

## Call To Take Fossil Fuels Out Of Electricity Generation

Fossil fuels need to be taken out of electricity generation “as rapidly as possible” as part of a clear, long-term strategy for the New Zealand electricity sector.

That’s according to Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Dr Morgan Williams, who at the same time has called on the industry to become more efficient and resilient in the “shadow of climate change and rising fossil fuel prices”.

Williams said the sector needs to become more resilient so it can withstand whatever the future holds. “Energy policy in recent years has tended to be short-term and crisis driven, particularly around security of supply”, he said.

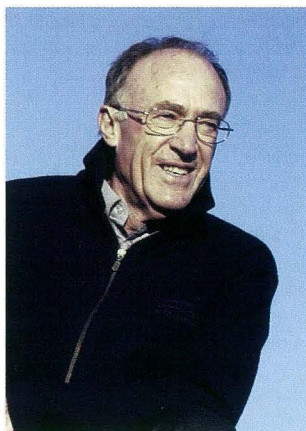
“The New Zealand government has a responsibility to outline a clear view of where we are headed, and the Electricity Commission needs to put that into practice.” Williams was drawing on his latest report *Electricity, energy and the environment: Environmental performance assessment 1 July 2004 – 30 June 2005*, tabled in the NZ Parliament on 24 July 2006.

The report contains six recommendations to the Electricity Commission and seven to the government. It shows that although the Electricity Commission is asking the right questions about the electricity sector and making good progress on energy efficiency, overall the sector still lacks a clear strategic direction.

“The commission has been overseeing the sector since March 2004, but it has still not developed an environmental sustainability framework,” Williams said. “This means we don’t know how they make decisions that affect the environment, what criteria they use and how the sector will achieve the government’s environmental aims.”

“At the moment the major players, who favour building more big projects to generate more power, dominate industry thinking. However, New Zealand’s energy future lies in smart thinking and making better use of what we generate. We must focus on getting more from our electricity supply, developing renewable sources, and promoting local and distributed generation.”

Williams said the global challenge of climate change casts a shadow across his second assessment of the Electricity Commission. “Described by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair as ‘a challenge so far-reaching in its impact and irreversible in its destructive power, that it radically alters human existence’, climate change dominates how we must view the provision of energy and its impact on our environment”, he said.



*New Zealand Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, Morgan Williams.*

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“All aspects of supply and use need to be democratised. We are currently researching this position and, in an upcoming report, we will examine the potential for greatly expanding small-scale distributed generation and energy capture.”

Included in the report’s 13 recommendations are six to the commission about:

- Developing an environmental sustainability framework;
- Using smart meters to encourage energy efficiency;
- Widening representation on the Commission’s advisory groups;
- Improving the information to advisory groups and stakeholders;
- Promoting distributed generation; and
- Reducing energy losses from transmission and distribution.

The seven recommendations to the wider electricity sector cover:

- Developing an overarching energy strategy;
- Clarifying the responsibilities of different government agencies;
- Strengthening the environmental goals in energy policy;
- Improving energy data;
- Reaching energy targets;
- Providing environmental performance indicators for the electricity sector; and
- Improving environmental reporting by the big electricity companies. ■