

Submission

Adapt and thrive: Building a climate-resilient Aotearoa New Zealand

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SUBMITTED TO: Ministry for the Environment
via email to
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Introduction

1. Ashburton District Council (Council) welcomes the opportunity to submit feedback on the Ministry for the Environment's 2022 consultation document '*Adapt and thrive: Building a climate-resilient Aotearoa New Zealand.*' This submission has been prepared by officers and approved by Council.
2. Located an hour's drive south of Christchurch, more than 35,400¹ residents live in our district. Approximately 50% of our residents live in the main town of Ashburton, with the rest of our residents living rurally or in smaller towns or villages across the district.
3. Ashburton District (the District) has experienced moderate and sustained population increase since the mid-1990s, increasing by 23% between 2006 and 2013 (a 3.3% increase per year). This growth, however, has now slowed, with an average growth of 1.3% per year since 2013.
4. The Council currently has a [Climate Change Policy](#) and is currently developing its own Resilience Action Plan.
5. Council supports and endorses the points made in the Canterbury Mayoral Forum submission. As such, this submission has been made to reinforce some key aspects of the submission by including our local experiences to date.

General comments

6. Council supports the intent of the draft National Adaptation Plan and the need for national direction on climate adaptation action. We support and encourage the National Adaptation Plan to work with the National Emissions Reduction Plan as the cornerstones of climate action in New Zealand.
7. In the mid 2000's Environment Canterbury constructed flood protection along the banks of the Ashburton River to provide protection for a one in 200 year flood event. This foresight and investment meant that the urban Ashburton community was protected during the 2021 flood event last year.

¹ Statistics New Zealand Population Estimates 30 June 2020

8. However, this event was a first-hand example of the impact of a changing climate on our community. Researchers from Bodeker Scientific, MetService, NIWA, Victoria University of Wellington, and the University of Canterbury studying the effects of climate change on severe weather events in New Zealand have found that the extreme rainfall that brought flooding to Canterbury in May 2021 was 10 to 15 per cent more intense as a result of human influence on the climate system. ([Climate change made the May flooding in Canterbury more severe - researchers | Stuff.co.nz](#))
9. In Ashburton, those floods caused damage to local roads that took over six months' of work and \$4M to restore roads to a pre-flood condition. Some bridge damage will take longer to repair. The floods also highlighted the vulnerability of the lower South Island to damage to critical infrastructure like the SH 1 bridge at Ashburton.
10. Almost a year on from those floods, the NZ SeaRise: Te Tai Pari O Aotearoa programme released location specific sea-level rise projections, these projections combined forecast vertical land movement with sea-level rise information and showed that, in some locations, the annual rate of sea-level rise can double. In those locations, this effectively halves the time available to respond.
11. The impacts of climate change are real and they are here now. In some cases they will be here much sooner than we previously thought. In the meantime, events will continue to be intensified creating the need for more investment in repairs.
12. While a systematic and long-term approach will help us to manage those impacts and how they are funded to ensure that we maximise the value of investments in housing, buildings and infrastructure and minimise adverse social and economic impacts, we feel the document would benefit from an injection of urgency. While the Plan is necessarily broad and encompasses many different facets, unless there are real and tangible short-term expectations placed on the actors involved, we believe it will be difficult to effect meaningful change.

System-wide actions

13. Reforming the system is a critical part of ensuring that we are all on the same page and have the tools at our disposal to plan and adapt. Embedding climate resilience across legislation, government policies and strategies will ensure the roles and responsibilities of all involved is certain from the outset.
14. The standardisation of data, information, tools and guidance is critical for the success of adaptation and resilience. As a provincial territorial authority the costs of creating this on our own are excessive. However, as a part of our work with the Canterbury Mayoral Forum and associated forums and working groups, as a region we are on a pathway with understanding the risks of climate change collectively. This work will continue and we urge that central government solutions work with local government to avoid duplication.
15. Local government needs specific, measureable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) actions so that we are clear on the expectations central government has on local authorities. For example, an action could be to require each territorial authority to have community adaptation plans in place by 2025, prior to the next Climate Change risk assessment in 2026.

16. Learning the lessons from the three waters reform process it is evident that central government has been clearly unhappy with local council performance in this area for some time. The approach that government has taken with this reform has not been well received at the local political or community level, so we urge government reflection to avoid repeating this in the future.
17. Council advocates that the current reform programme of key Council areas, specifically the Resource Management Reform, the Future for Local Government Reform, the Three Waters Reform and the Emergency Management Act, is eased so that local government can focus on what is really important for our communities. As it stands right now, collectively these are consuming a significant amount of Council resource, which we believe could be used more effectively on meaningful work.
18. If this isn't possible, we remain concerned of a high potential for lack of integration between these system components. We are not currently convinced that climate change will be sufficiently and consistently factored into these reforms. We encourage the Ministry to ensure that the climate change, emergency management and sustainable development law and policy support each other and are not designed in isolation.
19. Given our community and economy reliance on the agriculture sector, we urge an inclusive and just transition for the rural sector. We believe this is a sector that will rise to the challenge of climate change adaptation and mitigation through researched and proven innovation and technology. This approach will be more effective than a one-size fits all rules-based approach.

Funding

20. Council believes that Central Government must be a partner and co-funder in New Zealand improving resilience and sharing the costs of adaptation, alongside the private sector, insurance industry, and local government to a lesser extent. We suggest funding may be allocated on a fair-basis to recognise the district and regional-specific responses that will be needed.
21. We believe the failure of successive central Governments to respond to climate change in a timely way has contributed to the situation we face now. If we do not fund our responses adequately, the solutions will fail and the social and economic costs of that failure will be enormous.

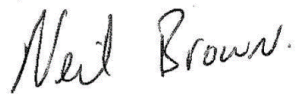
Communities

22. We wish to strongly emphasise the critical role of local authorities in leading meaningful conversations with local communities with regard to climate change adaptation and mitigation. We urge government to ensure that we have the tools and support to do this well, so we have *'the right conversations with the right people at the right time'*.
23. Local government is the sector best-placed to lead local planning. It responds best to clear deadlines and clear expectations.

Concluding comments

24. Council supports the intentions of the draft NAP, however we hold some reservations about the ability of the NAP to deliver meaningful change to what is the single most pressing issue for current and future generations of New Zealanders.

Kā mihi



Neil Brown
Mayor



Hamish Riach
Chief Executive