THE HISTORY OF LONG-TERM PUBLIC GOVERNANCE IN NEW ZEALAND

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ABOUT ME

- Born and bred in the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand
- Taught Science at Secondary School level
- Ministry of Research, setting priorities for Government investment in science
- Chair of New Zealand Futures Trust
- Published articles about Futures Thinking
- Research Manager for Retirement Commission - long term view (demography)
- Researcher at New Zealand Transport Agency – long term view (infrastructure)

FAMILY CONNECTION



Ms Niki Menzies

Second Secretary (Political)

High Commission of New Zealand to Malaysia

Daughter

Briefing the group on 14 September

AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND: KEY POINTS

- Long, thin country, a long way from most other places
- Many physical risks, increasing with climate change
- Relatively small population, highly urbanised
- Creaking Infrastructure
- A history of colonisation; strong indigenous culture
- Ageing population, though not evenly
- Uncertain geopolitical environment (not unique to NZ)
- Three-year electoral cycle – short termism
- Historically, economy based on primary sector; low productivity growth, many efforts to change

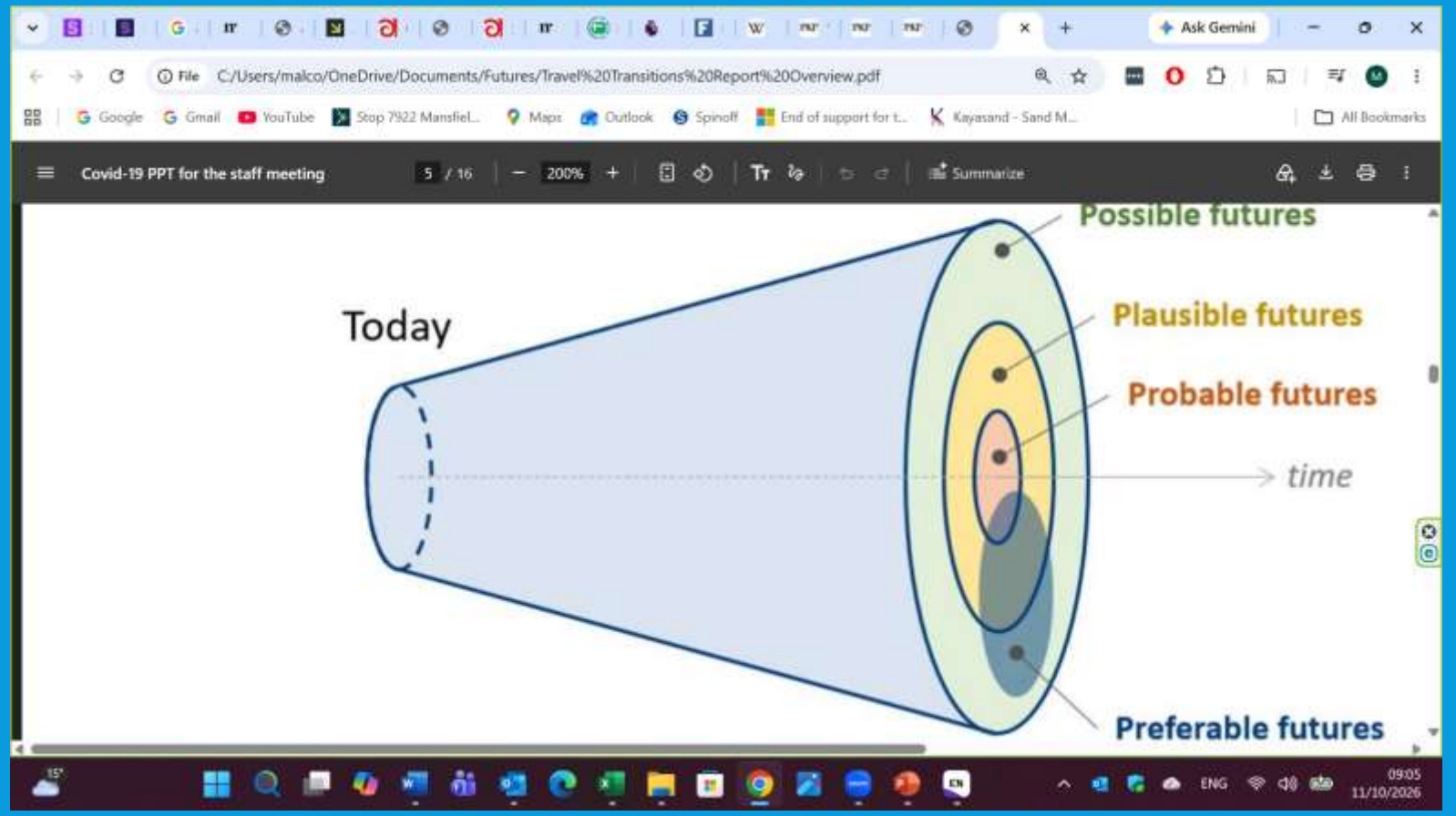
LONG TERM GOVERNANCE REQUIRES FUTURES THINKING

- Not the same as planning (or even strategic foresight)
- Malaysia has much to teach New Zealand about National Planning: Wawasan 2020; 13th Malaysia plan with core targets
- Planning based on forecasts, projections (e.g. pensions)
- Futures thinking: probable, possible and preferred futures
- Not predictions, but scenarios
- Asks "what if?"

THE PURPOSE OF FUTURES THINKING

- To identify key trends and uncertainties and probable, possible and preferred futures and their implications for the present, so that strategies, policies and plans can be made more anticipatory, adaptable and robust in the future that eventually emerges.
- What if?

INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT FORUM



THE HISTORY OF LONG-TERM PUBLIC GOVERNANCE IN NEW ZEALAND

- NZ Development Conferences
- Planning Act 1977
- Futures Trust
- Central and local government initiatives
- Knowledge Wave
- Commissions for retirement, productivity, environment, infrastructure
- Long Term Insights Briefings
- Ad hoc bodies and interest groups

NZ DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCES 1960, 1968, 1972

- To establish an agreed direction for diversifying the New Zealand economy away from its dependence on primary agricultural products (wool, butter, meat carcasses, etc.).
- Farmers' representative used his centre-stage opportunity to tell the exact opposite story to the one the government was trying to have heard: he claimed that if the farmers were only given enough resources, they could solve New Zealand's economic problems all by themselves – i.e. by producing more of the same
- Lesson: Vested interests will resist change

PLANNING ACT 1977

- Established the **New Zealand Planning Council** and the **Commission for the Future.**
- The Commission was to study the possibilities for the long-term economic and social development of New Zealand, with particular reference to developments in science and technology and trends and events in New Zealand and overseas; to report to the minister and inform members of Parliament; and to publish and promote discussion and education about the future.
- Scrapped in 1982 and 1990
- Lessons: Read the political winds, don't try to do too much

NZ FUTURES TRUST

- Non-governmental, membership-based body
- Strong leader
- Base gradually eroded
- Became marginalised
- Ran out of funds
- Wound up in 2013
- Archive at futuretimes.co.nz
- Lessons: Resource base is essential (so is mandate)

THE KNOWLEDGE WAVE 2001

- The Prime Minister and Chancellor of the University of Auckland co-chaired a conference to identify strategies for New Zealand's transition into a knowledge society (echoes of the 1960s).
- 450 participants from political parties, the bureaucracy, academia, the business community, trade union movement, community organisations.
- Very difficult to get consensus.
- Mixed results; Gave rise to peak business organisations
- Lessons: "big bang" events don't work in the long term

RETIREMENT COMMISSION

- Concerns about ageing population, how to support the baby boomers when they get old
- Bitter disputes about pensions policy from the 1970s to the 1990s.
- An accord was reached between political parties, including the establishment of the office of the Retirement Commissioner in 1993.
- The Commission was expected to carry out periodic reviews of pensions policy (now every three years).
- To "take the temperature" and to keep the temperature down!
- Lesson: Independence is important, but not too much

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION 2011-24

- To provide independent advice and conduct in-depth inquiries to the government on ways to boost New Zealand's productivity.
- Government selected topics for inquiries; e.g. on housing affordability, international freight, economic relations with Australia, regulation
- Acted as an advisory and research body rather than a policy-implementing agency, meaning the government was not legally bound to adopt its recommendations
- Disestablished by incoming Government – funding diverted to a new Ministry for Regulation
- Lesson: read the political winds; focus on core purpose; be prepared for tweaks

COMMISSIONER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

- Established in 1986. Produces independent reports and advice on environmental issues, and a mission to maintain or improve the quality of Aotearoa New Zealand's environment.
- Decisions to change environmental law, policy and institutional arrangements are the responsibility of Parliament, central government and local government. Implementing these decisions, and monitoring their impact on the environment, is the responsibility of government agencies.
- Accountable to Parliament, not the Government of the day.
- Lessons: Credibility and independence are of critical importance

LONG TERM INSIGHTS BRIEFINGS

2020 Legislative requirement requiring departmental chief executives to give a LTIB to the appropriate minister at least once every three years.

19 LTIBs prepared (too many, inconsistent approaches). Some more influential than others (Treasury). Policy Quarterly Boston, Jackson, Menzies

2026 Amendment requires the chief executive of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to give a LTIB to the Prime Minister and the Minister at least once in every 3-year period and independently of Ministers.

Will it work? Too soon to tell.

Lessons: Futures thinking is not well understood, nor supported. But there is hope!

INFRASTRUCTURE COMMISSION TE WAIHANGA

- Established in 2019. Researches important infrastructure issues, advises on policy, provides expert project support, and shares data on both upcoming projects and infrastructure performance.
- The National Infrastructure Plan sets out a path for New Zealand's infrastructure over the next 30 years.
- Key insight: look after the infrastructure we have rather than just build new
- Broadly accepted, though not guaranteed.
- Successful because: Independent; cross party support, well resourced, clear purpose, focused; analytical, transparent. Very difficult to reject their findings.

AD HOC BODIES AND INTEREST GROUPS

- **Aged care ministerial advisory group**
- Sets out a vision and a plan for supporting older people to live and age well through a new and better system of integrated aged care in this country – one where people can receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

- **New Zealand National Forum for the Decade of Healthy Ageing.**
- The choices Aotearoa New Zealand makes now will shape whether longer lives deliver a growing longevity dividend – the social and economic value created when people are able to age well for longer – or place increasing, avoidable pressure on health, housing, care and community systems.

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO SECURE CONSISTENT POLITICAL ATTENTION TO THE LONG TERM?

- Political leadership that understands the importance of long-term governance, and supports futures thinking
- Which means capability building
- Plan initiatives at a high level, looking 30-40 years out, not enmeshed in the vested interests and politics of today
- Don't go for "big bangs"; aim for continuity
- Be independent but politically savvy
- Enlist credible voices, get cross-party support
- Be focused, analytical, transparent.