



Submission
of the
**New Zealand Union of Students'
Associations**
on the
**He Pou a Rangi / Climate Change
Commission 2021 Draft Advice for
Consultation**

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To	He Pou a Rangi / Climate Change Commission
From	New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA)
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Subject	Climate Action for Aotearoa

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The New Zealand Union of Students' Associations ("NZUSA") would like to thank you for the opportunity to make a written submission on He Pou a Rangi / Climate Change Commission 2021 Draft Advice for Consultation ("the Advice"). NZUSA would also like the opportunity to make an oral submission.

2. Background

- 2.1. The New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) is the national voice of students in tertiary education. We are proudly owned by students' associations and councils from universities, institutes of technology and polytechnics around the country. We work alongside our partner organisations Te Mana Ākonga (National Māori Tertiary Students' Association), Tauria Pasifika (National Pasifika Tertiary Students' Association) and the National Disabled Students' Association (NDSA) to fight for a barrier-free education for all.

- 2.2. NZUSA's members are:

- Albany Students' Association (ASA)
- Association of Students at Universal College of Learning (AS@U)
- Auckland University Students' Association (AUSA)
- Lincoln University Students' Association (LUSA)
- Massey at Distance (M@D)
- Massey Wellington Students' Association (MAWSA)
- Massey University Students' Association (MUSA)
- Otago University Students' Association (OUSA)
- Students' Association at Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology (SANITI)
- Students' Association at Wintec (SAWIT)
- Student Connection at Weltec & Whitireia
- Unitec Student Council (USC)
- Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA)
- Younited Students' Association at Eastern Institute of Technology

3. Our 'One Big Thing'

3.1. General Submission and Recommendations

NZUSA supports the Advice's main sentiments however, we believe to achieve just transitions, Aotearoa's Climate Change response needs to be more ambitious, and led and informed by our people - especially Tangata Whenua, Pacific peoples, disabled and low-income communities. The urgency of the climate crisis confronts us every day, and transformational, radical, lasting action is essential to secure a safe future for us. We need this action, and we need it now.

Aotearoa needs to significantly reduce all greenhouse gas emissions, including carbon dioxide from transport and energy, and methane from agriculture. Other priorities should also be on developing sustainable housing (focusing on building up in the cities rather than building out), effective and accessible public transport, renewable energy and environmentally conscious usage and disposal of waste.

NZUSA acknowledges that there are specific industries that will be severely impacted as we transition to reach our 2050 targets such as those working in agriculture, engineering, energy, and the transport sectors. It is important that our government consider the way we educate the next generation to ensure just transitions and an equitable future for all people in Aotearoa.

3.2. Disabled Voice (National Disabled Students' Association)

We do not see the voices and experiences of disabled New Zealanders prioritised in this advice document. It is well known that disabled people, and others within lower-socioeconomic communities, will be the first fatalities of climate disaster. It is crucial that disabled people are kept at the forefront of climate action.

We believe that the Government does not put enough energy into disaster mitigation for disabled people. Changes in our climate is proven to increase the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, putting disabled people at an increased risk if the Government does not consider them in their disaster mitigation. In 2013, the United Nations found that people with disabilities are rarely consulted about their needs and only 20% could evacuate without difficulty in the event of a disaster. During the recent Tsunami threat little information was provided to disabled people and the general public about how to support the disabled community to reach safety. The Government must acknowledge its obligations under Article 11 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

States Parties shall take, in accordance with their obligations under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law, all necessary measures to ensure the protection and safety of persons with disabilities in situations of risk, including situations of armed conflict, humanitarian emergencies and the occurrence of natural disasters.

NDSA also believes that the Government must acknowledge its obligation under the UNCRPD to engage with disabled people and disabled persons organisations in any climate change mitigation strategies.

With a key focal point for change being our approach to transport use, it is imperative that there are options available that are accessible to people with disabilities. Public transport will only be considered a feasible option for people with disabilities if it is ensured that the transport is accessible and inclusive to a diverse range of disabilities. With a push towards public transport going forward, it is also important to consider that private transport is at times necessary for people with different access needs that are not accommodated by public transport options.

Deviating from public transport, another solution that is presented is walking or biking and avoiding public transport altogether. Pedestrianisation raises further safety concerns for people with disabilities. Narrow and busy footpaths, traffic lights without reliable audio signalling, the proliferation of motorised scooters and bikes, and having important public facilities being too far apart, can all make it difficult to navigate a city without some form of transport. These issues are also exacerbated in smaller or rural towns where provisions are not put in place to support people with disabilities. Public facilities, services, and health care should be easily accessible in a walkable city.

Another consideration for ensuring climate change mitigation does not further marginalize disabled people is recognising the importance of certain materials for fulfilling medical needs. For example, plastic straws are often highlighted as negative due to them typically being made out of plastics which do not break down easily and harm the environment. However, plastic straws remain an important part of the lives of people with different medical and access needs. By painting certain materials in a negative light, disabled people are affected by being singled out and made to feel guilty for their reliance on things like plastic straws, or other aids. There needs to be options available for use of items which make everyday tasks possible for disabled people. Alternatively, there needs to be a focus on resourcing for sustainable medical supplies.

More work needs to be done to ensure quality, safe, and accessible housing is available for disabled people. Due to vulnerable housing situations and environmental barriers, disabled people may struggle to have access to safe spaces or shelters during an emergency. Disabled people also face worse health outcomes, especially as a result of poor insulation and the cost of heating.

Due to the economic impacts of climate events and climate disasters, people with disabilities are also at a higher risk of unemployment due to the loss of job opportunities. Disabled people are already at a disproportionately high risk of unemployment, and we urge the Government to ensure this is not exacerbated by the climate disaster or climate change mitigation strategies. Unemployment has a detrimental impact on quality of life and puts people with disabilities at an even higher risk of mental illness.

The negative impacts of climate disasters on people with disabilities highlights the importance of the need for a disability and access lens when considering climate change mitigation action. It is imperative that disabled people are at the forefront of decision making, and that a diverse range of perspectives are considered.

4. Submission

4.1. The pace of change: do you agree that the emission budget we have proposed would put Aotearoa on course to meet the 2050 emission targets?

NZUSA does not believe that the emissions budgets proposed would put Aotearoa in a position to reach 2050 targets. While we acknowledge that targets the Climate Change Commission have proposed to reduce biogenic methane emissions by 24-47% are a good start, they are not ambitious enough. While NZUSA agrees with the Advice in that current policies will not allow for New Zealand to meet its targets, we also stress that Aotearoa must accelerate action on climate change.

As a developed nation, Aotearoa's emissions budgets should reflect our ability as a nation to act quickly. While NZUSA understands the economic benefits of applying a more cautious approach to emissions budgets, we believe that there is no greater risk than the prospect of passing a global warming tipping point. No amount of money should be placed on the livelihoods of New Zealanders and our Pacific neighbours.

NZUSA would like to see agricultural climate pollution reduced further and faster. The Commission's recommendation to reduce as little agricultural methane as possible (the lower end of the target ranges - 13% by 2035 and 24% by 2050) is not ambitious enough. Aotearoa must aim for the most ambitious climate plan, not the least.

The Advice focuses on reducing methane emissions from organics that end up in landfills. However, long-lived greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) are also generated from the extraction, production, transport and consumption of packaging and goods, which is intrinsic to our current, unsustainable 'take-make-throw' attitude. To meet the 2050 emissions targets, NZUSA recommends that the Commission expand its advice to consider *all* waste streams and build consumption-based measurements into its analysis.

4.2. Do you agree we have struck a fair balance between requiring the current generation to take action, and leaving future generations to do more work to meet the 2050 target and beyond?

NZUSA does not agree that the Commission has struck a fair balance. Laying the foundations for a better future with policy recommendations to 'eventually'

reach agreed targets is not enough and the up-and-coming generations should not be left with the burden of finding solutions to ever increasing problems. Both current and future generations should be working together to find solutions to the recommendations posed in the Advice.

Moreover, NZUSA believes that by situating the bulk of reductions in the 2030's, this not only narrows the window of opportunity to take effective action, it also creates a disincentive as climate change is a *now* issue rather than a later one. Prolonging serious action on climate change places an unjust onus on future generations who are currently in primary and intermediate school, many of whom are unaware of the seriousness of their 'inherited' responsibilities.

NZUSA recommends that Aotearoa's approach to just transitions must unequivocally recognise our role as a developed nation. Our actions must account for our fair share of emissions that we have contributed in order to reduce the burden on future generations who have contributed the least to our problem.

Along the lines of this thinking, NZUSA believes that responsibility also must be placed on corporations who have contributed significantly to the climate crisis - not just individual citizens. Unlike individuals, corporations have more resources to advance quickly on the Advice's proposed recommendations. NZUSA recommends that the government work in partnership with industries on effective ways to meet emissions budget targets, while reducing the expectations on individual persons taking the bulk of action. Industry has the power to change, and they have the power to influence and resource individuals to do the same.

4.3. Do you agree with our approach to meet the 2050 target that prioritises growing new native forests to provide a long-term store of carbon?

NZUSA supports the commission's focus on large reductions of carbon dioxide with as little reliance on emissions removals by forestry as possible.

We support the significant increase in new native forests and the assumption that no further native deforestation occurs from 2025. All native habitats must be incorporated into this approach. For example, wetlands and tussock should be recognised for their role in storing carbon and protected from deforestation.

4.4. What are the most urgent policy interventions needed to help meet our emissions budgets?

Transport

NZUSA agrees with the Advice's stance that New Zealand needs an integrated national transport network. We believe that more resourcing needs to be provided to local government to improve their public transport networks. While it could be argued that transport in the main centres (Auckland,

Wellington, Christchurch, and Otago) are adequate, single-use transport significantly outweighs public and other forms of transport. According to Statista (2020), the largest number of licensed vehicles on the road in Aotearoa, by a significant margin, were private vehicles. In 2020 there were 2.17 million on our roads, compared to seven hundred thousand miscellaneous vehicles.

Furthermore, NZUSA agrees with the Advice that Aotearoa needs to make walking and cycling easier with good cycleways and footpaths. It is important that consideration be taken as to how we build our towns and cities, and the way people and products move around.

Housing

NZUSA believes that housing must be prioritised when planning our towns and cities. A key way to reduce emissions of private and public transport is by centralising housing and reducing the length of commuting. Developing inner-city housing allows for more accommodation options with less land usage. Moreover, apartment buildings offer large opportunities to improve energy efficiency through improved insulation and greater control of energy use.

Along this line of thinking, NZUSA agrees with the commission that transitioning from natural resource heating options to electrical heating alternatives is more sustainable. Moreover, we agree with the commission that improving the energy efficiency of homes can improve the occupants' health, particularly for low-income earners. The cost of heating is expensive, regardless of its form thus, Aotearoa must be more ambitious in building well insulated homes that require minimal heating.

Waste

NZUSA believes that multiple, urgent policy interventions are required. Aotearoa can make a just transition from a throwaway culture by resourcing local communities to produce locally grown food and locally made goods, and to develop innovative solutions to prevent and reduce waste. Achieving this requires comprehensive education programmes which need to start as early as kindergarten and primary school. The waste hierarchy, which prioritises prevention, reduction, and reuse, can be used as a climate lens that highlights what these urgent policy interventions are.

NZUSA believes that the Commission should provide more detail on the interventions needed to reduce organic waste to landfill. For example, mandating separate collection of organics and ban organic waste from landfill to halve food waste at source by 2030, and divert more organic waste to local and regional composting.

Education

NZUSA firmly believes that education is the best tool to prevent climate change. Not only is it important to educate primary, intermediate, and high school students on climate change, but the government must also work with the tertiary sector to make changes in academia. Students studying engineering, agriculture, or completing an apprenticeship such as building must be educated through an environmentally sustainable lens. Not only do we believe that a sustainability focus in education will better prepare students to adapt, but we know this is what must be done to have any chance of just transitions in the workforce.

The government and tertiary sector must also partner with industries to understand intentions to reduce the effects of climate change. NZUSA believes that if we are to demand change, and use education as a tool, we must make a shift from focusing on the issues and work collaboratively on finding solutions. There is a division between studying and the workforce and NZUSA recommends that more work-integrated-learning - with a sustainability lens - be used to better prepare students for the industry they wish to work in.

Equity for All

NZUSA is aware of the inherent inequity in transitioning to environmentally sustainable ways of living. Living sustainably also means the cost-of-living increases and the management of resources presents unique issues. We must honour indigenous people's management of resources as this is crucial to equitable emissions.

While disability is mentioned in the report, this does not go far enough. NZUSA recommends that the commission needs to expand on their advice with a disability-responsive position statement and work group recommendations, to ensure a just transition.

Gender is not mentioned in the report once; yet climate change disproportionately impacts women and people of diverse genders. NZUSA recommends that the Commission takes into account research on the gender impacts of climate change and climate action and include this in their analysis.

5. Recommendations (included within the above submission)

1. NZUSA recommends that the Commission expand its advice to consider *all* waste streams and build consumption-based measurements into its analysis.
2. NZUSA recommends that Aotearoa's approach to just transitions must unequivocally recognise our role as a developed nation.
3. NZUSA recommends that the government work in partnership with industries on effective ways to meet emissions budget targets, while reducing the expectations on individual persons taking the bulk of action.

4. NZUSA recommends that more work-integrated-learning - with a sustainability lens - be used to better prepare students for the industry they wish to work in.

5. NZUSA recommends that the commission expand on their advice with a disability-responsive position statement and work group recommendations, to ensure a just transition.

6. NZUSA recommends that the Commission takes into account research on the gender impacts of climate change and climate action and include this into their analysis.

5. Conclusion

NZUSA supports the fundamental values and considerations put forward by He Pou a Rangi, but there are a number of changes that must be made before Aotearoa reaches its 2050 targets. NZUSA is calling for more ambitious policies and solutions, faster emissions cuts, and changing the way people of New Zealand live their lives. Also, it is paramount that our response includes all communities: Tangata Whenua; Pasifika peoples; disabled people; and other minority groups.

Moreover, the onus of Aotearoa's climate change response should not be put on the shoulders of the next generation, nor should the requirements of finding solutions be placed on the shoulders of individual citizens. The destruction to our earth caused by emissions will only change if we work together, better educate our people and resource them to make real change.

The younger generations will inherit a world *still* being created by generations of today, and we have a right to demand a safe and equitable future for ourselves. This will not happen if our leaders and those in positions of power do not make the right decisions now. Climate Change is not a tomorrow issue, it is a now issue. We have an opportunity to tackle it - and we must take it.