

ALMA
POSITION STATEMENT ON CLIMATE CRISIS 2020
NEW ZEALAND PERSPECTIVE

ALMA acknowledges the work of Ora Taiao (NZ Climate & Health Council), the New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA), and the Ministry for the Environment in informing this statement.

Aotearoa New Zealand

Aotearoa New Zealand is blessed with a beautiful natural environment, with abundant green spaces and natural resources. Within this physical environment exists a diverse population, who generally have good access to healthcare and social welfare. However, our land is something that must be respected and cared for, and not taken for granted. As global citizens, we are facing a climate crisis.

Climate change will affect widespread areas of human health. Throughout New Zealand and the world, the major threats to health are likely to include:¹

- Direct: High temperatures and extreme weather events
- Biologically mediated effects: Change in patterns of infectious disease such as spread of vectors, and impacts on nutrition and sanitation through droughts and food shortages
- Socially mediated: Forced migration, conflict, and loss of employment

Climate change will disproportionately impact those who are already the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

Looking beyond our nation's borders, our neighbours in Oceania and the Pacific Islands are more susceptible to the damaging effects of climate change. These include food shortages through extreme weather, and loss of land to rising sea levels. In the Solomon Islands, near Papua New Guinea, at least 5 reef islands have already been lost through sea level rise and coastal erosion.²

The New Zealand Medical Association has declared climate change to be a health emergency.³ "Recognisable health threats from climate change include the direct impacts such as illness and deaths from high temperatures and other extreme weather events, biologically - mediated events including the changing patterns of infectious disease, and socially-mediated impacts with loss of livelihood, forced migration, economic vulnerability and increased risks of conflict... Climate change is already having severe health consequences on vulnerable populations around the world, including in our Pacific region and to our most vulnerable populations, including Māori" - Dr Kate Baddock, Chair of NZMA.³

Climate Change legislation

New Zealand has recently passed the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill.⁴

"The purpose of the bill is to establish a framework that New Zealand can use to develop clear and stable policies which contribute to the effort to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels under the Paris Agreement.

The bill as introduced will:

- *set a new greenhouse gas reduction target which would require:*

- *gross emissions of biogenic methane to be reduced to 10 percent below 2017 levels by 2030*
- *gross emissions of biogenic methane to be reduced to at least between 24 percent and 47 percent below 2017 levels by 2050*
- *net emissions of all other greenhouse gases to be reduced to zero by 2050*
- *set up a Climate Change Commission (the Commission), an independent body which would advise and support successive Governments to reach the 2050 target*
- *require the Government to set emissions budgets every 5 years that would act as stepping stones towards the 2050 target*
- *establish a range of measures to help New Zealand adapt to climate change”.*

➤ ALMA advocates for:

Strong support for implementation of the Zero Carbon bill, with the substantive changes in policy and industry which will be required to meet these targets.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi)

We cannot consider management of the land of Aotearoa without acknowledging its *Tangata Whenua* (people of the land/indigenous people). Entrenched in *te ao Māori* (the Māori worldview) is a deeply held respect for the land, and the belief that we must take care of it.

The principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi should be incorporated into new legislation and actions regarding management of the land.

Energy

As of 2016, 85% of electricity in New Zealand was generated from renewable sources, including hydro, wind, geothermal, solar, woody biomass, biogas and liquid biofuels⁶. However, there is still prevailing support for the fossil fuel industry, through financial investments.

➤ ALMA advocates for:

Fossil fuel divestment (removal of investment funds from companies associated with the fossil fuel industry) as has now been implemented by the government for default ‘Kiwisaver’ funds.

Continued strong investment in renewable sources of electricity.

Reduce Pollution

Air pollution has considerable health impacts globally, particularly concerning respiratory and cardiovascular disease. Overall, air quality in New Zealand is good, with notable improvements in pollutant levels and health impacts over the past decade^{7,8}. The major ongoing contributors to air pollution are the use of wood/coal burners to heat homes, and emissions from vehicles⁸.

➤ ALMA advocates for:

Investment in dry, well insulated homes, with a focus on equity of access.

Encouragement of public and active transport, with reduced reliance on personal vehicles.

Sustainable Health Sector

The health sector has a significant impact on the environment, especially through energy use, resource use, and waste. Disposable/one-use products are just one example of the ways the health sector have a negative impact on our climate's health.

➤ ALMA advocates for:

Recognition of the contributions of New Zealand's health sector to environmental damage.
Commitment to reducing and mitigating these contributions

References:

1. https://www.orataiao.org.nz/climate_change_and_health
2. <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1748-9326/11/5/054011>
3. <https://www.nzma.org.nz/news-and-events/media-releases/nzma-declares-climate-change-a-health-emergency>
4. <https://www.mfe.govt.nz/climate-change/zero-carbon-amendment-bill>
5. https://www.parliament.nz/resource/en-NZ/SCR_92789/7def17a414a95a1c769d8be6264ec2576e1aa90d
6. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/assets/bc14c2778b/energy-in-nz-2017.pdf>
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