



The Bluegreens is the National Party's Policy Advisory Group on environmental issues

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25th Annual Bluegreens Forum

March 2023



BLUEGREENS CO-CHAIRS, Hon Scott Simpson & Chris Severne

The 25th Bluegreens Forum has just concluded in Blenheim. Held over the 25th & 26th February it was attended by over 100 environment and conservation minded members of the Party, NGO's and major industry groups including farming, forestry, fishing, energy, tourism and waste. The Bluegreens are the 'practical environmentalists' who have a core value of using strong evidence-based science to improve sustainable environmental outcomes.

Note that this was the first Bluegreens Forum in 25 years with both the Leader and Deputy Leader of the National Party in attendance.

THIS YEAR'S "TAKEHE AWARD"



Bluegreens stalwart and founder, Dr Hon Nick Smith was this year's recipient of this prestigious award. Our new Nelson Mayor was recognised for his services to the

Bluegreens, having not only founded the organisation, but also overseen its growth over the past 25 years.

Nick has been primarily responsible for growing the Bluegreens from a "small splinter group" into a "mainstream environmental organisation, respected by both the right as well as the left in political circles. When established in 1998, the Bluegreens was represented by just two of National's then Caucus – Nick Smith and Simon Upton. At this 2023 Forum around half of the National Party Caucus were in attendance.

FORUM KEYNOTE SPEAKER – PARTY LEADER, CHRISTOPHER LUXON



Christopher gave a very clear policy direction saying that Three Waters legislation would be repealed in the first 100 days of a Luxon-National Government.

Luxon opened by endorsing Bluegreens long-standing commitment to pragmatic and practical environmentalism. He stated that the 5 key values of the Bluegreens are now "mainstream" within New Zealand these days. He said that, unlike Labour who talked the talk but can never execute to get their idealistic outcomes, National will be solutions focused to ensure environmental resilience.

Luxon reiterated that we must build long-term dependable environmental infrastructure, and National is committed to meeting emission reduction targets. He said that the goal of limiting Climate Change is doable, and we must take actions – setting commitments (as Labour does) is not enough.

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You only have to look at Labour's doubling of New Zealand's imported (dirty) coal use in their last 5 years in government, is a great example of a government that talks the big story (Jacinda's nuclear free moments) but doesn't actually get things done.

Luxon said reform is required – the investment in Three Waters is obviously substandard, but Labour's 3 Waters policy is plainly wrong. He said the 4 Water Entities and Labour's Co-governance agenda is wrong. He clearly stated that National is committed to "Local Water done well" – stating that within the first 100 days National will restore Local Government control, but Central Government will retain oversight to ensure that water infrastructure is financially sustainable. National will retain a national regulator to ensure water quality standards achieved. He said that if local Councils can't meet the required standards then Central Government would step in- but only as a last resort. National's "Water done well" Plan will not cripple this generation to do so.

National will:

- **One – Repeal Labour's Three Waters legislation and scrap the four mega-entities, with prescribed co-governance, that goes with them.**
- **Two - Restore council ownership and control, but with stronger central government oversight because we're not simply going back to the old way of doing things that hasn't worked.**
- **Three – Set strict rules for water quality, and for investment in water infrastructure.**
- **Four - Ensure water services are financially sustainable so that future generations don't inherit outdated or failing infrastructure.**

FORUM KEYNOTE SPEAKER

– PARTY DEPUTY LEADER, NICOLA WILLIS



Nicola opened her address by stating "**Environmental issues are mainstream issues that must be addressed by mainstream Parties, and not just fringe Parties.**"

She continued "Conservative values for me bring me to my Bluegreens commitment. National's agenda is underpinned by its Bluegreens Agenda. She reiterated that the Bluegreens

Agenda will be critical in achieving National's 5 big goals. With regards to Climate Change, she said it was National (and not Labour) that signed New Zealand up to the 1992 Rio Declaration, and several other international conventions since then. Labour talks the talk, but National actually gets things done.

Nicola stated that National is committed to Climate Change adaption, ensuring infrastructure resilience based on adaption. She said the key will be to empower local

communities to ensure delivery – not Labour's "*Central Government knows best.*"

Nicola said getting the consenting right, and she was critical of Labour's "shovel-ready" Covid projects – noting that 220 have been started but only 40 completed. Her biggest concern is around the unaccountability for Labour's spending. She noted concerns with Labour's Emissions Reduction Plan, saying she sees a lot of waste within this plan.

She concluded by saying:

"New Zealand must take care not to kill our golden goose." We must stand with our farmers to ensure farming sustainability. We want to protect food production services. We say Yes to Best Practice, but NO to sending farming offshore."

PANEL – RMA REFORM



Panellists: Chris Bishop (Chair) & National's RMA Spokesperson; Gary Taylor (EDS); Hon Dr Nick Smith (Mayor of Nelson); Stephen Franks & Brigitte Morton (both of Franks Ogilvy).

CHRIS BISHOP opened by stating that National was extremely sceptical that the new RMA Bills will be "*faster, cheaper, better*". His prime concerns are around increased bureaucracy and more democratic deficiencies. He said that the current propositions lacked either clarity nor certainty. "Te Tio o Te Reo" – threatens hierarchy. There is little guidance as to how trade-offs will be made.

STEPHEN FRANKS stated the "The rule of law" meant that you could read it and understand the consequences of your actions. He stated that the proposed new Bills make it very vague and only mention property rights once in the 900 pages of the draft Bills.

NICK SMITH noted that the challenge for the National Party Caucus is that the RMA does need reforming, and not all of the proposed Bills are a problem. He stated that over the 30 year life of the RMA it has limited "point source pollution" into our waterways by 90%. However, we need an honest conversation about the tensions between development and protection. He stated that National need to take a review between what is best for local versus central government. He said that no one can argue that local and regional plans are far too numerous; and separating Spatial Planning from Urban Development is an elegant solution to a 30 year problem.

Nick highlighted the big issue being property rights, saying these Bills will result in uncertainty, and that will

be very costly. He noted that for the first iteration of the RMA councils spent more than \$2 billion in writing these plans. Some spent too much, and others not enough.

Nick concluded that he is not satisfied that infrastructural investment issues will be adequately addressed in these 2 Bills, saying that 2/3rd of what is in this new legislation is just a re-write of past RMA legislation.

GARY TAYLOR stated that the gestation of these Bills has been 5 years in the making – following the Randerson Report. He said that there has been an exposure draft, and the missing bit is the Natural Environment Act. He stated that these Bills move away from an effects-based approach to an outcomes-based focus.

Gary said that the Purpose clause as proposed is chunky and unclear and will result in years of litigation unless it is fixed. He advocated for a “hierarchy of bottom lines” before development can proceed. He argued for the NBA and Spatial Plans to be built consequently to ensure that timeframes were shortened.

CHRIS BISHOP summed up by saying that the National Party has offered for the last 5 years to work collaboratively on RMA Reform, but Minister Parker has continually rebuffed them. He said that very few submitters like what they see, so it will be very hard to see any hope of a bipartisan fix.

From the floor, **Peter Scott** (Environment Canterbury Chair) noted that the NBA doesn’t look to put the environment first, and the unintended consequences will likely see his council having to spend an estimated \$27m to enact this, plus more than 150 extra staff.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS



Richard Dawkins – 2021 Marlborough Sheep & Beef Farmer of the Year

Richard set the tone with a passionate address about farming in Marlborough. Referring to He Waka Noa he said that we all want sustainability, but it was the method of getting there that was the issue.

Richard said that past and present generations of farmers are natural conservationists, believing strongly in ensuring sustainability - and we need a Central Government that recognised good science and pragmatic decision-making to work with (not against) our farming community.

Richard noted that previously his property had been a champion Corriedale sheep breeder but today, with the low price of wool, his farm is based on meat-based production.

PANEL – AGRICULTURE & THE ENVIRONMENT

Panellists: Todd Muller (Chair) & National’s Agriculture & Climate Change Spokesperson; Tim Mackle (DairyNZ); Corina Jordan (Fish & Game); Nicky Hislop (Beef+Lamb); Wayne Langford (Federated Farmers).



Todd Muller opened by stating that **“What was a very light touch environmentally 40 years ago, is today a very heavy hand.”**

He stated that the scale of Cyclone Gabrielle has changed how we need to go forward.



Tim Mackle - DairyNZ

Tim highlighted that DairyNZ is 100% industry funded. He said that in 2003 Fonterra established the Clean Stream Accord to keep animals out of our waterways. We have now done 7,500 Farm Environment Plans, recognising that *“we have to work together to fix the big environmental issues”*. The first focus must be in

problem identification, and for this it is essential that no-one is shut out of the room. The key is good sequencing, and we need to support farmers on this path. Certainty is the key, and we have to take people with us. We need a *“more whole of government approach”*. Focused is good, but being too narrow is counter-productive.

Tim’s key message was: **“Tell me what you want me to do, Make it easy to get it done.”**



Corina Jordan – Fish & Game

Corina noted that she has only been CEO for the past 6 months, but she has previously spent a decade with Beef+Lamb NZ, so she is very familiar with the issues.

She said that a Court decision in Southland has found that farming has degraded water, and as a result has put future farming at risk. She stated that the key going forward is collaboration. We need to recognise that economic well-being is directly linked to environmental sustainability.



Wayne Langford – Fed Farmers

Wayne stated that he is a 6th generation Dairy Farmer and current Federated Farmers Vice-President. He opened up by acknowledging a 6 year battle with mental health issues, and today goes by the creed *“YOLO” – You only live once”*.

He said that farming (especially dairy farming) in the current increasingly regulated environment is putting

huge pressure on farmers, and we need to find a way to work collaboratively together to ensure the environment is in sync with economic imperatives, and visa versa.



Nicky Hislop – Beef+Lamb NZ

Nicky stated that her background in Irrigated Sheep, Beef and Cropping farming in South Canterbury. She totally accepts the concept of kaitiakitanga (land guardianship and conservation), saying that we are already seeing the market rewarding good management practices. She

said farmers are just frustrated and often angry at the ill-informed approach by many in Central Government.

Nicky said her Farm Environment Plan is a valid tool for planning, and the big risk is that some farmers will rebel again with compulsory farm environment plans. She urges our bureaucrats to sit down with us to work through issues, rather than just building more red tape.

Peter Scott (Environment Canterbury Chair) noted that it currently cost around \$25,000 to get a Wetland consent in Canterbury.

PANEL – NEW 2023 CANDIDATES

We also had a brief session where we profiled three of our new Candidates for the 2023 Election.

Panellists: Tama Potaka (Chair) & new Hamilton West MP; Suze Redmayne - Rangitikei; Hamish Campbell -Ilam; Blair Cameron - Nelson.



All Candidates acquitted themselves extremely well and indicated that the Class of 2023 will be well represented within the incoming Caucus.

‘PITCH A POLICY’



Nicola Toki – Forest & Bird

Nicola strongly supported the “Pitch a Policy” sessions, recollecting that 10 years ago she promoted the concept of Predator Free NZ, and the National Party embraced it – and today it is a “standout” success.

This year she said that she wanted see the conversation changed with regards to conservation. She stated that the events of the past couple of weeks (Cyclone Gabrielle) highlights that we no longer have time to

procrastinate. We need to focus on investment, and not on the cost. **“The environment must be seen as the bedrock of our economy.”** We know that we need to have these “hard conversations” and that is why all the NGO CEO’s are here at this Bluegreens Forum.

In talking about the floods, she said there is an urgent need to “give the rivers room to breath” – we need to push back on intensive development that constrains our rivers.



Jesse Calder – Energy Resources

Jesse recognised the need to get to net zero emissions by 2050, noting that we have a highly successful renewable energy sector and short get to 96% of sustainable energy soon.

However, he stated that there are two opportunities that we need to consider.

1st Opportunity – use gas as a flexible backup fuel. He stated that replacing coal with natural gas would reduce emissions by around 1,000 tonnes annually. He also advocated to drop the Lake Onslow Plan, because it is based on flawed logic. Jess also wants New Zealand to drop the 100% renewable electricity target by 2030. He noted that gas BBQs have saved households in the recent Cyclone Gabrielle disaster.

2nd Opportunity – Jesse advocated strongly for Carbon Capture & Storage using CCUS. He noted that National’s Stuart Smith has a Private Members Bill in the House currently.



Dr Rene Haeberli – EnviroSolve

Rene noted that each New Zealander is responsible for 780kg of waste per year, and the Swiss model of “Waste to Energy plants” are a viable option for New Zealand. He said that Switzerland banned waste to landfill in the 1990s.



Kayla Kingdon-Bebb – WWF-NZ

Kayla advocated strongly for “building back better”, with nature as a positive investment. She said that realistically we won’t achieve “managed retreat” within the next decade.

She said that nature-based solutions include building wetlands & sea walls.

In response to Luxon’s request for action orientated solutions (at a NGO CEO’s breakfast earlier in the day), she had three suggestions:

1. Erosion – establish new permanent native forests.
2. Establish large scale coastal wetland restoration projects.
3. Address inland flood risk with freshwater wetland restoration, riparian plantings and by re-wetting peatlands.



**Vanessa Winning
– Irrigation NZ**

Vanessa stated that as CEO of Irrigation NZ she represents more than 4,000 members, noting that 26% of New Zealand’s dairy farmers use irrigation. She said her organisation was looking for a change of focus, rather than new policy. She sees a focus on

outcomes as essential, rather than the current process of “winners and losers.”

Vanessa urged National to establish a Minister for Water.

She said there is too much policy change and we need to pull it all together.

We need to capture water and store it.

Vanessa stated that Auckland shouldn’t be taking water from the Waikato River, and we wouldn’t need to if we invested adequately in water storage.

We also don’t need more bureaucrats, but we do need a more co-ordinated approach. This will lead to being more cost-effective through less duplication.



**Russell Norman
– Greenpeace**

Russell opened by stating that we can’t burn the oil that we have already found, if we are to prevent more than a 1.5° increase in Climate temperature.

He said that the only way to prevent a “climate freeloader” is

for Central Government to legislate.

Russell pitched his policy as one of “fear”, similar to when in Parliament he then espoused the fear of “peak oil” – that didn’t turn out too well for the far left back then!

Russell stated that when we look back in 40 years time, the National Party will have been on the wrong side of history.



**Rob Langford
– Packaging Forum**

Rob opened by saying that Labour had started 4 years ago on developing a packaging and container return scheme, and both are still in the ether. He said we need a regulatory framework for all

packaging – it’s not just around plastic.



**OUR BLUEGREEN
PRINCIPLES**

The Bluegreens are a group of passionate members and supporters who care deeply about our natural environment and we’re guided by the following principles:

- Sustainability must be at the heart of everything we do.
- We’re practical environmentalists, putting results before ideology.
- Our economy depends on our environment, and our ability to care for our environment depends on the success of our economy.
- A scientific and evidence-based approach is essential to quality environmental decision-making.
- People respond best to change when engaged and given incentives. We work with communities and businesses, not against them.
- New Zealanders have a unique birthright to access and enjoy our natural environment.
- We’re aiming to transition to a circular economy, meaning one that is restorative and regenerative, designing waste out of our system.

Our Bluegreen approach takes a long-term view that by making smart, strategic decisions today we can leave our environment in a healthier state for future generations.

Rob advocated for all packaging to be included in a “Product Stewardship Scheme” declaring all household packaging as a “priority product” along the lines of the Waste Minimisation Act.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS – VIA ZOOM



Josh Ellison – Rewiring NZ

Josh leads research, design and development work at Rewiring Australia. He has co-authored Rewiring Australia’s research papers and models since its establishment. He also works with industry and communities to design and

implement on the ground electrification.

Rewiring Australia is a non-profit, independent, non-partisan organisation dedicated to representing the people, households and communities in the energy system. We empirically demonstrate and communicate the cost savings, emissions reductions, and energy system benefits of electrification.

Josh espoused the possibilities for New Zealand to embrace this technology revolution.

DINNER SPEAKERS

Volker Kuntzsch (Cawthron Institute) & Jodie Kuntzsch (Aleotion)



A huge thanks must go to our superb Dinner speakers. They not only entertained us, but they were also incredibly informative.



“WE MUST BECOME A POWERFUL AGENT FOR CHANGING THE WAY NEW ZEALAND RESPECTS ITS NATURAL ENVIRONMENT IF THE COUNTRY’S BIODIVERSITY IS TO STAND A CHANCE.”

– ROB FENWICKE
CONVENOR OF THE BLUEGREENS
INAUGURAL BLUEGREENS FORUM
MARCH 1999

YOUR BLUEGREENS EXECUTIVE

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