

1 October 2017

Productivity Commission
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Submission: How to transition to a low emissions economy

Dear Sir, Madam,

I applaud that you are seeking public feedback on this important matter but there are a couple of issues I will mention first.

I have very recently stumbled on your request which begs the question of how widely you advertised the same. Further the timing is unfortunate with much attention distracted by elections. So I assume that the late notice and election distraction will limit the public response – and certainly has in my case. As such I have not had time to read your issues documents (92 pages!) thus my response is of more general nature.

I am also conscious of previous public submissions called for by the Govt. prior to the Paris Climate Change Talks, which I understand overwhelming asked for NZ to take more action, were totally ignored and ‘buried’.

Background:

I am sure you are well aware of the following but to recap:

I have no doubt that climate change is well under way – anecdotal observation of increasing record breaking extreme weather events is obvious, fifteen of the warmest years have occurred since the year 2000, Lloyds Insurance have graphed over time and exponential increase in their extreme weather event claims.

Having followed this topic for some 15 years, the scientific language has changed to include ‘happening faster than estimated’, the year 2100 replaced with 2050, tipping points have been reached and the appearance of the term human extinction.

It is obvious the IPCC and the two degrees target is a political agreement not supported by the science. It is extremely conservative and as finally has been made public, takes little account of the methane release from thawing tundra. And current Govt. targets are only uncommitted promises falling well short of even the IPCC requirements.

Simultaneously we face the uncertainty of available cheap fossil fuels that our current lifestyle, including food production, is totally dependent on. Not only is this uncertainty due to the need to cease the burning of fossil fuels to mitigate climate change, but there are the thermodynamics reasons.

Initially when discovered, one unit \$/energy invested in oil extraction returned 100 units. Or ERORI – Energy returned on energy invested was 100:1. The easy stuff has been extracted and now more of each barrel has to go back into extracting the next thus the ERORI is 12:1 – and it is falling. With what is required for extraction and distribution, the oil industry can't operate less than 7:1.

And added to that is the unstable global debt laden 'ponzi' financial system – which together with the above, has been described as the perfect storm that threatens humanity. And add to that other interrelated matters of other resource depletion, ocean acidity, peak soil, peak water, pollution, extreme inequality, deforestation, species extinction, lack of diversity

In summary I believe that we may be too late to mitigate but try we must – we need a target and a plan to get there – preferably apolitical. But equally we must prepare to adapt to the inevitable crisis approaching. With the lack of global leadership, one response I support is that of the global grassroots Transition Town Movement to build resilient all-inclusive local communities – resilience in local food, local energy and local economy.

Productivity Commission's position.

Which brings me to your introduction promo which mentions growth for wellbeing .. but what do you mean?:

"Anyone who thinks that you can have infinite growth on a planet with finite resources is either a madman or an economist" – and judging by your promo video, do I add the Productivity Commission to that well known quote? Much of what I have mentioned above are symptoms of our present growth economy.

Your promo mentions 'wellness' – how do you measure this - I trust you accept that GDP is not a measure of wellness. High crime, poor health issues, earthquakes etc all increase GDP but hardly represent wellness.

Mitigation Action – in no particular order.

Education - This Govt. unfortunately has missed the chance to make this NZ's 'nuclear moment' and to lead the world. Previous attempts have been quashed by the actions of vested interests and their influence on our leadership. Such failure to act will have a global detrimental effect on our so called "Clean green" image.

The NZ public have not been kept informed of the science and many remain ignorant on the same, thus there has not been the political will. Whilst climate change is now getting some mention, most is on the obvious effects such as sea level rise and extreme weather events. Equally, if not more important, is the less tangible threat to our food production

A huge educational shift is required, in MSM, social media, education system in schools so the public are informed instead of what appear to be generally 'dumbed down'.

Efficiency - We can start by increasing our efficiencies of energy use, reducing waste. Encouraging walking, biking has both energy saving plus health wellbeing results. Obviously insulated housing saves energy but also has health wellbeing results.

Zero Waste - with zero waste as a goal we will reduce emissions – business have to be encouraged to reduce such as packaging that become a externality problem for communities to deal with. Manufacturers need to cease unnecessary manufacture of innumerable gawdy, useless and breakable stuff = we need to recycle, repair and reuse adopting the ‘cradle to cradle’ approach.

Transport - The uptake of EVs has commenced by private individuals but lacks any real Govt. support. Public transport has to be encouraged – and of zero emissions modes. Our rail network needs to be restored, electrified and certainly not returned to diesel locomotives as has been suggested. Too much money, influenced by the vested trucking industry, has been spent/allocated to road transport at the expense of rail. Coastal shipping should be also integrated in to the mix.

Localise energy – yes we are 80% renewable mainly due to hydro but how resilient are we? Dams will silt up, water storage will be affected by droughts and our lengthy transmission lines are vulnerable to extreme weather events. Smaller decentralised local systems should be encouraged – solar panels are already economic but will be a game changer with battery improvement. Privatisation of our big utility companies whose goal is a bottom line profit is a barrier - but they may be left with stranded assets unless they become part of the change.

Localise economies – Our biggest income earners – agriculture and tourism – are totally dependent on fossil fuels. Of the total Govt. expenditure, only some 7% is controlled/spent by Local Govt. – this is out of kilter. It is essential that local community resilience is supported with encouragement of local food production. Currently many of our local produce growers are at retirement age and there are huge barriers to their succession by younger generations. This is a topic on its own.

Agriculture – Our present industrialised mono crop agriculture is totally dependent on fossil fuels. The externalities of pollution in our waterways is well discussed from mainly stock effluent run off, nitrate fertiliser leaching and soil erosion. We must move to a regenerative non till systems with organic diversity that allow the soil microbes to flourish and replenish our soils – which will also provide carbon sequestration.

The world demand for ‘real food’ is increasing thus it represents an economic option as well – NZ has a unique opportunity to grab this market – ultimately less energy intensive more labour intensive systems will be forced on us anyway – and the drift back and revival of rural communities would be a positive aspect and a major wellbeing outcome. Unfortunately Federated Farmers don’t appear to understand the position their industry is facing – but we are all in this together.

Forestry - Planting more trees is an obvious carbon sequestration exercise, plus has soil erosion and effluent runoff benefits. Protecting our native forests and wetlands are essential – pest eradication is important, not only to protect our native species, but to prevent canopy/foilage destruction leading to drought prone native bush, fire risk.

Reduce consumption - Ultimately a paradigm shift in our life styles is required. We have to reduce our consumption - especially the conspicuous consumption stuff.

Guardian article is timely to include. Titled *Neoliberalism has conned us into fighting climate change as individuals*, it points out that a hundred companies alone are responsible for an astonishing 71% of global emissions – so yes we have personal responsibility but it is obvious where the biggest changes have to occur.

The article goes on to state that “ At the very moment when climate change demands an unprecedented collective public response, neoliberal ideology stands in the way. Which is why, if we want to bring down emissions fast, we will need to overcome all of its free-market mantras: take railways and utilities and energy grids back into public control; regulate corporations to phase out fossil fuels; and raise taxes to pay for massive investment in climate-ready infrastructure and renewable energy — so that solar panels can go on everyone’s rooftop, not just on those who can afford it.”

I attach the link below for your information.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to have my say. But ultimately if we are ever to truly decarbonise, there has to be the political will to move away (transition) from our present economic growth model. This will require a paradigm shift which will be strongly resisted by the vested interests - thus we need to increase public awareness of the facts that we must build for the future, not steal from it.

Thank you

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