

Country will stay true blue

BY THE time this column is published, the votes will have been counted and we will know – or be well on the way – to seeing what shape our new Government is going to take.

At the time of writing, five days out from polling day, it is a fairly safe bet that most of the booths in rural New Zealand will have again mostly punted for National.

However, much of this support is probably more by default than desire.

Some rural votes will have gone to ACT in support of former Fed head Don Nicolson. However, that party's ugly struggles throughout the campaign will have scared many off. There will have been some pockets of organic-supporting, hippy types in the country who will have gone Green and even some rural support – more than likely those with early stages of senile dementia – for NZ First and its odious leader. It is also pretty safe to assume that both the Maori and Mana parties will not have garnered

too much support in the rural hinterland – save for Northland and the east coast of the North Island.

Meanwhile, Labour's ever-so tenuous advances for the farming/rural sector vote probably died about the same time it released its election manifesto. The prospect of being lumped with higher taxes, having agriculture dumped into an ETS, landed with a new capital gains tax; as well as commercial charges for irrigation and extending working for families for beneficiaries will have been an anathema to most in the rural heartland.

Just how is it economically or environmentally sensible to penalise New Zealand agriculture – and one of the few sectors with the ability to help the country out of the current economic malaise – by imposing even more taxes on it when our international competitors are not doing the same?

Surely all that will do is shift the production of agricultural greenhouse gases from



COMMENT
DAVID ANDERSON

New Zealand to even less environmentally-responsible countries.

Talk about cutting off our nose to spite our face!

National made a sensible decision by ruling that agricultural emissions will only be included in an ETS when and if practical technologies are available to enable our farmers to reduce their emissions and more progress is made by our trading partners to reduce their agricultural emissions.

It was also somewhat disingenuous of both Labour and the Green Party to claim that current high export commodity prices are proof that farmers can afford to pay any costs imposed by agriculture's introduction into an ETS. The fickle nature of commodity markets means prices

are likely to drop sooner rather than later.

You can be assured a Labour/Green government would not offer ETS rebates to farmers if meat and dairy prices suddenly took a dive

There is already evidence that the agriculture sector is reducing its greenhouse gases. Emissions per unit of product from agriculture had fallen by about 1.3% a year over the past 20 years – due to improved management practices, animal genetics, pasture and crop genetics and technological changes.

National will have also strengthened its rural support with its proposal to pump \$400 million into boosting on farm-water storage and irrigation.

Not surprisingly, the idea was shot down by its political opponents. But, again, the rationale for this opposition seemed more based on ideology than any sound policy reasons.

Much of this opposition stemmed from the idea of funding for these schemes coming from the Future Investment Fund – which will use the proceeds from National's part asset sales proposal. While Labour and the Greens may have

had problems with where the funding was coming from; surely even they could not argue with the concept of creating a more reliable source of water for farmers will in turn mean higher productivity

and income for the nation – in turn leading to more tax and jobs.

Reliable water means growth – both for our economy and the environment. All political parties – no matter if they

are left, right or just plain bonkers – should have been supporting such a plan.

Those are just a couple of reasons why the countryside stayed blue this election!

A FAILED EXPERIMENT

THE NOVEMBER 15 issue of *Rural News* included a statement by ACT candidate, and immediate past president of Federated Farmers Don Nicolson, that total reform of the RMA was a major election plank of his party, with the aim of reducing bureaucracy and better respecting private property rights.

But much more surprising was, an article attributed to the chair of the Greater Wellington Regional Council, Fran Wilde, under a banner headline of "RMA complex, costly and time-consuming".

Wow! Is this a Damascus Road conversion? Given Wilde's background as a very liberal

member of the Labour Cabinet that introduced the RMA in the 1980's? I, of course, had to re-read the article to make sure she wasn't making the point that the RMA wasn't complex, costly and time-consuming enough. But no, it seems she is actually seeking similar reforms to Don Nicolson.

Many ordinary folk might be superficially attracted to the idea of such "flexible" legislation which allows for "individual circumstance". But the reality of the RMA is a bit like going to a strip club... pictures of the curvaceous "Miss Permissive" on the outside, but once entry is gained (after an eye-watering fee) one encounters the more severe "Ms

Prescriptive" dressed in tights, boots and carrying a whip. She tells you to watch the show, "The Dance of the Seven Fees and Levies" and advises that actual flesh will only be seen after you have bought expensive drinks for the row of bored but expectant young 'consultants' lining the bar. You stumble blindly from the club with warnings about the role of the "enforcers"...the big guys in dark suits and matching shades, a much poorer but perhaps wiser citizen.

There are few other pieces of legislation more antagonistic to the ordinary property owner than the RMA. It is a failed experiment.

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