Public perceptions – issues in where we want rural NZ to head in the 21st Century

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38% of NZers have done, do, or want to experience, this!

“Wetting’ the appetite’

Most people do not want something like this!
Outline

• The approach and the biennial environmental perceptions surveys

• **A. Priorities for the government and for individual New Zealanders**

• **B. Pressures, state and responses – focused on the rural environment, and mainly freshwater**

• **C. What sustainability would achieve**

• What NZers don’t want, and do want

• Conclusions and the challenge
Reading the minds of NZers – making sense of the research mass

- Multiple surveys related to this topic area, undertaken by or on behalf of central government depts, local authorities, by NGOs, by business groups, and many by researchers.
- Many are descriptive and few truly analytical.
- Amongst the best known, relevant, surveys, are:
  - The Lincoln University biennial survey on peoples’ perceptions of the NZ environment (5 surveys from 2000);
  - Environment Waikato’s now triennial surveys;
  - Growth and Innovation Advisory Board (2004): national vs individual preferences for environment, growth, education, etc.
The approach and the biennial environmental perceptions surveys
The biennial environmental perceptions surveys

- Assesses people’s perceptions of the state of the NZ environment – 11 natural resources, e.g., air, fisheries
- Built around the Pressure-State-Response (OECD) model
- Postal questionnaire
- 2,000 people aged 18 and over randomly selected from electoral roll
- Demographic variables include: age, gender, region, ethnicity, education, and employment sector
- Data analysed descriptively and, where applicable, the 2008 survey responses compared with 2006, 2004, 2002, 2000
- >40% effective response rates in all surveys
Case studies

• Each survey asks an additional set of questions focused on one (and sometimes more) topic area:
  – 2000 natural hazards, and preparedness
  – 2002 coastal management and marine recreational fishing
  – 2004 freshwater management and recreational fishing
  – 2006 land transport and related externalities, priorities for NZers
  – 2008 conservation, recreation, freshwater management

• We present general results from the 5 surveys and specific results from the 2004 and 2008 freshwater case studies, and the 2006 priorities for New Zealanders case study.
A. Priorities for the government and for individual New Zealanders
Priorities for NZ government

- Ordered average rankings, on a scale of 1 (highest priority) to 7 (lowest priority), are:
  - a high quality health system 2.29 = Highest priority
  - a high quality education system 2.67
  - a strong economy 3.14
  - a high quality environment 3.97
  - a low crime rate 4.43
  - a fair level of superannuation and income support 5.08
  - a strong defence system 6.17 = Lowest priority

- While a strong economy was the most commonly chosen top priority, when priority rankings are averaged the economy rates 3rd, with quality of the environment in 4th position.
Personal importance

• Average Likert scores, on a scale of 1 (very important) to 5 (very unimportant), ranked from top to bottom are listed below:

  – Quality of life                  1.18 = Most important
  – Public health system           1.46
  – Quality of education            1.50
  – Quality of the natural environment  1.55
  – Crime prevention               1.60
  – Level of wages and salaries    1.85
  – Level of economic growth       1.89 = Least important

• As with the Growth and Innovation Advisory Board (2004), this survey shows that quality of life and quality of the natural environment are more important than either the level of wages and salaries, or the level of economic growth.
• Health and education outranked the environment.
NZ’s performance - 2006

Percentage of respondents

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Very bad</th>
<th>Bad</th>
<th>Adequate</th>
<th>Good</th>
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<td>Crime prevention</td>
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Don’t know percentage
Box 1. Priorities for the government and for individual New Zealanders: the key messages.

Key priorities for the government are health, education and the economy, followed by the environment.

For individuals the priorities are different and the environment and quality of life are more important drivers than economic considerations.
B. Pressures, states and responses – focused on the rural environment, and mainly freshwater
Pressures: Most important environmental issue: NZ and World - 2008

- Agriculture
- Urban sprawl/development
- Sustainable management of resources
- Global warming/climate change/ozone layer
- Air pollution/air quality
- Disposal of refuse/waste
- Pollution (unspecified)
- Water (unspecified)
- Water use
- Water pollution
- Other
Pressures: Main causes of damage to water: 2000-2008

- Forestry
- Tourism
- Mining
- Urban development
- Pests and weeds
- Household waste and emissions
- Dumping of solid waste
- Farming
- Industrial activities
- Hazardous chemicals
- Sewage and stormwater

Percent of respondents

Year:
- 2000
- 2002
- 2004
- 2006
- 2008
State: of the NZ environment 2008

Percentage of respondents

- Very bad
- Adequate
- Bad
- Good
- Very good

- Rivers and lakes
- Marine fisheries
- Wetlands
- Groundwater
- Natural environment in towns and cities
- Soils
- Native land and freshwater plants and animals
- Coastal waters and beaches
- Air
- Native bush and forests
- NZ natural environment compared to other developed countries

Don't know

%
State: ‘Small lowland streams in my region have high water quality’ (2004 cf 2008)
State: ‘Water quality in small lowland streams in my region has NOT been damaged by dairy farming’ - 2004

Total sample:
- Strongly disagree: 33%
- Disagree: 40%
- Neither: 25%
- Agree: 20%
- Strongly agree: 61%

Northern:
- Strongly disagree: 40%
- Disagree: 31%
- Neither: 28%
- Agree: 29%
- Strongly agree: 61%

Central:
- Strongly disagree: 31%
- Disagree: 34%
- Neither: 28%
- Agree: 34%
- Strongly agree: 61%

Southern:
- Strongly disagree: 28%
- Disagree: 29%
- Neither: 29%
- Agree: 34%
- Strongly agree: 61%

NZ European:
- Strongly disagree: 29%
- Disagree: 34%
- Neither: 28%
- Agree: 34%
- Strongly agree: 61%

Maori:
- Strongly disagree: 34%
- Disagree: 34%
- Neither: 28%
- Agree: 34%
- Strongly agree: 61%

Other:
- Strongly disagree: 61%
- Disagree: 41%
- Neither: 28%
- Agree: 34%
- Strongly agree: 21%

Non angler:
- Strongly disagree: 41%
- Disagree: 34%
- Neither: 28%
- Agree: 34%
- Strongly agree: 21%

Angler:
- Strongly disagree: 21%
- Disagree: 29%
- Neither: 28%
- Agree: 34%
- Strongly agree: 61%
Response: Small lowland streams in my region are well managed (2004 cf 2008)
Response: WTP $20 per year in additional rates for 10 years to pay for lowland stream enhancement work - 2004
Response: Open-ended comments re WTP proposal

Those **supportive or strongly supportive** of a $20 rate increase said:
- ‘Small price to pay for the common good’ (43% of 484 responses) followed by:
  - ‘Good to pass onto future generations’,
  - ‘To clean up the water’, and
  - ‘Better than cleaning it up later’.

Those **opposed or strongly opposed** said:
- ‘rates are too high already’ (23% of 484 responses),
- ‘industry or farmers should pay for this, not ratepayers’
- ‘no proof projects are being done efficiently’ and
- ‘on a low income’
Box 2. Pressures, states and responses – focused on the rural environment: the key messages

Overall state of the NZ environment is very good, but of all resources freshwater rates the lowest. At a more local level considerable concern about lowland streams, rivers and lakes.

The key pressures on these resources are human-induced. Farming is increasingly blamed for damaging freshwater but also for damage to a range of other resources.

Important demographic differences. Those in resource based industries much more positive about state of water resources than are others – anglers more pessimistic.

Management of lowland streams considered inadequate but people willing to pay for actions to improve lowland streams.
C. What sustainability would achieve
Achieving environmental sustainability in NZ (2006) would ...

Percentage of respondents

-40  -20  0    20   40   60   80   100   120

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Neither disagree nor agree
Agree
Strongly agree

Enhance economic growth
Enhance NZ's clean green image
Reduce pressure on limited resources
Ensure access to recreational resources
Lower living costs
Improve quality of life
Reduce climate change impacts

Don't know

- Enhance economic growth: 7%
- Reduce climate change impacts: 8%
- Enhance NZ's clean green image: 3%
- Improve quality of life: 3%
- Reduce pressure on limited resources: 6%
- Ensure access to recreational resources: 5%
- Lower living costs: 8%
- Don't know: 8%
Achieving environmental sustainability in NZ would, on average …

• Average Likert scores, on a scale of 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree), ranked from top to bottom, are listed below:
  – Enhance NZ's clean green image 1.65 = Most likely
  – Improve quality of life 1.94
  – Ensure access to recreational resources 2.04
  – Reduce pressure on limited resources 2.08
  – Enhance economic growth 2.30
  – Reduce climate change impacts 2.33
  – Lower living costs 2.94 = Least likely

• Even for lower living costs, the lowest ranked of these implications, the average response remains positive.
Box 3. What sustainability would achieve: the key messages.

Achieving sustainability would have multiple benefits for New Zealand and would arguably come at only one cost, a possibility of higher living costs.
Overall (and remembering the three boxes) ...
What NZers don’t want, and do want

• Don’ts:
  – Don’t let development wreck rivers, streams, lakes, etc.

• Concerns:
  – Farming is increasingly a cause of damage to the environment
  – People worried about water, pollution, climate change

• Priorities:
  – Quality of life & environment more important to individuals than economic growth

• Do’s:
  – People willing to pay for improvements/ mitigation
  – Look after natural resources, including freshwater, biodiversity, etc

• Implications:
  – Rural land development/intensification needs to occur with sustainability as a focus, and not afterwards as a quick fix solution
Conclusions

- **No overall vision** of the future for rural NZ – surveys have not provided a united visualisation of the opportunities.
- **We do know** that there is growing concern among middle and upper NZ, Maori and anglers, about farming, water pollution, etc.
- **We can infer** from some of this work, that more effort needs to go into proactive efforts at protecting the environment that run in sync with development, and are not patch up jobs afterwards.
- **A challenge then** - how to match policy and political responses to the level of public concern about the future of the rural landscape and its component parts, and turn these concerns into proactive sustainable development policy.
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