



# Submission to Ministry for the Environment on *Adapt and thrive: Building a climate-resilient Aotearoa New Zealand*

## INTRODUCTION

1. Thank you for the opportunity to submit on *Adapt and thrive: Building a climate-resilient Aotearoa New Zealand*. Our submission deals with some specific issues which the adaptation plan raised for us. We have chosen to comment on these alone rather than all sections of the plan.
2. We note the impacts of climate change are already being felt across a range of communities in Aotearoa New Zealand, many of these already experience marginalisation and lack personal and community resources to adapt to the escalating threats facing them.
3. Power dynamics are inherent in climate change policy; and this plan appears to be no exception. Many actions with this plan still work to uphold an "anthropogenic, capitalist growth economic paradigm"<sup>1</sup> (IFSW, 2020) which is simply not compatible with environmental and human wellbeing and are in essence the drivers of climate crisis and poverty on all levels.
4. We would like to see a more action orientated plan which boldly addresses the risks identified, begins to dismantle the power of the neoliberal paradigm, and equitably transfers powers and resources to communities, reinstating collectivism across the motu. In the words of Greta Thunberg "I want you to act as if the house was on fire – because it is"<sup>2</sup>.

## DISCUSSION

### COMMUNITIES SECTION

5. We strongly support the inclusion of 'overhaul of the welfare system' under the 'communities' section. The bi-directional relationship between climate change and poverty is well established<sup>3</sup>. As climate impacts are experienced, food and housing insecurity increases and affordability decreases,

<sup>1</sup> Powers, M. & Rinkel, M. (2020) *Social Work: Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability. Volume 3*. IFSW.

<sup>2</sup> Thunburg, G. (2018). *World Economic Forum speech*.

<sup>3</sup> Roy, J., P. Tschakert, H. Waisman, S. Abdul Halim, P. Antwi-Agyei, P. Dasgupta, B. Hayward, M. Kanninen, D. Liverman, C. Okereke, P.F. Pinho, K. Riahi, and A.G. Suarez Rodriguez, (2018) *Sustainable Development, Poverty Eradication and Reducing Inequalities. In: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty*. In Press.

whole industries may be wiped out which exacerbates precarious employment and financial stress<sup>4</sup>. Those who are living in poverty are more exposed to these impacts as they have less resources to weather such shocks and stressors thus creating a cyclic pattern of inequitable outcomes<sup>5</sup>. Our welfare system is currently inadequately supporting whānau in this position, therefore framing improvements to our welfare system as an intersectoral climate change issue should be commended. We do recommend that this action is re-prioritised as ‘critical’ rather than ‘supporting’.

6. We strongly support the action of awareness raising and suggest that public messaging campaigns go beyond disaster preparedness to general awareness of the climate crisis, namely how individuals, whānau and communities can engage in adaptation and mitigation activities. We argue there is a strong need to engage the public around climate change messaging is now equally urgent.
7. We recommend that accessibility of information is considered during development of the public education strategy. We note the development an information portal as a key action in section 1 alongside this, however, an equitable approach to providing information and messaging is required to ensure that exposed communities who need this information can be empowered to engage in decision making. Without taking an equity approach to accessibility of information, ecological injustices will continue as decision making power is likely to remain with those few who equate success with economic gain rather than those who are at greatest risk of the immediate impacts<sup>6</sup>.
8. We feel action around resourcing and equipping communities to adapt is missing. There appears to be much neoliberal ‘personal responsibility’ rhetoric in this plan which relies on providing information and education, and expecting individuals, whānau, communities and businesses to act. It needs to be recognised that those most exposed to immediate climate risks are unlikely to have the financial resources or social capital to act on this information. Therefore, without ensuring such communities are provided the right resources to act, the Government will heighten ecological anxiety which RANZCP notes is “mental distress caused by the real threat of climate change”<sup>7</sup>. We consider this highly unethical and recommend that an action around equitably resourcing exposed communities to adapt is added.

## MANAGED RETREAT

9. We have concerns about legislating powers around managed retreat. We are concerned that such a process may be further akin to colonisation for tangata o te whenua and needs to be carefully navigated to ensure there are not further breaches of te Tiriti o Waitangi. Forcing displacement presents many complexities relating to the notion of rangatiranga, ownership, value and connection to land, community, and culture. Legislated managed retreats may result in the forced displacement and dispossession of significant whenua for Māori, including possible loss of marae, whānau land, and urupā. Power imbalances are unavoidable in this context and the impact of this has already been seen in examples such as Matatā, where an already marginalised community

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<sup>4</sup> McCarthy, J. (2020). *Why Climate Change and Poverty Are Inextricably Linked*. Global Citizen. Retrieved from: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/climate-change-is-connected-to-poverty/>

<sup>5</sup> Hallegatte, S., Fay, M. & Barbier, E.B. (2018). *Poverty and climate change: introduction*. Environment and development economics. Vol 27 (3) June 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Powers, M. & Rinkel, M. (2020) *Social Work: Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability. Volume 3*. IFSW.

<sup>7</sup> RANZAP. (2021). *The Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ranzcp.org/news-policy/policy-and-advocacy/position-statements/the-mental-health-impacts-of-climate-change>

experienced prolonged ecological grief and loss of autonomy despite government intervention with the best of intentions<sup>8</sup>.

10. We agree that a consistent national framework for managed retreat is likely to reduce some of the negative impacts previously seen due to poor governance<sup>9</sup>, however, this process could be experienced as a repeat of past land purchase atrocities under the modern premise of climate adaptation. This must be avoided at all costs, on both an ethical and te Tiriti o Waitangi basis. We suggest extreme caution is taken when considering how managed retreat legislation is progressed through Parliament to ensure further dispossession of whenua does not occur for Māori. Meaningful engagement and partnership with mana whenua will be essential within any consideration of managed retreat. We strongly recommend that legislation is developed in partnership with Māori and the legislation considers treating whenua Māori differently to mandate a co-governance and partnership approach with iwi/hapū and whānau to any managed retreat agreements.
11. It is important to note the difference between impacts of landowners and renters in managed retreat areas. Renters are more likely to experience disproportionate financial burdens from managed retreat as they will not be compensated for the value of the property yet may need to pay more for alternative housing elsewhere, and face other costs such as transport and work displacement. The displacement of renters will also add further pressure to our housing crisis; therefore, housing availability needs to be considered carefully during managed retreat processes. Engagement should be targeted not just towards property owners, but all residents in an affected community to identify such impacts.
12. We recommend the psychosocial impact of climate change be accounted for in implementing managed retreat<sup>10</sup>. Namely, the need for resourcing support for those being displaced which encompasses more than financial compensation and may include the need for support around access to alternative housing, employment, education,<sup>11</sup> as well as emotional support to reframe the relocation experience and build new connections within new communities<sup>12</sup>.
13. We recommend that funding and provision of holistic support for individuals and whānau during managed retreat processes are included as a requirement under any framework. We suggest that social workers, with unique skillsets around empowerment of communities, applying an equity lens, strengths perspective and person-in environment approaches are well suited to this task. We hold core values around social justice which translates in the climate change context to advocacy for exposed communities. Such a role during the managed retreat process would provide holistic support and reduce the burden of decision making on these communities, whilst ensuring that authorities are held to account around transparency and fairness of the process.

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<sup>8</sup> Hanna, C. White, I & Glavovic, B (2019) *Managed retreat governance: Insights from Matatā New Zealand. Report for the National Science Challenge: Resilience to Nature's Challenges*. University of Waikato.

<sup>9</sup> Hanna, C., White, I. & Glavovic, B. (2021). *Managed retreats by whom and how? Identifying and delineating governance modalities*. *Climate Risk Management*. Vol 31; 100278

<sup>10</sup> RANZAP. (2021). *The Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ranzcp.org/news-policy/policy-and-advocacy/position-statements/the-mental-health-impacts-of-climate-change>

<sup>11</sup> Tubridy, F., Scott, M & Lennon, M. (2021). *Managed retreat response to flooding: lessons from the past for contemporary climate change adaptation*. *Planning perspectives* Vol 35; 6.

<sup>12</sup> Mah, A., Chapman, D., Markowitz, E. & Lickel, B. (2020). *Coping with climate change: three insights for research, intervention, and communication to promote adaptive coping to climate change*. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, Vol 75; 102282

## CONCLUSION

14. Thank you for providing the opportunity to submit on Adapt and thrive: Building a climate-resilient Aotearoa New Zealand.

15. We would be happy to discuss any of the points raised with you further if clarification is required.

## ABOUT ANZASW

The Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) is the professional association for social work in Aotearoa New Zealand. We have over 3,600 members who work throughout the community in both statutory social work and community social work settings. We advocate on behalf of members for social change and justice.

### Definition of social work

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.<sup>13</sup>

### Social work in Aotearoa New Zealand

Social workers in Aotearoa are required to be registered with the Social Workers Registration Board. Social workers are registered under the Social Workers Registration Act 2003 and are not included in the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003.

### Contact details

If you have any questions or require any clarification about this submission, please contact:

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<sup>13</sup> Global Definition of Social Work - International Federation of Social Workers and International Association of Schools of Social Work