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Government emissions target for 2020 inadequate

Leading climate policy and science experts say the Government's announcement on Friday (overshadowed by earthquakes) is markedly inadequate and disappointing.

The experts, from across a number of New Zealand universities, say the newly announced target for greenhouse emission reductions, of 5% by 2020, does not provide the leadership on climate change that New Zealand needs. It is also very unlikely, they say, that the 5% target by 2020 could be consistent with the Government's own 50% by 2050 reduction goal.¹

"Governments have a responsibility for leadership in areas where individual action to address societal problems is not sufficient. We elect governments to take the hard collective decisions on our behalf, not easy, short-sighted decisions." Associate Professor Chapman says.

"We would like to see the government adopting a progressive programme of encouraging renewable energy generation, discouraging transport emissions, making more of our houses energy efficient, and resurrecting our now barely functional emissions trading scheme."

"Globally, there is a major risk of dangerous warming -- of around 3 to 4 degrees Celsius -- if emissions are not rapidly reduced, starting this decade," Associate Professor James Renwick warns. Dr Renwick is one of the co-authors of the forthcoming 5th Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "To have a reasonable chance of avoiding dangerous warming requires that developed countries cut emissions by around 20% to 40% by 2020, rather than 5%. For developing countries, the rapid growth of emissions in recent decades will need to be substantially reduced."

"The Government rightly argues that New Zealand must do 'our fair share' to meet the global challenge of cutting greenhouse gas emissions, but its actions are inconsistent with this objective" says Professor Jonathan Boston, Director of the Institute for Governance and Policy Studies. "By repeatedly weakening the emissions trading scheme, rejecting a second legally-binding target under the Kyoto Protocol, and now announcing a negligible emissions-reduction target for 2020, the Government is undermining global efforts to address climate change and is further putting at risk New Zealand's clean, green reputation. We are embarrassed to now have a New Zealand target that is well short of the estimated combined commitment for developed countries of around 10-15% by 2020".²

All the experts underline that every year counts in fighting climate change. "Climate change represents a critical and urgent challenge for the world community. We cannot leave it to the last moment on this one. Like an athlete in training for the long

¹ Note that all reductions are calculated in terms of a 1990 baseline

² For further information, see Climate Action Tracker: <http://climateactiontracker.org/countries/developed.html>

haul, we need to build our fitness as a low-carbon economy. We need policies that keep the pressure on, and we need to find innovative ways forward. We cannot afford to throw in the towel on this challenging issue; nor can we ignore our global responsibilities,” Associate Professor Chapman concludes.

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