

Action on climate change policy falls well short

November 4 2011

A review of Government policy and action on climate change by researchers at the University of Otago, Wellington and Victoria University shows they fall well short of what is needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and meet even weak targets.

The research published today in the New Zealand Medical Journal raises questions about New Zealand's commitment to international targets and agreements regarding [climate change](#), and in adapting to the impacts on public health and society as a whole.

“What we’ve seen in this analysis of the last three years is wasted opportunities to make critical progress to reduce CO₂ and other [greenhouse gas emissions](#),” says lead researcher, Associate Professor Nick Wilson.

“Instead what has happened are public relations, watered-down policy, and media releases with ‘aspirational’ goals which are unlikely to result in a major reduction in New Zealand’s climate-damaging [emissions](#).”

Associate Professor Wilson says the limited progress may well reflect a lack of appreciation of the potential impacts of climate change on health and the environment – potentially at catastrophic levels.

He says commercial vested interests appear to have influenced policy, for instance in relation to the country’s agricultural sector, and there seems to be a focus on crisis management rather than planning and

adapting to climate change impacts other than a few guidance documents.

The researchers examined a range of government policies and responses over the last three years to the challenge of reducing [greenhouse gas](#) emissions (GHGs) in New Zealand.

- The contribution to international efforts and co-operation to reduce GHGs is weak and limited. The very long-term goal of a 50% reduction in GHG emissions by 2050 is inconsistent with what is needed to prevent climate change.
- The Emissions Trading Scheme has been weakened. The Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment says emissions are on course to exceed by 30% the reduction targets for 2020. The carbon price of \$12.50 a tonne is too low to have the necessary impact. However, Government subsidies for insulating over 130,000 homes are a positive move.
- Funding for research into reducing agricultural emissions is positive, but research funding for renewable energy and [energy efficiency](#) is inadequate. There is negligible research funding into the health impacts of climate change, and from one research funder, only one grant out of 19 for technology development was energy efficiency related (light bulbs).
- Some support has been given to further developing renewable energy, but a moratorium on new fossil-fuelled power stations has been axed. Regulations are still weak on improving energy efficiency of the existing housing stock and appliances. Fuel economy standards on vehicles have been abandoned, and car adverts rarely mention fuel efficiency as a selling point.
- Investment in public transport in Auckland and Wellington is continuing, but the overall budget for walking and cycling has been reduced, and is very small compared to the billions planned for roading. The International Energy Agency recently says

growth in the private transport sector in New Zealand is ‘the biggest energy saving challenge’, and government policies are ‘vague’ and ‘unclear’.

- Commercial buildings after the Christchurch earthquake can be rebuilt to a higher code with better thermal insulation. In contrast, higher [energy](#) standards are not permitted to be retrofitted to damaged Christchurch houses, other than through the Government ‘Warm Up NZ’ programme.

The researchers concluded that a range of opportunities to reduce emissions had been missed over the last three years.

“Action on climate change needs to be considered as an urgently required form of catastrophe insurance, but we are clearly not seeing this with minimal government action in recent years,” says Associate Professor Wilson.

Provided by University of Otago

Citation: Action on climate change policy falls well short (2011, November 4) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-11-action-climate-policy-falls-short.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--