



Briefing to incoming Minister

December 2020


NZ Climate & Health Council

Introduction

Climate change represents the greatest threat to public health of the 21st Century but it also offers an incredible opportunity to improve health and reduce health inequities both within and between countries. Proactively combating climate change is one of the most important actions the New Zealand government can take to improve outcomes for health and equity.

If climate change continues unchecked, the burden of disease, disability and premature death from climate change will continue to accelerate globally. New Zealand will not be immune from this burden and it will disproportionately effect those who already have poor health outcomes - Māori and Pacific communities. Conversely, potential co-benefits for health exist in addressing climate change across New Zealand's main climate polluting sectors: transport, housing, energy, food systems, and health.

However, these co-benefits will only come with well-planned action – they will not come automatically - and there is also potential for co-harms to health and health equity from mitigation and adaptation actions (examples include food crop biofuels, incentivising expensive electric private cars at the expense of public and active transport, an Emissions Trading Scheme from which only corporations profit, and poorly managed retreat from sea level rise). Many health equity risks of climate policy can be reduced through the effective government actions to use carbon pricing instruments, invest in active and public transport infrastructure and well-insulated buildings, phase out fossil fuel extraction and subsidies, and promote healthy sustainable diets and food systems.

We commend the passage of the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act and the establishment of the Climate Change Commission by the previous government. However, the government needs to incorporate health and wellbeing into its climate change response and put indigenous voices front-and-centre of our response. Presently, neither the act nor the goals of the commission reference health - neither the health risks from climate change nor the health gains from climate protection - this is a glaring omission when climate change is potentially the biggest global health threat this century.

Finally, the sidelining of agricultural emissions would be a huge missed opportunity, in that New Zealand stands to be a world leader in switching to a low-carbon farming sector. The current reliance of the country on a high-emitting and health-damaging farming industry is a major vulnerability and farmers need to be supported in a just transition to more sustainable options. We have already seen our other major export industry (itself high-emitting), long-haul international tourism, exposed and undermined by external events.

Our recommendations for priority actions are below. Most importantly we would like to see a change in approach from the government, from one that looks at climate change action as a cost to society, to one that sees the huge benefits for population health and wellbeing

Priority actions for climate and health

Recommendation 1

Develop a national climate change and health action plan.

This plan must include:

- actions to achieve a carbon zero health sector well before 2040 (N.B. the National Health Service in the UK have recently set targets to achieve net-zero emissions by 2040, and net-zero emissions in its supply chain by 2045);
- a health adaptation plan (including both health sector adaptation and health-protecting adaptation in other sectors).

Recommendation 2

Incorporate health and wellbeing properly into the government's climate change response.

- Appoint two public health specialist to the board of the Climate Change Commission including at least one Māori public health specialist;
- Recommend the Climate Change Commission increases its focus on health and wellbeing.
- Ensure a joining up of climate and health silos to maximise the potential for co-benefits.
- Take proper account of all marginalised groups.

Recommendation 3:

Centralise Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori expertise and opinion in all areas of New Zealand's response to climate change.

Recommendation 4:

Strengthen the Emissions Trading Scheme.

- All sectors and sources of greenhouse gas emissions must be included in the ETS. The inclusion of agriculture will incentivise emission reduction in the industry responsible for half of New Zealand's climate-damaging emissions.
- We strongly recommend a more rapid phasing out of free allocation of units to emissions intensive, trade exposed (EITE) industries.

Recommendation 5

Establish a Tiriti-based food system that is equitable, improves health, and reduces climate pollution.

- Take immediate action through government procurement of healthy and sustainable food (for example in hospitals and schools).

- Promote food sovereignty initiatives by encouraging development of local food initiatives, and strengthen the adaptive capacity of local food systems.
- Ensure that Māori primary industries are not unfairly burdened by transitions to a lower emissions economy.
- Develop food based dietary guidelines reflecting Food and Agricultural Organisation principles. Although there needs to be work across many sectors, industry influence must be curbed to protect public health.
- Address economic disparities so that people are enabled to make healthy food choices.

Recommendation 6

Re-orient New Zealand’s food and agriculture system using a suite of policies and trade and investment agreements to drive agricultural decision-making, and to ensure a just transition for farmers:

- Ensure that land use legislation and freshwater allocation and policy do not provide unfair and perverse incentives for high-emissions agriculture which also undermine health through water pollution.
- Reduce economic reliance on ruminant livestock farming and reduce the intensity of dairy farming.
- Provide assistance to the agricultural sector to end or significantly decrease emissions from coal-powered milk treatment, fracking waste-products and nitrogenous fertiliser use.

Recommendation 7

Reduce emissions from transport, which comprises New Zealand’s fastest growing source of emissions.

Invest in infrastructure and services that successfully prioritise:

- accessible, low cost and safe public transport for New Zealanders with diverse needs (people using guide dogs, pushchairs, walking sticks, wheelchairs, mobility scooters, and people with disabilities and their caregivers, people with babies and toddlers, and/or during the later stage of pregnancy, and senior citizens);
- accessible and safe pathways and cycleways
- zero carbon public and freight transport systems (electric rail and buses, widespread electric car share systems, low carbon shipping).

Recommendation 8

Reduce emissions from our houses while maximising health and equity co-benefits.

- Immediately fund or co-fund the installation of clean heating and insulation of all remaining houses accommodating low income households, including private rental housing;
- Provide a major investment in new, zero carbon, healthy, accessible social housing
- Set building standards that require new builds to be zero-carbon and that also protect the health of occupants from indoor air pollution;
- Enhance support for local government bylaws requiring high efficiency, low emissions home heating.

Recommendation 9

Pledge to phase out existing fossil fuel extraction in the next decade while enabling a ‘just transition’ to low carbon energy generation which ensures mitigation of the adverse effects of phasing out fossil fuel extraction on workers, local communities and regional economies.

Recommendation 10

For New Zealand to act as a responsible global citizen in the united effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

- Revise (and promptly meet) New Zealand's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) so we take a fair share in reducing global emissions to limit warming to 1.5°C. Fair means acknowledging our historic climate damage and comparative advantage, including natural resources. At a minimum, this means halving our emissions this decade, and reaching net zero emissions well before 2040.
- Protect our Pacific neighbours' health through the use of existing relationships and responsibilities to support healthy climate change adaptation and mitigation in these especially climate-vulnerable nations.
 - Provide fair climate finance for developing nations to reach their sustainable development goals in addition to current aid.
 - Provide fair global adaptation finance for the loss and damage in developing nations, caused by New Zealand and other historically responsible nations.
- Ensure that international trade and investment agreements do not undermine the ability of governments to legislate, regulate and develop healthy and effective policies to combat climate change.
- Include public health expertise (particularly those with nutrition expertise) in trade policy decision-making and negotiations.

Recommendation 11

Reduce the influence of harmful corporate interests on climate policy and develop strong and transparent processes for managing conflict of interest.

About OraTaiao

OraTaiao: The New Zealand Climate and Health Council is an organisation calling for urgent, fair, and Tiriti-based climate action in Aotearoa; we recognise the important co-benefits to societal health, well-being and fairness that are possible via strong mitigative action.

OraTaiao is made up of more than 700 health professionals who are concerned with:

- The negative impacts of climate change on health, well-being, and fairness;
- The gains to health, well-being, and fairness that are possible through strong, health-centred climate action;
- Highlighting the impacts of climate change on those who already experience disadvantage or ill-health (i.e. equity impacts);
- Reducing the health sector's contribution to climate change.

In addition to individual members, we have the backing of 17 of New Zealand's leading health professional organisations with respect to our Health Professionals Joint Call to Action on Climate Change and Health, including the New Zealand Medical Association, the New Zealand Nurses Organisation and the Public Health Association, as well as a number of Specialist Colleges and leaders of both New Zealand Faculties of Medical and Health Sciences. Together, these organisations represent tens of thousands of New Zealand's health professional workforce.

As an organisational member of the Board of the Global Climate & Health Alliance, we are part of a worldwide movement of health professionals and health organisations urgently focusing on the health challenges of climate change and the health opportunities of climate action. OraTaiao signed the Doha Declaration on Climate, Health and Wellbeing of December 2012, which reflects an international perspective. OraTaiao is also a member of the Global Climate and Health Alliance.

We honour Māori aspirations, are committed to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and strive to reduce inequities between Māori and other New Zealanders. We are guided in our practice by the concepts of kaitiakitanga (guardianship), kotahitanga (unity), manaakitanga (caring), and whakatipuranga (future generations).

