



Nelson Tasman Climate Forum  
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The Right Honourable Christopher Luxon,  
Prime Minister of New Zealand,  
Parliament Buildings,  
Private Bag 18041,  
WELLINGTON 6160

CC. The Right Honourable Simon Watts,  
Minister for Climate Change.

15<sup>th</sup> January 2025

Dear Prime Minister,

**Re: Averting the need for a future government apology.**

The Nelson Tasman Climate Forum, together with the undersigned specialists, is writing with deep concern to urge you to take a cue from your own strong apology to the victims of abuse in care and break an ominous cycle in a different but crucial arena.

Over the years various governments have apologised on behalf of the Crown for wrongs committed in the name of the government. As well as the very recent apology for Abuse in State Care, we can think of apologies to several iwi, to Erebus Disaster victims, to the Samoan community, and more.

While formally apologising is the correct thing to do in such circumstances, and you did so commendably last November, each nonetheless represents a historic situation that would be far better to have been properly addressed in the first instance.

It variously took years of dogged persistence by the aggrieved and their supporters, substantial formal inquiries, and courageous leadership, for each due, and usually long overdue, apology.

Reflecting on this tragic legacy we are struck by parallels, over many governments, with our nation's responses to the unfolding climate emergency. For example, failure to heed dire warnings from those with knowledge, downplaying deeply troubling situations, and ignoring or delaying measures that would help safeguard the people of New Zealand from such an escalating threat.

Indeed some of the shortcomings are so inexplicable that we at times wonder what ominous details of the climate threat have failed to cross the desk of successive Prime Ministers.

The history of misery and misdeeds behind past apologies makes it hard to imagine a situation that could eclipse those affronts to humanity. However, without taking a fraction away from such past suffering, we put to you that the unfolding climate crisis is set to become just such a situation.

One scholar assisting with this letter noted *"The brute fact is that climate change will dwarf any of the episodes of human suffering that have been recorded in history."* In that vein we attach "The 2024 State of the Climate report: Perilous times on planet Earth" from Oxford University Press, as

well as our summary of same. *“Much of the very fabric of life on Earth is imperiled,”* is one of many loud alarms sounded by the report.

With all of our hearts we urge you to pause and take most serious stock of the mismatch between the history and present state of Earth’s climate, and the history and present state of New Zealand’s climate responses. This applies both to climate mitigation and, increasingly, to climate adaptation.

We then request that you ask yourself whether this too must await a Royal Commission to bring its fraught reality to light. Such a commission would find a population that had been left largely in the dark by its governments, was needlessly imperilled by official intransigence, and had an economy struggling far more than would have been the case with robust, timely and well-informed strategies.

We have touched on a few parallels between historic apologies and shortcomings of successive responses to the climate emergency. They represent only a portion of myriad climate issues that deserve mention. For example, our water security is weak, most economic sectors are ill-prepared for what is coming, agriculture and forestry will suffer severely, and climate education falls badly short. Further, our ongoing pattern of urban development is ill-suited to the hothouse climate we are generating, and our approaches to energy and transport are destined to be found seriously wanting.

Among the sobering dimensions that would distinguish a climate-centred apology from historical ones is that the apology would be due to the entire population of the country, and to untold generations into the future.

As if that is not enough, there is now only a minimal, and almost extinguished, prospect of restoring the future to anything like we might have enjoyed had we acted sooner and with greater conviction.

A formal inquiry into our climate responses might or might not result in *“16 devastating volumes,”* as you described the Royal Commission’s report last year. However the findings would be devastating, nonetheless.

Among many worthy tributes in your November apology, you applauded those *“breaking that cycle that too often hangs like a curse over families.”* We respectfully put to you that you now have a singular opportunity to break the cycle of enfeebled climate responses that, otherwise, looks set to hang like a curse over every one of our families and for untold generations to come.

By decisive and visionary action to truly ready our economy and our communities for what is on the way, and to drive reductions in our emissions at scale and at speed, your government could help avert the imminent extinguishing of the future we are on the cusp of losing.

In so doing, that would also help avert the need for a future Crown apology for failures of preceding governments to adequately safeguard the people, the economy, and the environment in their care.

It need not, indeed must not, take even more lost time, more harm and suffering, greater sacrificing of our future, or a further Royal Commission, to get us to that point of realisation.

We implore you to make space in your schedule to take this request most seriously. We will, of course, be very pleased to meet with you or to respond to any queries you might raise.

Most respectfully,

Dr. Joanna Santa Barbara  
Co-chair, Nelson Tasman Climate Forum

Lindsay Wood MNZM  
Project lead, Nelson Tasman Climate Forum

Together with

Name	Role(s)	Affiliation
Dr. Aaron Stallard	Director	Stallard Scientific Ltd
	Councillor	Nelson City Council
Brian Bennett	Metacrisis and planetary futures researcher	
Bruce Gilkinson	Director	Climate for Change Ltd
	Director	Zero Carbon Nelson Tasman Inc.
David Sheppard	Retired builder	
Dr. Denys Trussell	A founding Director	Friends of the Earth (NZ)
Dr. Jim Sinner	Senior scientist (retired)	
Dr. Sean Weaver	CEO	Ekos
Dr Zoë Hilton	Research Scientist	Cawthron Institute
Dr Simon Stewart	Freshwater scientist	Cawthron Institute, Te Pūnaha Matatini
Andy Buchanan	Emeritus Professor of engineering,	University of Canterbury
John D. Potter MBBS PhD	Professor	Centre for Public Health Research, Massey University, Wellington
	Professor	Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center, Seattle, Washington, USA
	Professor Emeritus	University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA

Jonathan Boston ONZM	Emeritus Professor of Public Policy	Victoria University of Wellington
Chloe Van Dyke	Founder / Director	Chia Sisters
Graham Townsend	Secretary	Climate Action Ōtautahi
Jan Heijs	Retired water management strategist	
Kindra Douglas QSM	Co-Chair	Community Action Nelson
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Lindsay Wood MNZM	Director	Resilienz Ltd.
Liz Price	Counsellor and Clinical Supervisor	
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Joanna Santa Barbara	Co-Chair	Nelson Tasman Climate Forum
Jack Santa Barbara	Retired CEO	
Paul Winton	Founder	The 1point5 Project
	Chair	The All Aboard Aotearoa Project Trust
Rachel Sanson	Elected member	Nelson City Council
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