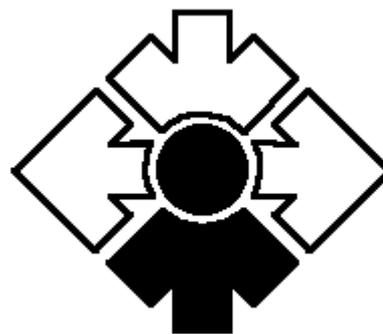


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Scientists point to serious flaws in Government public consultation on climate change

The New Zealand Association of Scientists (NZAS) has concerns about serious flaws in the Government's recent public consultation on climate change.

"Climate change will have a profound influence on New Zealanders, and there are many complex issues that need to be dealt with" says Dr Nicola Gaston, President of NZAS.

"Yet, there is a marked lack of publicly available information and analysis which would help New Zealanders decide on the best course of action."

The hurried consultation process was intended to help the Government determine a negotiating position in the United Nations' coming Paris meeting on climate change, in December this year. This meeting is widely seen as one of the last chances for a global agreement to be reached on limiting greenhouse gas emissions, to prevent more than 2°C of global warming since pre-industrial times.

The NZAS is concerned about the lack of publicly available relevant information, as well as the minimal involvement of key New Zealand scientific institutions, such as Crown Research Institutes (CRIs) and Universities.

The short timeframe for the consultation is also problematic, spanning less than 4 weeks. Hon. Tim Groser announced public consultation on 7th May. MfE's public discussion document was published in May and public submissions closed on 3rd June. In addition, Dr Gaston says in the Association's submission that "the key Landcare Research Report was only released on the 25th May, just before the last public meeting, and other relevant reports were only made available after 8 of the 12 public meetings or hui."

The general lack of engagement by CRIs and Universities in the consultation process may reflect concerns previously raised by the Association about conflicts of interest in the scientific community, as a result of the Government's policy of mainly funding scientific research that has a direct application in industry or government.

The CRIs play a critical role in advising the government on climate change issues, and are dependent on millions of dollars in year-to-year contracts as a result.

Therefore, it makes sense the CRIs are reluctant to critically comment on Government policy when the result may negatively impact Government science funding decisions. These concerns were widely echoed by the scientific community in a survey conducted by the Association last year.

The New Zealand Association of Scientists (www.scientists.org.nz) is a nationwide association of practising research scientists spanning the universities, technical institutes, Crown Research Institutes, government departments, industry, museums, other science institutions, and independent researchers.

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