



Molesworth & Featherston In The Loop



ELECTABLE

UPGRADE

The Governor's Edition of Molesworth & Featherston gets you extra facts and extra depth early in the week.

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POLICY BONANZA

As a fresh round of polls charges the start of election season, National and Labour begin to release strategic new policy.

PORKIES

Is Brad Pitt fat? A lobby group wants to ban ads for junk food and keep it out of the playground, but it can't back up its claims about fat kiwi kids.

VIEWER POLLS

Research companies have the technology, but broadcasters and agencies resist making minute-by-minute viewing figures available.

FEEDBACK

[Email us](#) with your comments and criticisms.

Election

Can we just say we told you so? Thanks

Not a ripple of surprise among our readers, we trust, at the news this week the election will be held on September 17.

We'll update our exclusive rolling average poll of polls early next week with fresh data from virtually all the major polls.

With two new polls this Friday in the Herald and NBR, and Thursday's TV3, it's already clear Labour is roaring back to the front. But keep your eye on the coalition options. Some polls are clearly showing volatility. But once we average them out with the exclusive algorithm, and take into account the ability of National or Labour to find a majority, the real movement has been comparatively glacial.

State of the parties

How it happened

Molesworth & Featherston is not surprised to see the momentum moving back to Labour, after we noted early this week the media's "all for or all against" approach – downplaying National's problems and over-emphasising Labour's.

Labour scored hits in the last week on its key messages while National took some blows.

Don Brash did the best he could deflecting attacks on nuclear ship visits and the Iraq war, but his stance on each has the whiff of doubt, compromise and hidden agenda about them.

Elsewhere, Wellington Central candidate Mark Blumsky's amnesia over how he ended up in a bloodied heap on the stairs of his apartment block has not helped his case in trying to unseat Environment Minister Marian Hobbs.

And then there was National list MP David Carter's description of the Christchurch suburb of Woolston as "shit country" and his not-at-all convincing recall he had actually said it was "tough territory". We figure no reporter of the experience of Dominion Post political editor Tracy Watkins would put such words in his mouth unless he said them.

M&F

Weekend update

Labour's pledge to scrap interest charges on student loans for people living here or returning to New Zealand (and an amnesty for those who come back in 2006) is being seen as a possible circuit-breaker.

The policy should help Labour turn back National's claims that the Government is not doing enough to keep and lure back graduates, and trumps National's \$70m tax rebate.

Apart from the 400,000-plus who have loans, it will also play well to the parents and grandparents who see the impact of student debt driving their families offshore, deferring pairing-up, house buying and even child-rearing.

It is an issue often raised at Grey Power meetings and was apparently the main factor unifying generations, socio-economic groups and different regions in Labour's focus group work.

National says the RMA 'devolves too much decision-making to councils, resulting in councils in every part of the country having different rules or having to reinvent the wheel'.

National claims small, determined groups can impose considerable costs on others. Out goes legal aid for eco-groups and in comes a requirement for objectors to be directly affected.

National is planning new bureaucracy and a much more centralised approach to resource management. An Environmental Protection Authority would draw up 'national environmental standards and policy statements' and impose them on councils. 'Greater recognition of property rights' suggests there would be more ability for developers to do as they please on their own land, but less ability to object to National economic development priorities (such as power pylons over your farm) or a prison next door).

DOC's role would be limited to advising on 'biodiversity and heritage issues'. Some resource application procedures would be streamlined to speed up consents through councils and courts.

The Reserve Bank held interest rates this week and indicated it's pretty comfortable with things.

The Bank's review this week stated the economy is broadly performing where the Bank had predicted and it can't see room for interest rate cuts or increases in coming months.

We continue to think inflation has peaked below the top of the policy targets agreement band while early indicators, like retail sales, indicate growth rates are lower than recent levels. The Bank thinks the housing market is stronger than we think it is.

The next update will be the Thursday before election day.

Lobby group 'Fight Obesity Epidemic' which this week sent out claims New Zealand kids are among the fattest in the world can't back up its claims.

FOE says our Pacific Island kids are the fattest group, with more than two thirds overweight and obese. It says TV ads for soft drink and junk food are so subversive, the only parenting strategy which makes any difference at all is to turn the TV off. It wants junk food ads banned during kiddie shows and 'unhealthy food and drink' banned from schools.

The group admitted there is "no direct evidence that banning unhealthy food and drink products in school will reduce obesity rates in children," when we asked for it.

Its evidence that our kids are the fattest in the world is based on a Body Mass Index that the US Centre for Disease Control, explicitly cautions against using as a diagnostic tool. The scale ranks Brad Pitt as overweight and the All Black backline as 'obese'.

The pressure group's widely reported advocacy doesn't acknowledge that 11-14 year old PI kids might be heavier because they mature faster.

With spot rates for thirty seconds of advertising during One News reaching twenty thousand dollars, pressure is growing for better accountability. We hear discussions are underway between broadcasters, market research and the ad industry.

We've heard People Meter operators, AGB McNair, are suggesting the publication of minute-by-minute audience figures could be the quid pro quo for a research system upgrade.

Broadcasters are horrified at the prospect of letting advertisers know how many people got up to put the kettle on when the ad break begins. Better just to sell the nice fat number who settle in to watch Judy read the headlines. Agencies are not thrilled about the accountability involved either. They may have to explain to clients why the audience watched all the way through the charming Toyota ad and switched off when the expensive toothpaste jingle began.

Campbell Jive

A regular column in which we report the genius attempts of the Lions' media maestro to reinterpret significant New Zealand events.

Alastair Campbell's brilliant efforts on behalf of various media outlets, as they tried to pick the election date, is only now coming to light.

There was his early contribution through TV3 – “put a ring around the last Saturday in July”, matched by NZPA's unequivocal claim that the Prime Minister had settled on July 30 as the election date.

Was that man Campbell the Beehive source again in the New Zealand Herald's tilt at August 20?

Surely he can in no way be blamed for The Christchurch Press' last gasp attempt to turn back the clock and get August 20 up again.

Finally a late effort to smoke out National's tax cut policy early by suggesting September 10 was in the running was deserving of an honorary mention. What an operator!

We will choose this week whose entry will win the copy of Dave Barber's book of political quotes, “Don't Vote; It Only Encourages Them” illustrated by cartoonist Bob Brockie.

Mapp loses way

Last week we compared statistics showing the number of work stoppages was nothing out of the ordinary, to National MP Wayne Mapp's claim of a ‘huge wave of industrial action’ this year. We commented *‘To be fair, the statistics look only at stoppages to the end of March, so include just one month of the current “five in ‘05” wages push by private-sector unions. The statistics for the next quarter won't be out until October, and could well be higher.’*

Dr Mapp dropped us a note agreeing the ‘current wave of strikes cover the period 1 April 2005 to the present, rather than the period ending March 2005’.

We asked for a copy of any prior statement clarifying that when he said there was a huge wave ‘this year’ he meant ‘after 1 April’. We haven't seen that statement, though Dr Mapp now says,

Since April this year, when the EPMU effectively started its campaign, we have had a huge increase in stopwork action. That is when I started issuing press releases on the level of strike activity.

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