

6 NEWS – CLIMATE CHANGE

How strong is the goodwill?

The primary sector is sceptical about whether the Government's plans to move on climate change issues will actually incentivise farmers to make changes on farm to reduce gas emissions. **Peter Burke** reports.

BACK SLAPPING was the rage recently at Parliament as Government ministers and primary sector leaders hoored their plans to work together to tackle climate change.

Journalists heard Climate Change Minister James Shaw refer to this "historic moment" – a coalition of all the agriculture levy paying organisations plus Federated Farmers, dairy and meat processors, Maori and Irrigation NZ.

Shaw noted the remarkable shift in the agricultural sector over the last few years and in particular the last few months. The result is all the parties striking a deal to work together, he said.

Shaw is very happy about the agri sector saying it wants to lead on climate change and reduce emissions. "For years, leading farmers have been putting in place incredible innovation up and down the country to increase efficiencies on farm. [Now to take] this good practice and roll it out



Ministers Shaw, O'Connor at the announcement

across the entire country," he said.

But Shaw agrees the technology to solve some of the problems is yet to be invented or proven.

Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor also pointed up the agriculture sector and Government working together.

O'Connor stressed NZ's reputation for pro-

ducing the world's finest food and the world's consumers demanding to know how food is produced. They want to hear about animal welfare and climate change in particular, he said.

"We now have competitors claiming 'zero carbon' beef and food. So we have to step up and match [consumers'] expectations in the marketplace," O'Connor said.

"My concern is that we give the right signals to the right people to get the right change in practice, and the correct balance in getting profitability. But we must also get change in farm practice."

Also talking up the unified approach was

Alison Stewart, chief executive of the Foundation for Arable Research (FAR). For the first time, she said, the livestock sectors and the plant based sectors are working together addressing a challenge.

"We are not just addressing the biogenic methane issues, but also the carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide issues." So having the plant sectors talking to the livestock sectors will contribute to innovative farming that will allow us to move forward, Stewart said.

Stewart believes the whole sector is collectively agreeing the way forward and will help each other out in the process.

ETS TAX 'NONSENSE'

NATIONAL'S CLIMATE change spokesman Todd Muller has described as "absolute nonsense" the Government's plan to make farmers start paying for agricultural emissions.

"To simply take the New Zealand agriculture sector, which is the world's most emissions efficient food producing sector, and say that the future for that sector is to tax it, before there's an opportunity to apply technology that hasn't appeared yet, I think is nonsense," Muller told TVNZ's Q+A programme.

Muller says agriculture should not be included in the ETS. "That particular proposal looks to sheet that cost back to the sector at a manufacturing level," he explained.

"The Interim Climate Committee itself said that if you actually wanted to drive change in an agricultural context you'd price emissions on farm, but that can't be done at the moment."

Muller says farmers don't have the tools to be able to effectively measure their on farm emissions, and don't have any tools to mitigate or reduce those on farm emissions.

He has "total confidence" that technology will be developed to mitigate the effects of climate change in the agricultural sector.

"You first of all measure, then you can manage. You apply innovation then you can change. I have total confidence that this technology will appear."