

Democracy, Ethics and the Public Good

Summary Conference Report

1st and 2nd August 2014

Co-ordinated by **public good** Aotearoa and

St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society



ST ANDREW'S TRUST FOR THE
STUDY OF RELIGION & SOCIETY

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Many, many people who gave their time and wise advice for free.



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Overview

The objective of the conference Democracy, Ethics and Public Good conference held on 1 and 2 August at St Andrew's Church, The Terrace, Wellington was to look at the problems and possibilities in New Zealand's democracy. It was held within the wider framework of the 2014 lecture series 'Choices' held by the St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society (SATRS) jointly by SATRS and **public good**. Over the two days more than 150 people were involved from as far afield as Canterbury, Whanganui and Hamilton.

Speakers included academics and members of civil society and activist organisations and the presentations were broadly themed and were interspersed with opportunities for participants to discuss the issues raised in the presentations. The themes were:

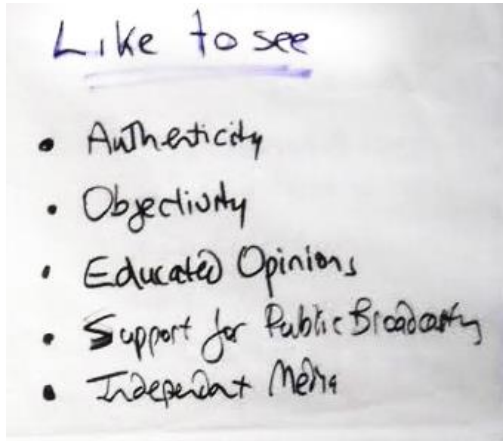
- The shape of New Zealand's democracy.
- Government and citizens.
- News media and access to information.
- Citizens and engagement.

"... focus on what the value of being engaged and voting offers."

Notes from a flip chart written by a group talking about getting information to citizens.

Although there was much disquiet about the state of our democracy, the main priorities identified for future action were framed up as positive actions to protect and enhance New Zealand's democracy. The aim was to identify organisations and individuals who can contribute to addressing the priorities that have been identified. Facilitator Esther Bukholt structured, designed and facilitated a process to support attendees to have open-ended discussions which would lead, after the final set of presentations, to a process to identify priorities for action. Analysis of these priorities was undertaken after the conference and three areas for action stood out. These are the ability to call out when there are incursions into the quality of our democracy, actions to improve the quality of our media and education for all in democracy and citizenship. These are described in more detail in the table below.

In particular the conference organisers wanted to draw attention to the work in Bronwyn Hayward's recent book *Children and the Environment: Nurturing a democratic imagination*. Bronwyn's work builds on the work of a diverse range of academic study, from geography to psychology and from child development to education, to devise models of democracy that range from the authoritarian through the formally rules-based and technocratic to the facilitative, empowering and self-transformative. Her work potentially creates a model and a language against which a democratic government's overall performance and individual policies can be described and assessed.



An attendee's wishlist for democracy

The conference took place two weeks before the *Dirty Politics* revelations but many of the concerns raised in that book about attack blogs and the kind of journalism that does not support a robust democracy were raised by participants. In addition the lack of transparency in government, the use of urgency in Parliament, executive orders replacing legislation and the name calling, denigration and silencing of alternative voices were also concerns.

Our vision for New Zealand's democracy:

VISION		
That the New Zealand government acts legally, ethically and democratically in all aspects of its work	That the New Zealand media provides a balanced and robust forum for information and debate about the quality of New Zealand's democracy	That New Zealanders are well informed about democracy and actively engage in democratic processes and protecting these
Recommendation 1: Shout out for democracy	Recommendation 2: Improving the media landscape	Recommendation 3: Democracy education to citizens
<p>To shout out when New Zealand's democratic principles are being upheld or undermined.</p> <p>Principals include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect • Transparency • Political Equality • Proper process • Rule of law • Protection of human rights including minority rights 	<p>To improve the quality of media channels and reporting in New Zealand about democracy through supporting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethical journalistic standards • Diverse and independent media channels • Public good funding models 	<p>To support information and education for New Zealanders on citizenship and democracy including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current status of our democracy (based also on our democratic history) • Tangata whenua and democracy • Actions citizens can take in support of a robust democracy • Information about other models.

For each of these actions there are many organisations whose role is already or potentially supportive of these outcomes and in some cases are already working on the issues.

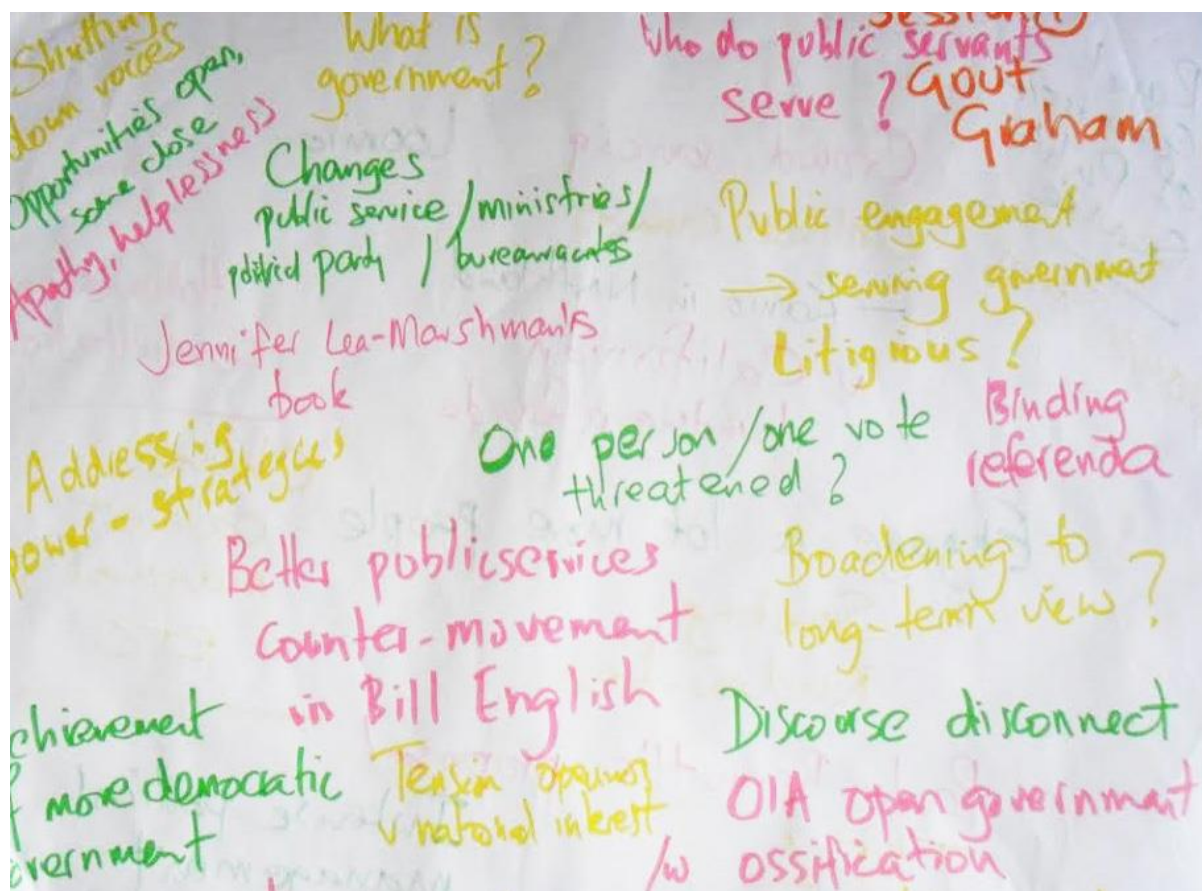
Conference Presentations

Person	Media/Presentation	Paper/More information
	Public Good conference overview	Jan Rivers was interviewed on Access Radio following the conference.
Professor Sir Lloyd Geering	Democracy and ethics video	
Dr Bronwyn Hayward	Understanding our social handprint video 26 minutes	Understanding our Social Handprint - slides
Dr Michael Macaulay	The Open Government Partnership video 25 minutes	Slides
Prof Jane Kelsey	Trade agreements and democracy video 25 minutes	It's our future website and TPP No certification website outlines newly clarified US powers over trade agreements
Wendy McGuinness	The Constitutional Review	McGuinness Institute Website
Sandra Grey and Charles Sedgwick	Stomping all over 'grass-roots' advocacy and activism	Fears, constraints and contracts
Ben Knight	Loomio and Democracy	Loomio Website
Max Rashbrooke	Inequality presentation	Inequality website
Bill Ryan	Emerging visions, emerging realities: Democratic deficit, deliberative democracy.	
Barbara Bedaschi-Lewando	Participatory Democracy 1 minute video	Participatory Democracy
Julia Amua Whaipooti	Unlocking Prisons	JustSpeak
Cath Wallace	ECO	
Meg Howie	Askaway	
Kieran Stowers	Onthefence	
Myles Thomas	Coalition for Better Broadcasting	
Stephanie Rodgers	Boots Theory	

Nurturing a Democratic Imagination

The original conference proposal suggested that the ideas presented in Bronwyn Hayward's recent book *Children, Citizenship and Environment, Nurturing a democratic imagination in a changing world* be a central theme, and that this provided a helpful language for discussing the quality of our democracy. Bronwyn's book makes the case that a more robust democracy and a wider conception of citizenship are needed to address the environmental and societal challenges, such as climate change, water allocation, population, food security that lie ahead. The three contrasting shades or types - SEEDS, SMART and FEARS - that she identifies describe the quality and extent of opportunities for democratic involvement. Each contrasting type of democracy differs in its relationship to elements of democracy. The extent to which opportunities for decision making, imagination, agency, justice and concern and care for the environment are the common criteria in each model. Bronwyn's work provides fresh and accessible language for us to use whether looking at individual policies or the overall programme of our government and is equally relevant to politics in the adult world as to children's experience.

Fig. Flip chart generated in one of the conference discussion groups



SEEDS



SMART



FEARS



Taken from *Children and the Environment: Nurturing a Democratic Imagination* by Bronwyn Hayward Earthscan 2012.

The conference's proposed actions are not things that conference attendees or the St Andrew's Trust or **public good** can achieve alone but rather they are foci for large pieces of work into the future. They are presented here as recommendations. Potential partners for this work will be found across New Zealand society and would include political parties, tangata whenua organisations, government departments and civil society organisations of all kinds.