

Sustainable assessment in New Zealand — 100% pure conjecture?

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Abstract

New Zealand's international reputation puts great store in its 'clean, green' and '100% Pure' image. The economy is heavily based on primary production and, increasingly, tourism and its drivers can be summarised as:

- Grass grows well in NZ
- NZ's stunning natural environment is a major box-office draw

Faced with global environmental change issues, however, NZ is turning domestic policy to support its current market image and has joined other countries in the race to be 'the world's most sustainable country'.

Landcare Research's involvement in this agenda has grown from part time commitment to an SD report (2001) to over 50 staff today, and is directly involved in

- developing and reviewing national policy
- creating viable products and services of immediate commercial take-up
- providing advice to central and local government and to corporates
- understanding the underlying mechanisms and
- establishing how these can be enhanced to increase sustainability

As such, Landcare Research is well-positioned to take advantage of NZ's relative isolation, deregulated policy environment, and can-do attitude, to participate in real-time experiments on developing sustainability as a kind of global lab.

Of particular interest here are our experiences with assessment techniques. This includes stand-alone indicator sets; corporate reporting, full-cost accounting techniques and an attempt to provide an overall taxonomy. To achieve this we will look at sustainability through a post-normal lens including O'Connor's concept of the Monetisation Frontier and the extent to which this delineates 'models' from 'similes' and why we prefer the latter as offering:

- relevant 'post-normal' technologies that are
- dialogic in nature and that
- enable 'thick' interpretations of data that encompass complexity and uncertainty

There will then be a brief exploration of other technologies, yet in their infancy, that are strong candidates to support the global challenge of sustainability and the forms of expertise needed in the research community to ensure progress.

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