

Zero Carbon Bill – Victoria University of Wellington Students Association Submission

Introduction

Victoria University of Wellington Students' Association (VUWSA) exists to represent and advocate for the interests of Victoria University of Wellington's 22,000 students. Decisions on the way our Government approaches the issue of climate change will affect our students now and into the future. We welcome the opportunity to submit on the proposed Bill. It should be noted that alongside this written submission, VUWSA will be providing a video submission of direct and independent student opinions.

Executive Summary

Students and young people are concerned by climate change and its impacts on our country and the globe. Our age bracket will inherit a world already facing fast-increasing global temperature and climbing sea levels. The physical effects of climate change greatly affect our generation now and into the future, most especially in Wellington as a harbour-side city, with much of its foundations on reclaimed land.

Additionally, the economic implications are twice as likely to effect low income households, and students, especially those of us living independently and away from parental support, are extremely vulnerable to financial harm as a result. Rising temperatures have seen increasing severe weather and the destruction of infrastructure and valuable ecosystems. Already in the last decade, the costs of severe weather events have cost our countries transport networks \$70 million more annually.

If sufficient action to address climate change isn't taken now, it will be our generation that shoulders the burden. This Bill provides the opportunity to establish processes, plans and expectations to adequately address New Zealand's contributions to the global problem. VUWSA supports the Government pursuing an ambitious goal of net zero emissions, in a manner that gives priority to equitable considerations, and adequately prepares our communities for real impacts of climate changes.

An Ambitious Goal

VUWSA would support the Government imposing a 2050 target into legislation now, that will demonstrate a firm commitment necessary to address New Zealand's contributions to climate change.

VUWSA would urge that the Government be ambitious in its goal and set a target which specifically addresses the realities of our emission contributions.

VUWSA supports the Government establishing a clear and reliable long-term vision using emissions budgets, to create certainty for New Zealanders in the approach to climate change. We agree that the Government should be capable of reviewing plans furthest into the future to adapt to potential harms to society, particularly those that affect vulnerable communities.

VUWSA considers that a key factor for the Government to consider in setting the emissions budgets, along with factors like science and technology developments, are social impacts, especially given that these decisions and the effects of climate change have concentrated effects on households in the lowest income brackets.

Equitable Solutions

The plan of the Government should prioritise equity in solutions and protect vulnerable groups from disproportionate negative impact. Students, along with other households in the lowest thresholds, will be more exposed to rising costs and the actual physical impacts of climate change. It is important that the plan implemented by the Government acknowledge and address these inequities to protect all New Zealanders.

VUWSA supports these plans being made in consultation with iwi, relevant experts and businesses. The plans should be fair to all New Zealanders and reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We agree and would emphasise the need “to ensure a just transition” that does not exclude or disadvantage vulnerable communities.

We would also support the proposition of including expertise on public health alongside the proposed expertise for the Climate Change Commission.

Building Strength and Resilience

VUWSA thinks it is important to for the Bill to build resilience and strength, particularly in vulnerable communities, to address the current and future impacts of climate change.

We agree with the proposed functions, but would emphasise the need for local stakeholder input, such as councils and key community groups, to ensure these functions are built to succeed in the diverse communities of New Zealand. Those proposed functions being: a national climate change risk assessment; a national adaptation plan; regular review of progress towards implementing the national adaptation plan; and an adaptation reporting power.

VUWSA agrees that the sharing of information between organisations on risk exposure to climate change would be a positive step, and it should be supported by the Bill.