### **Summary of submission:**

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand (PCANZ) supports an ambitious “Intended Nationally Determined Contribution” (INDC) which commits both New Zealand and the world to a low carbon future by 2050 and a less than 2 degree C level of global warming. To this end we urge an INDC of **at least 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2025**. We need a target which will challenge both ourselves and other nations to pay the price necessary for both the survival of future generations and of the most vulnerable nations already being drastically affected by climate change.

In choosing this INDC, the Presbyterian Church is guided by 2014 reports from the UN’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which found emissions need to peak and then fall by between 40 and 70 per cent by 2050. The European Union has pledged an INDC of at least 40 per cent below 1990 levels by 2030 and has called on nations such as New Zealand to match this level.

Alongside a target for emissions we need to face up to the excess of fossil fuels already available – the vast majority of which cannot be burnt – and place an immediate moratorium on fossil fuel exploration and a rapid phase-out of existing extraction and industry subsidies.

### **The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand:**

The Presbyterian Church is part of the wider family of Christian churches and the third largest denomination in Aotearoa New Zealand. With over 400 churches throughout the length and breadth of New Zealand, and more than 330,000 people identifying as Presbyterian, Congregational or Reformed in the 2006 census, our Church is a significant voice within our country. The 30,000 people who attend a Presbyterian church every week are actively involved in serving their communities.

The Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand believes it is called by God to work with others in making Jesus Christ known through: teaching and nurturing people in Christian faith; loving service responding to human need; proclaiming the Gospel; seeking to transform society; and caring for God’s creation.

### **Our Submission and its Basis**

In your discussion document you seek to understand “what’s most important to us”. In our view a *fair* contribution to this global challenge must first and foremost acknowledge the urgency of our situation and the enormous cost, both financial and moral, of a failure to act strongly now. For us this is a question of justice (God’s justice) in respect of (a) the natural environment (God’s creation) and (b) the human community. The Presbyterian Church at a national level has committed itself to such justice and to action to oppose climate change. Such action acknowledges that we are called by God to care for the natural world and for our neighbors, especially those most vulnerable. The potential devastation threatened by climate change to both the environment and the human community dwarfs other concerns.

In our view a ‘fair contribution’ is one which is first of all fair to the planet, to our weakest neighbours and to future generations. It is also a contribution that acknowledges that our lifestyle as a ‘developed nation’ bears a greater responsibility for the situation we find ourselves in (“polluter pays”). Our status as a ‘developed nation’ leaves us able to afford a greater cost than less developed nations provided we are prepared to make the appropriate lifestyle changes. On the other hand if we compare ourselves to other developed nations, as your paper does, there may indeed be relatively ‘fewer low-cost options’ for NZ. However, we submit that reality will no longer permit a ‘low-cost option’.

We believe that our current INDC needs to reflect the government’s previously stated support for international agreements seeking to limit global warming to 2 degrees C above pre-industrial levels and its previously stated target of a 50 per cent cut in emissions by 2050. We need to set a target which is consistent with the degree of global action required to achieve this. Anything less will embarrass us internationally.

In the light of all of this we call on the government to set a target of at least 40 per cent below 1990 emission levels to be achieved by 2025. Although our General Assembly\* has not voted on this specific figure, it is consistent with the stated position of the General Assembly\* on both climate change and justice and is in line with IPCC targets. It is also consistent with the aforementioned previously stated objectives of this government.

We are deeply concerned that a focus (as in the Summary of your discussion document) on not endangering our ‘competitiveness’ as a nation might cause us to avoid taking a risky act of responsibility and that if all developed nations think along these lines then nothing will be achieved. We are also concerned that your list of matters for consideration (p. 17) includes ‘what’s best for us’ but says nothing about the ‘impact on our neighbours’.

Alongside its concern for the world’s most vulnerable nations the Presbyterian Church has strong relationships with our Pacific neighbours. We submit that the cost of a less than ambitious INDC is devastation for our neighbours in the Pacific. Our Micronesian neighbours of Kiribati and Tuvalu are already preparing themselves for the loss of their island homes. The devastating cost for them will incur further economic costs for us as displaced people seek refuge (whether we call them refugees or not) in countries like New Zealand.

As indicated in the summary above we believe that a strong commitment to reducing emissions, which acknowledges the results of current climate science, must accept that the vast majority of the world’s present fossil fuel reserves cannot be burnt and thus a moratorium on further exploration is imperative. The idea that current extraction should be phased out by the end of

the decade (h/t 350 Aotearoa) seems wise and with it we urge an end to government subsidising of the fossil fuel industry. Consistent with this call, the Presbyterian Church at its General Assembly in 2014 has already decided to request its Church Property Trustees to divest from the fossil fuel industry.

In order to meet ambitious emission targets we urge the government to work on this with all the main political parties in a transparent manner, in accord with Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and to establish an independent body and process to monitor these targets.

We support an ambitious INDC for reasons of social equity, justice for those most affected, and care for our environment. We appreciate the opportunity to make this submission and have our voices heard.



**The Right Rev Andrew Norton**  
**Moderator of the General Assembly\* of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand \*\***

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\* General Assembly is the Presbyterian Church's top decision-making body

\*\* The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand is the elected spiritual leader of the Presbyterian Church and the spokesperson of the Presbyterian Church.