

THE KiC CALL

A climate policy focus
for the 2026 election

Kiwis in Climate

A global network of New Zealand climate and sustainability professionals

Introduction

Kiwis in Climate is a fast-growing community of over 400 New Zealanders working in climate and related fields, amplifying our collective impact from Aotearoa to the world.

We are non-partisan, and bring together expertise from across our network to cultivate science-backed solutions to help tackle climate change and live within our planetary boundaries.

Our three calls

We want to amplify the policies we see as the most effective ways to tackle both climate change and the cost of living. This election, we call on political candidates to commit to cross-partisan climate policy, build climate resilience and prioritise electrification. These are pragmatic policies which are deliverable in the short term, while having long term impact.

While Aotearoa New Zealand is small, we have a responsibility and impact - nations that emit less than or about 1% of global emission combine to make up 30% of global emissions. NZ should play its part, and work to support our Pacific neighbours who experience outsized climate impacts. The next government will determine whether we make real efforts to meet our climate commitments.

These policy calls have been developed in consultation with Kiwis in Climate membership and represent a collective vision. They were selected because we see them as impactful and actionable over the next parliamentary term.

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#1 Progress cross-partisan climate policy

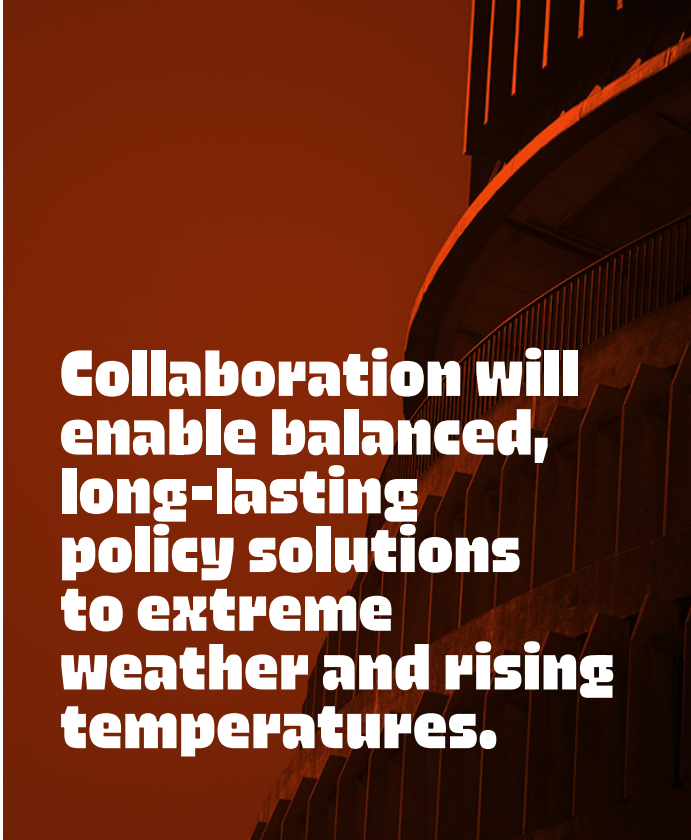
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We encourage all political parties and incoming Members of Parliament to:

Create a parliamentary cross-party climate group. Resource this group to do work that can be used by all parties, like the report on long-term low emissions pathway produced during the 51st parliament.

Strengthen climate governance, such as cross-party select committee investigations, review of legislation through a climate lens and cross-departmental coordination mechanisms for climate.

Better resource existing climate architecture e.g., the New Zealand Climate Change Commission to gain an independent revenue stream through an enhanced Emissions Trading Scheme.



Collaboration will enable balanced, long-lasting policy solutions to extreme weather and rising temperatures.

Photo: altfullstop@unsplash

Context

The majority of New Zealanders want more action from governments on climate¹. They see opportunity in clean energy jobs, reconnecting with nature and protecting future generations. Kiwis are concerned² with 21 local states of emergency this year (compared to one in 2008), rising food prices and \$55 million a day being spent on importing fossil fuels. Many realise that acting on climate and forward-planning will save costs in the long run.

Yet in recent years, politicians have reversed, delayed or defunded climate action. Most disappointedly, politicians have moved away from the cross-party era of 2019 and have failed to listen to independent, expert advice. Climate action has unnecessarily become a political rugby ball.

¹ Public attitudes to the Climate Crisis and the transition to Net Zero. Ipsos, April 2025 <https://tinyurl.com/3ubv6a6t>

² IAG (2026) NZ Climate change poll <https://tinyurl.com/5n6htj4u>

#1 Progress cross-partisan climate policy

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Benefits

While approaches may differ, New Zealand politicians should realise that we're all on the same team when it comes to the threat of climate change. **Collaboration will enable balanced, long-lasting policy solutions to extreme weather and rising temperatures.** Kiwis in Climate endorses Minister Watts' intention to take a cross-partisan, long-term approach to build climate resilience. Seeking cross-party solutions also embeds a stable, evidence-based policy direction on climate that the public can trust, and that businesses can align activities and investments with.

From business, we are seeing a keen interest for the return of cross-partisan approaches and keeping institutions in place. Climate change is a complex challenge that requires long-term planning. Businesses, local government, and communities require stability and certainty to fund and produce meaningful initiatives. Cross-partisan work on climate policy can help ensure policy that is forward-looking, and more stable over time. The recent Climate Leaders Coalition report, from 140 businesses representing 42% of private GDP states their number one priority as 'maintaining New Zealand's climate change response architecture to provide long-term investment certainty'.

Seeking outside input can also remove the potential for flip-flopping and create an enduring path.

Implementation

One tangible way to boost climate collaboration is through **the re-establishment of a cross-party climate group in Parliament.** From 2015 - 2023, at least 35 MPs across several parties formed a cross-party dialogue on climate change called GLOBE-NZ. They commissioned joint reports and as Kennedy Graham MP put it, 'went some way in bridging an entrenched divide between two major blocs in Parliament'. Kiwis in Climate, an organisation with over 400 sustainability professionals, is calling for a cross-party working group to be reinstated this election.

Ways to implement cross-partisan climate policy, beyond a Parliamentary working group, include: joint investigations at select committees, cross-sponsored members bills and consultation from Ministers across the political aisle. Finally, cross-departmental coordination ensures strong sectoral pathways in the transition.

As with any complex challenge, progressing good climate policy means balancing multiple considerations and making tradeoffs, it's important that Members of Parliament have independent advisors that they can rely on for rigorous, high quality advice. Seeking outside input through mechanisms like the Climate Change Commission, business groups, and citizen assemblies can also remove the potential for flip-flopping and create an enduring path. Better resourcing the NZ Climate Commission could also help build an enduring approach providing certainty for NZ businesses and households.

#2 Build community resilience

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We encourage all political parties and incoming Members of Parliament to:

Clear the way for local government to get on with adaptation. Remove the liability risk for councils making hard decisions in good faith, align adaptation, resource management and emergency management law, and give practical guidance on delivery. Be clear about what national initiatives such as the national flood model will deliver and when, and set out the funding routes for the work.

Progress climate adaptation policy, including tackling tricky issues such as cost-sharing and managed retreat. Continued cross-party collaboration will provide policy certainty.

Prioritise nature-based solutions for building resilience by preferring these solutions in adaptation legislation, regulation, and Government Policy Statements; as well as using these approaches, where appropriate, for any adaptation undertaken by central government. Consider reforming the NZ ETS to phase out forestry offsets for fossil fuel emissions.

Develop a national climate and landscape infrastructure resilience plan.

Context

While policy work on climate adaptation has been under way for years, there has been little progress on difficult but important decisions. Meanwhile, New Zealand is experiencing more and more severe weather events, with a record number of emergencies declared this year.

This has an effect on the cost of living: recovery from these disasters is expensive and the impact on farming and crops affects food prices. In the last 5 years, dwelling insurance has increased 61.6 per cent, and Cyclone Gabrielle and the Anniversary Floods in 2023 cost \$9-14 billion according to the Treasury. The most vulnerable communities in New Zealand are suffering the most, as we can see in Westport³ and Northland⁴.

In the last term of government, the Ministry for the Environment established an Independent Reference Group to support development of policy advice for a national adaptation framework. They made recommendations relating to four pillars:

- Natural hazard and risk information
- Decision-making
- Crown investment in risk reduction
- Financial assistance for residential property owners

The government responded in October 2025, announcing 16 actions relating to the four pillars used

³ Responding to a changing climate in Westport. Climate Change Commission, 2025 - <https://tinyurl.com/53j6ayex>

⁴ Responding to a changing climate in Te Taitokerau/Northland. Climate Change Commission, 2025 - <https://tinyurl.com/y396ts5b>

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by the Independent Reference Group. Their response highlighted cross-party work to establish an enduring, long-term approach to adaptation. They included proposed legislation to clarify the responsibilities of local government by requiring adaptation plans in the highest priority risk areas, and a bill amending the Climate Change Response Act has been introduced to make these changes. The response refers to a transition away from central government buyouts, but it doesn't confirm the 20-year period recommended by the Independent Reference Group, and decisions about cost sharing have been deferred until after the election. It's evident that some important decisions are yet to be made, and that with increasing climate impacts, time is of the essence.



Photo: NZ Herald / Dawson Bliss

Benefits

If we plan now, we can save over \$10 for every \$1 spent⁵, and protect lives and livelihoods. There is considerable uncertainty around how the impacts of climate change will play out, so rather than letting this slow progress, we must move forward and where possible use approaches that are robust to a range of climate outcomes. Kiwis in Climate support Minister Watts' intention to take a cross-partisan, long-term approach to this work.

Implementation

We encourage the next government to build on a long-term, cross partisan approach by **prioritising progressing the Climate Change Response Amendment Bill**, ensuring a **robust select committee consultation process**, and **continuing to tackle difficult decisions** around cost sharing and managed retreat, for example considering proposals for an expanded role for the Natural Hazards Commission.

Legislation and guidance should be geared towards building resilience, rather than just managing acute risks, and consider cascading impacts, where damage to one piece of infrastructure has further effects.

A positive, tangible action the next government can take to build resilience to the impacts of climate change is **prioritising nature-based solutions** such as restoration of indigenous forests and wetlands. Protecting these ecosystems reduces soil erosion and mitigates flood risk, as well as supporting carbon sequestration and protecting our unique native biodiversity.

Nature underpins New Zealand's livelihoods, and should

⁵ Climate Adaptation Investments Yield Massive Returns, World Research Institute, 2025 <https://tinyurl.com/bdf54fjh>

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be viewed as essential infrastructure that we invest in now to reduce cost later.

We support the proposal by NZ charity Pure Advantage to create a national climate and landscape infrastructure resilience plan. Current NZ ETS settings favour pine, increasing climate risk by exacerbating soil erosion and flooding, as well as increasing fire risk. Kiwis in Climate recommends that the next government consider the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment's recommendation to phase out forestry offsets for fossil fuel emissions.

At the moment, councils are caught in a situation where they are exposed if they act on hazard information, and exposed if they don't. **Removing liability risk**, while still requiring due diligence from decision-makers, would allow councils to progress climate adaptation.

Councils are also having to deal with changes to resource management and emergency management legislation alongside updates for climate adaptation. The incoming government should **ensure there is one consistent set of rules** as a result of these changes, and that councils receive **practical guidance** on how to do the adaptation work. Many councils are holding off on acting while they wait for the outcome of national initiatives like the National Flood Map. Providing more clarity on what will be delivered and when would enable councils to progress adaptation work.

Finally, with an estimated cost of \$0.825m to \$5.12m per adaptation plan, **local government must have adequate funding to do this work**, whether through rates or through central government funding.

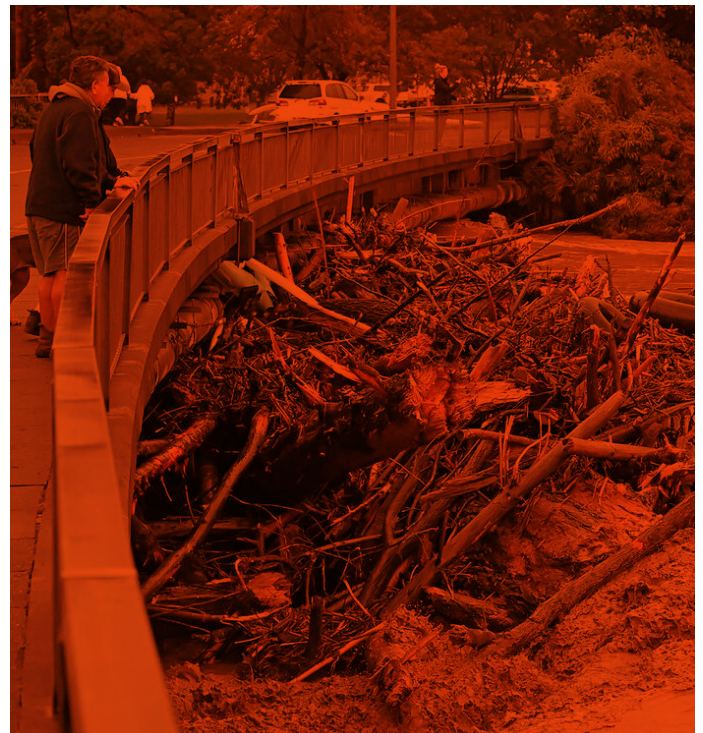


Photo: NZ Herald / Paul Rickard

The incoming government should ensure there is one consistent set of rules, and that councils receive practical guidance on how to do the adaptation work.

#3 Electrify Aotearoa

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We encourage parties to commit to moving away from fossil fuels and supporting clean, affordable, local energy by:

Developing a long-term electrification strategy which covers homes, industry, and transport.

Making electrification the easiest and cheapest choice by using incentives and subsidies and making information and advice available to consumers.

Making Aotearoa NZ a world leader in energy innovation.

Accelerating EV uptake alongside incentivising mode shift to public and active transport.

Benefits

Supporting electrification makes the most of Aotearoa New Zealand's natural advantage, with our abundant hydro, solar and geothermal resources, and reduces our reliance on foreign supply, which can be impacted by factors outside of our control.

We can build a future where billions of dollars in fossil fuels no longer need to be imported, instead saving billions every year with New Zealand-generated electricity flowing through the grid and powering our technology.

An electrified country enables homes, businesses, farms and industries to save money, while also reducing emissions. Electrifying Aotearoa's buildings, infrastructure, and fleet will also result in cleaner air and reduce preventable deaths from the pollution caused by burning fossil fuels. Increasing energy efficiency of buildings and machinery supports cost-savings.

The next government could support innovation to make New Zealand a world leader in electrification.

#3 Electrify Aotearoa

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Implementation

While the benefits are clear, there are barriers to unlocking them. Kiwis in Climate supports Rewiring Aotearoa's approach and recommendations. In particular, we endorse **developing a long-term electrification** strategy. There are a range of existing initiatives that support electrification, including MBIE's review of permitted voltage range, EECA's information sharing and co-funding, and the Electricity Authority's work to protect consumer interests. An overarching strategy with cross-party support could coordinate initiatives across government and provide certainty for investment.

A strategy would set a clear direction, introduce policies to make it easier and cheaper for New Zealanders to switch to electric options, and ensure that electrification policy is aligned with other national priorities. This strategy could set expectations for regulators, distributors, councils and retailers, to facilitate progress.

While being cheaper in the long run, switching to electric options such as solar panels, batteries and electric machines can have a high initial cost. We endorse **Rewiring Aotearoa's recommendation to help New Zealanders with the upfront cost** by introducing the Ratepayer Assistance Scheme developed by Local Government New Zealand. This would provide access to low-interest loans which households could pay off using the savings on bills, or when the property is sold.

Switching to EVs should be done in conjunction with **improving options** for walking, cycling and public transport. Finally, the next government could **support innovation** to make New Zealand a world leader in electrification.

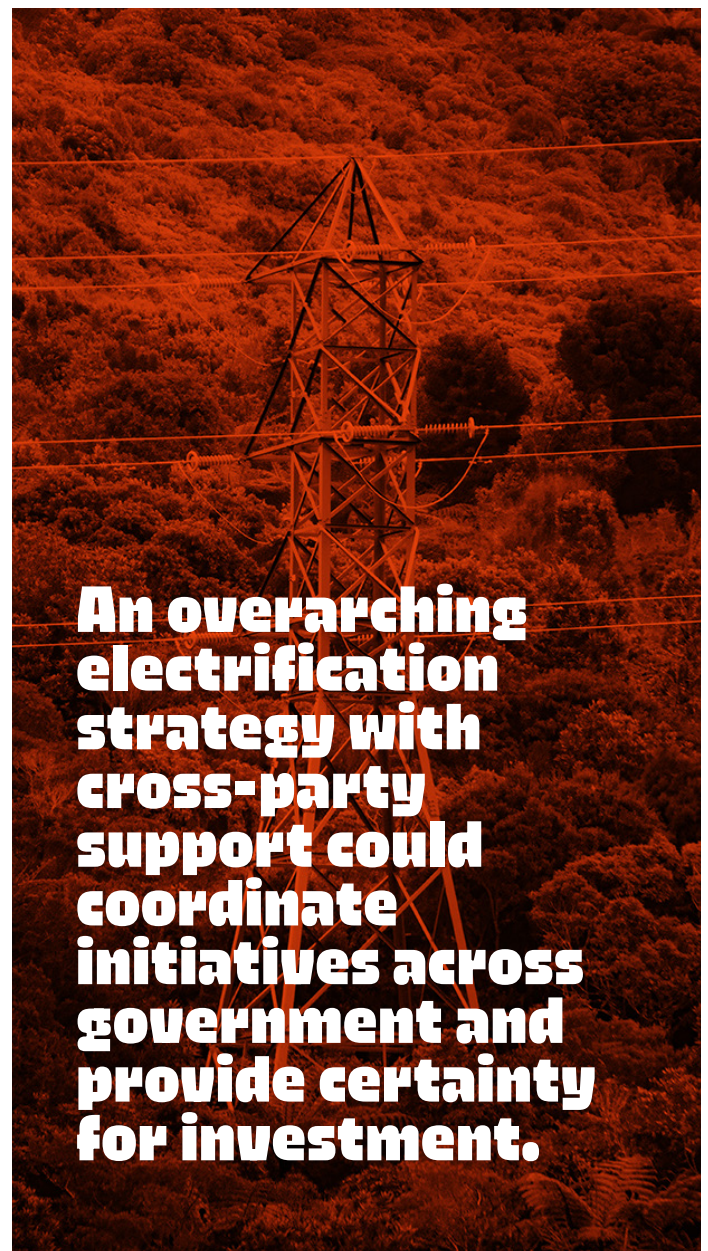


Photo: altfullstop@unsplash

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We urge political candidates and parties to collaborate on delivering on these three pragmatic policies, to ensure long term benefits for Aotearoa New Zealand.

This election will determine whether we make real efforts to address the climate and cost of living crisis.

Let's make it count.

Kiwis in Climate