
Don't wait - act

The Climate Change Commission, He Pou a Rangī, provides independent, evidenced-based advice to Government on climate action. Its purpose is to guide Aotearoa New Zealand to change in ways that will help address the global problem of Climate Change.



—
Dr Rod Carr.

What's a key statistic worth sharing?

For the first time in the past 300 million years, in the history of the world as we know it (with dinosaurs and trees), the temperature of the planet's surface is forecast to exceed plus two degrees by the end of this century, compared with pre-industrial levels. We have not been here before. It's not just the level of CO2 in the air, but the speed at which it's rising. Species are becoming extinct because they cannot adapt given the speed of change.

What's your top message?

There is hope. We have socially acceptable and economically affordable technologies available now that could decarbonise our society, if we chose to act. The longer we wait, the harder it will be to create change and greater the uncertainty as to whether we can do it at all.

We all need to take responsibility and stop waiting for something else to happen or someone else to act. Every individual, family, business, industry and nation must look at their ways of living, supply chains, business processes and see what they can change – now. Don't wait for governments to act, or new technologies to become available.

What are three myths you'd like to bust?

That we're so small it doesn't matter. There are over 100 countries in the world who have emissions at the same level or less than Aotearoa New Zealand. Together these countries make up 20 per cent of the world's emissions. We do matter.

Another excuse is that we feed the world. We don't. Our meat and milk has been estimated to provide protein that feeds 40 million people, whereas the world population is eight billion. And we feed the richer people – not the hungry. Our business strategy is to deliver upmarket meat and dairy products. Half our emissions come from agriculture and we need to reduce the environmental impact of the food we produce and export

The third point is that we've made some legitimate choices as a sovereign nation, but we need to recognise their climate impact. We choose not to dam flowing rivers or to have genetically modified animal feed, and not to use nuclear power. However, we also choose to buy polluting vehicles and use them a lot. We have to care about the emissions caused by our choices.

Tell us the key opportunities to fight climate change?

We can and should be at the forefront of initiatives to reduce emissions from agriculture. We can contribute to and will benefit the most from sharing technology with other nations.

We need sustainable aviation technologies. We are a long way from the rest of the world, and we have to be able to keep our planes in the air without ruining the planet for market access, business, cultural, educational and family reasons.

Iwi/Māori communities and te ao Māori world views are unique to Aotearoa, and our equitable and just transition to a low emissions and climate resilient future will not happen without partnership with Māori. Philanthropy is well situated to partner with Iwi and Māori, to work together to develop a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges posed by climate change on Māori people and communities. This would help to direct support to the benefit of everyone.

“There is huge wealth being generated very quickly, and a growing feeling that these new wealth holders are obliged to give back.”

What is the role of philanthropy?

Globally, philanthropy is playing a significant and growing role in fighting climate change. There is huge wealth being generated very quickly, and a growing feeling that these new wealth holders are obliged to give back. On the other hand, the largest transfer of wealth occurs intergenerationally with older money, and those inheriting that wealth are often looking to do good with that money.

Can you point to some areas philanthropy and grantmakers could look at?

Given we need everyone to change, from households through to businesses, how do we motivate people to adapt; and support new technologies to thrive; or adapt what's working overseas to the NZ context?

We have to decarbonise ground transportation. There's an opportunity to support low income families to get the benefits of low emission cars which are cheaper to run. However, they have an upfront cost that is more expensive than other cars.

It's similar with housing. There's an upfront cost of sufficiently insulated housing, but many long term health and environmental benefits, as well as being cheaper to heat. However, we have tenants who can't make this change because their landlords can't see the benefits, for example tenant health, lower emissions, and higher rent for their investment.

There are models that will support philanthropic intervention where the benefits are locked in for the tenants, but the landlords aren't motivated to make the necessary intermediate changes. There are many options for renewable energy (wind power or solar energy) for local communities. So, there's an opportunity for philanthropy to support new business models and new ways of working, as well as financial support for low-income households to access the benefits of lower emission vehicles, homes and energy.

Planting native trees for carbon sequestration rather than exotic forests is another opportunity. Exotic forests are faster growing and therefore generate better economic returns. However, philanthropy can support native planting as they don't need the quick market return.

Pest reduction to protect carbon stored in forests is also extremely worthwhile.

What are some good examples of philanthropy making a difference?

Trees that Count is an example that comes to mind as well as the contribution funders make to cross-sector initiatives like the Aotearoa Circle. I am also aware philanthropy and grantmakers are backing predator-free initiatives. I'd like to acknowledge the growing difference philanthropy and grantmakers are making.

I'd also like to acknowledge the integral position iwi Māori communities hold in supporting an inclusive and equitable transition to a low-emission future. The principles of kaitiakitanga are firmly rooted in te ao Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and must be reflected at all levels of decision making to achieve reductions in our gross emissions in Aotearoa.

What's the next step?

Within the next two years we need to have created a momentum for change that we don't have now. In ten years, we need to have locked in an observable and significant downward trend of emissions. Otherwise we will be very challenged on how to live with global warming in the second half of the century.

The opportunities to focus on low income people in the transition are there. There are huge investment opportunities that will generate returns as well as creating a better world. How philanthropy earns and divests its money allows multiple ways to contribute. Every dollar invested or given can be looked at through the lens of a changing climate. Develop a strategy, write a plan and make a difference, now.

“There are huge investment opportunities that will generate returns as well as creating a better world.”

Philanthropy New Zealand Communications and Marketing Advisor Courtney Ellingham Prebble interviewed the commission's Chair, Dr Rod Carr.