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A History of
Future-thinking
Initiatives in
New Zealand
1936–2010

Learning from the past
to build a better future

sustainablefutureinstitute

Report name *A History of Future-thinking Initiatives in New Zealand, 1936–2010: Learning from the past to build a better future*

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About the Institute The Sustainable Future Institute is an independently funded non-partisan think tank. The main work programme of the Institute is *Project 2058*. The strategic aim of this project is to promote integrated long-term thinking, leadership and capacity-building so that New Zealand can effectively seek and create opportunities and explore and manage risks over the next 50 years. It is hoped that *Project 2058* will help develop dialogue among government ministers, policy analysts and members of the public about alternative strategies for the future of New Zealand.

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Background Papers to this Report

Working Paper 2011/01 *Outputs from Eighteen Past Future-thinking Initiatives in New Zealand*
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Preface

He kākano i ruia mai i Rangiatea

The seed will not be lost. (Grace, 2003: 28)

Our attempt to think about the long-term future of New Zealand is not the first such endeavour, nor will it be the last. As we have undertaken this project, we have noted how easy it is for the work of earlier future thinkers to be lost, buried beneath new trends and fashions or hidden away until dusted off again many years down the track.

In researching the history of these future-thinkers, we have become increasingly aware not only of the high standards that have been set, but also that their thoughts and ideas are at risk of being forgotten. It is to guard against this risk that we have documented the methodologies and outcomes of 18 future-thinking initiatives in this report. In addition, the lessons we have learnt from this research will shape our *Project 2058* work programme, and in particular, our own future-thinking initiative, 'StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future'. We will be presenting this workshop in March 2011, with the purpose of creating a place and a process in which New Zealanders can prepare and communicate a range of strategy maps for New Zealand's long-term future.

The preparation of this report has involved a team effort over a lengthy period of time. It began in 2005 when we were developing the parameters for *Project 2058*, and since that time many people have become involved. We value the contributions of all these people, and in particular the external reviewers acknowledged on the previous page, without whom this report would not have been possible.

Wendy McGuinness
Chief Executive

Executive Summary

A number of future-thinking initiatives have been undertaken in New Zealand, and the background, method, output and outcomes of these are explored within this report. This research forms part of the Institute's *Project 2058*, which focuses on mechanisms to build a nation that is able to meet the needs of current and future generations, with the ultimate aim of creating a National Sustainable Development Strategy for New Zealand.

The purpose of this report is threefold: (i) to learn lessons from the past and present a useful model for emerging initiatives in the future; (ii) to provide greater access to the existing knowledge established by these initiatives (so that earlier contributions can be built on), and (iii) to provide a repository for this information.

In Sections 1–3, the purpose of the report is outlined and its relevance to the strategic aims of *Project 2058* is discussed. These sections on methodology, boundaries and limitations, and institutions and initiatives detail how the research was conducted and the criteria for selecting the initiatives that were included. These criteria were based on:

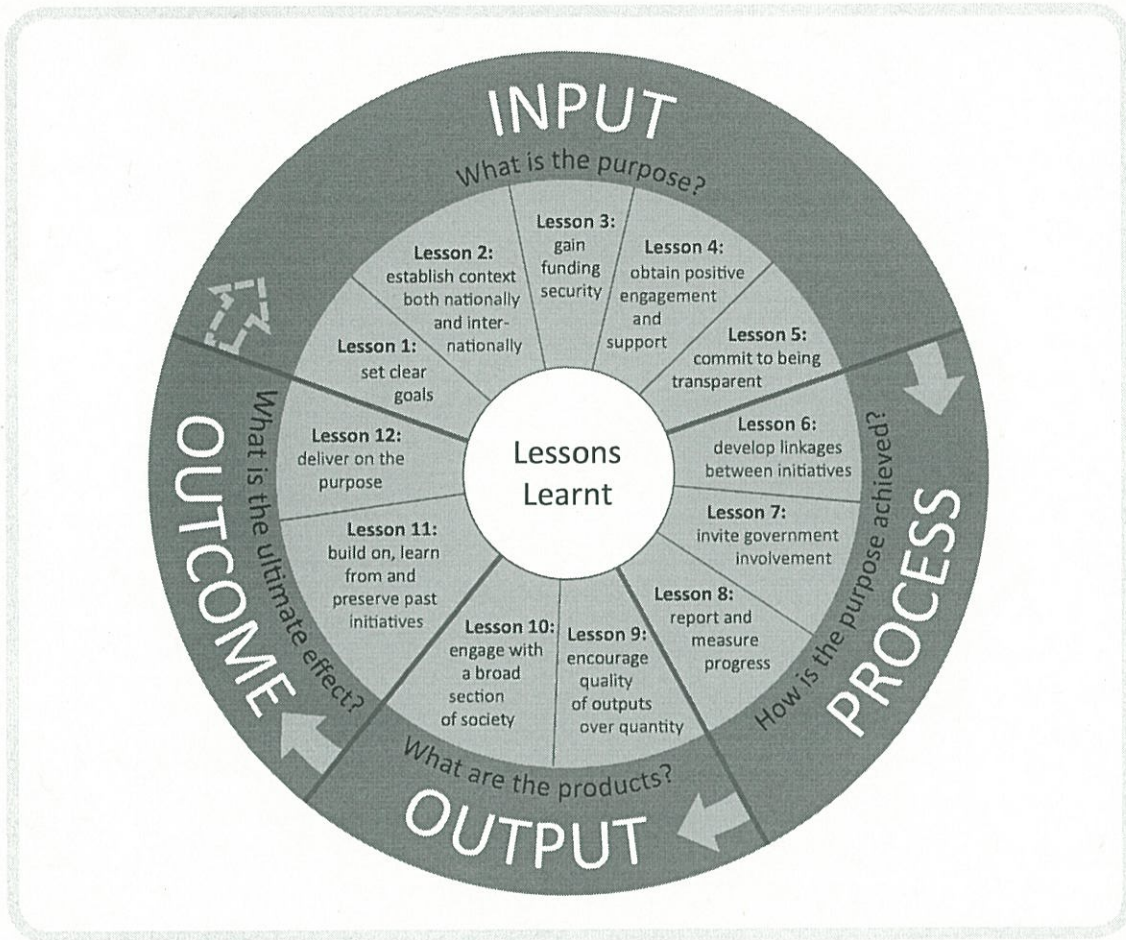
- Breadth: New Zealand-wide;
- Width: integrated across a broad range of themes and groups;
- Process: based on two-way communication between initiative leaders and their audiences;
- Timeframe: long-term in their perspective, looking at least 10 years ahead, and
- Non-partisan.

Section 4 contains a review of 18 initiatives that met these criteria, arranged chronologically. Four aspects of each initiative are considered. The 'background' provides the context and objectives of the initiative. The 'method' and 'output' report on the way initiative leaders set out to achieve these objectives, while 'outcomes' are concerned with the impact of the initiative and, where relevant, contributions made to other future-thinking work. The quality and quantity of information varied enormously between initiatives; a number pre-dated the internet, and information was harder to find in these cases. We have listed the key published outputs for each initiative in Working Paper 2011/01, *Outputs from Eighteen New Zealand Future-thinking Initiatives* (SFI, in press). In doing so we acknowledge the work of our colleagues and hope that others will use the information to inform their own work.

Government involvement in future-thinking is reviewed in Section 5. The Commission for the Future (1976–1982) and the New Zealand Planning Council (1977–1991) have been New Zealand's only attempts at cohesive, formalised, whole-of-government strategic planning. The inception and demise of the Commission and the Council are outlined, and we consider this to be an area that is worthy of further research. The independent, ad hoc or partially government-funded initiatives described in Section 4 have emerged in response to the need for long-term future-thinking about our country's direction, and this is discussed in Section 6 in terms of the need for a centralised, government-funded futures organisation.

Following our review, we were able to define at least 12 'lessons learnt'. In order to incorporate these lessons into a useful planning tool, we developed a four-step model based on current best practice and emerging trends in public participation initiatives. These lessons, and the model (shown on the following page in Figure 1), are discussed in Section 7.

Figure 1 Four-step Model for Planning Future-thinking Initiatives



Section 8 then applies the four-step model to our upcoming initiative, StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future. This allows the model to be tested, and will ensure that our initiative draws on past learning and is well planned and executed with targeted and effective outputs and outcomes.

In Section 9 we present our conclusions. We note that a robust process design that reflects well-defined goals is central to successful outcomes. Transparency of objectives, and performance measured against these objectives, provides credibility and strengthens the case for government and corporate involvement in futures initiatives.

New Zealand's Coat of Arms, our first Strategy Map?

Momentum gathered in 1906 for New Zealand to adopt our own Coat of Arms, rather than continuing to use the British one which we had been using since 1840. Having our own Arms seemed especially symbolic as we moved to become a Dominion in 1907. Initial plans to develop our Coat of Arms were thwarted by a fire which destroyed Parliament in 1907, but the competition for the design was successfully relaunched the following year. A series of iconic symbols were incorporated into competition submissions, illustrating the important nature of the Coat of Arms as an emblem for New Zealand. These included sheep, cows, moa, stars, ships, British soldiers and Maori warriors.



Three entries were sent to Britain to be judged, and the winning entry, submitted by James McDonald, became official in 1911 and is now referred to as the 1911 Arms. During the 1940s it was found that multiple versions of the Coat of Arms were in use, and a committee was established to oversee a standardisation of the image. The slightly changed image was approved by Queen Elizabeth II in 1956, and remains the Coat of Arms for New Zealand today in 2011. The shield uses symbols to represent the Southern Cross, New Zealand's farming, agricultural and mining industries, and the significance of our sea-trade. The shield is flanked by a Maori chief with a taiaha and a European woman holding the New Zealand ensign; St Edward's crown floats above, representing our current Queen's coronation. The woman is believed by some to be Zealandia, a personification of New Zealand and daughter of the British equivalent, Britannia.

Could this be considered our first attempt at a strategy map?

Whilst a similar strategy is not required today, the path to our Coat of Arms has messages which continue to resonate. The use of Arms is emblematic of the government's authority and reserved for government use only. Privileged usage

includes documents such as passports, and parliamentary acts, and approval must be gained to reprint the image. These characteristics connect the initial creation of the Arms to a wider vision for New Zealand. A vision for a country which is young and independent yet rooted in an older tradition. A country with a unique personality and a distinctly New Zealand identity, both of which are reflected in the choices made and the trust placed in the authority of the government. It also shows that we have attempted to reach consensus before with regard to representation of New Zealand, and that we can do it again: New Zealanders are good at having this identity represented on a global stage.

Most significantly, we see what can be achieved for a country when a group of people put their heads together and seek to help positively shape the direction for New Zealand, and envision New Zealand as it moves into the future. Like a strategy map, this evidences the staying power and significance that such a tool can have, and the importance of working to create these tools.