Farmers, fishers and growers - how the primary sector will save New Zealand's bacon

On Tuesday this week, the Prime Minister announced a multi-agency, multi-million-dollar plan to dig New Zealand out of a very deep, post-COVID economic hole.

And over soy lattes country-wide, urban liberals had to face the uncomfortable fact that it was the much-reviled farmers, fishers and growers that were the answer to the question, how?

*Fit for a Better World* is a mammoth piece of work, the foundation of which is that the primary sector is New Zealand’s lifeline for export-led growth to counter, what would otherwise be, the country’s economic collapse.

Of course, the primary sector has always been the backbone of New Zealand’s economy, but we have received little acknowledgement of that.

While the fishing industry feels particularly aggrieved by the often false and misleading claims of its opponents, it is not alone. Attend any beef and lamb, dairying or horticulture conference and the stories are interchangeable.

The primary sector shone through the lockdown. They endured uncomfortable conditions and changing workplaces to bring New Zealand food. And the public at large thanked us for that. A new appreciation emerged of the importance of food security and a recognition that New Zealand, through its primary producers, was in a privileged global position—we produce good food and lots of it.
Fit for a Better World sees central government acknowledging that, with other large export sectors like education and tourism stuck at the border, our primary sector exports are their economic ‘get out of jail free’ card.

It’s about time.

Because, we’re a bit angry out here in rural land. Angry at being demonised for producing good, quality food. Angry that our aggressive measures to lessen our environmental footprint are lost in the clamour of calls to shut us down. Angry at headlines on dirty dairying, environmental disregard, deliberately flouting the law, corrupt practises and just being all-out bad bastards.

New Zealand primary produce is feted around the world. It fetches a premium price because it is valued so highly. Our international reputation as a quality food producer is first class. Domestically not so much.

We sincerely hope that Fit for a Better World is the springboard to a better public understanding and appreciation of the men and women working their butts off in often difficult circumstances to put food on your table and lead New Zealand’s economic recovery.

We also sincerely hope that the impediments constantly put in the way of doing business in the primary sector are addressed at the same time. That our ongoing efforts to ensure scientifically based environmental best practise are rewarded, not railroaded by ideology.

But we thank you for the acknowledgement that primary produce matters.
The forecast for seafood amid climate change

The seafood sector could be facing a 24 percent reduction in fish species due to the impact of climate change, according to a new report.

Prepared for Aotearoa Circle, *Climate-related risk scenarios for the 2050s* looked at the position New Zealand's commercial fishers could find themselves in in 30 years' time.

The report considers two scenarios for the year 2050: *Mako*, where the world fails to curb greenhouse gas emissions; and *Kahawai*, where nations succeed in meeting the 2050 Paris Agreement goal - keeping warming under 2°C by 2100.

Under a 4°C water temperature increase scenario, the acidity of New Zealand waters were predicted to increase by 150 percent – threatening fish stocks, displacing species and shrinking those like mussels.

"The implications for farmed shellfish are dire, with growth rates and productivity greatly diminished," the authors said.

Variable sea temperatures could also make aquaculture unviable closer to shore, shifting farms into deeper waters at a financial cost, and making some fish such as hoki and ling harder to find.

"Vessels must spend longer at sea, travel further, trawl at greater depth, and incur higher fuel and crew costs in order to target them."

By contrast, warmer waters might see snapper and kingfish migrate to Southland fishing grounds, providing a boon to fishers there.

Globally, the abundance of marine species was predicted to drop by 10 percent, but New Zealand would still fare better than most, "with net primary production in the oceans around New Zealand remaining broadly unchanged and commercial catches holding up well", the report added.

Other risks identified for our seafood sector included the growing popularity of plant-based proteins and the food-miles debate – pushing consumers towards locally produced food with a lower carbon footprint.

The next decade will be crucial, the report warned.

"If we haven't taken decisive action by then, feedbacks and tipping points in the climate system will choose a perilous path for us."

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**2020 Sustainable Business Awards**

The Sustainable Business Awards are New Zealand’s longest-running and pre-eminent sustainability awards. Now in their 18th year, they recognise businesses, local government, social enterprises and individuals succeeding in sustainability.

The Awards provide the chance to compete in 12 categories relating to sustainable business, including new categories for covid-19 resilience, climate action and technology:
The Supreme Award will be awarded to a business for outstanding performance in all aspects of sustainability.

All New Zealand organisations and individuals may participate.

For more information or to make an entry, visit: [www.sustainable.org.nz/awards](http://www.sustainable.org.nz/awards)

Entries close 28 July 2020.

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**News**

Ex-gratia payments offered to fishers by the government to adopt more dolphin-friendly fishing methods falls short and will put many out of business, *Radio New Zealand* reported. The government estimated the cost of new bans on set nets around much of the South Island and the West Coast of the North Island was between $30 and $70 million. Egmont Seafoods sells fish on behalf of set-netting boats, which mostly ends up in local fish and chip shops. Its head, Keith Mawson, wouldn’t say how much his fishers were getting from the government, but said it only equated to about a year’s worth of income and would not
meet the cost of moving to alternative methods. "These guys are carrying debt so it might give them an opportunity to clear some debt and if they're going to exit the industry, I suppose they'll end up on the dole queue like a whole lot of other people," Mawson said. Two of the set netters that supplied him with fish may have to sell their boats and look for a different line of work due to the changes. Switching to longline fishing would require fishers to target higher value species such as snapper and the money on offer would not be sufficient to purchase quota for these fish, Mawson said. Another fisher said he did not qualify at all for a payment because his operation was too big. He estimated he would lose over $400,000 in revenue as a result of the measures which prevented one of his boats from using its set nets. "Fishing's an industry under siege really...the media seem to have a go at big business and fishing. But that's not the whole industry, there's an awful lot of small players like us and coastal communities." Fisheries Minister Stuart Nash said the money on offer to 25 of the most hard-hit fishers was fair.