Future Scenarios – Biodiversity Edition

This international version of our scenarios game (© Landcare Research) – launched 8 October 2008 at the IUCN Forum in Barcelona – has been developed from our island experiences in New Zealand, but we can imagine it being sufficiently relevant to other 'developed countries' to be an interesting educational tool/device and discussion-starter for citizens, consumers and policymakers. We had several trial runs of previous New Zealand editions with other ethnic and language audiences and at an international Futures Conference in Cardiff, UK.

Game materials are published as PDF downloads at
http://www.landcareresearch.co.nz/services/sustainablesoc/futures/

Translations of these notes are available in Spanish and French.

Your biodiversity futures game starting point

You are a resident on an ocean island state; its human population while theoretically within current carrying capacity, is still growing in number, and in per-person domestic and imported resource demands (energy, water, metals, food proteins).

Economic, political, social and cultural influences, along with change in the bio-physical environment, will drive human change towards a different future. We are neither predicting nor projecting trends here – simply exploring within a range of possibilities, to set you thinking! Which futures will be more sustainable ones for people and planet, and why? Which directions seem likely, on current trends?

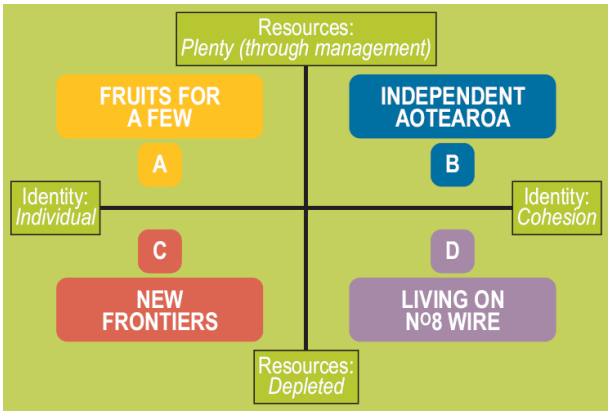
Later during the game we will invite you to take the role and viewpoint of a future resident, probably of your grandchild's generation, living 30–50 years from now. Their livelihood and expectations will be different from yours, and they will live in a different world, which you will explore 'through their eyes'. These roles will be allocated to you later, using cards distributed at random by the game facilitators (you cannot choose a grandchild's livelihood – only leave them a legacy/inheritance).

(1) Our first game step is to recall recent (20-year) changes affecting everyday life and review how technology and lifestyles have altered. Where we see trends, are these likely to continue?

(2) The second step looks at drivers of change affecting biodiversity in that same period. What are the new, emerging drivers of change, such as from new technologies or human behaviour/choices, global warming, or from sheer population numbers?

(3) Then your small group is introduced to one of the four scenarios, showing you also how the four are logically related, using two intersecting axes/dimensions. You will be invited to image human life and then biodiversity prospects there, 'in role' as an adult within your grandchild's generation.

The game unfolds from there; we hold back a few 'wild card' surprises until you are involved!



The scenarios are described on game cards, and in detail in our 110-page book: *Four Futures for New Zealand*, Taylor, Frame, Brignall-Theyer and Delaney, 2007, 2nd edition, Manaaki Whenua Press, Lincoln, NZ. Order it online now from: http://www.mwpress.co.nz/store/viewItem.asp?idProduct=541

The Four Futures differ economically in the extent of their global imports and tourism connections, readiness and ability to use new technologies, and reliance on commodity exports. However, these are *not* statistical forecasts projecting historical trends. The scenarios are a stimulus to creatively explore possibilities around existing 'faint signals' in society. They are also *not* science fiction, but are intended (and acknowledged by reviewers) as plausible extensions or outcomes of potentially competing socio-economic trends that are detectable in New Zealand society today.

Each scenario diverges from 2008, so that 30–50 years on, they resemble:
A. An open economy with many protected ecosystems but unevenly distributed benefits and access: over 80% of resources are in the hands of a small business-political elite and under 20% with the rest. The commons are privatised here.

B. A more closed economy and more equitable society, technology-using but less entrepreneurial, with national efforts to improve a Genuine Progress Index or Indicator (GPI) taking the place of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). How would biodiversity values fare in this more values-based but still technocratic society?

C. A globalised competitive economy where winners' income reflects education and business acumen/merit, until New Zealand hits a wall of resource shortage and ecosystem pollution a few decades from now. This results in a severe economic crash, emigrations and social conflict. Biodiversity is valued for its utility as a resource, provided one has rights to it.

D. After initial resource depletion trends (heading along the lines of C), but here stronger social networks help temper competitiveness, rediscovering cooperation to avoid the resource crash, creating a localised, inward-looking, subsistence lifestyle. Will this future be too poor to foster conservation, or may nature do better then?

Common assumptions

For game purposes, it is assumed that all four scenarios follow broadly similar demographic changes. These include an ageing population and relatively faster growth of numbers among indigenous (Maori) and Pacific Island migrant families than families of European cultural origin. They differ in the scale and timing of inward and outward migration flows. Some global influences are common to all, such as much more expensive fossil fuels (after global Peak Oil production) and effects of climate change such as sea level rise.