



Carbon neutral the way to go

Making New Zealand the first carbon-neutral country could be a marketing masterpiece, writes CHRIS RENNIE.

Price Rennie PR has become carbon neutral. Not much news in a public relations company becoming a speck of carbon neutrality amid a world tsunami of carbon dioxide emissions.

Still, as they say, you have to start somewhere.

In wondering what difference it might make, at Price Rennie we are a bit like New Zealand as a whole, in trying to find the right response to all the Kyoto business.

Our country is just a tiny emitter of greenhouse gases, so is beggaring our lifestyles and our economy for absolutely no effect on the rate of climate change, a very smart move?

Surely Prime Minister Helen Clark's scoffed-at suggestion of aiming to become the world's first carbon-neutral country is a valid solution, and also one with huge international marketing potential?

In terms of putting New Zealand in the right place on the world's environmental stage, it could be even more effective than our decision to go nuclear-free.

Just doing what 120 or so other countries are doing (or at least those who're included in the first part of the Kyoto Protocol) isn't going to make us stand out.

As well as that, New Zealand produces about 0.1 per cent of the world's CO₂ emissions, and nothing we do to significantly decrease our output, will make

any difference to the rate of climate change. At 0.1%, we are in the company of 24 countries which begin at the 62nd largest emitter (Turkmenistan) and end at 86th (Zimbabwe). New Zealand is 69th — between Bangladesh and Oman.

Yet you would think we were up there with total unrepentants China (3.3 billion tonnes, 2nd) and India (1.2 billion tonnes 4th), the way the local climate change debate — if it can be called that — rages.

As a for-instance on the quality of the debate, surely Greenpeace New Zealand actually had China in mind when it recently said (of us):

"We are heavy greenhouse polluters, and since 1990 have allowed our levels of greenhouse pollution to increase by more than 21%, and our carbon dioxide emissions by 38%.

"If we don't reduce our greenhouse pollution, climate change will lead to falls in global production of food staples . . . increased extreme weather events (such as Hurricane Katrina in the United States and droughts and floods in New Zealand and Australia etc)'.
As far as I can make out, both China and India have no intention whatsoever of significantly reducing the phenomenal rate of industrial and consumer growth that is pouring out those billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide.

And we are "heavy greenhouse polluters"? To put

that into context, say we beefed up our CO₂ emissions by 27%. That would put us on the bottom rung — with Ireland — in a club of 14 emitters at just 0.2% each.

In the face of the current climate-change emergency, no doubt the members of Greenpeace China and Greenpeace India are busy climbing "climate killer", power-station smokestacks. Their ministries for the environment are ordering citizens to stop using incandescent light bulbs and their government ministers to trade-in their Holdens.

Their agriculture ministries are also going to tax fertiliser, and their forestry ministries are stealing tree-growers' carbon credits.

Yeah, right.

Far smarter would be New Zealand positioning itself internationally as the first country in the world striving to be carbon-neutral — a nice partnership with our earlier global marketing masterstroke of being nuclear-free.

This would at least counter the lunacy of "food miles" that's being unleashed on us in the northern hemisphere.

Trying to become the first carbon-neutral country in the world is an idea someone could pick up and really run with — maybe even Greenpeace New Zealand.

■ Price Rennie went carbon neutral at www.carbonzero.co.nz