

A CASE FOR A UNITED PARLIAMENT TO MANAGE NEW ZEALAND'S RESPONSE TO GLOBAL WARMING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

(IMPORTANT: This proposed change, to working as a United Parliament, is intended **only** for the work on Global Warming and Climate Change. No other portfolio confronts such a dire and urgent national and world challenge. It is unprecedented. It justifies exploring a new concept that could enable our leadership to contend with it in a more effective way.

The other responsibilities and functions of Government would continue as usual, though naturally influenced laterally by the new structure for handling Global Warming.)

INTRODUCTION

This paper proposes a new, effective, encompassing concept for addressing the Global Warming catastrophe. It will not be actioned today. But it opens and brings to consciousness an idea that may gather momentum and influence because it makes sense. Hopefully before it is too late.

If well introduced and managed it must begin to attract thoughtful public interest. It has obvious and less obvious advantages over our present political structure for limiting global warming.

Co-operation is inherently attractive. Politicians are representatives of the people. If a change of form is pressed for by the public it should be researched with co-operative, constructive goodwill by parliament, embracing scientific and citizen input.

Indeed no one political party can be comfortable having global warming responsibility on its desk. The prospect of uniting with all parties in carrying the responsibility could be recognised as both sensible and a relief. It also should enable the United Parliament to be bolder in identifying, implementing, and gaining acceptance by the nation to accept necessary measures that greater numbers of people may object to otherwise. As important as plans for addressing global warming are, without the public putting its trust in decision makers there is less likelihood of success.

This paper is based on the reality that greenhouse gas emissions will continue to grow with ever more disastrous consequences. The intention here is to explore a reworking of our parliamentary form that would help New Zealand in two ways:

Firstly by more strenuously tackling global warming and secondly by anticipating the future and building a structure that will maintain and strengthen national confidence and unity.

This paper barely refers to Climate Change. That is intentional. First and foremost we MUST protect a priority focus on curbing the ever-urgent developing calamity of Global Warming itself. To ensure that, there should be a clear differentiation between this work and the more immediately tangible, vast demands of Climate Change adaptation and disaster response, despite the reality that they are fundamentally united. Uncomfortably but logically, decisions and resources that support the effort to combat global warming should not be committed to the bottomless demands of adaptation, and restoration.

Climate Adaptation

Necessary as it is now adaptation is evidence that we failed to intervene early enough in global warming and its climate effects. If the raised consciousness and trillions of dollars that will be spent on adaptation internationally, and needed year on year, had been committed to a planned, organised strategy of greenhouse gas reduction, as was already called for in the 1980s, disruption to life on Planet Earth would have been far less. As more adaptation responses become necessary the nation's resources will be further depleted and the burden on the future will worsen.

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BACKGROUND

Climate Changes are effects. Obvious, and vital to respond to.

But Global Warming is the cause. It demands the world's most urgent, focused attention. Global warming is a progressive crisis which jeopardises life on earth. It is triggering world-wide consequences, some already fatal, for human beings and other life forms. It must be arrested. Current climate-initiated disasters across the globe are only precursors of what is to come. Hard won international agreements to get control of greenhouse gas emissions have failed.

A slow, incremental global warming response will see us fall further behind the progress of the disaster. Committed, bold, well-informed action and leadership by our government would reduce and could even end and reverse New Zealand's emissions contribution to the global warming process.

As things stand hope is only justified through urgent decision and action. The world's absolute priority must be to unite in the response to global warming, committing the highest consciousness, intelligence, will and resources to the challenge. New Zealand must take more urgent action to reverse New Zealand's greenhouse gas contribution to the world disaster.

THIS PAPER was written before cyclone Gabrielle's threshold-crossing disasters gave the country a shock and a glimpse of one of the manifestations of global warming/climate change. As climate disasters intensify more people will understand where planet earth and its people are headed. But without steadfast public confidence and support, tougher emissions reduction measures may be rejected.

ADVERSARIAL POLITICS

The greatest barrier to a sufficiently powerful New Zealand response to global warming/climate change is adversarial politics.

Global warming is one, single, all-encompassing world problem. It requires of New Zealand a single, comprehensive strategy of response. There is no place here for party politics. Global warming is blind to political leanings.

With even the greatest understanding and will to do so, the Government will not respond to the climate crisis with the most decisive and urgent measures possible. To do so would be to risk the election, the coming one and others in the future. Every party has one eye on its constituency and one on what the other parties are doing.

A lead principle of the Opposition's role is defined by its name: to oppose and undermine the Government to enhance their own prospect of becoming the next government. Come the election they will offer the electorate less painful and life-disruptive global warming policies,

probably defeating the incumbent. This wastes time in establishing the new government, jeopardises continuity and undermines and may cancel existing strategies.

In adversarial politics no one party can have the best possible solution to complex problems. As things stand we are beneficiaries and victims of whichever party or parties hold the reins of power. Moreover if voters support one party or another's platform it may fix some voters on party lines, putting stress on a coworking that should transcend party political orientations.

The cataclysmic consequences of global warming demand unwavering commitment from government. The adversarial principle is unfit to meet the challenge. We must pioneer a new way that can grapple with global warming in a unified effort. For this a united strategy is essential.

UNITED PARLIAMENT

Earth, sky, oceans, and all other life forms have no time for party politics. To take on global warming neither should we.

A parliament united in taking on global warming would be best able to develop a plan that could achieve, even exceed our greenhouse gas reduction targets. A United Parliament would join the resources of all parties to come to 'objective' or common understanding of the situation, analysis of what can be done, agreements, and action. Intelligence, imagination and wisdom are not the assets of just one party or group of parties. Every MP must engage seriously in various ways to contend with the crisis.

Although standing for a particular party, once elected an MP is in principle responsible to every person in the electorate however they voted or did not vote. But presently in parliament they are bound to the policies of their particular party. To give their total allegiance to one party or another is to be prepared to become blind to open exploration of another party's ideas, not bring forward their own, and risk neglecting the priority voices of science if they do not fit their party's policy.

This betrays the search for truth, and the responsibility to use all possible faculties and capacities to help find and execute the best strategies to meet global warming. All our representatives would be responsible to participate in forming or at least to consciously support and carry the nation's responses regardless of party allegiance on other matters.

In a United Parliament there would not be party policies for global warming/climate change. Our MP representatives would be united as individuals in the same mission: to seek, decide, support, act on, communicate a powerful response to global warming. They would be free

and individual as regards global warming issues, making their contributions independent of the constrictions that party policy and discipline require. This would also get rid of the time wasting and truth wasting of trading party blows.

NB: This does not mean that every M.P. should necessarily speak on the floor of the house. Most MPs would be also, or mainly, engaged in their normal parliamentary work with its party nuances. But they all must be knowledgeable and up to date with global warming developments and parliament's responses. They must be engaged, encouraged and free to bring forward their and others' new insights and ideas through some simple mechanism.

A United Parliament would not frustrate but encourage vital debate and scrutiny. However that would happen within the context of a United Parliament seeking its way forward together. What might otherwise have become rigidified as 'party policy' would be contributed as individual ideas/perspectives into the processes of the United Parliament.

There can be only one best solution to a problem. By definition it is unlikely for committed adversaries to find it. Working as genuine allies it is a realistic goal.

Science

Government's task is to seek the best possible solutions to challenges, informed from many sources. For global warming this includes giving prominence to science in many forms including: expert understanding of global warming itself and its known, anticipated and potential consequences; strategies of response, present and potential; current and future technologies; behavioural responses and psychosocial factors; education of politicians themselves and the NZ public.

It would be absolutely necessary, and obvious, to have a permanent, strong and independent voice of science involved in the debate, able to be a resource, but also with a licence to actively introduce relevant understandings of science where they are overlooked.

Cross Party Work

This proposal is about more than a cross-party working group. There would still be political parties working as usual on most matters, but on the issue of the highest importance, Global Warming, there is no party, only a working together as a United Parliament to find the best ways forward. With a United Parliament every MP is carrying the whole, and equipped with the knowledge, ability and readiness for the role of engaging with their community. The next and later sections expand on this.

From a global perspective New Zealand is a country with rare potential to achieve this unity internally. One great New Zealand contribution to a

global solution could be pioneering a new approach to climate change decision-making that transcends the ineffectiveness of adversarial politics.

EDUCATION

Essential to the acceptance and success of any deep plan will be truthful unvarnished education about the global warming/ climate crisis: understanding, current evidence, and outlook to the future.

Members of Parliament

In a United Parliament all current and new MPs would be comprehensively educated on global warming and the prospects for the future, so they can accompany knowledgeably and support the processes of debate and decision in parliament. They are our elected representatives, the interactive link between government and their electorates. They must be equipped to develop a good relationship with their electorates and have the confidence to represent the government's global warming policies and decisions.

This will help create public confidence that the intention of parliamentary unity is being modelled centrally and working, and that the working together of the whole country, citizens and parliament, is respected, sought, and can be fairly expected of all.

The Country

A comprehensive, thorough, ongoing process of education on Global Warming across the whole country is important for achieving understanding of and support for the difficult, sometimes radical decisions parliament will have to take. If hard responses are to be accepted there is no room for easy half-truths or unsupported palliatives of hope. In this crisis hope is only reasonable if every possible action is being taken to justify it.

As effects of global warming become ever more diverse and critical, the deteriorating physical, emotional, economic and social consequences for people will put the fragile structures of society's agreements in jeopardy. Without a successful process of consciousness-raising many citizens, perhaps the majority, may reject the life changes that realistic government strategies and strictures will require. That would sabotage any global warming response plans however good they are.

SOCIAL

Citizens will long for a unified response to global warming that they can put their hopes in and support. If our political leaders work as allies

towards an agreed strategy it will release the public from the confusion and insecurity of competing party platforms. Without the sense of allegiance to 'their' party citizens will be free to engage as they will, contributing ideas into parliament's processes, working with councils and like-minded action groups etc.

If this confidence is not built there is a risk that society could fracture dangerously through fear, uncertainty of essential and lifestyle resources, economic collapse, and inability to cope with rapid forced change. There is even a potential danger that uprising could develop so powerful that that the covid mandate protest at parliament would be like a candle flame to an inferno.

Only a United Parliament could hold the country to a common orientation. Its form would mean that its decisions are endorsed by parliament as a whole, encouraging confidence.

The power of unity, strength, clarity, efficiency, informed policies, programmes and actions, all with ears out and respect for wisdom, would make citizens' hope justifiable. The experience of parliament itself modelling and practising unity would promote trust, helping the country manage its fears and anxieties, and respect the decisions of government.

The government will ask citizens to take actions and accept to do our utmost to check and ultimately reverse global warming. Some measures will be very difficult and painful to accept. They will not be passing nor specific like the Covid restrictions. Doubtless there would be resistance from some quarters against them and people will need to be persuaded to accept them because they are right.

ELECTORATE ROLES OF MPs

As the conduit between parliament and the electorate MPs' roles would include to: _

- Engage actively with their electorates to deepen peoples' understanding of Global Warming.
- Engage with people about government's reasoning, planning and programmes, reinforcing that global warming is the cause of climate change, that climate changes are the effects.
- Reinforce the message that global warming does not recognise any country's borders and although New Zealand might be relatively favoured in the short term(!!), we will share the calamity and suffering of the whole planet.
- Help to overcome public inertia and counter scepticism such as: 'What's the point, we are a tiny country insignificant in our contribution of greenhouse gases.'

- Work to overcome the temptation to limit our concern and resources to New Zealand's own huge adaptation challenges.
- Be in active communication and co-operative working with local councils, citizen groups and individuals, and a resource for links to government.
- Action the two-way process through which the 'mood', major concerns and ideas of the electorate can be reflected to parliament.
- Hold, act on and express the moral obligation of New Zealand and New Zealanders to do everything possible to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

- Facilitate recognition that:
 - The prime agents of global warming flow from technological developments, practices and decisions made by people in the west.
 - Although individuals may not be primarily responsible for these factors, society at large has been inadvertently and even wilfully complicit through its creation, adoption and enjoyment of their fruits.
 - The effects are visited as or more powerfully on other countries who have less or very little responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions, yet have fewer resources to handle global warming.
 - Being a privileged country New Zealand has a responsibility to exceed our own targets in order to help take up the slack of less able countries.
 - We have a duty to help scientific and practical work on handling the huge greenhouse gas release from phenomena beyond any particular country's control, such as melting tundra and wildfires.
 - However advantaged New Zealand might be in the short term compared to other countries, as conditions deteriorate the more of a prize we may become to other countries or elites with greater power.

PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR A UNITED PARLIAMENT

The degree of public support will depend on many elements including:

- Clear evidence from the beginning that all parties are committed to this new United Parliament form for taking on global warming.
- Their confidence in the unity of their political representatives in the processes required and the decisions made.
- The United Parliament's co-operation and efficiency in developing plans for its own agreements, structures and processes for its new tasks, and for its relations with the public.
- Government carrying the country with them through the strategies they make and the actions they take.

- A sense that parliamentarians are truly their representatives, in active communication with their electorates, and understand and share their concerns as human beings.
- Confidence that their representatives personally support the decisions of parliament.
- Government recognition that valuable ideas can arise in any individual and can be communicated to a suitable body.
- Encouragement and freedom to participate in the process through engaging with the United Parliament and local MP initiatives, and encouragement to work with local councils, citizen groups, etc.

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT MOVING TO A UNITED PARLIAMENT

- Continuation of weak decision-making. Government avoids necessary boldness for fear of losing way with the electorate, to the advantage of the Opposition.
- Unreal, unactioned promises made for political ends. The Opposition attacks Government decisions as a matter of course.
- Postponement of doing now what is necessary and possible. Leaving it to the future.
- Only a few MPs are fully knowledgeable, engaged, and carry responsibility for the issue in the ways explained above.
- Planned, comprehensive education of both MPs and the public is unlikely.
- A lack of cohesion, confidence, communication and public participation.
- MPs carry their own party's perspective into their electorates instead of the unified voice of the United Parliament.
- Disagreement damages the public's confidence, support and hope.
- Without the government modelling and practising unity, society fragments through fear, uncertainty of essential and lifestyle resources, economic collapse, inability to cope with rapid forced change.
- Social breakdown may become endemic.

CONCLUSION

For a country as well-resourced and nimble as ours an 'early adopter' ethos would be a failure. A thoughtfully constructed United Parliament is a realistic proposition for tackling global warming and of course limiting the inevitable intensification of crippling, unmanageable climate change disasters.

New Zealand could pioneer new technologies and concepts of civic, community and environmental structures to reduce global warming

emissions. Our creative scientists could participate in finding strategies to respond to the vast fatal, unstoppable consequences and further agents of global warming such as the melting of ice sheets and tundra.

If this example of recasting democratic government was to have an influence across the globe perhaps a new confidence might arise that we could actually achieve a sense of brotherhood, co-operation and powerful action across the world's nations.

This could start the necessary international co-working that might replace the failures of COP meetings with hope and united, committed action.

TOO FAR-FETCHED TO PURSUE?

If the rationale of this paper is true and a United Parliament could be beneficial in the ways identified then it has to be landed on the ground. If it is true it will speak to people.

Politicians themselves will become ever more nervous and vulnerable carrying the responsibility for dealing with a catastrophe that is expanding before their eyes and besets the whole country. They may come to recognise the advantages of a United Parliament both in bringing every possible resource to the task and knowing that their experience of burden is shared with every member of the parliamentary body.

The first hope is that this United Parliament concept draws some people towards it who are moved to engage with it, develop it, and introduce it into the public arena so that it begins to resonate with people who are becoming ever more alarmed at the rapidly unfolding global warming/climate disaster.

That is the purpose of this paper.

['United Parliament' may not be the best name for this new form. It is clear about what is being sought over global warming but there is a possibility of it being none-the-less misunderstood to mean the working of government across all its functions, which is not intended. Nor that it is the name of a new political party.]

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Postscript: In the event that this concept is introduced well and received well I have the broad outline of a new form of wide-reaching petition through which major citizen support for a United Parliament might be quite quickly gathered.