



Public Service Association  
Te Pūkenga Here Tikanga Mahi

# Briefing to the incoming Minister of Climate Change

December 2023

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Climate Change. This briefing sets out how we'd like to work with you over this term of government, and what we consider to be the most important priorities for the climate change portfolio.

## Working well together

Climate change is an all-of-economy issue, that requires a systemic and connected response across Government, industry, and community. The PSA is an important social partner for the Government on climate change matters. As the union for public and community services, we have a strong interest in ensuring those services are equipped to facilitate Aotearoa New Zealand's shift to a low-emissions economy and society.

For such a transition, the Government needs to harness the important contribution of the public sector. The PSA represents over 92,000 workers across public and community services, including people whose work feeds into New Zealand's climate change response in a wide range of fields. Through our engagement with members we provide a valuable channel for the perspectives and experiences of workers in these areas to be heard.

We also have a strong interest in the working lives of our members and all New Zealanders, all of which will be affected in by climate change in one form or another. It is in their interests to advocate for an ambitious and equitable climate response that brings prosperity to all.

The PSA has engaged constructively with the previous Minister of Climate Change on issues of shared interest, and we look forward to continuing to do so with you.

## PSA Eco Network

The PSA Eco Network represents over 3,000 workers across public and community services who are motivated to act on climate change, in many cases because of the knowledge and expertise that also enables them to deliver quality advice and public services. Our Eco Network members are a resource to drive positive, constructive climate action across the public sector.

To meet the challenge of climate change, our members look forward to working with incoming Ministers to plan for action that will both address government priorities while ensuring our ability to meet national and international emissions reduction targets.

## Our priorities on climate change

### **Ambition on climate action, matched with resourcing**

We look forward to strong political leadership to build on the COP 28 outcome which recognises the urgency of climate action risks entrenching poor outcomes for us all. Scientific evidence has long shown (by near consensus) the risks and urgency of anthropogenic climate change.

The adverse effects of climate change are already being felt and will only get worse unless action is taken urgently. New Zealanders are acutely aware of how they can be impacted by climate change, with the events of Cyclone Gabrielle and flooding earlier in 2023 – which have together caused between \$3-4 billion in damage<sup>i</sup> - still fresh in our minds. The urgency of the situation and the extent of the personal impact climate change currently front of mind for New Zealanders.

Aside from the social, environmental and broader economic threats posed by climate change, New Zealand also faces a financial liability of \$3-23 billion<sup>ii</sup> if we fail to reach emissions targets we've committed to under the Paris Agreement. There are also implications for our diplomatic relationships if we regress behind other nations' climate policies.

We were pleased to see you indicate during the election period that the incoming Government would focus on reducing emissions domestically. Domestic emissions reduction policies and initiatives could be leveraged to foster improvements to infrastructure, innovation and social cohesion in New Zealand, reducing long-term costs to New Zealanders. This is vastly preferable to delaying action and being forced into paying for offshore offsetting.

However, the lack of clarity on how domestic reductions will be achieved is concerning, especially in light of the incoming Government's intention to return ETS revenue from the Climate Emergency Response Fund into the general funding pool. We would like to see clear signals about how the Government intends to adequately – and ambitiously – invest in New Zealand's climate response.

### **No to new oil and gas drilling**

We call on the Government to leave the ban in place, and to sign up to the Port Villa call for a fossil fuel free Pacific, including support for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

It is concerning that all three parties in the incoming Government have indicated a desire to repeal this ban, which was considered world-leading at the time – but is now supported by a United Nations call for a global phase-out on fossil fuels. Developing new oil and gas resources is incompatible with the goal of limiting global warming to the 1.5°C target<sup>iii</sup>. Even setting aside the impact on emissions, it would be a mistake for New Zealand's economy. It would threaten our international reputation, and leave us open to challenge from our trading partners<sup>iv</sup>, for an industry that makes a negligible contribution to our overall exports and is already in decline.<sup>v</sup> The COP 28 agreement signalling the end of the fossil fuel era<sup>vi</sup> warrants a reconsideration of this approach.

### **Fossil-free state sector**

There are over 750 schools, hospitals and public buildings waiting for funding from the government to transition off fossil fuel heating sources (like diesel and gas burners) to renewable heating sources<sup>vii</sup>.

We encourage the Government to set a deadline to transition these public sector facilities off fossil fuels, and provide adequate funding through the State Sector Decarbonisation Fund for the transition.

### **Carbon neutral government**

The public service has made progress on reducing its carbon footprint and sustainability performance since the introduction of the Carbon Neutral Government Programme<sup>viii</sup>. It's essential that this work continues and that it has the backing of ministers, especially as agencies look to make cost savings in line with Government expectations.

### **Equitable transition strategy**

The first Emissions Reduction Plan committed to supporting New Zealanders through the necessary transitions toward a low-emissions economy, including through the development of an equitable transitions strategy that would help us proactively identify and develop initiatives that are tailored to make the most of the opportunities the transition brings, while addressing the challenges that different groups may face. This supports commitments New Zealand has made on the global stage<sup>ix</sup>.

Despite these commitments, to date the development of the strategy has been delayed. We call on the incoming Government to prioritise progressing this work, and to ensure the process:

- takes a broad view of what is required for an equitable transition, looking not only at jobs in polluting industries, but at all the ways in which climate action can support equity for communities and groups affected by change
- is inclusive and allows for meaningful engagement with social partners, including unions
- is backed up by a commitment to give effect to the strategy's contents, and practical mechanisms to ensure equity is built into government decision-making
- supports Māori to respond to the impacts that climate change has on marginal, at risk land returned to them through the treaty settlement process
- supports and grows the valuable role that marae have shown in building resilience for communities.

### **Equitable climate action**

Done right, action on climate change is also action on the cost of living. We strongly encourage you to work closely with your ministerial colleagues in portfolios such as housing, transport and energy to ensure equitable climate action is a core consideration in their decision-making on infrastructure and funding.

We're pleased that the new Government intends to drive a surge of investment in renewable energy. Focusing on the consenting process, however, fails to address the perverse incentives within our electricity market for power companies to under-invest in renewable energy and over-charge consumers<sup>x</sup>. Energy is one example of where public investment in the rollout of publicly owned, publicly delivered infrastructure help address climate goals while also addressing cost-of-living pressures.

Other examples include public provision of warm, dry, energy-efficient housing; and more affordable and more readily available public transport. We support the idea of a Ministry of Green Works<sup>xi</sup> to

develop infrastructure at scale, and we believe workers in the public sector would have valuable expertise to contribute in further developing the model to make it as effective as possible.

We also encourage you to retain and expand the current subsidies for public transport to make public transport more available to low-income groups, as called for by the Free Fares Campaign. Polling has demonstrated that this is supported by 71% of New Zealanders.<sup>xii</sup>

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## References

<sup>i</sup> [Financial stability implications of recent North Island weather events - Reserve Bank of New Zealand - Te Pūtea Matua \(rbnz.govt.nz\)](#)

<sup>ii</sup> [Ngā Kōrero Āhuarangi Me Te Ōhanga: Climate Economic and Fiscal Assessment 2023 \(treasury.govt.nz\)](#) p 80

<sup>iii</sup> [New fossil fuels 'incompatible' with 1.5C goal, comprehensive analysis finds - Carbon Brief](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Sustainability and the New Zealand-EU Free Trade Agreement: A step up in accountability | International Institute for Sustainable Development \(iisd.org\)](#)

<sup>v</sup> [Closing-Time-Report-Oxfam-Aotearoa.pdf](#) p10

<sup>vi</sup> [UN Climate Change Conference - United Arab Emirates | UNFCCC](#)

<sup>vii</sup> [Fossil Free State Sector \(350.org.nz\): Is your local school or hospital still burning fossil fuels, waiting for funding?](#)

<sup>viii</sup> [Core government departments leading the way in emissions reduction | Ministry for the Environment](#)

<sup>ix</sup> Under the [Paris Agreement](#), New Zealand has agreed to 'take into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs....'. The New Zealand government also signed on to the '[Supporting the Conditions for a Just Transition Internationally](#)' declaration at the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties, which includes supporting communities, regions, affected workers and vulnerable groups to transition away from carbon intensive activities; implementing skills development and labour market policies that allow workers to shift to decent jobs in low-emissions sectors; supporting and promoting social dialogue and stakeholder engagement on just transition planning, including with unions; and supporting developing countries and emerging economies to transition and promoting decent work throughout global supply chains.

<sup>x</sup> [Generating Scarcity: How the gentailers hike electricity prices and halt decarbonisation Report.pdf, NZCTU, First Union, 350 Aotearoa \(union.org.nz\)](#)

<sup>xi</sup> [A Ministry of Green Works for Aotearoa New Zealand: An ambitious approach to housing, infrastructure, and climate change, First Union](#)

<sup>xii</sup> [Poll shows majority want public transport discounts to stay | RNZ](#)