

MEDIA RELEASE

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‘Count human health in your climate calculations’, health groups tell Ministers

The government may be asking for public input on New Zealand’s planned action to address climate change in the lead-up to global negotiations this year in Paris, but health is left out of the equation, health groups say.

Doctors, nurses, public health professionals and medical students today expressed alarm about the government’s scrambled public consultation on New Zealand’s post-2020 climate contribution.

In the rushed round of public meetings, Ministry for the Environment officials admitted not counting health gains from climate action – nor counting the human health costs of inaction – when calculating climate action “costs”.

Dr Rhys Jones, co-convenor of OraTaiao, NZ Climate & Health Council says: ‘It’s hard to take this climate consultation seriously, when the government analysis has completely ignored New Zealanders’ health and well-being. This is totally irresponsible, when the evidence tells us we must reduce climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions to keep our climate compatible with human health and survival.’

‘Placing human well-being and fairness at the centre of our government’s climate planning would see New Zealand push for a global 2050 zero carbon emissions agreement in Paris this year. Our government would legislate now for an independent Climate Commission to oversee rapid emissions reductions, especially for long-lived carbon dioxide. We would also see a credible cross-party climate action plan, with concrete policies to rapidly reduce our emissions put in place within the term of this government.’

‘How we share the costs and benefits will also be crucial. Changes to our climate will be hardest on the health of older people, children, Māori, Pacific peoples and low income households. Many people reading this will be in one or more of these groups sooner or later,’ says Dr Jones, ‘yet this consultation ignores health and fairness.’

‘Smart climate action means real health gains that can be counted,’ says Dr Jones. ‘The sooner we act, the better for health – through warmer houses, enjoying being more active with our daily commutes, and more local fresh fruit and vegetables.’ Dr Jones says ‘Our health also depends on a healthy economy, but instead of future-proofing and diversifying in a world that’s turning to clean energy, New Zealand is fixated on an obsolete fossil-fuelled economic model that’s fiscally reckless and harmful to human health – from transport spending that increases inactivity, to extracting fossil fuels we can’t risk burning.’

‘Just as health professionals put the needs of their patients first, we call on Ministers to prioritise New Zealanders’ health and wellbeing in calculating essential climate action,’ ends Dr Jones.

OraTaiao: The New Zealand Climate and Health Council www.orataiao.org.nz

New Zealand Nurses Organisation www.nzno.org.nz

Public Health Association of New Zealand www.pha.org.nz

College of Nurses Aotearoa (NZ) www.nurse.org.nz/

New Zealand Medical Students’ Association www.nzmsa.org.nz

Medical Students for Global Awareness (Wellington) www.facebook.com/groups/193398224034238

(endorsed by) the New Zealand College of Midwives www.midwife.org.nz.

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Background

This statement is by NZ health organisations:

- OraTaiao: The New Zealand Climate and Health Council www.orataiao.org.nz
- New Zealand Nurses Organisation www.nzno.org.nz
- Public Health Association of New Zealand www.pha.org.nz
- College of Nurses Aotearoa (NZ) www.nurse.org.nz/
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and is endorsed by the New Zealand College of Midwives www.midwife.org.nz.

The Ministry for the Environment is currently consulting on what NZ's greenhouse gas emissions reduction target and overall climate contribution should be after 2020 ('Intended Nationally Determined Commitments'), as part of its international obligations under the UN Framework Convention for Climate Change.

More information on the Ministry's consultation is available at <http://www.mfe.govt.nz/climate-change/reducing-greenhouse-gas-emissions/consultation-setting-new-zealand%E2%80%99s-post-2020>

Dr Rhys Jones (Ngāti Kahungunu) is a Public Health Physician and Senior Lecturer at the University of Auckland. He co-convenes OraTaiao: The NZ Climate and Health Council.

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