



Summary Paper

This document is a summary of the Zero Carbon Act blueprint released in April 2017.
Explore the full blueprint at www.zerocarbonact.nz

The Zero Carbon Act will drive meaningful climate change action in New Zealand. The Act will commit New Zealand to zero carbon by 2050 or sooner, set a legally binding pathway to this target, and require the Government to make a plan.

Climate change is a pressing global crisis that is already impacting on our homes and livelihoods. The planet has warmed by around 1°C since pre-industrial times, mainly due to human greenhouse gas emissions. The world has agreed that we must limit warming to well below 2°C, and aim for below 1.5°C. This requires global CO₂ emissions to reach net zero by early in the second half of the century, along with deep cuts in other greenhouse gas emissions.

All countries must undergo their own transition to a zero carbon society. While many other countries are reducing their emissions, New Zealand's continue to rise. There is no plan to meet existing national targets. The longer we delay our own transition, the more costly it will be. We also miss out on the many benefits and opportunities of early action.

Climate change is bigger than politics - we need political parties to work together and look beyond election cycles. Getting to zero carbon by 2050 or sooner is possible. It will require broad political commitment, immediate action, and coherent long-term planning. A clear and stable path will help New Zealand businesses and citizens plan for their future and invest with confidence in low-carbon solutions.

The Zero Carbon Act is an idea for a powerful new law to get our country on the right track. It is based on a proven concept: the UK's 2008 Climate Change Act. The UK Act has cross-party support and has been adopted in several other countries. The Zero Carbon Act will pursue three key objectives:

1. Getting us to zero carbon

The Act will commit New Zealand to zero carbon by 2050 or sooner, and drive a fair and cost-effective transition. The Government must set binding five-year 'carbon budgets' well in advance, and produce credible plans to meet these budgets.

We propose two key changes from the UK Act to suit New Zealand's circumstances:

- **The Firewall Principle**

The targets in the Act will apply to New Zealand's domestic emissions only. This will create a 'firewall' between domestic action and international carbon trading, to ensure our own zero carbon transition is on track.

- **The Two Baskets Approach**

The Act will set separate targets and pathways for long-lived greenhouse gases (mainly carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide) and short-lived greenhouse gases (mainly methane). Long-lived gases must go to net zero by 2050 or sooner (accounting for carbon sinks). Short-lived gases must be significantly reduced to sustainable levels, but not zero.

Key elements:

- *Legally binding long-term targets*
- *Pathway of five-year carbon budgets*
- *Independent Climate Commission to guide the transition*
- *Government must produce policy plans to meet carbon budgets*

Climate Commission

The Zero Carbon Act will establish an independent Climate Commission, consisting of 6 - 10 experts appointed by Parliament. The Commission has two main functions:

- 1) providing expert advice on targets, policies and climate risks;
- 2) holding the Government to account.

Principles

The Act will ensure New Zealand's zero carbon transition is fair and cost-effective. The Act will honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The Government must take into account a range of factors when setting carbon budgets, including environmental and social impacts, business competitiveness and intergenerational equity.

2. Adapting to our changing climate

The Act will also ensure a comprehensive national response to the impacts of climate change. Even if we limit global warming to less than 1.5°C, New Zealand faces significant challenges from rising seas, more frequent extreme weather events and other impacts.

Key elements:

- *National Climate Risk Assessment prepared every five years with expert input from the Climate Commission*
- *Adaptation Programme produced to address the identified climate risks*

3. Supporting global climate action

Finally, the Act will ensure New Zealand delivers on its international climate change obligations in a transparent manner. New Zealand has duties under the Paris Agreement to support mitigation and adaptation in developing countries, such as low-lying Pacific states.

Key elements:

- *Annual reports (covering international carbon trading, climate finance, technology transfer and capacity building)*

A simple overview of the Zero Carbon Act's key elements:

	Legal framework		
	Binding targets	Climate Commission	Transparent planning and reporting
Domestic mitigation	✓	✓	✓
Domestic adaptation	✗	✓	✓
International contributions	✗	✗	✓

The Zero Carbon Act framework is uniquely suited to cross-party agreement. It sets out legally-mandated outcomes and process, without prescribing specific policies. It combines long-term clarity on policy direction with flexibility in its delivery.

The Zero Carbon Act is a proposal developed by Generation Zero with support from other organisations and individuals. Go to www.zerocarbonact.nz to explore our detailed blueprint, tell us what you think, and get involved in the campaign.