

John Stowell, 11 Nola Road, Oratia, Auckland 0604, New Zealand.

Hon, MP

26 August 2019

Dear,

Within your busy schedule, I hope it will be possible for you to give a few minutes to thinking of ways in which a particular form of participatory democracy could assist this great country of ours to address some of our more difficult challenges. Specifically, as suggested in broad outline in the enclosed leaflet, I am writing about setting up a rolling series of citizens' assemblies at say four centres up and down the country. The aim would be to plug the public more firmly into direct participation in devising fair, acceptable and urgent changes in our collective behaviour to address the issues of climate change. We all need to do our best to reduce our net emissions of greenhouse gases, and also to agree the vital measures to adapt pro-actively to the changes that are already not to be avoided.

There are many inspiring examples of the use of citizens' assemblies around the world, with participants selected by sortition. There is also wide experience available in how to run such deliberative assemblies effectively internally, adapted to local circumstances. However, a key issue for their external or public effectiveness is the degree of commitment from Government to publicise the proceedings, including their aims, and to be fully transparent in its response to recommendations made by such assemblies. Trust is a two-way thing.

With commitment to the process on the part of you, our representatives, such assemblies can increase inclusiveness, both of presence and voice, enhance the degree of popular control of policy, permit considered judgement of issues before recommendations are made and policy developed, and augment transparency. By upgrading our ways of consulting we can reduce the tendency of consultation bias towards vested interests and those with time and resources to make submissions. Citizens' assemblies can energise, engage and empower an ever-widening set of New Zealanders by turning over the membership of citizens' assemblies on a regular basis. Turnover also ensures that participation does not become sufficiently burdensome to be a disincentive.

Within the website of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, there is a Policy Methods Toolbox as part of the Policy Project. This toolbox has a section on Public Participation at the bottom of which is a section on citizen juries (<https://dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-methods-toolbox/public-participation/citizen-juries>), which are essentially the same as citizens' assemblies, involving controlled random selection of participants. So the idea is not news. Also, in the Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Bill, New Part 1A, Climate Change Commission, subpart 2, Commission's functions, duties, and power, under 5M Consultation, the Commission may – (b) *undertake any other type of consultation that it considers necessary for the performance of its functions and duties under this Act.*

The door is open, a crack at least, for us to learn to use this class of democratic innovation in a way which suits our cultural mix, which can and will help us to address the very real dangers and costs of inadequate action on mitigating and, where unavoidable, adapting to climate change. You, as our representatives, have the power to do this. Will you?

I am sending this letter to all of your colleagues in the House.

Sincerely yours,

**DEAR MEMBER, LET'S CONVENE
CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES
REPRESENTING THE INTERESTS
OF ALL THE INHABITANTS OF
AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND**
to deliberate and make recommendations on
**MITIGATING AGAINST AND ADAPTING TO
THE CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY**

----- WHO? -----

Randomly selected groups of residents over the age of 15
reflecting all of our communities and age groups
meeting at a number of centres

----- HOW? -----

Organised by a non-partisan independent entity
Hear principle-based information from experts and stakeholders
Ask questions and seek further information
Deliberate in small, facilitated groups
Draft and vote on sets of recommendations to Government

----- RESULT? -----

Regular reports to inform and support Government in developing its
Climate Action and Mitigation Plans
for the benefit and wellbeing of all generations

**POLICY WILL FAIL IF IT OMITTS ACTIVE
AND DELIBERATIVE PARTICIPATION
FROM NEW ZEALANDERS AT LARGE.
WE CANNOT AFFORD FOR THIS TO HAPPEN**

Who runs a citizens' assembly?

A non-partisan organisation that is independent of government, industry stakeholders and protest groups. The whole process should be transparent.

Who pays for a citizens' assembly?

All of us through our taxes – the assemblies should be funded by Government.

How does a citizens' assembly proceed?

- Members are selected and invited randomly from the population.
- Quotas are used if necessary to ensure that the assembly is representative in terms of demographics such as gender, age, location, and cultural affinity.
- Members are paid to attend and to get to the sessions.
- Members meet for a series of weekends spread over time.
- They are given training in procedure to ensure that all voices are heard, are provided with information from experts and stakeholders and can seek additional information through asking questions.
- Trained facilitators help members deliberate, ask questions, and talk and listen to each other in a fair and respectful manner.
- Members deliberate, with only their facilitators present, and seek to agree on a set of decisions and recommendations, with their reasoning. These are presented reports, which is published.
- The Government ensures that the proceedings are widely publicised and guarantees to respond to any report in detail and in public.

Result?

A series of informed and democratic judgements by New Zealanders at large on what to do in response to the climate and ecological emergency and on how our response is progressing.

What can you do to help?

Support the introduction of this democratic technique in Aotearoa New Zealand thereby assisting to make it possible to address the crisis in an effective, pro-active and sustainable manner. Set up a cross-party group to consider citizens' assemblies, if one does not already exist. .