

VALUES, ATTITUDES AND EDUCATION LEVELS OF NEW ZEALANDERS RELATED TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION: New Zealand Study of Values Results relevant to the Tapuae, New Plymouth Marine Reserve Application

(Results from the most recent survey, 1998, authorized by Dr Alan Webster, Founding Director, NZ Study of Values)

These results are abstracted from a questionnaire survey with well over 300 specific value-selections. The sample is a national probability design (N=1200), with booster samples for Maori, Pacific Islanders and block residential type. The environmental items are able to be correlated with many other types of value as well as demographics. This is one of a series run approximately 5-yearly since 1984, based at Massey University, Palmerston North. As expected, the 2005 survey yields similar results over time on such stable values as the environment.

The environmental values noted below are not specific to the Marine Reserve Application. This is in one sense a strength, as it avoids bias created by allegiance to such immediate, politically sensitive matters as local projects.

ECONOMIC PRESSURES

It is arguable that environmental values are more influenced by economic beliefs than many other social or personal views. That linkage was tested by comparing various environmental values of two groups: those who believe that in a choice of importance, the environment should be given priority vs. those who believe the economy should be given priority. Results in broad terms showed that those who gave priority to the environment over the economy markedly favoured such related values as increased government spending on the environment, saw environmental protection as an urgent problem, used environmentally friendly household products, practiced waste-recycling, and were more strongly in favour of the Green/ecology movement.

There is a clear association between environmental values and an economy-over-environment position. The view that where there is a political choice, the economy must take priority over the environment would be expected to detract from environmental protection and from measures designed to enhance environmental values. As such, they would frequently detract from those outcomes in which green policies are economically advantageous. This suggests that whilst there may be – indeed is – an overwhelming support for environmental protection, the critical factor may be the extrinsic impact of interference with

occupational, recreational and commercial interests. In other words, negotiation or trade-off discussion may obscure the strength of underlying agreement on 'ideals'.

Educational and Political Effects

It is hardly controversial to suggest that education will influence people's response to the area of environmental protection. The issue of government spending resounds differently at different educational levels. There is a major difference (64% to 42%) between those with tertiary education and those with three years or less of secondary education in regard to increased government spending on the environment. Similarly, there is a large difference in favour of education between those with tertiary education and those with three years or less schooling on the question whether the environment represents an urgent problem.

The fundamentally political-economic issue of priority of the environment over the economy clearly swings significantly on educational level: with 29% of those with up to three years schooling giving priority to the environment over the economy against 62% of those with completed tertiary education says the qualitative welfare of the country is in the hands of education. The fact that a low 24% of those with a completed tertiary education give priority to the economy might encourage a belief in the role of education above legislation in long-term values-change. It might also suggest that decision-makers could look at the opinions of those with a larger view of the world and ask whether these are not the builders of any future we may think we have owing to us!

Values Related to Support for the Reserve Proposal:

Virtually the whole sample agreed either definitely or probably that central government should "*impose strict laws to make industry do less damage to the environment*". A similar percentage supported an equal responsibility for local government. This constitutes virtual universal agreement. There is thus a population-wide agreement to a decisive role of government at all levels in protecting the environment from damage done by human activity.

Government spending attracts greater uncertainty than simple value preferences, conceivably because there is always a trade-off where public money is involved. Nevertheless, when the question is *Suppose you had to make a choice between "increasing government spending in particular areas even though this would mean paying higher taxes for this extra spending, or cutting spending in these areas and thereby reducing taxes,*

protection of the environment ranked fifth after health, education and unemployment and at 51% only narrowly below pensions. Significantly again, education affects this outcome: The range of approval of increased government spending on the environment, while 51% overall, goes from 48% at the lowest education levels, and even lower (42%) at up to three years schooling, and rises to 64% for complete tertiary education, with 56% at 'some tertiary'.

Other values fill out the picture further:

71% choose household products thought better for the environment
79% decide for environmental reasons to re-use or recycle something
64% disagree with giving Maori land and fishing rights to make up for past injustices

Overriding Attitudes

At the time of the survey, there was a strong cynicism and disillusionment with Government, so that 80% disagreed that the average citizen has considerable influence on politics, and 86% disagreed that the average person has a great deal of influence on government decisions. This distrust, much remarked at the time, may have ameliorated but the environment nonetheless might be thought to arouse conflicting emotions not strictly pertinent to the issue at stake.

There is clearly room for decisiveness as the intruding influences are not the most informed or up-to-date. A final note on age-effects gives some support to the view just stated: on the question of priority of the environment, those above 60 years of age were 28% in favour of the environment, and 60% for the economy, while about 50% of the 21 to 50 year-olds held views opposing their elders.

On support for the economy over and above the environment, the opposite picture was, of course, obtained: the economy got the thumbs up from 60% of the above 60's, 52% of the 50s bracket and less than 30% for those under 40.

It would be fair to say, from these results, that general opinion strongly favours care of the environment, but if environmental enhancement be the preferred value, then the future will be best provided for by the educated and the mid and younger adults.

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