

The Gathering Storm on the Foreshore and Seabed: Why it must remain in Crown Ownership

By Dr Hugh Barr

This just-released book of 110 pages discusses the background to the National Government's astounding U-turn in introducing a Bill to Parliament to remove Crown (i.e. public) ownership from New Zealand's foreshore and seabed. This is solely to allow Maori tribal groups to own areas of the foreshore and seabed, including the currently Crown owned resources they contain. This major political issue is a result of National's pact with the Maori Party to share power.

This, the largest proposed race-based privatisation in New Zealand's history, will open a Pandora's box of claims, arguments and loss of public rights and resources. Additional steps to make the obtaining of customary title even easier are likely to follow.

Privatisation to customary title means that tribal groups will be given very strong private property rights and so will be able to exploit the minerals, aquaculture, and control of recreational and commercial facilities (launching ramps, wharves, marinas, mooring buoys etc) in their areas, and charge fees to make money.

They will also be able to negotiate their own exclusive areas – wahi tapu – where public access will be forbidden with summary fines of up to \$5,000 being imposed on “trespassers”, even though these areas have been open to the public since 1840.

In spite of National's statements to the contrary, free public access to the foreshore and seabed, or even public access itself, for surfers, boaties, yachties, fishermen and other members of the public is not guaranteed.

The book also discusses the background of the person who has instituted these changes, the Attorney General, Christopher Finlayson, without whose influence it is unlikely that these astounding changes would be happening.

The book is a lively and stimulating read that cuts through the National and Maori Parties' self-interest and secrecy. This is a very important issue that will adversely affect all New Zealanders for many years to come.



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