

## Submission on the Inquiry into the 2023 General Election

From: Nelson Tasman Climate Forum (<https://www.nelsontasmanclimateforum.nz/>)

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### Introduction

The Nelson Tasman Climate Forum (NTCF) thanks the Justice Committee for the opportunity to contribute to the Inquiry into the 2023 General Election.

The NTCF is a community-led initiative open to everyone. Our mission is to weave individuals, households, civil society organisations, businesses, councils and iwi together toward urgent, strategic climate action in the Nelson-Tasman region.

NTCF members bring a breadth and depth of expertise and experience from across all sectors of society, including scientific research and practice, social science, the health sector, monitoring and evaluation, education, environmental management, climate justice, community engagement, communications and more.

We work in our local communities to educate and empower them to take positive action on climate change, for example through the innovative behaviour change programme, Take The Jump. We work closely with our two local Councils (Nelson City Council and Tasman District Council) to support their mahi in protecting, restoring and enhancing the natural and social environment we are privileged to call home.

A draft of this submission has undergone review and then been endorsed by NTCF Signatories.

### Climate Justice

Embedded within Goal 3 of the [NTCF Charter](#) is a commitment to climate justice. It calls for ‘responding to climate change in a way that recognises the rights of all living organisms, including people, and provides for a just, equitable and resilient society.’

Central to achieving this Goal is the establishment of a fair and just electoral system. Such a system empowers marginalised voices, particularly those disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, to contribute to the governance of Aotearoa New Zealand, and increases the [democratic impetus](#) for climate action. We consider their voices need particular care to be represented through the electoral system of our democracy.

Globally, close to half of all emissions are released by one-tenth of the global population, and just one-hundredth of the world population (77 million individuals) emits about 50% more than the entire bottom half of the population (3.8 billion individuals) ([Chancel 2022](#)). Others disproportionately bear the consequences of their use of the global atmosphere as a free fossil fuel emissions waste dump.

[Our atmosphere and climate 2023](#) cites multiple instances where climate emissions and climate change disproportionately impact the disadvantaged in Aotearoa New Zealand, for example:

- Remote communities, those with limited economic resources, populations that are under-represented in local and central government and those in vulnerable climatic areas will be disproportionately affected by climate change and extreme weather events....
- Existing health and social system inequities will be exacerbated further by climate change. The already intersectionally disadvantaged, including young, elderly, disabled, Māori and Pasifika, will be disproportionately affected.

A recent Nelson Tasman climate risk assessment workshop in Motueka highlighted the profound concern of tangata whenua regarding the loss of their ancestral lands due to sea rise - representing the loss of their identity. [Greatly increasing melt levels](#) of the Greenland Ice Sheet raise prospects of this occurring sooner than predicted by the recent IPCC [Sixth Assessment report](#).

Bronwyn Hayward, IPCC author and winner of the [2021 Stuff and Westpac Women of Influence Awards](#) spoke movingly at the [2022 Thomas Cawthron Memorial Lecture](#) in Nelson on the impacts of climate change on young people: ‘,,, we’re exacerbating issues for rangatahi and tamariki ... who are disproportionately exposed to the impacts of climate change, loss of biodiversity, growing income and asset inequality and weakening democracy, issues which are intersecting in ways that are particularly harmful to children today and for future generations’ [starts at 07:20].

Moreover, advancing climate justice is not solely a moral imperative but is very much in the national interest of Aotearoa New Zealand. We (for the most part) are relatively affluent, and disproportionately contribute to current global emissions and have disproportionately contributed to historical emissions. [Back in 2019](#), [Africa, Latin America and Asia] already produced 62 per cent of global fossil fuel emissions. Soon enough they will produce two-thirds ... people in the [Global] South will not stop climate change if the [Global] North refuses to do so’.

## Electoral Matters

**1. An Equity and Te Tiriti Based Approach:** Under Article 3 of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in the English language version, the ‘Queen of England extends to the [Māori] of New Zealand Her Royal Protection and imparts to [Māori] all the Rights and Privileges of British subjects’. This goes to the heart of the General Election inquiry.

A Te Tiriti based approach (tino rangatiratanga) is fundamental to the health of any government system, including the electoral system. The Waitangi Tribunal [Wai 1040 Report](#) states: ‘Under the treaty agreement, it has always been the Crown’s duty to give effect to the guarantee of tino rangatiratanga contained in the plain meaning of article 2’.

Legislative recognition of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, including the retention of dedicated Māori seats in Parliament, is crucial for upholding Māori self-determination and enhancing democratic representation.

**2. Removing Barriers to Participation:** Ensuring adequate and equitable funding for electoral education and outreach programs is paramount for prompting inclusivity within the electoral process for Māori and other minority groups.

**3. Youth Enfranchisement:** Children and youth are among the disadvantaged groups being disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis. Many think they should be able to vote on this issue, one so important to their futures. We request the Committee recommends extending the vote to youth aged 16 to 18.

**4. Improving Electoral Logistics:** Adequately staffed and resourced polling stations, conveniently located Aotearoa-wide, are essential for safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process. According to media reports (see [here](#) and [here](#)), this was inadequate at some predominantly Māori populated places during the 2023 General Election. Electoral planning needs to take account too of increasingly more frequent extreme climatic events (e.g. [Cyclone Gabrielle](#)).

**5. Regulating Political Donations:** [There is increasing evidence](#) that corruption and unregulated donations are exercising undue influence on politics and undermining the integrity of elections. In some countries, money from organised crime has infiltrated politics to gain control over elected officials and public institutions. These threats to democratic politics help explain why large numbers of people around the world are losing faith in politicians and democratic processes.’

[Most western democracies have regulations](#) in place to cap political /election donations. [Caps on election spending](#) would improve New Zealand's electoral system by:

- promoting fairness, ensuring all citizens have a more equal opportunity to participate in the electoral process regardless of their financial means
- limiting undue influence of wealthy individual donors or entities over politicians or political parties through large donations
- reducing potential for corruption or the perception thereof, preventing politicians from being beholden to big donors in exchange for favours or policy influence.

**6. Enhanced Disclosure Requirements:** At present, political parties are only required to disclose their political donation sources yearly. More frequent disclosure - monthly during election campaigns - would inform the public about who is politically supporting parties and candidates. This transparency would enhance accountability of parties and candidates for their sources of funding.

**7. Countering Disinformation:** Disinformation can manipulate public opinion, distort facts, and influence voting behaviour, thus jeopardising the integrity of the electoral system. The Director-General of the NZ Government Communications Security Bureau [cites](#) a [Canadian Government report](#) which noted that “cyber interference targeting voters has become the most common type of cyber threat activity to democratic processes worldwide.”

Countering disinformation could be done (especially during election campaigns) through:

- education and awareness campaigns: conducting educational programs to help voters identify and counter disinformation
- fact-checking resources: providing easily accessible fact-checking resources to verify information circulating during election campaigns
- collaboration with social media platforms: working with social media platforms to detect and address disinformation, including implementing mechanisms to flag and remove false information
- civic engagement initiatives: encouraging civic engagement and critical thinking skills among citizens to empower them to discern credible information from disinformation
- legislation: considering legislative measures to combat disinformation campaigns effectively.

8. **Opposition to Online Voting:** [As there is currently](#) 'no known technology that can guarantee the secrecy, security, and verifiability of a marked ballot transmitted over the Internet, we submit that online voting should certainly not be considered for general elections.

### **Conclusion**

The Nelson Tasman Climate Forum emphasises the pivotal role of a fair and just electoral system in addressing social inequalities in the responsibility for causing the climate crisis and the bearing of its consequences. Aligned with the NTCF's mission and our climate justice Goal, our recommendations seek to uphold principles of fairness, inclusivity, transparency and accountability within Aotearoa New Zealand's electoral framework.

We extend our gratitude to the Select Committee for considering our submission.