

Our role in the world

By Rod Oram

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As a tiny independent nation we aspire to thrive in an increasingly complex and difficult world. Our experience with the Treaty of Waitangi tells us a lot about how we can succeed.

Courage and foresight led Maori to sign the Treaty 175 years ago. They saw it as a way to benefit from the extremely powerful British Empire, yet win safeguards of their own rights and identity.

For the first 140 years or so, though, Maori discovered the Treaty gave them next-to-no protection. Only over the past 30 years has the settlement process helped them reclaim their rightful place in our history, and their role in our future.

Today, we're increasingly confident who we are as a nation. Our unique blend of Maori, Pakeha, Pacific, Asian and other cultures makes us distinctive in the world. It helps us find better ways to work together. We are known as constructive, trustworthy partners in international agreements.

But as a very small country, what particular attributes can we give to a world wrestling with intense political, cultural, economic and environmental issues?

Anake Goodall, a key negotiator in Ngai Tahu's settlement in the 1990s and an independent corporate director and social entrepreneur today, offers this perspective in this essay in *"Inequality: a New Zealand Crisis"*, edited by Max Rashbrooke.

"It is interesting to speculate on the vision that the Maori leadership of the nineteenth century had in mind as they signed the Treaty of Waitangi, and what they may have envisaged a co-created Aotearoa New Zealand – and their role in that nation-building exercise – would look like.

"A genuine blending of the Maori worldview, with its dynamic, community-grounded customs and values held in a frame of reciprocal responsibility to each other and the natural world, and the equally dynamic Western model, with its technologies and capital market economy and systems of management, would have been a heady mix indeed."

So far that's not the country we've built, as he points out. But the post-settlement return of Maori to the mainstream gives us the opportunity to do so, he argues.

Imagine what we would contribute internationally along the way. We could play a leading role in the urgent search for ways to achieve development that is sustainable in economic, environmental and social terms.

We have a brilliant opportunity to do so through our membership of the UN Security Council this year and next. We helped create the UN in San Francisco in the final months of World War II. We can help improve it now.

In seeking to win this two-year term on the council, our government campaigned on New Zealand being a trusted voice for small countries. It also said it would identify themes the council could debate this July and in September 2016 – the two times we will chair.

Two obvious subjects causing escalating global tensions are oceans and climate. They are vital to all countries but they are particularly important to us. We are a small island nation and, among developed countries, we are the most dependent on our natural environment for earning our living.

We have experience, good and bad, to offer in both fields as the global community struggles badly to develop bold and effective ways to manage them.

On oceans, we have the fourth largest Exclusive Economic Zone in the world and we are a leader in fisheries management. But our quota system is designed to keep fish stocks just above minimum

sustainable levels rather than to substantially rebuild them; and our policing of illegal fishing by foreign vessels is farcical. Moreover, we're still trying to work out how to safely, sustainably and productively extract mineral resources.

On climate, we introduced our Emissions Trading Scheme in 2008 and we initiated a global research consortium on agricultural greenhouse gases in 2009.

But we've been hypocrites since. We have pledged to cut our greenhouse emissions but they are rising. Ours are now the fifth highest per capita in the OECD. Our climate policies rank 42nd in the 2014 Climate Change Performance Index compiled by European researchers.

Likewise, our ETS signals a price of barely \$1 a tonne. The World Bank rates it as the least effective of 26 in the world. Chinese schemes, which in aggregate are the second largest after the EU's, deliver a carbon price between five and 11 times greater than ours.

Antarctica is a third crucial global challenge on which we can contribute significantly. In 1959 we helped establish the Antarctic Treaty, which is independent of the UN. We remain leaders in its governing structure today, as we are in Antarctic science, conservation and operations.

The treaty appears rock solid because its method of consensus decision-making can't be changed until 2048. But this means signatory nations can easily block vital action, as Russia is with efforts to establish an extensive marine protection area in the Ross Sea.

The political, environmental and developmental pressures on Antarctica are rising rapidly. We must play an even stronger role in making the treaty work effectively.

Oceans, climate and Antarctica have common characteristics we know a lot about: the nexus of economy and environment; complex multi-party governance; rights and reparations; and enduring relationships.

If we play distinctive global roles on all three subjects, we will have ample opportunities in science, technology, the economy, environment and diplomacy. We will make our future as a small independent nation wealthy in all senses of the word.

Links:

- Anake Goodall's essay: bit.ly/MaoriFuture
- Founding of the UN: bit.ly/UN1945
- Antarctica New Zealand: antarcticanz.govt.nz/

Disclosure: Rod Oram visited Antarctica in December as a guest of Antarctica NZ

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