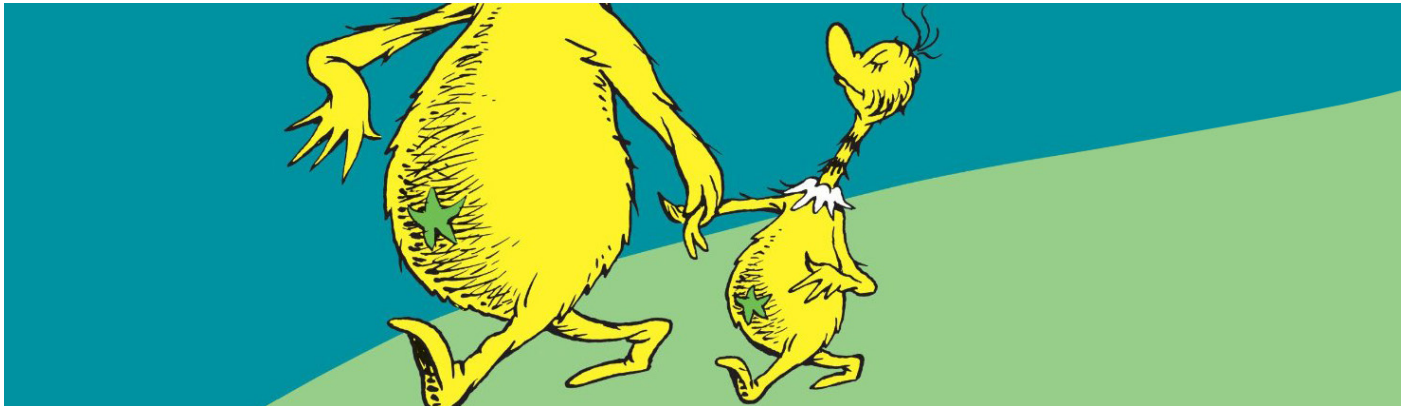


The Day They Decided That Sneetches Are Sneetches

Think Piece 13: October 2010



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Building on our research into the shared goals of Māori, we found two obstacles that reduced the potential for these goals to be realised: (i) an unclear constitution and ineffective parliamentary representation (the topic of *Think Piece 14* and *Report 8*), and (ii) a lack of clarity over shared national goals (the topic of this think piece and *Report 7*). Having overarching national goals shapes the direction of the country, and also shapes the rights and responsibilities of all citizens, setting the basis for future discussions on those rights and on emerging goals. These shared goals are important and must not solely be those of the majority. New Zealand needs its own national goals, they must not simply be copied from others such as Australia, the US or Europe. Although they are not always easily identified, these are the goals the public should focus on. This think piece looks at the national goals that have got us to where we are today, and suggests that new goals and initiatives are necessary to deliver us a country that we are proud to pass on to our grandchildren.

Quoting Dr Seuss may seem a strange way to begin a think piece on the future of Māori and non-Māori relations in New Zealand. But as our research on this topic progressed, my mind started to wander back to a children's story about an island nation of yellow, tall-necked creatures, where those who had a green star on their bellies thought themselves superior to those who did not. It was of course the 1961 tale *The Sneetches*, where year after year the star-belly Sneetches shunned the plain-belly Sneetches:

**They left them out cold, in the dark on the beaches.
They kept them away. Never let them come near.
And that's how they treated them year after year.**

Then along came Sylvester McMonkey McBean with his magical 'star-on' machine. For three dollars the plain-belly Sneetches jumped at the chance to become green-star Sneetches. Now the plain-belly Sneetches – plain-belly no more – were able to yell:

**We're exactly like you! You can't tell us apart.
We're all just the same, now, you snooty old smarties!
And now we can go to your frankfurter parties.**

Clearly this upset the original star-belly Sneetches, but not the opportunistic McBean. He produced another magical machine – the 'star-off' machine – one that for a fee of ten dollars would remove the stars from the star-belly Sneetches. Not to be outdone, the original star-belly Sneetches grabbed the chance to retain their point of difference. After which, we see a frenzy of star-on, star-off activity until all the Sneetches are penniless and McBean departs exceedingly rich. The moral of this story is about the dangers of opportunists, but more importantly, racism. For the Sneetches, after losing a great deal of money at the hands of an opportunist, were finally able to see the stupidity of their past ways:

**The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches
And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches,
That day, all the Sneetches forgot about stars
And whether they had one, or not, upon thars.**

Let me explain. The aim of the Institute's Project 2058 is to create a National Sustainable Development Strategy for New Zealand. Underlying this aim is the need to clarify the overarching goals of the current generation of New Zealanders. To be useful, these goals must not just meet the needs of one particular ethnic group of New Zealanders – they must meet the needs of all New Zealanders. Further, in light of the status of the Treaty of Waitangi, and concerns over disparities between Māori and non-Māori New Zealanders, it is imperative that the long-term goals of Māori are understood. We knew this was a difficult and culturally sensitive area, so we began with a study of how Māori-focused research should best be carried out, and then we



attempted to qualify our work taking into account our limited resources, timeframes and skills. Our desire to recognise and gain a better understanding of the shared goals of Māori – should shared goals exist – led to the publication of ten reports and working papers (see Table 1 overleaf).

The reference to the plain-belly Sneetches above is intended to reflect the way of life of Māori New Zealanders in the late 19th

century. Our research found that the early European settlers had, figuratively speaking, left Māori out in the cold. Richard Seddon, New Zealand's Premier from 1893 to 1906, put it this way: *'... where native lands are suitable for settlement and are doing no good to the natives themselves, but are retarding the progress of European settlement – they must realize that every year the condition of things continues to obtain the greater is the likelihood of a remedy being applied by Parliament that may not be in the interest of the native race. I do not say this as a threat – I say it all in kindness.'* Ruthless as this sounds in today's terms, back then, the goal for the country was progress, and progress was couched in European terms. Arguably, the tail of this overarching goal of progress still exists today.

Table 1: List of 10 Research Reports and Working Papers

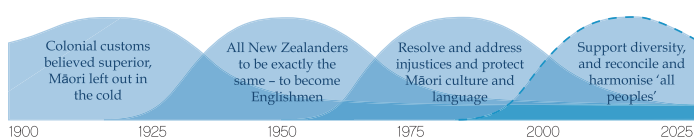
- Working Paper 2009/02:** A Methodological Approach to Māori-focused Research
- Working Paper 2009/03:** Identifying the Shared Goals of Six Māori Organisations
- Working Paper 2009/04:** Statistics: A selection of available data associated with shared Māori goals
- Working Paper 2010/02:** Institutions and Mechanisms Designed to Progress the Goals of Māori
- Working Paper 2010/03:** The Evolution of New Zealand as a Nation: Significant events and legislation 1770–2010
- Working Paper 2010/04:** The 2008 Election: Reviewing seat allocations without the Māori electorate seats
- Working Paper 2010/05:** The Waitangi Tribunal and the Office of Treaty Settlements
- Background Report 7a:** Environmental Goals of Iwi and Hapū: Six case studies
- Report 7:** Exploring the Shared Goals of Māori: Working towards a National Sustainable Development Strategy
- Report 8:** Effective Māori Representation in Parliament: Working towards a National Sustainable Development Strategy

A new goal came into existence in the mid-20th century. The aim now was to be the same as everyone else; using the Sneetches analogy, 'We're exactly like you! You can't tell us apart.' This was the period when large numbers of rural Māori moved to the city, and the focus was on being one people with equal opportunities and rights for all. It was hoped that equal education, employment and housing would resolve disparities. But dissatisfaction grew. Attempts to bring the people together arguably led to civil unrest, causing a few New Zealanders to look deeper.

In the latter part of the 20th century, historians Claudia Orange and Michael King effectively became the nation's whistle-blowers. Their books became the fashionable Christmas read and New Zealanders listened, discussed and reflected on the history that was before them. Diversity, freedom and individuality became the new cool. The goal now was to find an effective way to resolve past injustices, address disparities and celebrate diversity, hence the birth of the Waitangi Tribunal.

But are we there yet? Can we see the time that Dr Seuss described so well? 'The day they decided that Sneetches are Sneetches, And no kind of Sneetch is the best on the beaches.' In other words, have we arrived at a way of thinking that accepts differences and ensures no New Zealander has more standing than any other?

Figure 1: Longitudinal overview of New Zealand's overarching goals



This is clearly a tricky area: how do we honour the Treaty while at the same time ensuring equal standing for all New Zealanders?

The desire of many of today's citizens to define themselves as 'New Zealanders', rather than natives or settlers, Māori or Pākehā, is a response to the current conversation (or lack of conversation). In 1999 Michael King wrote that he preferred to call himself another form of 'indigenous New Zealander'. This trend can be seen in the 2006 census where 11.1% of people chose 'New Zealander' as their ethnicity. In response to the question 'Are we there yet?', we think not. While injustices are being resolved and addressed, no key initiatives to progress reconciliation are forthcoming.

Hence, while some New Zealanders need to work hard to complete the work of the Treaty settlement process, others need to find new goals that define and implement equal standing among 'the peoples of New Zealand' to ensure that one type of New Zealander is not privileged above another, and that all cultures are self-sustaining. While New Zealand is one nation made up of many peoples, no one group should have a higher or lower standing than any other. Given this political and social context, our research has focused on identifying the challenges and opportunities for Māori.

Table 2: Nine Challenges for Māori

1. Identifying shared goals;
2. Measuring progress towards shared goals;
3. Developing institutional capacity;
4. Managing the growing commercial asset base;
5. Pursuing positive demographic change;
6. Responding effectively to new and emerging technologies;
7. Managing resources in light of climate change;
8. The completion of the Treaty settlement process, and
9. The future of Te Tiriti after the settlement process.

Our research led us to propose a work programme that sets out seven key priorities, with the aim of progressing a National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS).

Table 3: Seven Priorities for Progressing an NSDS

1. Support Māori in identifying and measuring shared goals;
2. Support Māori to strengthen existing iwi, hapū and wider Māori institutions;
3. Support effective representation of Māori in local and national decision-making processes;
4. Align national policy with international commitments;
5. Clarify the roles of biculturalism and multiculturalism in New Zealand;
6. Clarify the role of Te Tiriti o Waitangi within a national constitution, and
7. Improve civic education, particularly in terms of New Zealand's history, and New Zealanders' rights and responsibilities.

Every national strategy should be long-term and good for its people. We believe a National Sustainable Development Strategy to be the kind of initiative that is needed, one that propels New Zealand forward towards a day when, like the Sneetches, we decide that New Zealanders are New Zealanders. No longer just a nation of many peoples, but a nation of equal peoples living together in harmony.

*Rapua te ara whānau
Hei ara whakapiri
I runga i te whakaaro kotahi*

*Seek the broad pathway
that will unite the two peoples
under one endeavour.*



The McGuinness Institute is a non-partisan think tank working towards a sustainable future, contributing strategic foresight through evidence-based research and policy analysis.
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