



## **Is the New Zealand government doing enough to deliver zero carbon buildings?**

### **An assessment of New Zealand's efforts to deliver zero carbon buildings, based on the Green Building Council's Zero Carbon Roadmap for Aotearoa's Buildings**

#### Introduction

Just a few years ago, the key role that our buildings must play in tackling climate change pollution was alarmingly and significantly underplayed. Statistics used by government vastly underestimated the carbon footprint of our built environment, and thereby discounted the solutions that the sector could utilise to reduce New Zealand's overall emissions, and help meet our international climate change obligations.

Fast-forward to 2021, and the Government readily states that the built environment makes up around 20 per cent of New Zealand's carbon footprint. The Climate Change Commission's advice to Government acknowledges the role homes and buildings must play to deliver a zero carbon Aotearoa, Government has announced a Building for Climate Change programme which could transform the sector, and both Labour and the Greens made electoral promises to build government buildings to green certified standards.

But are these efforts enough to successfully deliver a zero-carbon built environment? Here is our assessment of these efforts, based on the Green Building Council's Zero Carbon Roadmap for Aotearoa's Buildings released in September 2019.

#### Background

Working with independent consultants thinkstep-anz, we had revealed that the built environment was responsible for 20 per cent of our country's carbon footprint, and also identified that constructing and renovating buildings here in New Zealand emits pollution equivalent to the emissions of one million cars on the road every year.

Equipped with such alarming data, in 2019 the NZGBC unveiled the Zero Carbon Roadmap, which offered, for the first time, a raft of common-sense solutions to deliver a climate pollution-free built environment, including key milestones for government to achieve.

The Government has a huge part to play in driving a zero-carbon built environment - not just in a policy and legislative sense, although this is of course vital. Government are also the largest and most significant builder and occupier of buildings in all of Aotearoa. The standards government sets for their own buildings can drive sector-wide change.

#### Our assessment

Our overall assessment is that government has made some progress, but is failing to adequately implement the measures to deliver zero carbon buildings, which threatens its ability to meet international climate obligations. The government measures, while welcome, lack both the ambition necessary to deliver a zero-carbon built environment, and, where measures exist, they are being implemented too slowly.

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Government has been steadily building the necessary infrastructure needed to address our climate emergency. This includes Parliament passing the Zero Carbon Act, creation of the Climate Change Commission (CCC), creation of the Building for Climate Change (BfCC) programme, and commitment to releasing a government backed Emission Reduction Plan. And, while these are fundamental steps forward, there is more that must be done. Frameworks achieve little without action.

This includes having the Government enact their election promise to build to Greenstar 5 or 6 or equivalent certification standard for government funded construction projects and also speed up the implementation of their Building for Climate Change programme. It is imperative Government also confirm election campaign commitments that Energy Performance Certificates will be required to incentivise greener homes that will use less energy to heat, cool and ventilate over their lifetime.

In addition to the already identified milestones, the government must also prioritise the growing energy inequity problem in Aotearoa. Right now New Zealand has an energy equity problem. Too many households need to spend high proportions of their incomes heating cold, inefficient homes. If we are serious about tackling poverty and improving the lives of all Kiwis, we must ensure our homes don't shackle New Zealanders to high energy bills.

The most equitable way to tackle the carbon pollution of our buildings, and improve New Zealanders' wellbeing, is to push energy efficiency into every corner of the economy, particularly to those disadvantaged communities where households spend far too big a share of their income on energy bills.

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Besides emissions reductions, other benefits include lower household and business energy bills, reduced energy poverty, and improved health.

Until Government rolls out impactful measures to tackle New Zealand’s energy inequity problem, it cannot be said to be succeeding in delivering measures for a carbon pollution free built environment.

<b>Key milestone identified for zero carbon buildings in Aotearoa</b>	<b>What has Government done to hit this milestone?</b>	<b>Has Government done enough to hit this milestone?</b>
<p>1. It must set a ten-year trajectory to ensure new buildings and zero energy under the Building Code by 2030. To achieve this, we propose three updates to the Building Code in 2022, 2026, 2030, including restricting fossil fuel combustion in new buildings by 2026 and eliminating their use in new building by 2030.</p>	<p>Government has announced consultations for updates to the Code, and the Building for Climate Change programme. And government has also proposed a ban on coal boilers in new buildings, and is working to upgrade some schools and hospitals so they can get rid of their coal boilers.</p>	<p>The Building for Climate Change programme could be transformational, but it isn’t ambitious enough, especially around timeframes.</p> <p>Tens of thousands of buildings and homes are being consented each year. The sector needs clarity on what the first cap will be and how it impacts homes and buildings. Thousands of buildings will be constructed before 2035, and we must move more quickly.</p> <p>The consultations around the Building for Climate Change programme are also running too slowly, with the next draft taking too long to release. A great deal of feedback to the consultation called for zero energy targets closer to 2030 than initial government proposals. Government needs to listen to this and to be more ambitious with the final targets.</p>

		Overall, the government is taking some action although there are concerns over the pace of change and ambition.
2. It must require energy-efficiency labelling on existing buildings (residential and non-residential of more than 1000m <sup>2</sup> ) when they are sold or leased by 2024. Government can also lead with procurement declaring that, from January 2021 NABERSNZ energy-efficiency ratings will be required on base buildings in leases of more than 1000m <sup>2</sup> for government ministries, rising to require 4-star NABERSNZ from October 2024.	A NABERSNZ 4 Star rating is now required for all government agencies that occupy single tenant, co-tenanted, or co-located government office accommodation with an area greater than 2000m <sup>2</sup> .	<p>This is a step forward and sends a strong message to the rest of the sector that this is where we are headed. However, government are again not being ambitious enough. In this instance, Government has failed to implement the policy that their own advice says would deliver the biggest return in terms of carbon emissions and economic benefits (Govt forgos <a href="#">\$6m with green buildings policy</a>).</p> <p>The Climate Change Commission has called for <i>“Government to have by 31 December, implemented measures on existing buildings to mandate participation in energy performance programmes”</i>. The simplest step is implementing a Commercial Buildings Disclosure programme, as in Australia. This has delivered significant savings for Australian businesses and reduced carbon emissions. It would provide additional transparency, and large emissions reductions for New Zealand buildings. Government is far too unambitious here. This is easily achievable and will free up much needed electricity for other uses such as electric vehicles.</p>
3. It must ensure that the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, New Zealand Defence	As part of their campaigning in the 2020 election, both Labour and the	Unfortunately, this promise remains only that: a promise. It is still unfulfilled and

Force and Department of Corrections lead an all-of-government shift to verify their new buildings as sustainable and having lower embodied carbon from June 2020.

Greens promised that all new government buildings would be built to high Green Star standards. This promise goes beyond the milestone identified.

appears to be languishing while the emissions from new government buildings continue to rise.