



Election Year Strategy 2011

A Discussion Paper
by Tony Orman and Ken Sims

Introduction:

As life members of the Federation, we have spent well over three decades - collectively - fighting threats to rivers and trout fishing and to its status as a public egalitarian sport. We are both a "swinging voter" with no party allegiances so can claim to take a reasonably strong dispassionate view.

Tony Orman has spent over 40 years since 1969, first in the "Save Manapouri" campaign, involved in lobbying and advocacy in supporting political action, presenting submissions to select committees ranging from trout farming, sea fisheries, a Maori fisheries bill, Conservation Law Reform Bill and others, part of deputations to see Cabinet Ministers and lobbying politicians face to face.

Ken Sims has spent 30 years researching trout fishing (on and off the water), making submissions and representations to Ministers and Officials.

The victories can be counted on one hand - trout farming (the big victory), importation of trout meat, channel catfish, grass carp and one or two others.

The 1972 election defeat of the National government with Save Manapouri, trout farming and the sale of public lands to a rich American to exploit the trout fishing in the Upukerora River, was a big victory helped by Labour leader Norman Kirk's personal empathy with the outdoors.

But almost over-whelmingly the outlook is far from rosy. We are fighting erosion of the public ownership of fish and game, erosion caused by the sale of fishing (and hunting) rights, encroaching pollution, warnings about contact with (let alone drinking) water in rivers causing human illness and even dog deaths, private power companies (often overseas owned) vying to dam rivers for their own profits, and a racially divided country as epitomised by the Marine and Coastal Bill.

And we are seeing politicians in government deaf to any protests. Since the 1972 Kirk government the slide has been downward and politicians increasingly arrogant.

Since then, it has been a frustrating process with successive governments founded on and dominated by either Labour or National, whose politicians have indulged in arrogance, deceit and deception. In the background have been career bureaucrats adept at "double speak" and manipulating ministers.

The Embryo

It was a chance conversation by Tony with a Marlborough National Party stalwart that triggered an idea. The party member said government was nervous the public might learn how to use MMP largely through the party vote.

In other words if the public largely realised that the party vote is totally independent of the candidate vote, then governments could not afford to be so arrogant.

Germination.

The outdoor public sector is large. It has been put at a million, more or less. And there is a feeling that National and Labour are Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dumb.

But MMP gives the public a choice. A voter can still vote for a National or Labour candidate if they wish, but is totally free to cast their second, party vote for either Labour or National but more importantly for a minor party such as the Green Party, NZ First, United Future, Kiwi, Act or any other.

What if the public were encouraged to give "Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dumb" a loud wakeup call by voting for a minor party?

Discussion

MMP has been far from perfect with criticism being focused on an overlong number of un-elected list MPs and on the influence by minority parties who have gone into coalition with government. Exactly!

The Green Party deeply influenced the Clark-led Labour government and now the Maori Party is doing the same on the current Key-led, National-based government. However for all that, we believe MMP has been a considerable improvement on the arrogance of the FPP system it replaced.

Irrespective of the debate on MMP versus FPP, MMP is here for the 2011 election.

What if minor parties in coalition with either Labour or National had good outdoor recreation, fishing and hunting policies? Therein lies the the possibility and the opportunity.

Action Plan.

We believe the outdoor sector should grasp this opportunity. Time is running out. With each three-year term, the slide is downward.

The MMP system should be made to work for the outdoor lobby by utilising the influence of minor parties in coalition with government.

To repeat, part of the MMP "problem" is the public has not fully understood the two-vote system and the freedom it gives the voter. A significant number do not understand the party vote is 100% independent of the candidate vote. So a voter can vote for any party and for any candidate. The significant vote is the party vote.

If enough people understood the importance of the party vote and that it has no relevance to the candidate vote and if they voted for a party that had sound outdoor recreation policies, then significant power and influence would be given in Parliament to the minor parties.

To get MPs in the House, a party has to beat the 5% threshold. Alternatively it has to win a seat or seats. The mix of the two determines the number of MPs.

As of 2008, seven parties have representatives in Parliament.

The current parties are as follows: -National Party, Labour Party and minor parties Green Party, Maori Party, ACT, United Future (Dunne), Progressive Party (Anderton).

Two parties - significant to outdoor recreation - not in Parliament are: - New Zealand First (Winston Peters) and Kiwi Party (ex-MP Larry Baldock).

United Future is the only one in Parliament that has battled for the outdoor public.

NZFFA, CORANZ or similar bodies cannot champion one party. But we believe such organisations - collectively- could advocate to the outdoor public (a) vote for a minor party and (b) vote for United Future, Kiwi or NZ First.

The two outside of Parliament, we have mentioned -- NZ First and Kiwi -- have some empathy with the outdoors traditions. Peters is reportedly a keen sea fisherman, and duck shooter. NZ First is also showing significantly in polls. Kiwi through leader Larry Baldock, have made strong public statements against 1080, for game animals and other outdoor issues.

Hypothesis

Current seats are:-

National 58, Labour 43, Green 9, Maori 5, Act 5, United Future 1, Progressive 1.

Suppose a hypothetical scenario after November 2011 of:

National 47, Labour 40, Maori 5, Greens 5 --- and NZ First, United Future and Kiwi had 25 seats between them.

Obviously then those 3 minor parties (NZ First, United Future and Kiwi) could have a large measure of control and influence. It is negative to complain about the degree of influence of the Greens (with Labour) or the Maori and Act with (National). Let's try and make MMP work positively for the outdoor recreation public.

Recommendations

1. The NZFFA through CORANZ and in association with other outdoor groups organise an active campaign to:-

- (a) Educate voters on the importance and independence of the party vote, e.g. letters to editor, press releases, advertisements (outdoor type magazines, newspapers) next year
- (b) Advocate that electors vote with their party vote for United Future, Kiwi or NZ First. Do not comment on the candidate vote and even stress - that is the individual's choice.
- (c) Lobby the minor parties for good outdoor recreation policies. Of course with the Charter, CORANZ will lobby all parties so that it will remain apolitical.
- (d) With other groups, raise funding to cover advertisement costs.

It may be that organisations (NZFFA, CORANZ etc) choose not to be publicly identified but use a masking inclusive name like NZ Outdoor Heritage Coalition/Group or even Federation of Rifle, Rod and Gun Sportsmen, which we used in the 1970s and 1980s?

This strategy has not tried to influence the voter's choice of candidate which might very well be the Labour, National or Green candidate. Individuals can still vote for their party candidate. All we would be doing is urging them to deeply think about the significance of the party vote. That means that Labour and National committed voters could still vote their way for the candidate but also vote for a minor party.

The theme of the campaign could well be "Sick of Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dumb? Well vote for a minor party." It may or may not go as far to identify three best options ie NZ First, United Future and Kiwi.

It is the party vote that is vitally important for minor parties, i.e. to get as far above the 5% threshold as possible. If any one or two parties win a seat, then that's a bonus, e.g Dunne in Ohariu, Peters where he chooses???

Yes it's venturesome, but "nothing ventured, nothing gained". And from our decades of advocacy experience, apart from 1972, we've gained little and overall have lost ground under a succession of Labour and National regimes. In fact, we're on a slippery slope downwards.

It's a time for bold, positive strategic action.