

In Confidence

Office of the Associate Minister for the Environment

Chair, Cabinet Environment Committee

Government response to the Environment Committee Report on Food Waste.

Proposal

- 1 This paper seeks Cabinet approval of the Government's response to the Environment Select Committee's (the Committee) report on its briefing to investigate food waste in New Zealand (the Report).¹

Background

- 2 There is increasing recognition that food waste is a problem both in New Zealand and internationally. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include targets to halve per capita food waste at the retail and consumer levels, and reduce food losses along production and supply chains, by 2030 (see Target 12.3).
- 3 Although the actual amount of food wasted in New Zealand is not known, there are various estimates and proxy measures. In 2016, the Ministry for the Environment (MfE) estimated that New Zealand sent about 571,000 tonnes of food waste to landfills each year. Earlier research carried out by WasteMINZ and others estimated that supermarkets generated more than 60,000 tonnes, cafes and restaurants more than 24,300 tonnes, and households nearly 230,000 tonnes of food waste each year. A significant proportion of this waste is avoidable.
- 4 Food waste also occurs at the primary production and manufacturing stages of the supply chain. According to the Bioresource Processing Alliance, agriculture and horticulture industries self-reported that 350,000 tonnes of food by-products are either going to landfill or to low-value applications per year, of which 12% (42,000 tonnes) is avoidable. Auckland food manufacturers have self-reported that 40,800 tonnes of food waste is generated per annum, of which 28% (11,424 tonnes) goes to landfill, with an unknown percentage of this avoidable.² The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations estimated that 5.8% of food produced in Australia and New Zealand in 2016 was lost during the production and transport stages of the supply chain³.
- 5 Labour MP Angie Warren-Clark proposed food waste as a topic for inquiry by the Environment Select Committee, which opened a briefing to investigate the issue on 2 August 2018. The Committee received written submissions from 26

¹ Briefing to investigate food waste in New Zealand, Report of the Environment Committee, March 2020

² Sustainable Business Network research, 2017.

³ FAO. 2019. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2019. Moving forward on food loss and waste reduction*. Rome. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

organisations and individuals, and heard oral evidence from 15 of these submitters. The Committee appointed Associate Professor Miranda Miroso (Dr Miroso) of the University of Otago as an independent specialist advisor. It also received support from the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and MfE.

- 6 The Committee's Report was published on the Parliament website on 12 March 2020. It makes three recommendations to the Government. Standing Order 252 requires the Government to present a response by 9 June 2020.

The Committee's Report and recommendations

- 7 The report includes as an attachment a comprehensive report prepared by Dr Miroso. It sets out the global context of the issue and New Zealand's place in it; the scale, nature and impact of the food waste problem in New Zealand; methods for preventing, redistributing and re-using food waste; the challenges for putting those into practice; and a suggested road map for making progress.

- 8 Dr Miroso made 40 separate recommendations, which she grouped into a three-step approach:

- 8.1 **Target:** this step focusses on a national roundtable of key stakeholders across the food supply and consumption chain to agree on an approach for a national food waste definition, target, strategy and implementation plan.

- 8.2 **Measure:** this step would address data issues, which she regards as needing urgent attention. She identifies the need to establish baseline food waste data and ongoing measurement systems to support the target, as well as analysis to identify opportunities to reduce food waste and assess the return on investment for them.

- 8.3 **Act:** At the same time, she recommends starting work to establish cooperative research approaches, working groups on specific topics, and a review of labelling and packaging practices.

- 9 In its own report, the Committee encouraged the Government to consider this three-step approach and focus on the first two steps of targeting and measuring, to create a base of reliable information and clear goals. The Committee's three recommendations to the Government were:

- 9.1 Recommendation 1: That the House and Government take note of the appended report about food waste in New Zealand, drafted by the committee's advisor, Associate Professor Miranda Miroso.

- 9.2 Recommendation 2: That the Government adopt a national definition of and measure of food waste, in line with international approaches.

- 9.3 Recommendation 3: That the Government include reducing food waste with a reduction target as part of a national waste strategy and implementation plan.

Work underway across Government

- 10 More action is required to avoid food being wasted. Food insecurity and the increasing demand on food banks resulting from the economic insecurity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for more focus.
- 11 Urgent measures have already been initiated. For example \$14.9 million over two years was allocated to MPI to redirect food at risk of being wasted to people in need. In addition, the Government is investing \$32 million over the next two years to provide support for foodbanks, food rescue and other community organisations who are distributing food. This includes funding for a new bulk food distribution network called the New Zealand Food Network. This will be fully operational by August 2020, and will enable food producers, manufacturers and suppliers to donate surplus food which is then stored at bulk warehouses and distributed around the country. The Network will focus on accepting food that is high quality, healthy and nutritious. Foodbanks, food rescue and other organisations can then order food to restock their foodbank.
- 12 Food rescue organisations will also benefit from funding to contribute towards the increased demand for their services and the establishment of a national food rescue alliance. The alliance will increase the size and capacity of the food rescue sector, share policies and best practice, and provide a coherent voice for the sector.
- 13 Food Secure Communities funding will provide an additional 21 million meals per annum through foodbanks and other organisations at a cost of 71 cents per meal. This will result in approximately 6200 tonnes less food going to landfill and reduce CO2 emissions by over 2200 tonnes. This will reduce pressure on our food supply chains and benefit the environment. Foodbanks and other organisations will be better placed to manage future shocks and provide greater food security for vulnerable people.
- 14 However, we still need a more coordinated and resilient approach to food distribution in New Zealand. Reducing food waste and diverting quality edible food before it reaches landfill can improve food security.
- 15 Relevant agencies have recently begun exploring opportunities for connecting and coordinating work across government to improve food security. That work has highlighted that food waste is one aspect of a much larger set of policy issues relating to New Zealand's food system. These issues span sustainable food supply, supply chains, food knowledge and skills, health and nutrition, food security, and food waste. The main government agencies with an interest include MPI, MfE, Ministry of Social Development (MSD), Te Puni Kokiri (TPK), Ministry of Health (MoH), Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE), Ministry of Education (MoE), and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC).
- 16 Appendix 1 sets out the work across government so far identified in those discussions. It shows a base of existing work that has been significantly expanded in response to COVID-19, across many agencies. As noted above, Budget 2020 has provided substantial extra funding for existing and new

programmes in MSD, MPI and MoE to help improve food security and avoid food waste.

- 17 The current work is all useful and important, but risks being fragmented and piecemeal. I understand that agencies are intending to provide joint advice to relevant Ministers within the next two months on opportunities to strengthen coordination and linkages across existing work on food security and related issues, to ensure a more strategic, “whole of government” approach in this area.
- 18 I look forward to that advice and the chance to bring a much sharper and more strategic focus to these issues, so that we can identify and address any gaps quickly. In the meantime, I have asked MfE to work closely with MSD, MPI and the wider food sector to find opportunities to support and enhance food rescue and redistribution activity. Minister O’Connor has also requested that MPI commence immediate work to develop an action plan on waste minimisation across the primary industries supply chain.
- 19 Work on food waste also needs to be integrated with the overall work on waste minimisation. Government and MfE have worked hard across the last two years to overcome a history of piecemeal activity in the waste and resource recovery sector and get a comprehensive work programme underway. This programme includes expanding and increasing the landfill levy; responding to China’s National Sword initiative; improving kerbside recycling systems; tackling plastic waste and progressing mandatory product stewardship for challenging products. Organics (including food waste) is a recognised waste stream across all these areas of work. Reducing the amount of organic material sent to landfill is also a climate change issue, because it releases methane when disposed to landfill.
- 20 MfE is about to begin work on an updated Waste Strategy for New Zealand, to set out a clear direction for all the organisations and individuals working in this area. I expect the new strategy to include a specific focus on food waste throughout the supply chain, and in particular on rescue and redistribution as a way of minimising food waste.

Proposed response to the Committee’s recommendations

- 21 The Committee’s work has been valuable. Dr Miroso’s report is a comprehensive and useful survey of the issues. Submitters strongly supported the need for progress. The Committee’s recommendations are measured and focus on sensible first steps.
- 22 I therefore propose that the Government responds by endorsing the Committee’s recommendations and advising that it will progress them as part of our overall work programme on waste minimisation, and in particular the forthcoming work on a new Waste Strategy and on establishing a solid platform of data to inform future policy work.
- 23 Appendix 2 sets out the proposed text of the draft Government Response.

Financial Implications

24 There are no financial implications arising directly from this paper.

Regulatory impact analysis

25 Regulatory impact analysis requirements do not apply to this paper.

Legislative Implications

26 There are no legislative impacts arising from this paper.

Human Rights

27 There are no human rights implications arising from this paper.

Consultation

28 The following government agencies have been consulted on this paper: Ministry for Primary Industries, Ministry for Social Development, Te Puni Kōkiri, and Ministry of Health.

29 The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet have also been informed of this paper.

30 At a Ministerial level, I have consulted with Minister O'Connor (Agriculture and Food Safety) and Minister Sepuloni (Social Development).

Timing of the Government response

31 The Government response must be presented to the House by 9 June 2020. I intend to present it in the week beginning Monday 8 June 2020.

Communications

32 There are no communications needed for this Government response.

Proactive Release

33 I intend to proactively release this Cabinet paper in whole and within the required 30 business days of a Cabinet decision.

Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee:

- 1 note that on 12 March 2020 the Environment Committee published its report entitled 'Briefing to Investigate Food Waste in New Zealand'.
- 2 note that government agencies (in particular the Ministries of Social Development, Environment, and Primary Industries (including New Zealand Food Safety)) are increasing their work on food waste issues, in particular food rescue and redistribution, in response to the economic effects of COVID-19,

and that Budget 2020 provided substantial additional funding for existing and new initiatives in this area.

- 3 note that the updated Waste Strategy to be developed during 2020-2021 is expected to include a specific focus on food waste throughout the supply chain, and in particular on rescue and redistribution as a way of minimising food waste.
- 4 note that the Environment Committee recommended that:
 - 4.1 the House and Government take note of the appended report about food waste in New Zealand, drafted by the committee's advisor, Associate Professor Miranda Miroso.
 - 4.2 the Government adopt a national definition of and measure of food waste, in line with international approaches.
 - 4.3 the Government include reducing food waste with a reduction target as part of a national waste strategy and implementation plan.
- 5 agree that the Government responds by endorsing the Committee's recommendations and advising that it will progress them as part of our overall work programme on waste minimisation, and in particular the forthcoming work on a new Waste Strategy and on establishing a solid platform of data to inform future policy work.
- 6 approve the draft Government response attached to this paper.

Authorised for lodgement

Hon Eugenie Sage

Associate Minister for the Environment

Appendix One: Summary of current work across Government relevant to food waste and food security identified so far

Initiative	Issue	Agencies
Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures funding	Sustainable supply	MPI
EnviroSchools	Knowledge & skills	MfE
Maara Kai grants community/marae gardens etc	Knowledge & skills	TPK
Community gardens funding	Knowledge & skills	DHBs, local government
Special Needs Grants (food)	Food security	MSD
Whanau Ora funding	Knowledge and skills	TPK
Fruit in Schools (expanded and extended in Budget 2020)	Food security	MoH
Kickstart Breakfast funding (funded to June 2021; budget bid required for ongoing funding)	Food security	MSD
KidsCan funding (funded to June 2021; budget bid required for ongoing funding)	Food security	MSD
Free and Healthy School Lunch programme (expanded to 190,000 students in Budget 2020)	Food security	MoE
Funding for food rescue through contestable Waste Management Fund (food rescue made a priority in current WMF funding round)	Food waste	MfE
NZ Food Safety Strategy and associated work	Health & nutrition	MPI
DHB Healthy Active Learning Coordinators	Health & nutrition	MoH
Collection of health data on diet and food security	Health & nutrition	MoH
Healthy eating guidelines	Health & nutrition	MoH
Proposal to expand levy on waste going to landfill to increase incentive to divert, including food waste	Food waste	MfE
Action plan to minimise food waste across the primary sector	Food waste	MPI
Community supply of fruit and vegetable boxes (100,000 boxes over 10 weeks; component of Budget 2020 initiative)	Food security/waste	MPI
Innovation Funding –development funding to projects that focus on at least one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> getting fresh product moving through supply chains where there is significant risk of food wastage due to COVID-19 restrictions; or addressing other critical food supply vulnerabilities exacerbated by COVID-19. 	Food waste/security	MPI
Funding for NZ Food Network (national network to distribute bulk surplus food to foodbanks) and Korehai Kai (national umbrella organisation for foodbanks)	Food security Food waste	MSD

Grant funding for food banks, food rescue & community food providers, development of “food secure community” plans, supported by a small ‘Food Secure Communities’ team.	Food security	MSD
New strategy, action & investment plan to guide activity and spending on waste minimisation, including food waste	Food waste	MfE
Preparing for a UN Food Systems Summit in 2021	All	MPI
Influencing and coordinating the APEC Food Security Roadmap and associated activities during New Zealand’s APEC host year	Food security Food waste	MPI
Active engagement in the Committee on World Food Security, including in development of voluntary guidelines on food systems and nutrition	All	MPI

Proactively released

Appendix Two: Government Response to the Report of the Environment Committee on the Briefing to Investigate Food Waste in New Zealand

Proactively released

**Government Response to
Report of the Environment Committee
on
The Briefing to Investigate Food Waste in New Zealand**

Presented to the House of Representatives

In accordance with Standing Order 252

Proactively released

Government response to Report of the Environment Committee on the Briefing to Investigate Food Waste in New Zealand

Introduction

1. The Government welcomes the Environment Committee's report on food waste in New Zealand.
2. The Government responds to the report in accordance with Standing Order 252.

Recommendations and Government response

3. **Recommendation 1:** "that the House and Government take note of the appended report about food waste in New Zealand, drafted by the committee's adviser, Associate Professor Miranda Miroso".
4. **Response:** the Government notes the report and commends it as a useful contribution to the research and analysis on the topic of food waste.
5. **Recommendation 2:** "that the Government adopt a national definition of and measure of food waste, in line with international approaches".
6. **Response:** the Government agrees with the recommendation to establish a definition and measure of food waste in New Zealand, and notes that developing a national food waste baseline is the first step in measuring food waste. The Ministry for the Environment intends to progress this recommendation as part of its broader programme of work to develop a new waste strategy for New Zealand, including a waste data framework.
7. **Recommendation 3:** "that the Government include reducing food waste with a reduction target as part of a national waste strategy and implementation plan".
8. **Response:** the Government agrees with the recommendation and intends to include a food waste reduction target as part of a new waste strategy for New Zealand. Work on this strategy is beginning shortly.