

17 December 2021

Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern
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Tēnā koe Jacinda,

Why foresight matters in 2022

Foresight comes into its own during uncertain times. Without the ability to explore the future, we spend all our time responding to the present. In 2022, more than any other year in recent history, we must embrace foresight (and its tools) to help shape our investment and operational decisions. Our focus on evidence-based research (which, by its nature, is backward looking) is not sufficient to deal with the challenges we face. We also need to explore what the future might look like, which means seeking out and/or creating a diverse range of information that is decision-useful. This requires Members of Parliament to seek, require and demand information that tests ideas and explores options.

There has been progress; it is great to see foresight reporting being introduced in the Public Service Act 2020; schedule 6 requires chief executives of government departments to prepare Long-term Insights Briefings (LTIBs). Building on this initiative, the Institute undertook a survey ([found here](#)). The survey asked the question: Is it clear to you what Aotearoa New Zealand's long-term vision is? Ninety-eight percent said no.

The summer break is a time for our leaders to rest, reflect and regroup. We urgently need a fresh and unifying approach, one that will bring our people together as one – a team of 5 million that respects, accepts and is curious to learn, understand and embrace our differences. Our political parties can lead by example and be catalysts for change, moving the country on a trajectory that delivers positive outcomes for all New Zealanders and for the environment. We need to create a mindset and skill base that can identify and overcome the challenges we face. Foresight is a set of tools that can help us navigate the way forward, whether it be to tackle inequality, improve social cohesion, design a healthcare system able to withstand pandemics or build housing stock able to tolerate climate change. These things are doable, but it means we need to take the time to create 'win-win' situations, as both time (given the climate emergency) and money are in short supply. The Ernest Rutherford quote, 'We haven't got the money, so we'll have to think,' resonates.

Never in my lifetime have I seen our nation so divided, isolated, in pain and fearful for the future. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing inequalities, racism, the urban–rural divide, poor healthcare and inadequate education outcomes, and yet we have failed to develop an integrated public policy approach based on foresight. Silo-based thinking adds oxygen to a burning fire; we need to actively seek out integrated solutions.

It is not the risks we face that shape us, but our response to those risks. For example, many would argue we have failed to use the window of opportunity provided by our island status to invest in our healthcare system in preparation for 'opening up' to COVID-19. Aotearoa New Zealand was one of many countries that failed to be 'pandemic ready' (see our discussion paper 1 September COVID-19 Situational Report

[here](#), and A Suppression Strategy: Living with COVID-19 in the Year 2022 [here](#)). Our healthcare system needed and still needs major strategic investment – a failure of many consecutive governments. Instead, we funded the private sector through wage subsidies. The primary focus was, in our view, wrong; investing in the healthcare system and in particular our healthcare workers, would ultimately have reduced lockdowns, improved health outcomes for all, and got the economy moving with certainty more quickly. Clearly, this is easy to say in hindsight, but we need to be honest and have open and frank discussions if we want to make better decisions in 2022.

We believe poor mental health, not COVID-19, is arguably the biggest challenge facing our young people. This new generation faces a terrible dilemma; the virus is shaping their youth while climate change is shaping their adulthood. Unfortunately, climate change will make Aotearoa New Zealand even more isolated and disconnected. Extreme waves may prevent container ships from bringing critical imports (creating supply chain issues) or carrying produce to international markets (impacting profitability). Excessive air turbulence may stop planes flying. Domestically, electric trains around our coastline will not be a viable long-term solution. Whatever way you look at it, we need to face our fears, invest in the future and get prepared – and that means moving from fear to hope.

COVID-19 requires us to isolate and comply, but climate change requires us to connect and revolt. We need a persuasive and realisable programme of action that gets Aotearoa New Zealand not just ‘COVID ready’, but ‘climate ready’. The Institute is concerned about our oceans, in particular rising temperatures and pollution. In 2022, we hope to publish a Project 2058 Report on dolphins, which we see as the equivalent to the canary in the mine. To help collect data on dolphins we have prepared a poster on how to identify and report dolphins (a copy is found [here](#)).

At the end of every year, the Institute prepares a Prime Minister’s Summer Reading List. Given the above observations, the books we have selected for our leaders to read over summer focus on the unique voices of three New Zealanders whose books were written over lockdown (Alina Siegfried, Abbas Nazari, and Girol Karacaoglu); two international voices experienced at exploring the future (Mariana Mazzucato and Alec Ross) and an unusual book on history through the lens of clocks (David Rooney). This latter book reminds me that we are all part of a long narrative and that we need to think about the artifacts that we want to leave behind for future generations. Each book in the selection is briefly discussed below.

As in previous years, the Institute will provide the leaders of all political parties copies of the books. It has been a hard year and hard decisions have had to be made, often based on very little information. I have no doubt our political leaders are exhausted. The Institute would like to thank all Members of Parliament for their contribution and in particular, for looking after our country at this time. Next year will require a focus on looking forward, but right now it is time to look after yourselves and your family.

We wish you a wonderful relaxing break, ready for 2022.

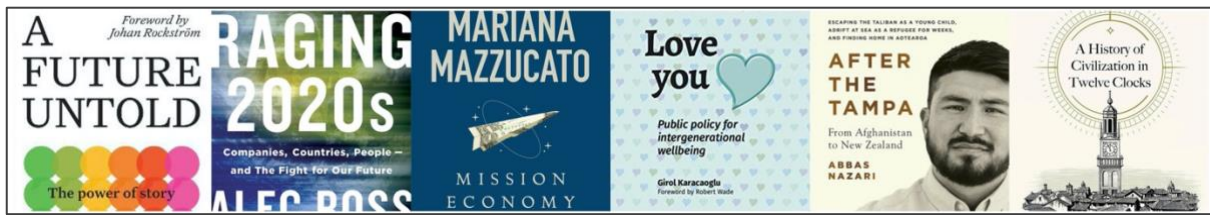
Meri Kirihimete,



Wendy McGuinness
Chief Executive

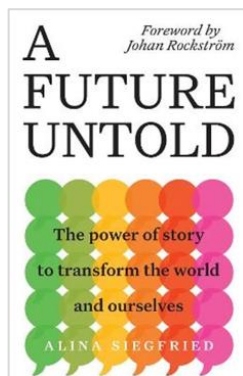
Please note: This forms part of our final blog post for 2021. If you would like to visit the links, please go to www.mcguinnessinstitute.org/publications/blog

A brief summary of the six books selected for the Prime Minister's Summer Reading List



1. *A Future Untold*

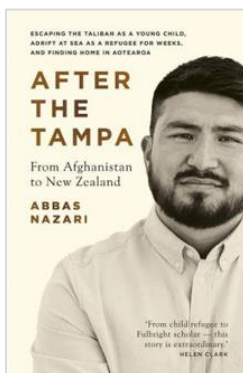
Alina Siegfried



Alina has been someone I have watched from a distance. Our paths have crossed a number of times, and at those times I have been aware that this young woman is a deep thinker. Her latest book reinforces this view; it is honest, forthright and considered. [Chris Reed's review](#) describes the book this way: 'Alina Siegfried is a past national champion of slam poetry. Her poem "A Cure for Them" is a remarkable piece of poetry that has made it onto YouTube channels and sound bites. It may also be the stimulus for Jacinda Ardern's arguably most recognised like "they are us". Now, Siegfried turns her hand from brilliant poetry to the longer form of non fiction writing. She offers up a new lens to view the world through: what it is, and what it can be ... It is a worthwhile read for anyone interested in what we can do, now, to assist in the shaping of our own, and our loved ones' future.'

2. *After The Tampa*

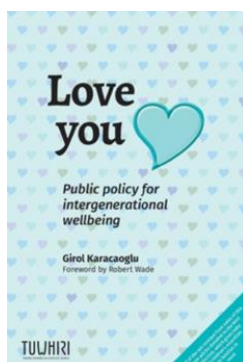
Abbas Nazari



Abbas Nazari attended two of our youth policy workshops: LivingStandardsNZ (2013) and ForesightNZ (2016). He wrote this book while in lockdown in New York. Abbas was one of 433 refugees rescued by the Norwegian cargo ship *Tampa* in 2001 after leaving Indonesia in an unseaworthy boat with his Afghan family. Twenty years on, he recalls the fear and uncertainty on the *Tampa*. Abbas and his family have thrived since being resettled in New Zealand. In 2019, he was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to the United States, where he attained a Masters in Security Studies from Georgetown University, Washington DC. Abbas hopes to help children of refugee backgrounds build meaningful lives in their adopted homelands.

3. *Love You: Public Policy for Intergenerational Wellbeing*

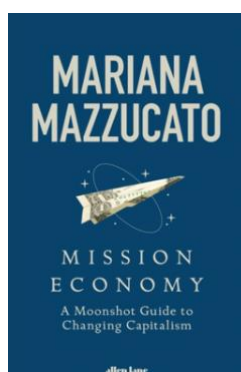
Girol Karacaoglu



Girol is one of the Institute's patrons. The Institute was fortunate to work with Girol on a webinar on 'Long-term Insights Briefings: A novel policy instrument to deal with foresight' on 1 September 2021, found [here](#). Girol is currently Professor of Policy Practice at Victoria University of Wellington and was previously Chief Economist at the New Zealand Treasury. He is a superb thinker and doer. In 2016, the Institute was fortunate to host workshops on how to tackle poverty around the country (learn more [here](#)). Girol joined us at every location – listening, thinking and reflecting on how to solve inequity. I like to think that many of the lessons we heard over that time have guided his thinking and are reflected in this book. *Love You* uses the concept of a 'wellbeing garden' – the broader ecosystems that provide all members of society with the opportunities and capacity to survive and thrive, to flourish in safety.

4. *Mission Economy: A Moonshot Guide to Changing Capitalism*

Mariana Mazzucato



In June 2021, we hosted a webinar based on this book. You can find the recording on YouTube [here](#) and the resulting discussion paper *Mission Aotearoa* can be found [here](#). Mazzucato writes about the way the extraordinary efforts that took mankind to the moon 50 years ago were more than a scientific feat of aeronautics. They required new forms of collaboration between the public sector (notably, NASA) and private companies. This book asks: what if the same level of boldness – the boldness that set inspirational goals, took risks and explicitly recognised that this required large spending but would be worthwhile in terms of long-term growth – was applied to the biggest problems of our time: climate change, disease and inequality, to name only a few? Mariana Mazzucato argues that by applying innovation to societal goals and structuring government budgets more explicitly for the long term, as the moon programme did, we can do government differently.

5. *The Raging 2020s: Companies, Countries, People – and the Fight for Our Future*

Alec Ross

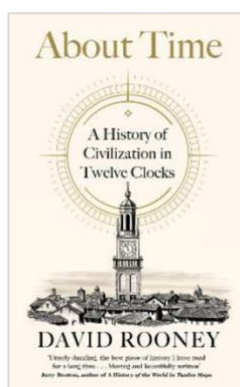


Al Alec Ross is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Industries of the Future* and has been named a Top 100 Global Thinker by Foreign Policy magazine. Alec served in the presidential administration of Barack Obama for four years, as Senior Advisor for Innovation to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. This book has travelled with me throughout the year; I keep picking it up! It is one of those books that is simply great to have beside your chair to dip into. At the Institute, we are very interested in how companies report and in doing so, how they report on their social licence to operate. We need companies to act in all our interests. While many consider and manage their impacts on society, there are a few that remain solely focused on the short-term gain of shareholders. The Companies Act 1993 should be reviewed and updated in 2022 to bring the legislation in line with current thinking and best practice. A particular section of legislation that we consider deserves urgent attention is s 211: Contents of annual report.

Alec weaves interviews with influential thinkers into a narrative that explores the successes and failures of corporations as they transition to a new form of social contract. He shares a number of examples where governments have failed to deliver the necessary ecosystem to support companies and industries to be the type of corporate citizens we need for the future of society and our planet. The Institute is a strong supporter of Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD) recommendations and the recent legislation creating ‘climate statements’. Our recent working paper (2021/06) reviewed NZX-listed companies and found 27 out of 130 companies have prepared or are in the process of preparing TCFD reports (see Table 5 in the working paper [here](#)).

6. *About Time: A History of Civilization in Twelve Clocks*

David Rooney



David Rooney is a horologist – a clock enthusiast. His book takes us on a journey through time, from the unveiling of al-Jazari’s castle clock in 1206, in present-day Turkey, to the Cape of Good Hope observatory at the southern tip of Africa, where 19th-century British government astronomers moved the gears of empire with a time ball and a gun, to the burial of a plutonium clock now sealed beneath a public park in Osaka, where it will keep time for 5,000 years. He uses these 12 artifacts to show ‘how time has been imagined, politicized, and weaponized over the centuries – and how it might bring peace’. Ultimately, he shows that a history of clocks is a history of civilisation. See the full book review [here](#). This book reminds me that we are part of a long narrative and what we do (or do not do) shapes the trajectory of future generations. It also reminds me of the importance of collecting data and being clear about its purpose; and, most importantly, why we need to ‘take time’ to prepare, reflect and engage early with the challenges we are likely to face. Lastly, it makes me wonder about the artifacts this generation will leave for future generations and if we were ambitious, what those artifacts might be.