



Stepping stones to Paris and beyond: Climate change, progress, and predictability

Frequently Asked Questions

What is this report about?

This report looks at how successive Governments can best deal with the ultimate intergenerational issue: climate change.

In 2008 the United Kingdom Parliament voted overwhelmingly in support of a new climate change law. It is a law that sets up a process for reducing greenhouse gas emissions into the future – a process that endures through changing Governments.

The Commissioner has looked at the UK Climate Change Act, and recommended New Zealand enact a similar law.

Why did the Commissioner decide to undertake this investigation?

The proposal that New Zealand follow the UK's approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions is not new. For instance, Generation Zero has proposed a Zero Carbon Act. The Commissioner decided to examine the UK law in detail and consider whether New Zealand should adopt a similar approach.

What are the report's main findings?

The Commissioner has recommended a new Act that is similar to the UK Climate Change Act 2008.

The Act would put New Zealand's emissions targets into law, and require the setting of carbon budgets that would act as stepping stones towards the targets. It would also establish a high-powered independent expert group that would crunch the numbers and provide objective and transparent advice. The Government would still be responsible for developing policies to reduce emissions.

What would this mean for business?

Businesses and investors are calling for more predictability in New Zealand's response to climate change. Some are keen to take advantage of the opportunities of moving to a low-carbon economy, but they need more predictability before they invest. More predictability would also help them manage the risks.

Are any other countries taking this approach?

At least nine other countries have passed similar climate change laws – Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Mexico, Norway, Scotland, Sweden, and Switzerland. Each of these countries has:

- Targets in legislation
- Carbon budgets (or similar) to guide progress towards targets and avoid the need for abrupt transitions
- Policies developed by Government to reach the targets
- Independence and transparency in advice and/or monitoring

At least twelve states / provinces in the United States, Canada, and Australia also have these features in law. These are California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Washington, Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Victoria.

What is happening to the UK's emissions?

The UK has met its first two climate budgets, and is on track to meeting the third. Meeting the fourth carbon budget will be more challenging.

Weren't emissions already falling in the UK before the Act in 2008?

Emissions in the UK have been falling since 1990, but the setting of carbon budgets demonstrates a serious intent to continue on this downward path. This measure of predictability helps businesses manage the risks and take up the opportunities of the transition to a low carbon economy.

Should the New Zealand Government be doing more?

The Commissioner acknowledges that the Government has made progress since the Paris agreement, and welcomes the establishment of the cross-party working group on climate change (Globe NZ). But she says it's now time to take the next step.

Are New Zealand's targets ambitious enough?

New Zealand's emission targets have been criticised for lacking ambition. But the Commissioner believes the most important thing now is to make progress – to change the direction of travel and make large and lasting reductions in our greenhouse gas emissions.

What about the ETS?

The ETS is an important tool for reducing emissions, but by itself it will not put New Zealand on track to meeting targets. A UK-style law would set up a process for making sure that New Zealand is on track. It would also establish a high-powered independent expert group that would crunch the numbers and provide objective advice that would be available to everybody.

What are New Zealand's long-term greenhouse gas targets?

	Target year	Target	
		As expressed	Net emissions (million tonnes CO ₂ -eq per year)
Paris	2030	Net emissions 30% below 2005 gross emissions	57.7
New Zealand '50 by 50'	2050	Net emissions 50% below 1990 gross emissions	32.3