

Govt says no despite ag's gas support

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THE Government says it won't adopt Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment Simon Upton's suggestion of changing the Emission Trading Scheme despite universal support from agriculture groups. Upton suggested different policies to deal with gases produced by animals and those coming from fossil fuel use.

And the focus should be on eliminating emissions from fossil fuels rather than storing carbon in forests. When Upton's report was released Climate Change Minister James Shaw immediately ruled

out treating carbon dioxide from fossil fuels differently to other greenhouse gases saying to do so will create policy uncertainty for emitters and the forestry sector.

The narrowing window of opportunity to keep global warming within 1.5C necessitates using trees to offset greenhouse gas emissions, Shaw said.

Upton's proposals would necessitate further changes to the ETS, which Shaw says is about to be altered following five years of consultation and reviews.

The most significant change is the introduction of a sinking lid on total allowable emissions, a lid that will be lowered every five years. The tenor of Upton's



RAPT: Federated Farmers is delighted Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment Simon Upton recognises the difference between long and short lived greenhouse gases, vice-president Andrew Hoggard says.

recommendations supports that of Myles Allen, a professor of geosystem science at Oxford University, who says as methane is a short-lived gas that should be treated separately carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide.

If that happened New Zealand farmers might need to make only small annual reductions in methane to stop it contributing to global warming.

"A 0.3% decline a year, or 10% over 30 years, is about enough to give you no further methane-induced warming," Allen said.

However, that does not preclude action to lower carbon dioxide emissions, the primary contributor to climate change.

Upton's approach would reduce the planted area of offsetting forestry and he advocates a landscape approach to tree planting to address social and environmental issues such as run-off. Farming leaders support a split gas approach saying sectors should not be able to offload the impact of their emission on to others.

Federated Farmers believes Upton's report challenges the Government to let science rather than politics guide policy decisions.

"We're delighted that the PCE joins the growing list of agencies, scientists and environmental commentators who recognise the fundamental difference between the permanent conversion of inert, long-term fossil fuels into

carbon dioxide and shorter-term biological emissions from livestock (methane and nitrous oxide)," vice-president and climate change spokesman Andrew Hoggard says.

Beef + Lamb NZ chairman Andrew Morrison says the Upton report should contribute to the Zero Carbon Bill and other climate change policies.

"It is essential that policy drives the right kinds of behaviours for fossil-fuel and biogenic greenhouse gases.

"To do this, policy must reflect the differences between those gases and how they can be effectively mitigated."

DairyNZ chief executive Tim Mackle says the report shows science is evolving and greenhouse gas reduction involves all sectors.

"We agree, however, that reduction efforts must occur across all sectors and forest sinks shouldn't be used to avoid reducing carbon dioxide emissions. All sectors need to do their part.

The science community thought Upton's approach has merit with NIWA atmospheric scientist Dr Sara Mikaloff-Fletcher describing it as a bold approach.

"By grouping biological sources and forest carbon credits under a single umbrella the recommended strategy makes full use of the potential of our forests to slow climate change while reflecting the real limitations of over-

reliance on forest carbon in the long term."

AgResearch farm systems scientist Dr Robyn Dynes says Upton's approach will allow communities to shape changes to their catchment and land use.

"It also offers the opportunity for all we know about land and environmental process to come together, which can be shaped by the grassroots knowledge of the farming sector and communities."

Landcare Research and Agricultural Greenhouse Gas Research Centre plant and soil scientist Dr David Whitehead said the report provides a fresh perspective on changing land use.

"Such changes could also transform our farming systems to increase resilience to adverse climate events and improve community wellbeing.

"The overall benefit to enhancing other ecosystem services is much more than reducing greenhouse emissions."

Canterbury University forestry school expert Professor Euan Mason says tree sequestration is crucial for NZ to be carbon neutral by 2050. Upton's proposal would make the ETS logical by establishing an emission's cap and removing the tree loophole for those exceeding the cap.

"The main disadvantage is that agriculture would once again be given a free pass and, in a sense, the forestry sector would be made responsible for cleaning up agriculture's messes."

But BusinessNZ said Upton's plan would result in upheaval for NZ's environmental settings.

Chief executive Kirk Hope said changing the zero carbon timeframe is a realistic recommendation, along with differentiating between short-lived and long-lived gases and the need to think holistically about water, soil and biodiversity objectives but restricting forestry offsets is not helpful.

"If NZ's heavy emitter industries are no longer able to use trees as an offset, with the absence of international units, they will be greatly disadvantaged compared with businesses in other countries."

People want to do more but ...

MOST people want to do more about climate change – both collectively and individually.

More than 80% of New Zealanders, including businesses, believe climate change is happening, 88% want companies to do more and 76% want the Government to do more, an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority survey found.

And 79% say they could do more.

"It's heartening to see so many New Zealanders are already very much on board with the need to reduce our climate change emissions," authority chief executive Andrew Caseley said.

"Energy use makes up 40% of NZ's total greenhouse gas emissions and modern

technologies such as LED lighting, heat pumps and electric vehicles can make a big impact on our emissions.

'Energy use is an area where New Zealanders can, right now, choose options that will reduce our carbon emissions and they are smart investments that save people money over time and can improve quality of life.'

But barriers to greater action exist with 30% of people believing reducing their environmental impact will affect their quality of life while 62% of businesses think taking action will increase their costs.

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