

Subject:

Australia - New Zealand: Why we are on the outer!

Australia - New Zealand: The Chickens are Coming Home!

Many of the comments on Australia's recent policy changes affecting New Zealanders are ill informed and misleading.

I was born in NZ but have lived and worked in business in both Australia and NZ - as a senior executive, company director and chairman; worked on trade development in both; am a Life Member of the Australia-NZ Business Council; and was the first New Zealand Chairman (for 3 years) of the Australia-NZ Leadership Forum.

Australia's tougher line with NZ now is the logical outcome of the disdain and indifference with which too many New Zealand officials and politicians have too often treated Australia in recent decades. The mismatch in immigration policies is long standing and worrying to Australia as a serious vulnerability. Successive NZ governments eschewed serious policy anyway and didn't respond effectively on this issue (and others), leading to a steady erosion of a preferred and privileged position which we have negligently squandered. And we have the gall to be surprised! Welcome to the Real World!

Few New Zealand politicians and officials (there are notable exceptions) have engaged effectively with Australia - fly in, couple of meetings, photo op, one night and home again doesn't cut the mustard. I warned repeatedly on this with little effect although a "high level" NZ officials group did make a special effort and visited their Australian counterparts - and so annoyed and them that they vowed never again.

A special relationship needs to be worked on and kept special with fences mended, which we haven't done. And the A-NZ Leadership Forum has largely been wasted by a very weak policy engagement when the business engagement was excellent.

So, its all very predictable really!

Kerry McDonald, Wellington.