

# The New Zealand Herald

**HD** Arguments for new flag show paranoia

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The three arguments in favour of changing our flag are that the present one is indistinguishable from the Australian flag, that we need a flag to better reflect the country's unique characteristics, and that a new one would represent our individualism and freedom from the shackles of British colonialism.

All three fail because they fall under the national identity crisis banner, which is manifested by some New Zealanders displaying a deep sense of paranoia and parochialism.

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Being a small country alongside a much larger, economically prosperous neighbour probably explains the national pastime of comparing and denigrating things Australian, but it does not stop there. The same small-minded jealousy is exhibited towards the United States.

Another lot believes in an exceptionalism that makes us stand out from other people, and goes beyond national identity. Ingrained in the psyche of those is a belief that we are a clever bunch.

The other **group** loathe our British heritage and favour modern-day New Zealand, where multiculturalism is favoured over contribution.

But, indisputably, our nation was founded as a result of Britain's expansion throughout the world, not by the recent migrants from the Pacific or Asia.

J. Stark, Cambridge. Trade with **China** Misleading and fraudulent use of the Prime Minister's photograph, drugging of kindergarten children, dead pigs polluting waterways, a surge in elephant and rhino poaching for the **Chinese** market. All this in Friday's edition of the Herald.

While not underestimating the importance of the **Chinese** market, is this a country with which we really want to develop closer ties, let alone allow virtually unfettered immigration and property **acquisition**?

There has been much bowing and scraping by both **business** and politicians over the Fonterra botulism fiasco but not a word has been said about the breach of contract by **China** over the asbestos in train carriages.

The contract should not have gone to **China** in the first place, but why are we not holding them responsible for losses, both actual and consequential, as a result of their breach?

Have payments been withheld? What penalty clauses are there in the contract? We have a right to know.

Ray Gilbert, Avondale. Problem gambling funding So the Government has cut funding for the Problem Gambling Foundation, a decent organisation that has provided counselling for some 25,000 problem gamblers over the years.

At the same time, John Key is allowing international gambling corporation SkyCity to increase its massed ranks of addictive pokie machines, and apparently increase its in-built profit margin to more than 3 per cent.

The loser, of course, is the average New Zealand taxpayer. Gambling is a nasty disease that fleeces money from the gullible, usually the least able to afford it, at terrible social cost.

Of course, the back-slapping deal over the unneeded convention centre in Auckland played no part, according to the Ministry of Health.

This is another building block in the Government's remorseless **sale** of New Zealand to powerful overseas corporate interests.

Jeff Hayward, Remuera. The Government's decision to cut funding to the Problem Gambling Foundation is an outrage. It reflects a callous disregard for the fact that the Problem Gambling Foundation is the largest provider of problem gambling services in the world, having served more than 25,000 clients over the past 20 years.

It is especially alarming that the decision to award the foundation's contract to the Salvation Army was reportedly a complete surprise to the Salvation Army. There had been no proper process of tendering and evaluation of competing proposals from the two organisations.

This constitutes incontrovertible evidence that this decision is indeed reprisal against the foundation for their advocacy role, which despite Minister Peter Dunne's denials appeared to have been clearly confirmed by Tau Henare on Twitter.

The lack of proper process in this decision must be investigated by the Auditor-General. Peter Matthewson, Avondale. NZ Post service NZ Post appears hell-bent on driving customers away by yet again ramping up charges.

There is even more incentive now for people to use electronic means to get their message to customers or friends and family. At least they know delivery will be immediate, which is more than can be said for NZ Post's abysmal performance.

An organisation with which I am associated has experienced several recent examples of five working days to get a 70c letter to Wellington or Christchurch and three to four days just to get across greater Auckland. It is now forced to use courier services.

A much smarter move would have been to cut the cost of a 70c envelope to encourage a return. While that would have reduced income per article, increased volume would compensate.

Is it now too late? The trend is for Christmas cards to be sent by email, and corporates encourage their clients to allow electronic transmission of annual reports and the like, putting the cost on to the recipient for ink and paper to print.

Graeme McIntosh, Army Bay. Bank funding It was very encouraging to read of Westpac's commitment of serious funds to the clean tech sector - green buildings, waste reduction, **energy** efficiency and **solar dairy** sheds. These developments are part of a sustainable economy and need capital.

This makes it all the more puzzling that Westpac would undermine its own reputation by continuing to fund the development of new **coal** mines.

Despite many hundreds of letters pointing out the damage that Bathurst plans to do to the inspiring and beautiful Dennistown Plateau, and the damage that **coal** will do to the climate, Westpac steadfastly continues to lend to Bathurst.

The **company** plans a suite of mines to dig up 84 **million** tonnes and put 218 **million** tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere at a time when the threat of climate change is already extreme. No amount of "green development" can ever remedy this.

That is why hundreds of its customers are about to switch to another banker, which does not fund fossil fuels. There is still time for Westpac to change, and make its sustainability real.

Jeanette Fitzsimons, Thames. Crimean parallel How ironic that Western nations are now so adamant that Russia should be punished for splitting a sovereign nation when only a few years ago they were doing exactly the same thing in Kosovo.

For centuries a province of Serbia, Kosovo was split away following threats by Nato and its allies, invasion and continued occupation by its forces, and a stage-managed vote in the region.

Russia, to this day, refuses to recognise Kosovo as a separate state on the basis that it came after actions that tore apart a sovereign nation. Now the chickens have come home to roost on an international scale.

In an extreme case, even New Zealand could fall foul of this dangerous precedent. What would be the result of a vote on the East Cape aimed at establishing a separate nation there?

David Spratt, Drury. Rescue helicopter For some reason there seems to be a deliberate push to discredit the Westpac helicopter organisation over funding. The argument advanced over which groups "need" funding is largely irrelevant.

There is one significant difference between the helicopter rescue trust and any of the arts **group** that are funded through the same channel. None of the arts groups have to **buy** or maintain twin-engined helicopters used in life-critical medical evacuation services.

More to the point, we should be asking why arts groups are having to compete for funding from the same source as the helicopter service, and why central government thinks this is okay. Or is that too sticky a question in election year? Mark Baker, Papakura. NZ drug laws I came over here for last week's Pathways to Reform conference on the emerging psychoactive drugs. Because Australia has taken the opposite route to New Zealand and embraced prohibition and punitive laws to try to regulate the **sale** of these products, we are now finding people salting lawn clippings with garden poisons and trying to pass these highly dangerous compounds off on the black market.

I noted your Saturday story on the poor woman whose son had spun out on these products. That is regrettable but so is the fact that half a dozen young people will die from alcohol over the next month or so, but banning alcohol will not stop that.

More will die from tobacco-related causes but banning tobacco will not stop that either. Two packets of Panadol will probably kill you if you take it all at once and even petrol and glue become highly toxic if you sniff them to get high. In Australia thousands do this. Do we ban petrol? Of course not.

New Zealand laws on emerging psychoactive drugs are the best in the world. It would be a shame to derail them because a few people have reacted badly. Robbie Swan, ACT, Australia.

**RF** lettmain24

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