

Submissions on this were allowed only through a Survey Monkey portal.
The following shows the Q&A format and KiC's responses on each.

CONTEXT

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade is undertaking its triennial Strategic Foreign Policy Assessment. The Assessment will examine the international context New Zealand will navigate in the decade to 2036, and what this means for us.

The Assessment will consider:

- the most important changes and drivers we see happening in the world
- what those changes mean for our relationships
- what they mean for our region — the Pacific and the Indo-Pacific
- what they mean for New Zealand

The Assessment assumes that New Zealand has a set of enduring interests:

- A safer, more prosperous and more sustainable future for New Zealanders achieved via:
- a rules-based international system that supports New Zealand priorities
- a security environment that keeps New Zealand people and activities safe
- conditions and connections that enable New Zealanders to prosper
- global action on issues that matter to New Zealand

We invite submissions from members of the New Zealand public to inform our Strategic Assessment. Submissions should address any or all of the questions below. Please provide any feedback by 5pm 24 December 2025

SUBMISSIONS

What are the big international issues you think New Zealand will have to navigate over the next 10 years, and what are the opportunities you think New Zealand can pursue?

KiC Response

Climate change is the most significant international issue facing Aotearoa. Despite progress in reducing emissions, global average temperature rise will very likely exceed the 1.5°C limit within the next decade (UNEP Emissions Gap Report, 2025). Every fraction of a degree increases impacts, including more intense flooding, stronger cyclones, more frequent fires and droughts – destroying livelihoods, causing mass displacement, loss of life, increased conflict, trade disruption and security threats for billions of people worldwide – and disproportionately affecting already vulnerable and marginalised communities.

In Aotearoa, climate change impacts are already hitting hard. For example, the Auckland Anniversary Day floods, and Cyclone Gabrielle, caused significant harm to affected communities, and an estimated \$9-\$14.5 billion in damage. New Zealand is ill-equipped to face the burdens of climate breakdown beyond the 1.5°C limit.

The physical reality of worsening climate impacts will also have profound implications for diplomacy. Tensions already existing in the UNFCCC process may further intensify as climate impacts accelerate, mitigation lags, and climate finance continues to fall short of developing countries' adaptation needs (UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2025). These strains will spill into wider international engagement.

It will be challenging for New Zealand to navigate these dynamics, given the growing risk of non-compliance with our international commitments. The systemic repeal of domestic climate policies, including weakening our methane target, reversing the offshore oil and gas ban, coupled with statements ruling out purchasing international offsets, casts doubt on New Zealand's ability to meet our NDC. Repealing climate policies without credible alternatives creates a compelling case that New Zealand is not meeting the international standard of due diligence to pursue domestic mitigation measures to achieve the objectives of our NDC (see ICJ Advisory Opinion on Climate Change).

Non-compliance with our international commitments will have consequences. First, we are likely to face heightened criticism internationally, including as part of any consideration by the Compliance Committee of a systemic issue. Vanuatu and Palau have already called out New Zealand for reversing the ban on offshore oil and gas exploration. This will diminish our diplomatic credibility.

Secondly, we lose the trust of the international community more broadly, as our word can no longer be relied on. This weakens the rules-based international system that underpins New Zealand's security and prosperity, by providing excuses for other countries to pick and choose which rules to comply with. It further diminishes our influence, and is likely to harm our campaign for a seat on the Security Council for the 2039-40 term as a voice for small states, as our voice is not reliable.

Thirdly, we are likely to breach existing trade obligations where compliance with the Paris Agreement is required, facing the risk of trade sanctions.

Lastly, New Zealand’s non-compliance risks emboldening other countries to weaken or abandon their own climate commitments. As one example, the weakening of our methane target sets a dangerous precedent that other agricultural countries, for example Ireland, may follow. This will increase warming and accelerate overshooting the 1.5°C limit.

What do you consider New Zealand’s foreign policy needs to do to protect and advance our interests in the world over the next 10 years?

KiC Response

Aotearoa’s foreign policy should integrate and prioritise climate change action across all areas, including trade, environmental protection, peace and security, and human rights. Even with increased global effort to implement climate change obligations, warming that is already locked into the atmosphere will cause severe global and domestic impacts. Our foreign policy should therefore recognise this reality, and be part of supporting increased global efforts to address climate change in all of our work.

This is important in the current context, where multilateralism is under increasing threat, particularly from isolationist, populist regimes. The breakdown of the ‘rules-based’ international order and its underlying multilateral architecture could have particularly significant adverse impacts on a small, trade-exposed nation such as Aotearoa. Over the last five years, the international climate regime has become a battleground for competing visions of multilateralism. New Zealand must reprioritise demonstrating its independent foreign policy in these fora to help protect the multilateral mechanisms that our security and trade interests depend on.

In embedding climate change across our foreign policy, Aotearoa should engage based on our interests, values and national circumstances, rather than defaulting to alignment with ‘likeminded partners,’ which has often characterised our climate diplomacy. MFAT’s 2023 public consultation on New Zealand’s UNFCCC mandate highlighted a clear expectation that New Zealand should demonstrate climate leadership.

Climate leadership should not include applying pressure on large emitters to maintain our reputation as a “good international citizen,” as suggested in “Navigating a shifting world Te whakatere I tētahi ao hurihuri.” This framing overlooks New Zealand’s high per-capita emissions, and capacity to act domestically. It also reinforces narratives that undermine core principles of the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement, particularly equity, common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities in the light of different national circumstances, and the obligation of developed country Party leadership in combating climate change. Rather, leadership is more credibly demonstrated through leading by doing.

Our foreign policy should also reflect Aotearoa’s constitutional foundations in Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and meaningfully integrate Te Ao Māori across all international engagement and policy. As recognised in “Navigating a shifting world Te whakatere Itētahi ao hurihuri,” a vibrant Te Ao Māori within foreign affairs

strengthens New Zealand's influence. The rights of Indigenous Peoples are also explicitly recognised in the UNFCCC processes.

In its Ko Aotearoa Tēnei (Wai 262) Report, the Waitangi Tribunal considered that engagement with Māori on New Zealand's international affairs should go beyond consultation where appropriate, and extend to securing Māori agreement, or delegating the voice of the Crown to Māori in international negotiations if the nature of the interest is central to Māori.

Climate change will have disproportionate health related impacts on Māori, present risks to Māori capital, enterprise and employment, and fundamentally alter the way Māori interact with the environment, each other, and other communities (He huringa āhuarangi, he huringa ao: a changing climate, a changing world, Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research for Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga, 2021). Accordingly, Te Ao Māori should be strengthened in the forthcoming Strategic Foreign Policy Assessment.

For you, your community, organisation or business: What matters most in the world beyond New Zealand? What places and international relationships matter most? What do you think are New Zealand's greatest strengths and weaknesses in our international engagement?

KiC Response

Deepening Aotearoa New Zealand's relationship with Pacific Small Island Developing States should be our most important priority, recognising our whanaungatanga connections, geographic proximity and shared histories.

For countries in the Pacific, climate impacts are already causing devastation, undermining development gains, driving internal displacement and, for some, threatening the long-term viability of the state itself. As these impacts escalate, existing geopolitical tensions and competition for influence in the region will intensify. Cross-border displacement linked to climate change will further compound development challenges and geopolitical pressures. Aotearoa should be actively engaged in the face of shifting complexities. Ensuring our relationships are meaningful is essential to navigate these challenges, and maintaining the trust of the Pacific as a valued partner.

Meeting development cooperation and climate finance commitments is an essential part of this, and deepening the nature of our relationship. New Zealand should reverse recent cuts to our development support, and go further to increase our financial support to meet our climate finance obligations under international law. We should also increase our diplomatic effort to support systematic change, for example actively engaging in reform of the global financial architecture to increase access for Pacific countries.

In addition to providing development assistance and climate finance, Aotearoa should more actively align policy objectives in the climate change negotiations. Actively supporting issues identified by Pacific countries will deepen our understanding, strengthen our relationships, and contribute to an international policy framework that genuinely supports Pacific resilience and leadership.

It is also important we continue to maintain our strong relationship with Australia, and deepen our relationships with the wider Indo-Pacific region, China and the EU, noting the importance of trade, including in relation to electrification; and recognising the need to work with countries committed to multilateralism and the Paris Agreement.

Our greatest weakness is not only our lack of leadership on climate change, but the likelihood of non-compliance with international obligations as discussed above.

One of our greatest strengths is our skill and capacity to engage constructively in global affairs, coupled with our unique situation in the Pacific and commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (see above).

Aotearoa has a highly skilled, professional diplomatic service that is able to engage effectively in multilateral negotiations. These skills should be deployed at greater scale and depth to support more progressive environmental governance and climate change outcomes. It is in our national self-interest to avert catastrophic climate collapse and for global cooperation to be effective. International diplomacy can be derailed at times because of unclear processes, technical misunderstandings, lack of trust, capacity constraints, as well as language and cultural barriers. Skilled diplomats, with meaningful relationships, and a deep understanding of geopolitical context and issues play a critical role in helping countries reach consensus. New Zealand should significantly increase its diplomatic engagement, focussed on climate change across all areas of international policy.

Do you have any other thoughts on the international context you would like the team to consider?

KiC Response

The ongoing and pervasive influence of the fossil fuel industry on the climate negotiations, and climate law and policy more broadly, is a critical part of the international context. Phasing out fossil fuels is essential to achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement, and limiting overshoot of the 1.5°C limit . Yet, fossil fuel lobbyists continue to deploy disinformation to frame fossil fuels as indispensable for energy security and affordability, advancing corporate interests while undermining global efforts to address the climate crisis. New Zealand has an opportunity to gain credibility by supporting efforts to develop a formal conflict of interest policy in the UNFCCC, built on the models that already exist in other UN entities.

This dynamic is also evident in Aotearoa New Zealand. For example, fossil fuel companies were given access to confidential briefings prior to Ministerial decisions, in relation to overturning the ban on offshore oil and gas exploration and decommissioning liability. New Zealand's failure to recognise and counter the sophisticated role of the fossil fuel industry in weakening domestic and international climate change law and policy undermines our credibility among countries advocating for evidence-based solutions to limit temperature rise. It also decreases the likelihood of international consensus for increased action to phase out fossil fuels.

These dynamics already risk compromising our access to key international partners. For example, New Zealand left the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (on threat of being ejected) shortly after the Alliance announced a formal partnership with the European Union.

Additionally, energy security is a critical issue for the next decade. It is paramount that we increase independence from foreign supplied fossil fuels through increased renewable electricity. Our trade policy must also be informed by the international context that responds to the Paris Agreement, and innovation to reduce emissions. As another example, cellular agriculture and precision fermentation will take larger roles in the global food supply. Given agriculture is one of New Zealand's primary industries, these developments are critical to enabling innovation domestically, and ensure ongoing trade opportunities.

Finally, the international context for climate law and policy is not always well understood among politicians, other government agencies, the media, industry and the public. For example, domestic debate often focuses narrowly on New Zealand's total emissions, rather than on our high per-capita emissions, our obligation to lead on climate action, and our responsibility to provide climate finance to developing countries, as noted above. Many countries are making substantially greater efforts than us: New Zealand is currently ranked 47th out of 63 countries in the Climate Change Performance Index. MFAT is well placed to lead efforts to build capacity across government and society on the principles of the international climate regime, including the Paris Agreement and the ICJ Advisory Opinion on climate change.

