



Submission

by the

Victoria University of Wellington

Students' Association

on the

He Pou a Rangi / Climate Change Commission Draft Advice Package 2021

Prepared by

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VUWSA also wishes to make an oral submission.

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To	Climate Change Commission
From	Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA)
Date	28th March 2021
Subject	Draft Package Advice 2021

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- 2. Students and Climate Change**
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 - c. Do you agree with the changes we have suggested to make the NDC compatible with the 1.5C goal? DISAGREE**
 - d. 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? AGREE**
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 - i. Policy design**
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iv. Agriculture

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The Big Thing

INTRODUCTION

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA) advocate for and represent the 22,000 students of Te Herenga Waka– Victoria University of Wellington. Climate change, and the community and government response to it, has an all-encompassing impact on students from housing, to mental health, to job security and so much more.

Notwithstanding the individual and systematic impacts of climate change and climate policy, most important to us is Papatūānuku. We depend on, value and love our environment. Our seas, rivers, lakes, forest, air, native plants, animals are all inherently valuable. When we look after and allow the mauri of our environment to thrive, it allows **us** humans to thrive **as well**.

We believe and advocate for policy that:

- Places the environment at **itsthe heart of policy**.
- Upholds and affirms Te Tiriti o Waitangi, specifically Article Two.
- Prioritises equitable outcomes and acknowledges the disproportionate effect of climate change on structurally oppressed communities such as disabled peoples, people of colour, indigenous peoples, lower socio-economic communities and women.
- Gives governance, decision making powers, and autonomy to Māori to practise Kaitiakitanga and exercise Tino Rangatiratanga over all their taonga.
- The articles, as well as the principles, of Te Tiriti o Waitangi should be integrated throughout the policy recommendations.
- Focuses on a just transition– through our mitigation and adaptation to the climate crisis we must work to repair the historic oppression of frontline and vulnerable communities through the acknowledgement of past and contemporary oppression.

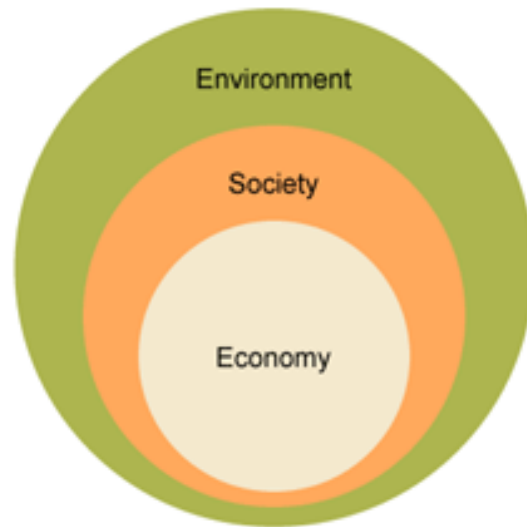


Fig 1. Diagram representing the holistic nature of the environment and the intersectional relationship and dependence of our economy and society on the environment.

STUDENTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change and its ongoing impacts are a key source of concern for students. As the future thinkers and leaders of Aotearoa, climate anxiety is an acute issue for many students. Grappling with an uncertain future and a sense of helplessness, whilst leaders of the current generation dither, is highly detrimental and compounds the stress students' experience about university, employment, living and commuting situations. We do not deserve to be forced into a fearful and dangerous world because of a lack of action in the 2020s.

Climate change has an adverse impact on, and is contributed to by, housing and city infrastructure. The increased costs of building and maintaining housing in a world threatened by immense climate change is passed on to us through rental costs and adds another financial barrier to our generation owning their first home. Without access to long-term shelter or housing, many students will be left further vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change.

Public transport systems play a huge part in helping to reduce emissions and reducing urban centre impacts on climate change. The prioritisation of low-emission public transport benefits not only our environment, but also our students and wider community as well, providing cost-effective and safe transport. We urge the Climate Change Commission to include stronger advocacy for an equitable transition to accessible public transport in their draft advice.

Other forms of city infrastructure, such as our city waste and water systems, have rapidly contributed to our environments pollution and degradation. There **must** be a greater focus within the draft advice as to the need for improving, and making more accessible, wastage systems in our city.

Green spaces, including city parks, wildlife and nature reserves, and the presence of trees and greenery throughout the city, play a huge role in mitigating climate change, and raising awareness of and connection to the natural world. This is in turn both beneficial to city-dwellers' overall hauora and mental health, but also to the aesthetic and welcoming nature of our cities. Students often live -in dense city housing, or poor-quality flats, so having safe and more prominent green spaces around the city allows those in our community without a

backyard or access to transport a stronger connection to the whenua. VUWSA believes this crucial aspect is missing from the draft advice.

VUWSA commends the Climate Change Commission for their discussion on the socio-economic impacts of climate change, however, believes that more of a focus should be placed on advocating for those unable to adapt under the current system. Behaviour change is a crucial part of ensuring that we as a country meet our climate goals. Students, and other low-income earners in our community, should not be told to change our behaviours in systems which do not allow this or make it inaccessible.

There needs to be wider level systemic change, driven by government, which allows those who do not have the luxury to afford behaviour change to contribute to reducing our climate impact. The current costs of switching to green solutions are not realistic for students or those already financially struggling under the current system. The Climate Change Commission has a responsibility to outline this fact in its draft advice to government.

VUWSA, as a community focused, student-led organisation, has the needs of our tāngata and our whenua at the heart of everything we do. Aotearoa's land has inherent value, particularly so for our tāngata whenua and tauira Māori at Te Herenga Waka. This inherent value, and the connection many of our students and wider community feel to the whenua, must be further outlined in the draft advice to government.

However, it is not just students whom VUWSA advocate on behalf of. Our wider Wellington community, particularly those from marginalised groups, must be given a stronger focus within the Climate Change Commissions' draft advice to the Government. There is little discussion within the draft advice on the impact climate change will have on our disabled community, or those increasing number of tertiary students who identify as climate refugees, particularly from the Pacific region. It is absolutely pertinent that the draft advice includes adequate reference to each of these at-risk groups.

OVERVIEW

The draft package advice is a step in the right direction. However, it is not ambitious enough, does not create equitable outcomes and does not encompass the right design principles to ensure justice, human rights, and ambitious outcomes. The looming climate crisis is one that needs fast, just, and effective action and systemic change now, especially in areas such as transport, waste, energy, forestry and urban design.

This draft advice does not recognise or take responsibility for the high cost of inaction and lack of ambition. Students deserve, and urge, the Climate Change Commission to be bolder and aim higher.

ON THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

VUWSA believe that the consultation provided on the draft advice has been seriously lacking. The document's length and formatting are inaccessible for those wishing to make a submission. Certain areas and jargon usage is not explained succinctly, making the advice inaccessible to those without significant background in climate science, limiting the scope of engagement and thus, the perspectives being presented. This is especially detrimental to the engagement of youth, students and those from marginalised communities.

In an effort to gain a better understanding of the draft advice, many stakeholder groups have turned to alternative sources which have produced robust summaries on the advice. The fact that alternative, independent groups have offered a better summary and breakdown than the Climate Change Commission on their own draft advice says much about the accessibility of the advice and consultation process. Ultimately, if the Climate Change Commission wants to meaningfully engage with younger communities, who will bear the full brunt of climate change, then they must take proactive steps to go out to the community and engage on their terms. We hope to see the consultation process dramatically improved in future, and are happy to further discuss on these key points.

AFFIRM TE TIRITI

Climate justice should equate with Treaty justice. The second article of Te Tiriti affirms tangata whenua tino Rangatiratanga status over all their whenua, over all their kāinga, and over all their taonga. Tangata whenua are kaitiaki of the whenua. Tangata whenua know how to manage their land with the interests of Papatūānuku at heart. We should look to them for guidance and leadership, and most importantly, iwi should have full autonomy in managing the whenua within their rohe. A transition to a climate-centred economy provides an opportunity to reaffirm and strengthen tangata whenua tino Rangatiratanga status.

ON THE SIX BIG ISSUES

A. The Pace of Change

We do not agree that the emissions budget proposed would put Aotearoa on course to meet the 2050 emissions targets. The budget is not ambitious enough. To gain even a chance of averting the impending climate catastrophe, students need urgent action now, otherwise we will be the ones facing these consequences the most.

The first three carbon budgets take a very cautious and incremental approach to reducing emissions now and requiring larger cuts in later years. As outlined in the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change's 1.5 degree report, to have this 66% chance of averting climate catastrophe, we must approach emissions reductions with a deep cut in emissions **starting immediately**. The Commission's proposed approach risks passing many tipping points, putting us on a more dangerous trajectory.

The younger generations, students, will face the brunt of these decisions. The emissions budget should reflect New Zealand's commitment to global equity and fulfillment of our obligation as a developed nation - noted in the NDC section of the report. The legislation describes the purpose of emissions budgets to be for meeting the 2050 target AND New Zealand contributing to global efforts for 1.5 degrees (section 5W). There are various policy areas where greater action can be taken in the next decade to enhance the first two budgets for greater consistency with IPCC's 2030 pathways for 1.5 degrees (outlined under question 4), while also meeting the 2050 target.

We do not agree with the Commission's plan to reduce as little agricultural methane as possible – we need agricultural climate pollution to be reduced further and faster. We must aim for the most ambitious climate plan, not the least.

The Commission's waste advice focuses on reducing methane emissions from organics that end up in landfills. However, long-lived GHG emissions are also generated from the extraction, production, transport and consumption of packaging and goods, which is intrinsic to our current, unsustainable 'take-make-throw' linear economy. **To meet the 2050 emissions targets,**

the Commission should expand its advice to consider *all* waste streams, and build consumption-based measurements into its analysis.

B. Future Generations

A fair balance has not been struck. Climate crisis is a compounding problem. The work of future generations will be made far more difficult by instability and decades of inaction. These recommendations unfairly burden future generations. Any notion of 'fair' does not go to the heart of the intersectional burdens of climate change, and potential for positive community change to come from climate related actions. A safe and positive climate future is one where enough is done now.

In order for this to be achieved, we must include and support structurally oppressed communities. As students we bear a dual burden. We are coming into a workforce and economy that has been slow to react and adapt. As the current generation works to implement better climate policy, it is the young or structurally oppressed who will be most impacted if a just transition is not realised. Equally we form part of the future generation, as do our direct descendants, and so care deeply about the need for swift change.

Aotearoa New Zealand should do more than is currently suggested. Doing more now offers better protection – which is again why this notion of a fair balance is wholly flawed. A 1.5-degree future is better than a 2-degree future. We are a developed nation that has historically contributed far more than our 'fair' share of emissions.

Corporate responsibility should be prioritised and actioned. Individual responsibility does not adequately reflect the lived experience of students, most of whom already have far lower carbon footprints as compared to the current generation. Primarily focusing on the 2030s leads to this double bind on our students, as young people who have grown up in the shadow of inaction and dismissal, we are then faced with the responsibility to implement. We must bring

more direct investment into emission reduction forward. This is the equitable choice, and allows consistency with 1.5-degree pathways.

VUWSA believes that the cost of transitioning to a low-carbon future must fall on the industries most responsible, and work must be done to protect low-income and vulnerable communities. Specifically, this means that tertiary education centres should be given support to offer diverse programmes of work for a low carbon future. Additionally, in striking this balance, we should focus on the co-benefits of design for and by disabled people in the built environment. Design that benefits disabled people, in an accessible, rights centered, collaborative process, also benefits non-disabled people.

C. Our Contributions

VUWSA fundamentally disagrees with the suggested changes in the draft advice to government. We believe that these changes are not as aspirational or ambitious as required.

We strongly support the recognition that New Zealand's current 2030 target under the Paris agreement is not in line with ensuring that we have an adequate contribution to limiting global warming, and its adverse impacts on the pacific community, to 1.5 degrees. In our opinion, a fairer contribution sits far above the 35% below 2005 gross levels by 2030.

VUWSA advocates for the publishing of a 'fair share' 2030 NDC target, that represents New Zealand's realistic impacts on the climate. We want this to be recommended to the government for adoption, and calculated using appropriate calculators which take into account historical responsibility, and need. Currently, New Zealand's NDC targets have us doing the bare minimum. As a nation which has based its economy off methane and river pollution, it is important we go above this when addressing our own climate sins.

The fact that New Zealand, a country with an outsized carbon footprint and a history of mass contribution to climate change and environmental pollution, should look to reduce our

emission through offshore mitigation is, in VUWSA's perspective, absurd. Aotearoa must have a primary focus on meeting our NDC goals through reduction of our domestic emissions. This is key if we as a nation are to take responsibility for our own impacts on climate change. Usage of external mitigation must only be a last resort.

We believe that a stronger climate budget, as well as greater financial assistance to help those communities transitioning to more climate friendly production methods, should be a priority for New Zealand. In addition, tertiary institutions must also be supported in developing stronger focuses on sustainable processes and marketing to reach these targets. Greater publication of the need to reach these targets must be given in our tertiary institutions, where the thinkers and leaders of tomorrow are formed.

Ultimately, the current recommendations for government on reaching our NDC goals are not strong enough.

D. Role and Type of Forest

We agree with the Climate Change Commission's approach to meet the 2050 target, which prioritises growing new native forests to provide a long-term carbon store. We also believe the Climate Change Commission's approach must address the intersecting biodiversity crisis, putting a stronger focus on the restoration and preservation of native habitats. This approach must be inclusive of native habitats such as wetlands which are not as productive as forests in terms of Carbon sequestration, but are equally valuable in terms of biodiversity.

Students come from a multitude of backgrounds; we cannot hope to capture the universal student experience in this submission. Some students will never have set foot in a native forest nor have any interest in doing so, some will be too old to ever feel the worst effects of climate change, and others will come from communities which are heavily reliant on oil and gas. However, the prioritisation of native afforestation in the CCC's approach to meeting our zero

emissions target will have tangibly positive effects for the vast majority of students at Te Herenga Waka- Victoria University of Wellington.

Preserving and expanding our native forests and habitats is important for many students' hauora.

Climate anxiety, the sense that our natural world is facing an avoidable, yet impending doom, seeps deep down into the minds of young people and remains rooted there. Climate anxiety creates feelings of futility and disenfranchisement. The knowledge that we are failing to preserve New Zealand's unique beauty is **heartbreaking for** students.

Physical interactions with the native bush are important for students' hauora. Access to green spaces has a positive impact on taha hinengaro (mental and emotional wellbeing) and, for many students, taha wairua (spiritual wellbeing). Our mauri is derived from our environment. If the mauri of our forests is destroyed, so too will our own mauri be destroyed. We are nothing without our native forests, our native wetlands, our unique and beautiful foreshores, estuaries, and rivers.

We should be doing everything we can to protect these and make them more accessible in urban and rural areas alike. Encouraging the creation and expansion of green spaces, particularly in our cities, will enhance the mauri of many students at VUW. Policy which encourages the expansion of native forests and habitats will result not only in a happier climate, but a happier and more reflective New Zealand.

We agree with the Climate Change Commission's potential policy approach of providing financial incentives or subsidies to help reduce the costs of establishing and maintaining native plantings. Such incentives and subsidies should be available on a larger scale to encourage large land-holders such as farmers to plant natives where possible. However, we believe there should also be subsidies available on a smaller scale for people wishing to plant just a few natives in their backyard.

Increasing accessibility to native species and encouraging their planting on a local scale would have significant effects on the health of our cities and our environment generally. Alongside the

spiritual and mental health impacts of having more green spaces in our city, there would be biodiversity and Carbon sequestration impacts arising from the collective efforts of New Zealanders to give native species space in their original habitats.

Too much reliance on commercial forestry passes the problem onto our generation.

Commercial forestry is an effective short-term emission stop gap, but cannot be construed as a permanent solution. All forms of afforestation are only useful as long as new forests are being planted. Commercial forests store large amounts of Carbon quickly, but would need to be replanted for an indefinite number of harvests to avoid the large-scale re-release of emissions into our atmosphere. Therefore, any benefits we gain from commercial forestry are only short-term and not necessarily guaranteed, being subject to the owners' commercial interests.

Native forests, by contrast, may store Carbon for hundreds of years, making them better guarantors of long-term Carbon storage. Further, with the Climate Change Commission assumption of no further native deforestation from 2025, all gains will effectively be locked in, barring large-scale fires or disease spread. Putting an emphasis on native afforestation ensures less of a burden is placed on today's students to mitigate climate change.

While we have a strong preference regarding the primary mode of afforestation which the Commission recommends, we do not overstate the value of afforestation overall as a Carbon sequestration method. The proposed afforestation has value for the space it creates in the short-term, with forests sequestering large amounts of Carbon quickly while providing benefits in biodiversity and hauora. However, the Government will have to enact other more aggressive, more permanent solutions in order to meet its net-zero obligations. Afforestation is a temporary measure, and no more.

Many iwi have strong commercial forestry interests. It is important that the Commission in its recommendations affirms iwi rights to self-determination, which includes the right to conduct commercial forestry on their lands.

The Commission's approach of prioritising the growth of new native forests is promising. By prioritising long-term gains in Carbon sequestration, increasing biodiversity, and prioritising systemic change, we help to preserve New Zealand for our mokopuna.

E. Policy Interventions

In order to meet our emission budgets and requirements under the Paris agreement to not exceed 1.5C, we require urgent ambitious policy interventions. Through these policy interventions, the climate commission and government need to take more proactive steps to mitigate the effects on structurally oppressed communities, and ensure the cost is spread equitably throughout society so those who are most vulnerable do not burden the costs and consequences of climate change. At the heart of these policies, the government and Climate Change Commission must centre the following principles:

- Justice.
- Honouring and affirming Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- Effective and ambitious policy.
- Affirming the rights and centring the experiences and voices of structurally oppressed communities including but not limited to: BIPOC communities, disabled peoples, women, lower socio-economic communities.

The current policy interventions are unambitious, do not centre and affirm the rights of structurally oppressed communities, and do not create systematic change and enable behavioural changes.

Transport:

As students, we understand the value in active and public transport, and have been big advocates for a mode shift to active and public transport. But there are many barriers in place to accessing public and active transport, mainly around accessibility, affordability, and safety. Central and local governments must create systems that allow for behaviour change, rather

than expect us citizens to change our behaviour to fit into systems that do not suit us due to the inaccessible, unaffordable and unsafe natures.

A mode shift to public and active transport is a key step in the mitigation of the climate crisis, and these policy interventions are not ambitious enough. Whilst electric vehicles are important, and we advocate for the use of electric vehicles as a supporting measure for situations where alternatives to private vehicle ownership is not possible, more focus needs to be put into public and active transport. The Climate Change Commission needs to advocate for further steps to create a more ambitious, affordable, and safe approach to policy interventions through:

1. Ensuring that transport systems are accessible for people with disabilities.
2. A complete transformation to how citizens get around by prioritising walking, cycling, and public transport.
3. Ensuring transport systems are safe, affordable, and efficient.
4. More specific policy and action around creating liveable, compact, accessible, and equitable cities.
5. Implementing free public transport for tertiary students in full and part time study
6. Stop expanding road capacity.
7. Create better systems to support cycling.
8. Divert funding to local government to support the shift to active and public transport in their communities.

Energy:

Moving from high polluting dirty energy to clean, green, efficient energy is a key aspect of reducing our emissions. However, this must be done in an affordable, accessible, and more ambitious approach than is currently proposed by the Climate Commission. The Commission must take more proactive steps to mitigate the emissions that come from coal and fossil fuels, put more accountability onto the big polluters, and ensure the low-income communities can access clean green energy. It is well documented that many students do not have steady and stable financial income streams. We care about the environment and the emissions we are creating, but are currently disempowered from building sustainability into our lives due to the

financial barriers that are in place. The Commission needs to advocate for policies that enable everyone, regardless of their income or accessibility needs, to create change in their households. We believe this can be better achieved through:

1. The further development of energy efficiency by increasing direct investment into it.
2. Ensuring housing stock and energy efficient homes are financially affordable and physically accessible by using universal accessible design principles.
3. Creating more ambitious targets and bans on coal. The 2037 date proposed for ending coal use in process heat for food production is too far into the future, 2027 is a more ambitious, and possible goal.
4. Bringing forward the 2025 phase-out date for fossil fuel heating in new buildings to 2022.
5. Ensuring the biggest polluters pay for their emissions by immediately ending the subsidies through free carbon credits. It is unconscionable to allow this to continue.

Agriculture:

The agricultural sector must take more responsibility for the pollution and emissions they create. Wherever it is possible to make change to reduce emissions and for industries to take responsibility, the Climate Change Commission should be advocating for that. We must be doing more to reduce emissions. We advocate for the following two policy interventions in the CCC report:

1. Direct regulations on the sources of climate pollution from the agricultural industry.
2. New Zealand agriculture entering the Emissions Trading Scheme in 2021 with no subsidies.

Waste:

Waste is a major issue, both in terms of the amount we create and the emissions resulting from waste. There are currently not enough measures to support students in the reduction of their household waste, and diverting household waste from landfills. As students, we create a lot of waste due to systems that do not enable us to be sustainable as a result of low incomes, lack of

education, and lack of strength and resources in our local communities. For example, in the moving processes between flats much waste is created, it is inaccessible to compost, and there is little support from our local council to implement community-based solutions. We need multiple, urgent policy interventions in order to take action, at both the local and central government levels. The Climate Commission must take further action on addressing the issue of waste by:

1. Recommending the support of local communities through resourcing to produce local solutions such as producing locally grown kai and goods, and to develop solutions to prevent and reduce waste. This requires better education and funding for communities.
2. Providing more detail on the interventions needed to reduce organic waste to landfills.
3. Recommending binding reduction targets for all waste streams.
4. Recommending the measuring and increasing of circularity in our local economy.
5. Recommending the strengthening of the government's approach to product stewardship must be strengthened. Products that cannot be effectively reused, repaired, recycled or composted should be designed out of the economy whilst ensuring access to sustainable goods is physically accessible and financially affordable. Initiatives such as resource recovery centres should be elevated.

Health:

The physical and mental impacts of the climate crisis are severe in the student community. We need ambitious climate action to ensure the impacts on our health are mitigated, but we also need more measures and policy interventions to ensure our mental and physical health can be looked after. The Climate Change Commission must take more action to address the impacts of climate change on health. This includes planning for emergency situations, and considering inclusive solutions to mitigation and adaptation.

Equity:

The Climate Change Commission does not take an ambitious approach to the inequitable outcomes of climate change and policy addressing climate change. The Climate Commission must change their approach to climate policy by:

1. Advocating for the government to ensure indigenous management of resources by returning stolen land and ensuring Māori governance.
2. Recommending the Government implement the Matike Mai report and support co-governance at a minimum.
3. Taking further into account disability, acknowledging the disproportionate impact of climate change and climate policy on disabled peoples, and address that.
4. Taking further into account the disproportionate effect of climate change on gender minorities and women.

F. Technology

VUWSA maintains that the proposed emissions budgets can be met with existing technologies. However, given existing technologies, we can achieve far more ambitious emissions budgets, stronger policy recommendations and more stringent targets for heavy polluters than what has been outlined in the Draft Advice. Currently, the report focuses on the costs of change and completely misses the opportunity to highlight the serious costs of inaction. Therefore, the report misses the important point of comparing the potential risks versus potential savings of taking ambitious action now. It is widely agreed that the cost of inaction will far outweigh the costs proposed in the Draft Advice and, if no action is taken, the burden of climate change will fall on today's students and young people.

It is also worth noting that setting ambitious goals helps to foster the innovation necessary to tackle Climate Change. With the right incentives to invest and adapt, New Zealand can lead the world into a more sustainable future. Setting more ambitious goals helps us to go fast and early as we transition into a carbon neutral economy.

The Commission's advice is in the right direction, but must be more ambitious and holistic to harness the power of innovation and press New Zealand forwards.

CONCLUSION

Climate change is one of the key issues facing our student community and the future of our country. This package of advice is unambitious, inequitable, and does not affirm the rights and justice of structurally oppressed communities. We need the Climate Change Commission to take a more ambitious approach to the issues we face, and the policy interventions required to reduce emissions. We want a future where students are able to study without the implications of climate change resting on their shoulders, where structurally oppressed communities are not being disproportionately impacted by climate change and climate policy, where public transport and energy efficient homes are affordable and accessible.

Papatūānuku, our environment, our rivers, and our forests are the lifeblood of our community. The earth has been crying out for generations, and it's only now that Pākehā are choosing to listen. Tangata whenua never stopped listening. Māori have the mātauranga, they have the leadership. Let's listen. We must affirm Te Tiriti. The Climate Change Commission needs to prioritise a just, clean, and equitable approach to the issue of climate change, and must take more proactive and ambitious steps to not only ensure our future, but the future of generations to come.