

New Zealand ratifies Paris Agreement to combat climate change

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The aim of the agreement is to aspire to limit warming to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

CHARLES PLATIAU/REUTERS

New Zealand has ratified the Paris Agreement, which aims to tackle climate change.

The agreement is between the countries that make up 90 per cent of global emissions, including New Zealand, to limit global warming "well below" 2 degrees Celsius, and if possible below 1.5C, until 2100.

"By ratifying today, we are helping to get the Paris Agreement officially over the line, and [have] demonstrated our commitment to global action on climate change," Climate Change Minister Paula Bennett said.

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Climate Change Minister Paula Bennett says New Zealand's target to reduce emissions to 30 per cent below 2005 levels is ambitious, and won't happen without change.

In order for it to come into force, countries that make up 55 per cent of emissions must ratify the agreement.

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New Zealand's challenge from here is to develop an effective plan for meeting the Government's target to reduce emissions to 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030, Bennett said.

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

Victoria University recently released this underwater image showing Wellington at 2C warmer than pre-industrial levels. The latest science says that by the year 2100, the sea level is projected to be as much as 1.5 metres higher than it is now.

"Although New Zealand contributes only a small proportion of global greenhouse gas emissions, the early timing of our ratification enables us to join the group of countries that make up 55 per cent of global emissions.

"A significant benefit of the Government ratifying early is that it guarantees New Zealand a seat at the decision-making table on matters that affect the Paris Agreement at the next United Nations climate change meeting in Marrakesh in November."

Bennett said New Zealand is committed to keeping global temperature rise well below 2C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5C.

But she told *RNZ* that will not happen unless we make changes.

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"At the moment we've got a number of pieces of work going on where we really start getting into the nuts and bolts of how we reduce our emissions and play our part worldwide," she said.

STARTING GUN FOR NZ

New Zealand will need to end its reliance on imported fossil fuels and shift to sustainable forms of farming, such as organics, in order to address climate change, Green Party Co-leader James Shaw said.

"National needs a rethink of its economic strategy. Carbon emissions have increased 19 per cent under National, and they're still talking about expanding pollution-intensive industries like oil, gas, and intensive dairy farming."

The Green Party is part of a cross-party working group, including National, which is identifying how to transition this country to a cleaner economy, Shaw said.

"We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to design more accessible, environmentally friendly cities, invest in fast electric public transport, and build healthier more energy-efficient homes," he said.

What really matters is cutting emissions, Forest & Bird's climate advocate, Adelia Hallett said.

"So far, New Zealand has failed to cut emissions at all, and is relying on using international carbon credits to meet its international commitments – effectively buying emissions cuts from other countries."

Rising sea levels and global temperatures mean that at least 70 native species could be extinct by the end of the century, including the tuatara, Hallett said.

That means every business, every industry, every politician and every person. New Zealand's future depends on what we do next."

PM TOUTS EMISSIONS TRADING SCHEME

When Prime Minister John Key was asked if the Government planned to make real policy changes to meet the 2030 target he said signing the Paris deal was an important statement.

"We're one of the few countries in the world that has an emissions trading scheme, about half of our emissions come from agriculture and we're pouring tens of millions of dollars into scientific solutions there. You can see the changes that are happening at a practical level."

Carbon trading would not be the only method relied on to meet the target and Key said the country was making good progress but it was harder here because we lacked the enormous amounts of renewable energy other countries had.

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