

## Futurewatching from "Down Under"

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### *Where it comes from*

Futurewatch is a regular, quarterly service which has been published by the N.Z. Futures Trust in its journal *Future Times* since 1985. Its scope is a constant challenge to me, not only for the range of possible material, but also in terms of the readership. This could range from diverse levels of bureaucrats, through a similar diversity of private sector organisation staff, an assortment of local government administrators, a cross-section of non-governmental organisations, a few academics, some professional futurists and an unknown quantity of public library readers. Now, JFS adds an equally unknown range of international futurists. It will continue to be what it always has been, a service directed to my part of the Southern Hemisphere. This provides those beyond our shores with our distinct perspective on the world and futures. New Zealand (sometimes referred to as Aotearoa, the Maori name given by the Polynesian discoverers, meaning Land of the Long White Cloud) provides its own mix of the futures issues we all face. Three mountainous, beautiful islands, in an ocean whose potential is still mostly unexplored, astride two major tectonic plates, whose barely surviving fauna and somewhat endangered flora form remnants of the ancient Gondwanaland. A Polynesian heritage, with a large, recent addition from the South Pacific Islands and smaller ones from Asia, dominated by a British-sourced settler society trying to determine its own identity, all washed by the tide of Western (mostly American) high technology and IT culture. Situate this between the giant powers and emerging blocs on either side of the Pacific, all trying to navigate the currents of globalisation. How can a small economy, still largely based on primary commodity exports, survive and prosper? How can its society heal the resulting inequalities? Wellington is the world's southernmost capital city, at least three hours or more flying time to our neighbours in Antarctica, Fiji or the Eastern Coast of Australia.

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### *The Futurewatcher*

I emerged many decades ago from tertiary studies with History degrees, very useful for futurewatching, and worked as a teacher and librarian. For most of my adult life I have been in the non-governmental (NGO) sector, after marrying a scientist and raising a family. Over twenty years ago, New Zealand had an official Commission for the Future, which was closed in 1981. One of its staff, Myra Harpham, started a futures scanning publication and trained me to do this work, which was eventually merged with Future Times. Since our journal is in hard copy, most of the source material is likewise, researched in a variety of Wellington libraries, with important help from sources in the WFSF, of which I am a member, and the WFS.

### *Futurewatching*

At a basic practical level, most people do this, without realising what they do. Major business decisions or important, anticipated life changes, all require that we gather relevant information, and try to develop some understanding of where this could lead us, impacts we could expect and even a few What Ifs? Its the refinements of futurewatching that become challenging. One picture I have is that of the Polynesian navigators of the Pacific Ocean, who guided their frail crafts over massive distances of deep and not-so-pacific ocean. The tools they used were developed from long practice and wisdom inherited by generations, but essentially depended on constant observation of a myriad of clues in their environments; not only the great patterns of the stars, but the shifting patterns of clouds and currents, small flotsam in the water, behaviour of fauna and even the feel of the boat. To a trained eye or mind, small clues can reveal important messages, or Eureka! moments, but its important to look in all sorts of places. What would have happened if they had relied only in the clouds? And it was the ones who read the clues correctly who made landfall and passed on their wisdom. In such futurewatching situations, could we have navigated to landfall?

Another picture I have comes from domestic situations, with the rich and varied assortment of fibres, colours and textures used by a weaver, especially one who makes creative, woven pictures without use of the traditional loom. The weaver may have a definite creation in mind, or it may develop as the weaver proceeds, but there is always the thrill of selection from the range of possibilities; the matching and contrasting, the experi-

mentation with this or that colour or texture against the rest. Sometimes there is frustration, leading to the creation being torn up, or partially dismantled, before reconstruction is attempted. If the same collection of material were given to another weaver, a different creation would emerge, even though both might be given a particular theme title before starting. Taking the bits and pieces of the current gathering of futurewatching, selecting, then crafting it all into the constraints of the space available, for me is an art, a creation, frustrating but usually satisfying. Then the next deadline looms...

