



ETS puts NZ in a very lonely place

By ROBBIE KAY

FARMERS Neal and Esther Henderson used to be global warming believers.

Today, the East Coast couple, along with Brian Anselmi of Piopio and many others are very active climate realists.

The Hendersons, are loud and angry protesters against the next phase of the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) that was introduced by the

Government on July 1.

In recent weeks protests at public meetings, the 2010 National Agricultural Fielddays and on the steps of Parliament have been front page news.

Mrs Henderson has done extensive research into climate change issues, was a keynote speaker at the Wellington protest late last month and she maintains a website and regular

e-letter to keep people in the loop – all while overseeing their children's schooling.

So what's turned a 'regular' farming couple into climate realists and political activists?

Neil Henderson is the third generation on the 404ha (1000 acre) medium to steep hill country farm originally taken up from the bush



SIGNING UP: Members of the Henderson family put the finishing touches to their mobile ETS protest vehicle (aka the farm truck).



by his grandfather in 1892.

Neil and Esther formed a partnership along with Neil's father, who died in 1999.

The Hendersons produce Angus beef cattle and Romney sheep on the property which is situated about half-way between Gisborne and Opotiki – inland from the North Island's East Coast.

Neil married Esther, a primary school teacher originally from Auckland, in 1991 and they have three children - Maria (17) Laura (15) and Andrew (13).

The children attend Motu School up to year 8, but all currently are completing their secondary schooling by correspondence.

Neil is the expert farmer, making all the business decisions, while Esther prefers to train the working dogs and does most of the mustering - on horseback.

She is also the gardener, cook, schoolwork supervisor and responsible for the Climate Realists' Network website and weekly newsletter.



FARMING REALISTS: Neil and Esther Henderson say they are not the lunatic fringe or part of a radical protest group, but are just ordinary, law-abiding, sensible citizens who care about the beautiful country they farm and live in.

Their teenagers all love the country lifestyle - Laura has her own heading pup; Andrew and his fox terrier "wreak havoc" says his mum on the local possum, rat and ferret populations, and Maria is looking forward to a break from her studies next year to work on the farm fulltime.

Mr Henderson used to be a believer in global warming until the time of the 'FART' tax debacle.

Mrs Henderson has been somewhat more sceptical, although the 'Great Global Warming Swindle' DVD made a big impact on them both.

In addition, Mrs Henderson read Ian Wishart's book 'Air Con', and they both watched Al Gore's 'An Inconvenient Truth'.

When some of the popular theo-

ries around global warming started to come into circulation, they both did their own background research (mainly on the internet) and came to the conclusion there was something not quite sound about the alarmist claims being made in the mainstream media.

For a start they know CO2 is not a pollutant, but an essential driver of life and CO2 versus temperature graphs do not correlate as closely as temperature versus sunspot activity graphs.

Other inconsistencies and irregularities in the alarmist propaganda caused them both to become firm 'sceptics'.

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The step up into a more active role came about in mid-2009 when Gareth Morgan was invited to Gisborne to give a speech about the climate change debate. In an effort to provide an alternative view, the couple invited Ian Wishart to Gisborne in July 2009 and were rewarded by about 250-300 attendees.

At that meeting an invitation was launched for anyone interested in keeping in touch by email, to form a network of like-minded people. It was labelled the 'Climate Realists' network.

Initially about 50 people left their names. A further 25 or so joined up when Ian spoke at Wanganui a month later. Mr Henderson happened to be at Ruapehu with a school camp at the time, so he travelled over for the meeting.

By August the decision was made to launch a petition calling on the Government not to sign up for any emissions reductions at the Copenhagen Climate Conference in December.

This was for two reasons – the expense would cause undue hardship to NZers and that no measurable benefit to the climate would be achieved. Word of the petition spread far and wide via email and Mrs Henderson had to launch the Climate Realists' website to give easier access to it. It was a steep learning curve for her.

Meanwhile Mr Henderson was busy writing submissions to two select committees considering the ETS legislation, appearing before the Wellington committee, doing a television interview, a number of radio interviews and trying to keep the farm operational while lobbying MPs.

As news of the petition spread so too did the membership of the network.

On November 25, 2009, a petition of 10,067 signatures was presented to the Rodney Hide at Parliament. A few hours later the Government passed its amended ETS legislation.

The Climate Realists decided to become more proactive and produced a pamphlet called 'Climate Change- what is really happening' along with eight different types of bumper stickers. Membership has continued to grow.

Last month the Hendersons joined Mr Anselmi to help organise the recent protest march in Wellington. More than 2000 signatures were collected on an informal 'Scrap ETS' petition at the national fieldays in Hamilton and passed over to Act MPs

John Boscawen and Rodney Hide at the Wellington protest on June 22.

The Hendersons believe the biggest challenge is to reach the urban population, who by and large, either don't know or don't care about the ETS and its impact.

Their strongest motivating factor is their conviction that the ETS is based on a lie – that of human-induced global warming.

They believe the climate is changing – it has in the past and presumably will continue to do so in the future.

"Classic examples are the Little Ice Age and the Medieval Warm Period," says Mrs Henderson.

"However, NZ having an ETS will make no difference at all to the climate, even if one does choose to believe the hype.

"NZ is only responsible for 0.2% of greenhouse gases anyway - so why force such an immense cost on our economy? We are continually told we will face trade repercussions if we do not have an ETS, but our major trading partners do not even have one."

The Hendersons are concerned that the ETS sets rural and urban people against each other with rural people being 'blamed' for almost 50% of NZ's emissions and urban people initially subsidising those costs. This, the couple believes, could lead to resentment and a growing movement against eating meat - the 'Go veg – go green' campaign in Wellington for example.

Of even more concern to them is the ETS creates a situation where farmers are strongly encouraged to plant trees at the expense of farming livestock. Quite apart from the fish hooks in the scheme:

- when the trees are harvested, all the money needs to be paid back,
- credits are only awarded while the tree is 'actively growing' after which time more trees need to be planted,
- if trees are damaged by snow or fire, for example, the grower is liable to pay back the credits), the rewards go to those who plant trees and simply leave them in the ground.

In the long term, activists believe this will mean less and less land is available for livestock farming and that huge areas of NZ will be covered in pine trees.

Farmers come into the scheme at 10% in 2015.



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with their share increasing by 1.3% every year thereafter.

For those on family farms, or wishing to hand their farm on to their children or grandchildren, the outlook is one where the eventual cost of carbon credits will be more than the economic farm surplus.

On that basis alone, the future of livestock farming is looking bleak indeed.

Mrs Henderson says: "Another concern about the supposed guilt of our livestock is that New Zealand prides itself on its clean green image.

"Our animals exist in about as natural conditions as are possible given the domestication of livestock. Yet it is now considered desirable to put research money into looking for a vaccine to alter their natural methane emissions, or genetically modify rumen

bacteria or grass and or clover for the same result, or even to genetically modify the animals themselves."

As climate realists, the Hendersons are aiming to continue the growth of the network.

With the 'Scrap ETS' petition, Mrs Henderson says "We found it fairly easy to collect signatures - about 50% of people willingly signed.

"However, 47-48% had no idea what the ETS is about. A very small 2-3% were definitely opposed to us and the stand we are taking.

"The protest started with at least 110 people and as we marched, some of the people on the streets joined in when they realised what we were on about. There were even more already waiting at Parliament.

"We are certainly grateful to all those who made a sterling

effort and we applaud Brian Anselmi of Piopio who was the main organiser."

The ETS is now in force, so what next?

Mrs Henderson says the wider public needs to become much more aware of the issue. "We have plenty of pamphlets available if anyone else would like to obtain some in order to drop them in letterboxes around your neighbourhood.

"Given that about half the people we questioned at the recent Fieldays had no idea what the ETS even is, this approach is worth a try."

For more information, pamphlets and bumper stickers, visit the website - climaterealist.org.nz or email info@climaterealist.org.nz.