

Chair  
Cabinet Policy Committee

## **Climate Change: Directions for Public Education**

### **Proposal**

1. This noting paper provides a progress report on the action taken thus far regarding climate change public education and outlines the future direction of this work.

### **Background**

2. Cabinet Business Committee, at its meeting on 31 January 2001, noted that the proposed communications and consultation package for climate change does not directly target changes in behaviour prior to 2008, and directed officials to report back to POL on the options for public education and communication campaigns targeted at changing attitudes and encouraging behaviour which prepares for the commitment period (CBC Min (01) 3/4 and CAB Min (01) 3/1 refer).

3. Cabinet also agreed to fund research into public understanding of climate change and the needs of specific audiences and directed officials to work closely with the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA) in order to make strong linkages between the communications and consultation efforts on climate change, the national energy efficiency and conservation strategy, and EECA's regular programmes (CBC Min (01) 1/2 and CAB Min (01) 2/1 refer).

### **Actions taken to date**

4. Officials have undertaken research into the attitudes and knowledge of the public and key sector representatives. This research sought to provide an understanding of the base level of knowledge so that opportunities and areas for public education work can be identified.

5. Present means of communicating include the ClimateWise newsletter, the whole of government climate change website and other media work. Climate change messages are also being communicated through the range of work streams involving dialogue with stakeholders as well as indirectly associated work streams such as energy efficiency and conservation.

### *Attitudinal surveys*

6. A two-stage research study was commissioned with the key objectives being to:

- identify and explore public and key sector awareness, knowledge and level of concern about climate change;
- test any early ideas on communications strategies and identify the most appropriate means of communicating to different audiences;

- assess and explore the quality of communications and general relationships between the working groups and key stakeholder groups; and,
- provide benchmark ratings for future tracking of public awareness, knowledge and level of concern on climate change issues and the effectiveness of communications strategies.

7. Key results of the survey of relevance to public education are as follows:

*Level of awareness and concern about climate change as an issue:*

- The key sector representatives generally declared high levels of knowledge about climate change issues, with 55% claiming “a lot” of knowledge and 37% “a fair amount”.
- In the public survey, 12% claimed they knew “a lot” and 51% a “fair amount”. Levels of concern were modest and scepticism was apparent, with natural weather cycles being considered as a major cause of climate change. However, 20% declared they would be “very interested” in finding out more about the climate change issues and 56% were fairly interested.

*Views and concerns regarding the policy direction and response of Government:*

- The public participants held minimal awareness of the Government’s response (2% claimed to know a lot, and 13% “a fair amount”), with an impression that the Government was “*probably doing something*”.
- The key sector participants had a high level of knowledge, with 47% claiming to know “a lot” and 37% “a fair amount”.
- Qualitative responses from the key sector respondents included impressions that Government was pressing ahead too quickly without due consideration of the impact on the New Zealand economy. Some were agitated by the proposed timeline and the fact that they were not being consulted more fully on the impacts on their sector.

*What information is required for better understanding and acceptance:*

- A majority of key sector respondents (58%) declared they were satisfied with the information received from the climate change program. However, calls were made for more information better targeted for specific sectors. Some representatives also raised the need for more public awareness of climate change issues.
- Many public participants held fatalistic attitudes, believing that New Zealand is too small a country to be persuasive in negotiations, that the issue is too big to manage or that the interests of large businesses will frustrate any efforts to address it.

*How should the information be provided:*

- Key sector participants identified cabinet papers as the most useful indicators of government policy direction. Other communication forms identified were government websites and the climate change newsletter.
- Public participants said preferred media sources for receiving information were television, followed by newspaper articles, pamphlets, newsletters and a website.

## **Public education initiatives**

8. Officials aim to have a summary report on climate change impacts in New Zealand to be ready for public release by the end of May/early June. Some smaller

communications materials will be developed from that report and targeted according to areas defined by the attitudinal survey results.

9. The whole of Government climate change newsletter “ClimateWise” is being distributed to a wide range of organisations and individuals, as well as to media, secondary schools and libraries nationwide.

10. As in other areas, advantage will be taken of opportunities to increase the coverage of climate change issues in the mass media.

11. Opportunities for public education created by other events planned for reasons other than climate change will be taken full advantage of. The Draft National Energy Efficiency and Conservation Strategy and the Draft Waste Minimisation Strategy are examples of such events.

12. Given the breadth of actions that influence greenhouse gas emissions, the use of public education to change behaviour is a substantial task.

13. Before designing options for public education, the Ministry for the Environment, on behalf of the “whole of government”, is carrying out a stocktake of current activities in this area. This will be followed up with research that considers a range of public education options and associated resources, with a view to implementing a targeted climate change education strategy in FY2002/03. The following target groups have been identified: schools, community groups, women, Maori, trades people, local governments, professional associations, and corporates (especially small business). In particular, local government provides an important link to the public. Officials will ensure that local government is closely involved in the development and implementation of the public education strategy.

## **Consultation**

14. The following departments have been consulted by the Ministry for the Environment in the preparation of this paper and agree with its recommendations: Agriculture and Forestry, Economic Development, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Transport, Research, Science and Technology, the Treasury, Te Puni Kokiri and the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority. The Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet has also been involved in the preparation of this paper.

## **Financial implications**

15. No additional financial resources are being sought at this time for public education and communication campaigns targeted at changing attitudes and encouraging behaviour which prepares for the commitment period. However, it should be noted that the purpose of the stocktake of current activities and scoping study discussed in paragraph 13 is to develop a targeted education strategy. It can be expected that this will have financial implications beginning in FY 2002/03, which would be considered in the 2002 Budget process and will be elaborated in a future Cabinet paper that would seek agreement to a proposed strategy.

## Recommendations

16. It is recommended that you:

- a. note the results of the attitudinal survey, which identified awareness, knowledge and level of concern about climate change to varying degrees by the public and key sector groups;
- b. note that the summary report on climate change impacts in New Zealand will allow the creation of more targeted communications materials;
- c. note that opportunities for education and awareness raising on climate change issues are being taken as they arise with EECA and other groups;
- d. note the role of the ClimateWise newsletter in providing information on climate change;
- e. note that the Ministry for the Environment is carrying out a stocktake of public education activities in the area of climate change to be followed by a scoping study, with a view to enhanced public education programmes in FY2002/03; and
- f. note that the financial implications of a targeted education strategy will be considered in the 2002 Budget processes and will be elaborated in a future Cabinet paper that would seek agreement to this proposed strategy.

Hon Pete Hodgson  
Convenor, Ministerial Group on Climate Change