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Methodist Te Hāhi Weteriana Public Questions – Resourcing Responses to Social Issues



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Public Questions Network news

Methodist meetings

Betsan met PQ people from Raumati/Kapiti parish and Taupo. This was a treat and brought inspiring discussions on topics such as criminal justice, inequality, ethical investment. In Christchurch meetings with CWS, Jim Stuart, justice workers have been invaluable for liaising over NZ Aid & Development decisions. It was good to go to the meet people in the Connexional office – and to develop the PQ website. You will see a first step on the Methodist Church website homepage. Looking forward to more visits to meet PQ and church groups in the New Year.

Alcohol

Many church people have strong interests in law changes to stop the misuse of alcohol. Ken Rae wrote in on behalf of the Mana parish to explain the ways that alcohol is available to entice young people into drinking habits, and to highlight the effects of families and children of alcohol abuse. St Marks in Christchurch held parish forum on alcohol. A briefing on alcohol is in this update.

Overseas Aid

Decisions about the new Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT) Sustainable Development Fund were announced on 10th December. Out of 104 applications for projects in developing countries only 44 were provisionally approved. This means that many developing country projects cannot proceed. Church agencies such as CWS and

Caritas and other development agencies are very badly affected and CWS has written to parishes and friends about this very adverse news.

President Desmond, working with Betsan, has prepared a letter to send to the Prime Minister, expressing grave concern about the decisions and about the breach of good faith process with development agencies. Other church leaders are being invited to collaborate and send the letter on behalf of Church Leaders. The letter will be sent before Christmas.

Welfare Justice

The Alternative Welfare Working Group has produced two documents since the November Update. These reports were commissioned by Caritas, the Anglican Social Justice Commission, and the Benefit Advocacy Federation.

The first Welfare Justice report is 'What We Heard'. The following report 'Welfare Justice for All' is a comprehensive, readable and inspiring contribution to the welfare reform debate.

The introduction by Pihopa (Bishop) Muru Walters makes alarm bells ring about the direction of reform and the report itself provides an approach that will prepare us for further engagement in Government proposals for welfare reform. **Submissions to the Government Welfare Reform Working Group are due 24th December.**

A briefing on Welfare Reform is included in this Update.

Coastal Marine(Takutai Moana) Bill

President Desmond and Betsan attended a Māori Affairs Select Committee hearing on the Bill. Our presentation was based on three points

- Support for Repeal the 2004 Foreshore and Seabed Act
- Support for the right of iwi and hapū to proceed to court to have Customary Titles clarified and confirmed
- Remove the requirement for proof of continuous occupation.

In the short time we had we referred to the Ministerial Review Panel 'Pākia ki Uta Pākia ki Tai' and said there should be greater provision for these recommendations; We emphasized the priority of a Treaty framework for governance and management of the Coastal Marine area, and spoke about the Methodist /Weteriana covenant agreement as a model for power sharing.

We emphasized care for the environmental integrity of the coastal marine area as a value that should guide new legislation.

Land and Water

The Land and Water Forum is resuming Community Consultations in February. See [www....](#)

A summary of 'A Fresh Start for Water', with comments on the Land and Water Forum report is included in this Update. **February** brings a chance to go to hear from Forum members at meetings in different areas. See last page for details.

Further information will follow in February.

Christmas and New Year joys, reflections and inspirations, from Betsan, Michael, Mataiva and David.

To all who are celebrating the Christmas festival, and those responding to people with few means to celebrate, we honour the sharing of gifts of many kinds.

For many who work with developing country neighbours there has been hard news from the Sustainable Development Fund- we are heavy hearted with you for work that cannot proceed. We share hope that our summer breaks will bring refreshment for new plans ahead.

There will be no PQ Update in January: next one will be February 2011.

Resourcing Public Questions

Welfare Reform

Introduction

Intense concerns about Welfare reform are coming from church agencies, church and other Social Services, Benefit Advocacy groups and Government.

We have mentioned the Government Welfare Working Group Issues and Options papers. The large Options Paper was released in November. Laura Black, Methodist Mission Dunedin has been sending comments, including a letter to the Listener on the feature article on Paula Rebstock who is chairing the government Welfare Working Group.

A very significant intervention has taken place through the Alternative Welfare Working Group. This was commissioned by Caritas, the Anglican Social Justice Commission and the Benefit Advisory and Advocacy Federation to address shortfalls in the Government consultations, advice and terms of reference for Welfare Reform. These eminent commissioners are Mike O'Brien, Paul Dalziel, Pihopa Muru Walters, Susan St John, Māmari Stephens, Sue Bradford and Wendi Wicks.

The documents published by the Welfare Justice Commission are available on line. The Report 'Welfare Justice for All' is a marvelous story of New Zealand's welfare with attention given to the role of Māori in that system. In very readable form it goes through the real

issues of change, the challenges to be met and gives ideas for long term reform.

Links for these important documents

<http://www.alternativewelfareworkinggroup.org.nz>>

The week before Christmas is not the time of a full review of the proposed changes – hence these are some indicative notes.

Submissions to the Government Welfare Working Group are due 24th December.

By way of a submission you could simply VOICE YOUR SUPPORT for the '[Welfare Justice for All](#)' paper by sending an mail with or without comment, to Paula Rebstock at welfareworkinggroup@vuw.ac.nz

Methodist Missions Aotearoa are sending submissions.

Methodist Mission Dunedin submission:

<http://www.dmm.org.nz/publications.htm>

Notes on the Welfare Working Group (WWG) Options Paper and on 'Welfare Justice for All'

From a Public Questions point of view, 'wellbeing' is the lens through which an analysis of the reform debate can be made. Asking whether policies will lead to enhanced wellbeing through improved access to health, education, enhanced job opportunities is a way of assessing proposed change. Improved wellbeing is one of the goals identified by the Welfare Working Group, but does their discussion so far back up improvements to wellbeing?

Terms of the debate

The main contention about the Government's approach to reform is that they are framing the discussion about beneficiaries as 'dependents', that the onus of getting off benefits is the responsibility of individuals, and that reform is based on the view that the only means to a fulfilling and responsible life is through paid work. The Issues paper speaks about the 'large numbers' of people on benefits, and quotes 170,000 as being in 'long term reliance' on benefits – which has an effect of magnifying the burden of welfare provision.

The Options paper is framed with narrow economic interests. Commentators such as the NZ Council of Christian Social Services including Methodist Mission Dunedin, the Welfare Justice Group all identify social participation, social inclusion and wellbeing as the key frameworks for achieving social cohesion and an inclusive society. All these groups and agencies agree that major reform should be designed and built on these values and frameworks for long term sustainability.

The Treaty of Waitangi is given no significant place in the Options paper. This seems a remarkable omission given the major policy initiative of Whānau Ora. The 'Welfare Justice

for All' paper provides an overview of the significance of welfare and for Māori; it includes analysis of the over-representation of Māori in social disadvantage. Any reform must prioritize whole of system multifaceted strategies for education, employment and welfare.

In the introduction to the Issues paper Paula Rebstock writes

Long term reliance on benefits has contributed to many adverse impacts such as poverty, poor physical and mental health and deep deprivation where intergenerational dependency has taken hold'.

In contrast, Paul Dalziel, member of the Alternative Welfare Justice Commission, and others have said – of course those who are on benefits are living in deprivation, because the benefit is paid at levels which are 30 - 80% below the average wage, and below the poverty line (see Welfare Justice For All p. 34). The failure of the welfare system is that with incomes below poverty levels, 30% of New Zealand children are growing up in deprivation –and likely to present the symptoms of poor health, poor educational achievements, crime and addictions. The symptoms of deprivation are inter-related and need integrated, whole of system strategies to address them.

Options and Responses

The issues raised in the Options paper by the Government Welfare Working group are significant. Some of these are credible, but many betray the limited terms of reference of the review.

- the economic system, labour market, health and education systems need to be aligned with strategies to reduce long term benefit dependency support.

- the focus on paid work needs to be complemented with active support and clear obligations so as to enable people to take work opportunities when they emerge. (An example might be the availability of and access to child care if a part time job for a parent with child care responsibilities becomes available)
- Expectations to address barriers to paid work, backed up by sanctions and community expectations for participation in paid work.
- Benefit and tax systems need financial incentives for people to enter and remain in paid work.

Laura Black provides both big picture analysis of the government Issues and detailed commentary and critique of the Options paper. Some points in her submission include:

- The case made in the Options paper about welfare dependency is not credible .
- The WWG group has failed to provide any analysis of the contribution of underlying macro-economic conditions to the number of poor individuals and whānau, and no analysis of the low-skill nature of much of our economy and/or the long tail of educational failure and their impact on the macro-economic environment. These elements are the primary cause of poverty in Aotearoa/New Zealand and any solution that excludes answers to these contributing factors can only fail.

Some Suggestions (abbreviated):

- Provide wrap around support and advocacy services via NGO's for long-term beneficiaries toward the rebuilding of individual and whanu resilience so that education and employment opportunities are able to be embraced
- Support community employment projects

- Establish internship to provide positive incentives for beneficiaries to move into work experience.

The strong focus of this submission on creating educational and training pathways into employment, along with the need for policies for job creation are also features of the Welfare Justice proposals.

The Children's Commissioner John Angus has pointed to the risks to children that will be the outcome of the 'draconian measures' presented in the Welfare Working Group Options paper. Reduction in benefits and punitive measure against women who are not working will lead to further stress on families.

The Need for Reform

Many have suggested that government concerns about the monetary cost of the welfare system is the real issue. Bishop Muru Walters quoted the Prime Minister saying that welfare is unsustainable. Mike O'Brien makes the point that the cost of Welfare is not a blow out, and the government is using the cost of welfare to manipulate public opinion against welfare provision.

Even before legislated reform there are already stringency measures in place to deter people from accessing benefits, and for pressuring people into work when there are not the jobs to take up. Then sanctions can be applied in withholding benefit payments if it is deemed that insufficient effort has been made. The loss of motivation and depression from multiple rejections from job applications – sometimes hundreds, and the exhaustion from re-crafting CV's to no avail, have to be recognized in the challenges facing job seekers.

The Alternative Welfare Justice Group agrees that reform is needed, and also challenges the approach being taken.

There seems to be little real engagement with the realities of people with disabilities in regards to work, the government is working with a narrow definition of work so that the caring work and voluntary work are disregarded as contributions, and there is no strategy for wider-government engagement to make child wellbeing a priority.

The higher numbers of people on benefits at present are because of the recession – the unemployment benefit fell to low levels during the recent period of economic prosperity.

For further information on poverty, wellbeing and justice see NZCCSS Vulnerability Report and Policy Watch www.justiceandcompassion.org.nz

The report of the Welfare Reform Group from submissions to the Options paper is due out at the end of February 2011.

Public Question of Alcohol.

Submissions due 18th February 2011

The Alcohol Reform Bill is a response to the Law Commission review of alcohol <http://talklaw.co.nz/liquor>. The Law Commission recommended changes to curb alcohol abuse but most commentators say that the proposed measures in the Bill are inadequate. The Law Commission said that the price of alcohol should be raised (as a tax), that advertising should be regulated and restricted or stopped, and that hours for purchasing should be reduced.

The focus of changes proposed in the Bill is on individualized responsibility for alcohol use, and there are no measures to curb access to alcohol by addressing the commercial interests in alcohol. There are no measures to curb marketing, advertising and sponsorships which have had an accumulative effective of saturating the public, including young people, with positive attitudes to drinking. There are no planned campaigns to expose the huge personal and family health costs associated with alcohol. These translate into major public health and public safety risks, costs and concerns, including the effects of domestic violence and drink-driving.

The Alcohol Reform Bill proposes some measures to reduce youth access to alcohol such as restricting the alcohol content of 'alcopops' (RTD's), OR only a parent or guardian can provide alcohol to under 18-year olds.

The Bill provides 'empowerment' for local communities to make decisions about alcohol outlets. A challenge here is whether local councils have a mechanism to assess the

social effects of local liquor outlets or the regulatory mechanisms or the will to enforce restrictions (and loss of business profits) in communities. Many councils are dominated by those having business interest or associations.

Ken Rae, of the Mana Methodist Congregation wrote to Public Questions saying their parish endorsed the Alcohol Action submission to the Alcohol Reform Bill. He quoted 'the Bill trivializes the work of the Law Commission review by not including substantial measures to reduce the harm from drinking'. 'The main drivers of damage from alcohol, which are price, availability, promotion and drink-driving, are not being adequately addressed.'

You can write quite a simple submission. Give your name, address and contacts (phone and email). Explain your interest, and make key points, including your experience or knowledge of alcohol abuse. Send it to:

The Justice and Electoral Committee,
Parliament, Wellington

You may also wish to follow the draft submission provided through the Alcohol Action link (at the end)

Background Briefing:

'The alcohol industry is enriching itself while the effects of alcohol are damaging the country'.

This quote is from Doug Sellman's speech at a Manukau Alcohol Rally in August. It refers to one of the major drivers of the heavy drinking culture identified by the Law Commission as the 'unbridled commercialization of alcohol' ('Alcohol in Our Lives' 2010). While the alcohol industry benefits from the profits, taxpayers are paying 'billions of dollars' in health and associated costs such as ACC injury costs, and police and legal and costs from downstream effects of violence, loss of productive hours and so on. Ken Rae brings this to life by referring to his observations in his local community

Ken Rae wrote:

The members of our congregation wholeheartedly support the call for additional provisions made by Professor Doug Sellman, Director of the National Addiction Centre, University of Otago,

We are very aware as parents and grandparents, as members of local Mana communities, and as shoppers at local dairies and supermarkets, of the major increases in availability of alcohol and in its promotion close to our homes. Of particular concern is the promotion of cheap alcopops seemingly aimed specifically at our grand-daughters.

We invite those other community groups and congregations to take similar steps to ensure that the current opportunity for reform on the basis of careful

research is not squandered. We will also look to strong leadership from our church leaders and our national office.

Professor Connor affirmed 'The Law Commission brought together the best international scientific information about what would be effective measures to reduce our problems, but the Government is not prepared to use them.' She pondered, 'This means there are other considerations that are more important than health, welfare, law and order. What are they?'

The answer seems to be commercial interests. While Methodists and all churches have an ethical basis for the need to curb excessive alcohol use, there are also cogent personal and public health arguments to do so. The Salvation Army have emphasized the hazardous health effects of alcohol in their strategies they advocate to address the harm caused by alcohol. Similarly Alcohol Action calls for a bold approach to alcohol reform which the current bill goes nowhere near addressing. While much of the debate is framed in terms of personal freedoms, the public health and social harm caused by alcohol include domestic violence, drink-driving and the injuries caused from this, and diseases such as heart and liver diseases. Youth are enticed into drinking through sugar laden 'ready to drink' RTD's.

Church Leaders raise issue of Alcohol with the Prime Minister

At a November meeting between Church Leaders and the Prime Minister John Key and Deputy Prime Minister Bill English alcohol was one of five topics were raised, with unanimity on the need for robust law reform to curtail alcohol abuse. The Prime Minister was challenged that

proposed reform measures will be inadequate and ineffective. The 5+Solution advocated by Alcohol Acton New Zealand was presented to the Prime Minister.

The planks of '5+Solution' presented to the Prime Minister are:

1. Raise alcohol prices (through taxes)
2. Raise the purchase age
3. Reduce alcohol accessibility
4. Reduce marketing and advertising
5. Increase drink-driving counter-measures

The Church Leaders said that the most pressing strategy to spearhead effective reform is in the sale, advertising and consumption of alcohol in New Zealand. They said that the commercial forces pushing alcohol in New Zealand are so compelling that they over-ride the weak measures of education to support self-control and personal responsibility. Ken Harrison clarified to the Prime Minister, that the churches are not promoting a total ban on alcohol, but much strong measures for safety and restraint.

Proposals for Reform and Why

The 5+Solution is being advocated by Alcohol Action and supported by health and social service professionals, and by many in churches as well as the Church Leaders. The 5+Solution measures correspond to the recommendations of the Law Commission in 'Alcohol in Our Lives- Curbing the Harm'. They are based on a World Health Organization criteria for reducing the harm caused by alcohol prepared by leading public health and alcohol professionals, and endorsed by a leading medical journal 'The Lancet'.

Proposals being for robust alcohol reform by Alcohol Action and the Salvation Army include:

- Increase taxation on alcohol (by 25%) as a key deterrent
- Ban liquor advertising on television and on print media price-based advertising
- Reducing the hours for purchase or banning alcohol from off-license purchasing
- Minimum age for purchasing liquor from an 'off-license' (such as supermarkets) should be 20 years and from an 'on-license' remain at 18 years.
- Greater capacity for licensing authorities (local government) to assess community impacts of alcohol before issuing outlet licenses
- Increase enforcement of penalties for breaking laws against selling liquor to minors
- Reducing drink-driving blood alcohol limit for adults to 50 mg/100 (down from the present legal limit of 80 mg/100 ml blood for adult drivers) , and to zero for under 20 year olds.
- Optimum availability of drug and alcohol counseling

A problem with the supply of liquor through supermarkets is that supermarkets can cut costs on alcohol and use this as a 'loss-leading' strategy , to attract customers who will also purchase other goods. As Ken Ray notes, the allure of alcopops (RDT's) provide an easily accessible pathway for young people towards abusive drinking habits.

Weak proposals in the Alcohol Reform Bill

There is no provision to lower the blood alcohol level in the Alcohol Reform Bill. If you look at the 'Visibly Shaken' website (see link at end) you can see colour graphs for drinking and driving – basically 3.5 drinks in 2 hours for women, and 5 drinks in 2 hours for men will take you over the current limit (variations because of body size). This

would reduce to 2.5 drinks for women and 3.5 drinks for men with changes advocated by the 5+Solution.

The government has rejected a proposed 50% increase in excise tax, there are anomalies in banning supply of alcohol to under 18 year olds without adult consent : an under 18 year old can't drink at a private home without consent but can drink at a pub. A \$2000 fine for a false ID is a further example of penalties aimed at barriers to alcohol abuse for young people. In effect the barriers are directed towards individualized controls, while the larger issues of collective government responsibility through serious curbs on the industry, on profits from outlets and on advertising – similar to the campaign to extinguish smoking - are sidestepped; yet the reasons are similar.

Conclusion

The Mana parish is expressing strongly and widely held view that the measures in the proposed Bill need to be strengthened in line with the 5+Solutions. Commercial interests need to take a back seat to those of the health and wellbeing of New Zealand young people and families. The drive against 'P' / methamphetamine' by the Prime Minister needs to be matched with a similar drive against alcohol. Would anyone dare challenge the strong stand taken to stop smoking – on counts of health and the long term impacts on families and communities. It is high time

to act on Alcohol to stem the effects of its misuse on families in New Zealand.

Website References:

Visibly Shaken < <http://sciblogs.co.nz/visibly-shaken/2010/04/13/drinking-and-driving-how-much-is-too-much/>

Law Commission report <http://talklaw.co.nz/liquor>

Salvation Army Submission to the Law Commission report <http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/research-media/social-research/social-policy-and-parliamentary-unit/>

Or:

http://www.salvationarmy.org.nz/uploads/Submission%20to%20Law%20Commission%20Alcohol%20Report%2030%20Oct%2009_09.pdf

Alcohol Action Submission <

<http://www.alcoholaction.co.nz/StandardSubmission.aspx>

Alcohol Reform Bill 2010 (Digest)<

<http://www.parliament.nz/NR/rdonlyres/F52D0A4C-99EB-4856-9898-807EE299DD68/165510/1814Alcohol1.pdf>>

Land and Water Briefing

Summary of the Land and Water Forum report 'A Fresh Start for Fresh Water' September 2010.

We have water in abundance in Aotearoa-New Zealand and we treasure water for spiritual and cleansing qualities, for its re-creational values and its ecosystem services. Water is central to iwi identities, responsibilities and food sources. The economic value of water is evident in power generation, food and wine production and waste disposal. New Zealand tourism relies on rivers and the great diversity in character of New Zealand waterways.

These are the values and interests that the Land and Water Forum had in mind in seeking a new, effective policy framework water management. The report, 'A fresh Start to Water' makes the case for integrated management. It also sees collaboration as the means to integration. However in supporting collaboration, we make a note of caution from a Public Questions and Care for the Integrity of Creation point of view – there needs to be a overarching guiding framework of environmental responsibility that enhances rivers, water ecosystems, biodiversity and water quality. Such a framework needs to ensure iwi partnerships in decision-making and management. Consultation must be across all interest groups and ensure the more powerful players, such as those with commercial interests do not over-ride smaller parties.

Pressures

The Land and Water Forum report plainly says that current water management is not working. Climatic changes mean that water shortages and droughts are becoming more intense. The quality of many rivers and wetlands is degraded – in some cases severely so. The state

of groundwater aquifers is of concern. Leaching of nitrates from farming into lakes and waterways is condemning water quality for generations to come. Political and legal disputes to settle these problems are costly and often ineffective.

Increasingly access to the use of water is a source of conflict with competing pressures for use rights, with farming, conservation and ecological interests having very different perspectives on water management. Development interests compound the complexities of water infrastructure, with growing pressure on sewage management and waste water and industrial discharge. Water allocation is currently managed on a 'first-in-first-served basis which leads to inequities and conflicts. The Forum regards new a framework water allocation as a top priority. The financial ability of developers to take resource consents to higher courts compared with local issue groups must be noted as an inequality.

Iwi have major interests in rights to water and have laid the ground for legal arguments to ownership as a means to recover the capacity to manage water in accordance with tikanga. Ownership may well provide pathways for iwi development that have been denied to Māori under current regimes.

Possibilities and Proposals

The joint governance arrangement for the Waikato River is full of promise, and there will be much interest in the implementation and the hoped for beneficial effects of a system that combines iwi priorities for clean-up restoration

and development with maintenance of Crown and regional investments and infrastructure.

The orientation of the Land and Water Forum Report on Freshwater management is to show the way for collaborative management of water. The Government asked the Forum to identify goals for reform and options for

achieving them, and these are summed up in the need for governance in water management to be stepped up through the establishment of a Land and Water Commission. The Commission to be co-governance arrangement with iwi and to provide leadership in setting limits to water allocations and to ensuring local government carry our responsibilities for water quality.

Questioning how water is cared for

- If you decide to host a forum on water who would you invite to participate, and to speak, or provide information?
- Which groups are looking after waterways in your area?
- What is the state of your rivers? How could you find out? Where would you go to find out about these things?

Dates for Land and Water Forum community meetings: http://www.landandwater.org.nz/index_files/meetings.htm

Wednesday 9 th February 2011	Canterbury	Copthorne Hotel Commodore, 449 Memorial Avenue, Christchurch
Thursday 10 th February 2011	South Canterbury, Waitaki	The Function Centre, The Landing Service Building, 2 George Street, Timaru
Monday 14 th February 2011	West Coast	Beachfront Hotel Hokitika, 111 Revell Street, Hokitika
Thursday 17 th February 2011	Northland	Kingsgate Hotel, 9 Riverside Drive, Whangarei
Tuesday 22 nd February 2011	Otago	Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Conference Room, 30 The Octagon, Dunedin
Wednesday 23 rd February 2011	Southland	Ascot Park Hotel, Corner Tay Street and Racecourse Road, Invercargill
Tuesday 1 st March 2011	Hawke's Bay	Hawke's Bay Opera House, 101 Hastings Street South, Hastings
Wednesday 2 nd March 2011	East Cape	Gisborne District Council, Rose Room, 15 Fitzherbert Street, Gisborne
Thursday 3 rd March 2011	Marlborough	Heartland Hotel Marlborough, Blenheim