

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

PM rediscovers sustainability for election year

Paul Gorman
Environment reporter

A sustainable New Zealand has been put firmly on the election-year agenda by Prime Minister Helen Clark.

Using World Environment Day and the inaugural Hillary Institute symposium on leadership in climate change in Christchurch last night as her platform, Clark said New Zealand had to take a lead and meet the challenges of being a truly sustainable nation "head on".

"It's important to front-foot

this issue - to take leadership of it as New Zealand has done on so many other issues," Clark said, including votes for women, the introduction of social security and becoming nuclear-free.

The National Party and the Green Party said recently that Clark appeared to have quietly shelved the use of the word "sustainable".

Green co-leader Jeannette Fitzsimons said on Budget night two weeks ago: "They've dropped sustainability like a hot brick". National's environment spokesman Nick Smith had

agreed, saying Government's spin doctors have changed tack again in that sustainability was the mantra for all of 2007 but has simply disappeared in 2008".

There was no evidence of that last night, with the Prime Minister speaking at length about breaking down what seemed immense climate change and sustainability challenges into manageable tasks for individuals, households, communities and businesses.

The emissions trading scheme, energy efficiency and conservation strategies, enforce-

ing the sales of biofuels and increased funding for research into reducing agricultural emissions were key planks in attacking the problem, she said.

"Sustainability in a broad sense has economic, social, environmental and cultural dimensions. A sustainable economy cannot be built on plundering the natural environment for short-term gain, nor on a society where many are left to fail.

"Sustainable societies are built on investment in knowledge and skills and technology, which are also critical

ingredients to 21st century success. That is why I have issued the challenge that we should dare think we could be a truly sustainable nation and to be carbon neutral. Heaven knows it isn't easy, but I am convinced that moving in that direction is not only right for the planet but also is essential to our future prosperity."

New Zealand was privileged to have hosted World Environment Day, Clark said.

"We haven't been chosen to host because we are perfect - far from it. Clearly we have work to do. But we can be credible hosts

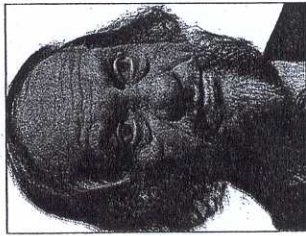
because of our commitment to tackling the big issues and getting on with the job."

Symposium convener David Caygill said Clark, who is patron of the Hillary Institute, had "put the challenge squarely at the head of the agenda".

Keynote speaker Dr Rajendra Pachauri, chairman of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), told the symposium the world was beginning to wake up to the intricacies of climate change, "based on the work of literally thousands of scientists" who

helped fashion last year's reports on the severity of change and likely effects. The IPCC had used the word "unequivocal" to describe the certainty that climate change was happening because the group hoped it was strong enough to "put to rest any doubts that people have about climate change."

Eleven of the past 12 years had been among the warmest years since records of global surface temperatures began. "You cannot get more relevant than this on the reality and extent to which climate change is taking place."



Rajendra Pachauri