



Hon Damien O'Connor
Minister for Agriculture and Rural Communities
Parliament Buildings
Wellington

28 March 2018

Dear Damien

I am writing to you to request information regarding actions your Ministry may be undertaking in response to climate change issues highlighted in the environmental report *Our atmosphere and climate 2017*, published by the Ministry for the Environment and Statistics New Zealand under the Environmental Reporting Act 2015.

This request is made in relation to my role under this Act. As set out in Section 18, I have a broad role to comment on national state of the environment reports, which includes discussing implications of environmental reports and recommending responses to the findings contained within those reports.

Our atmosphere and climate 2017 contained information on increases in greenhouse gas emissions from the agricultural sector since 1990. Specifically, the report notes “Agricultural emissions from livestock digestion (mostly methane) rose 5 percent, while emissions from agricultural soils (mostly nitrous oxide from nitrogen fertiliser use and excrement from grazing livestock) rose 51 percent.”

In light of this, could you please answer the following questions:

1. *What work has the Ministry done to identify what is driving the increases in agricultural emissions cited above, or what may be done to reverse their upward trend?*
2. *What targets or goals, if any, has the Ministry set for reducing domestic emissions of greenhouse gases from the primary sector?*
3. *What work has the Ministry done or is planning to do with other government agencies to address issues where greenhouse gas reductions require co-ordinated actions from multiple stakeholders?*
4. *What work has the Ministry done to consider the relative contributions to greenhouse gas mitigation from domestic action and international efforts – be they purchasing international carbon credits or other actions?*

The existing and projected impacts of climate change described in *Our atmosphere and climate 2017* will lead to New Zealand becoming more exposed to the risk of new pests and diseases, with potential implications for native biodiversity as well as market access.

In light of this, could you please answer the following questions:

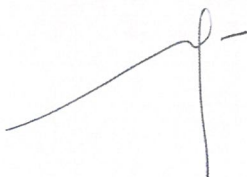
5. *What work has the Ministry done on the biosecurity risks that climate change poses for native biodiversity, and agricultural production and market access?*
6. *More broadly, what is the Ministry's strategic approach to dealing with the risks that climate change poses to New Zealand's agricultural sector, including biosecurity, food safety and agricultural infrastructure?*
7. *Has any work been done to estimate the cost of these risks?*
8. *What climate related research areas (and to what extent) is the Ministry funding, and how are funding areas and priorities decided upon?*

Our atmosphere and climate 2017 also contains information on the impacts of ozone depleting substances (ODS) on ozone concentrations and subsequent UV light levels. Due to the effectiveness of the Montreal Protocol, nitrous oxide is now the most significant remaining ODS. Given that this is also a potent greenhouse gas, and management of it will also have implications for water quality, could you please provide information on what the Ministry has done or is planning to do regarding the following:

9. *What work is being undertaken to ensure a coordinated approach to managing nitrous oxide with respect to climate change, ozone concentrations, and water quality.*

I would also welcome a meeting to discuss these issues with you following the reception of a reply to this letter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a long horizontal stroke followed by a vertical line and a small loop at the top.

Simon Upton
Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment

CC: Hon Nathan Guy; Gareth Hughes, MP; David Seymour, MP