

PAM  
309.230  
61931  
NEW  
1978

Programme of future studies

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF  
NEW ZEALAND



*a*  
*programme of*  
***Future Studies***



**CF**  
Commission  
for the  
Future



## *Why we are here*

Thinking about the future is both a necessity and a luxury. A necessity, because national survival depends on how well we respond to future uncertainties. A luxury, because only a country that is well off can afford freedom of choice.

Freedom to choose is the highest social aspiration and the maintenance of that freedom should be a basic purpose of social and economic organisation in New Zealand. We are struggling to maintain it. Our choices in important areas like trading patterns, our economy, and our balance of payments appear through a darkening glass. We lack a sense of direction and there is dissension in the community about what should be done.

Despite these worries, or because of them, we have an interest in our own future that transcends the truths of the moment. We spend considerable effort on prospecting future options in economic, social, and environmental fields. The effort is not confined to public agencies and organisations. Necessarily, every individual and private company must look to the future and try to reduce uncertainties.

Now, with New Zealand's solidarity severely strained for the first time in more than thirty years, the wisdom of placing greater effort into future studies is more apparent. The first purpose of greater effort must be to show what choices we have. The ultimate purpose of future studies should be to extend the opportunity to choose and lead to personal and national fulfilment.

In recognition of the need to create a forum where future studies might be focused, Parliament has agreed to establish a Commission for the Future. The commission's role is to assemble and disseminate information about the future in such a way that New Zealanders will be drawn into the process of exercising choices about how we should develop as a society.

The commission's terms of reference are:

- (a) To study the possibilities for the long-term economic and social development of New Zealand.
- (b) To make information on these possibilities available to all members of Parliament and to publish such information for wider dissemination.

- (c) To promote discussion on those possibilities and information relating to them.
- (d) To report to the Minister of National Development on those possibilities.

In carrying out its functions the commission is required to—

- (a) Give special attention to the long-term implications for New Zealand of new or prospective developments in science and technology; and
- (b) Have regard to prospective trends, policies, and events in New Zealand and overseas which would have important consequences for the country's future.

# *The Commission and the Planning Council*

It is not for the commission to decide where we should go, although at times, the commission will have a view and choose to express it (as happened in its submission to the Royal Commission on Nuclear Power).

Nor are future studies the prerogative of the commission alone. There are several organisations, public and private, which have more than an ordinary interest in the future. Chief among them, so far as the commission is concerned, is its working partner, the New Zealand Planning Council. The council was established by the same Act as the commission. Several of the functions of both bodies are similar and the distinction between them needs to be clearly understood.

The council's main roles are to advise the Government on planning for social, economic, and cultural development in New Zealand and to assist the Government in co-ordination of that planning. It is in effect one step removed from policy recommendation (despite its advisory role), in that it is directed to act as a "focal point for consultative planning". The council's activities are directed at specific ends, related to clarification of the policy options in the medium term.

The commission is not so constrained by policies of the Government of the day and has a greater freedom of movement, remote from policy determination. That is the real distinction between the council and the commission.

The council exists to advise the Government and the nation of what should be done by instruments of policy, to achieve given purposes. The council must necessarily become closely linked to the formation of national policy in order to contribute towards effective policy instruments. The commission's job is to uncover the possible purposes, not the policies nor the instruments. That means some differences between the bodies on the time framework within which each will work. But this difference is not the chief distinction and, on occasions, the time frame will be of little importance to the issues under discussion by both bodies.

## *Choices and limitations*

The future evolves, built on the structure of the present and the past. We do not, usually, have the ability to cut away these structures and the limitations they impose, so we must critically appraise them for the possibilities they allow. New Zealand's limitations derive from our size, our geographical position, and our resources.

Our geographic position isolates us just enough to ensure a lag between social and economic movement within New Zealand and our partners. This lag, often seen as a weakness, is also a strength. It gives us the time to modify ideas or their manifestations. That we so often ignore those opportunities and instead tread the paths that others have followed, stumbling on the same obstacles, is our failure to turn adversity to advantage, to use our geographical isolation as the basis for finding regional solutions.

Our resource base is large but not diverse. We do one thing exceptionally well and our capacity to produce from pasture land is far beyond our own needs. Agriculture, horticulture, fisheries, and manufacturing derived from these indigenous industries and silviculture are still our biggest resources. With a careful eye to markets, we could adapt to compensate for the limitations of resources, particularly land and liquid fuels.

Each limitation we have can be viewed constructively and used as a way to define opportunity and focus energies rather than a negative constraint upon choices. Much of the commission's work will be in bringing out these choices and enlarging their scope. We really do have a great many options on most situations at any one time. It is frequently our poorly developed analytical techniques or our lazy habits of thinking that prevent us from discovering new ways of doing things or new things to do.

## *Making a start*

Our first problem, on the Commission for the Future, was to find a way to begin the hugely complex task of thinking about the future. Now, after a year in which we have come together as a commission only about a dozen times, we are slowly gaining in confidence. At first, our unconscious response to the task was to approach it from well within the security of the present. We did not ignore likely future changes but we did see future studies in terms of problems and issues that are topical. Our first attempts at analysing the task led us to a framework of—

1. 10 areas of study;
2. Defined issues within each of these areas;
3. Specific projects within each of these issues.

An example of this classification is—

1. Area: Natural Resources;
2. Issue: Implications to New Zealand of shortages of natural resources (e.g., phosphate), overseas or at home;
3. Project: The likely shortage of minerals in New Zealand and their relation to world markets in the year 2000.

The 10 areas of study are—

1. New Zealand in World Society;
2. Economic Growth;
3. Technological Development;
4. Distribution of Wealth;
5. Population;
6. Distribution of Functions and Power in New Zealand;
7. The Individual in Society;
8. Human Relations;
9. Natural Resources;
10. Energy.

It is possible to think of many issues within each area and of even more projects within each issue. This brings us to the next problem.

We have no surplus of highly skilled manpower capable of sustained research in many different fields at any one time. For this reason, it is not possible to do everything at once. Priorities must be decided and methods found to share the work among organisations and individuals.

Having just reached the stage of a very broad coverage of basic areas and issues of study the commission has now thrown out the anchors to stabilise the ship a little while. During 1978 we plan to get under way again in the area of highest priority. The criteria by which the 1978-79 programme is being determined runs like this.

**First: Where should the priority lie?** Since we cannot do everything we have to restrict our work in some way to concentrate on priority areas. The future evolves from the present, so that the concern with present realities cannot be avoided. Later in this paper the arguments are presented for a priority which grows out of our present state which is nevertheless related fundamentally to our future conditions.

**Second: Is someone else better able to study the particular area?** Three of our areas of study are Distribution of Wealth, Population, and Energy. The New Zealand Planning Council is studying the first two and the New Zealand Energy Research and Development Committee is the central body for the third. The commission believes that its most useful role in these areas is to keep itself informed of what is going on but to leave the development of these areas to others. Occasionally, issues and projects in these areas may be recommended to, supported by, or even undertaken by, the Commission for the Future, but that will be unusual.

**Third: Are the people available who can sustain effort in the remaining areas of interest?** We have a national habit of volunteer effort in New Zealand. Management and research effort is a part of the country's store of unpaid public enterprise. Altruism has its limits and not even the most dedicated worker has an unlimited time to contribute to New Zealand's future development. Therefore, we must ensure the human resources are available before embarking on a project. Because this is a severe limit on what can be done in the areas of interest, some elements of the commission's programme will be advanced according to the opportunities or limitations in human resources.

**Fourth: Is the money available?** Like any other product, the product of careful thought attracts a value. Good scholarship is seldom cheap and the commission is interested only in the best research that can be arranged. Initially, it will probably be the human resources combined with a cautious approach to several areas of interest which control the upper limit of money expenditure. Later, money may become the limiting factor.



**Fifth: Can the commission successfully launch and sustain effort in all the programmed areas at the same time?** We are conscious that the commission will only succeed if the public's imagination is captured by its work. That will require a constant effort as will the translation for the public of work by a number of people in various projects. Getting the best out of the people and organisations in whose hands is much of the necessary expertise will test the capacity of the commission's management. Since we intend to keep the staff of the commission small, management capacity will become a limiting factor on the work that can be generated.

## *The proposed programme*

New Zealand is a trading nation, very dependent for her economic and social health on a world system of distribution and exchange. When the terms of trade fall, as at present, our security as a people is weakened.

Current trading problems are only part of the newly emerging picture of New Zealand in the world. Our place among nations has changed in both measurable and intangible terms. No longer does New Zealand hold its head high in the international tables of living standards. And no longer can we depend on the United Kingdom and Europe for trading survival.

In the international upsets of the past decade it is little wonder that we in New Zealand are confused about our insignificance. For reasons of economic survival, we must carve a new role for ourselves. With whom should links be allowed to weaken; with whom encouraged to strengthen? These are questions we do not have good answers to at present. Our perception of the world, never very clear from New Zealand's distance, is temporarily clouded by our concern with the short-term and expedient economic issues.

The changes that have befallen us are extreme. The message, despite the pessimistic reaction which greets it, cannot be too widely broadcast—

- In 1972 oil imports cost New Zealand \$66 million. In 1977 they cost about \$550 million. This equals the export earnings of the whole of the dairy sector.
- The terms of trade have been against us since 1973. In less than the two years between mid 1973 and March 1975 the fall in terms of trade means that we could buy only about half a given volume of imports from our exports. There is no clear evidence that the terms of trade will improve.
- Our "standard of living" fell from fourth place in 1960 to twentieth in 1977. Arguments about the price of clean air, water, and countryside do not make up for the fact that disposable income has fallen and former necessities are beyond the reach of many.
- Our inflation rate is still high and we are not earning our way.
- Output in agricultural produce—on which 80 percent of our export income is dependent—rose only marginally between 1969 and 1975.

Despite the gloom, choice provided we maintain the. Whatever choices we make in the world will be insignificant, ignored by the larger and stronger nations, with little to contribute to their health, our choices will diminish along with our waning confidence. If we can correctly analyse the growing commodity dependencies that are bringing nations into new alliances then we may realistically set New Zealand's course and carve a new role for ourselves. The nature of global changes in commodity trading will defy an economy based on old trading relationships. It is the world that has changed. Unless we understand that and develop a new perspective of our place in the new world, our "place" will be that to which we are assigned, like it or not.

For these reasons a programme of future studies should focus early on New Zealand's place in the world (New Zealand in world society) and aim at—

1. Bringing home to New Zealanders the way others see us and the opportunities we must find to develop new international relationships;
2. Showing us what we must do to create a new economy, restructured towards developing needs;
3. Etching far more deeply upon our consciousness the relationships between our international, economic, social, and ideological networks, and our capacity for national development;
4. Understanding our responsibilities to the world, especially as custodian of the South Pacific environment—social, physical, and economic.

This choice of priority will provide the focus for the commission's work 1978–79. That is not to say all other work would be excluded. The availability of people, response to public opinion, and the need to communicate with New Zealanders about the future are among the reasons why the commission will endeavour to maintain some work in several areas besides the priority choice. Important work, for instance, is being done by the Systems and Modelling Working Party which is attempting to provide a logical, clearly thought out, partly mathematical base for the commission's thinking.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NEW ZEALAND



3 1111 01651599 9

THE N

Chief among "second order priorities" are more about New Zealanders' views. Consequently, the programme for the Commission will enlarge our understanding about the Commission is receiving information from people who are concerned with the future of the country (the Future Working Party) has also been looking at the effect of possible new developments.

The Commission is also studying the impact of new technology on society and economy of New Zealand. A working party will identify the impact and will study the possible effects on the social aspects.

Beyond 1978-79, the Commission will develop out of its current programme a study of the social and economic conditions.

**Please return this item to:**

Document Supply Services  
National Library of New Zealand  
PO Box 1467  
Wellington

*Supplied at no charge from the collections  
National Library of New Zealand*

DATE DUE

APR 2007  
10 DEC 2019

s'' for 1978-79 is the need to find out  
ws on the future choices we have.  
his year includes studies designed to  
now we see our future, so that the  
n as well as broadcasting it. Since we  
eople, a working party (Individual in  
een set up to advise the commission  
elopments on the individual.

the implications to New Zealand's  
pective developments in science and  
entify technologies likely to have an  
ffects on the economy, the workforce,

functions of the commission will  
me, moulded, but not constrained by,  
ns in which we find ourselves.

NATIONAL  
LIBRARY  
OF NEW ZEALAND

*Te Puna Mātauranga  
o Aotearoa*



of the

JE