

# Newman Weekly

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The New Zealand Centre for Political Debate

## Are you a New Zealander?

Next Tuesday is census day. Once every five years we are required by law to fill in a detailed questionnaire about ourselves and our households. The information gathered provides a snapshot of New Zealand and is used in a wide variety of different ways to determine such things as whether we have enough hospitals and schools, where new roads should be built, how many police will be needed, whether a planned shopping centre is viable, or whether an airport needs to be extended.

But census time also gives us all an opportunity to reflect on how life in New Zealand has changed over the five years. In other words, do we feel better about New Zealand now than we did in 2001?

In thinking about that question, we should be mindful that under Helen Clark's leadership, the New Zealand Labour Party has become a social democratic party, and as such has been heavily influenced by the Swedish Social Democrats. As she said in a speech to welcome the first ever visit to New Zealand by a Swedish Prime Minister in 2005, "I speak as a long time admirer of Sweden, its people, and achievements. Sweden and New Zealand may be geographically a long way apart, but our shared values, attitudes, and policies make us among the most like-minded countries on earth".

This week's guest columnist, Johan Norberg, is a Swedish writer who has been recognised as one of the most influential opinion-makers in that country. He gives us an insight into how Sweden is really doing and concludes that it is not necessarily a good role model for New Zealand (see [www.nzcpd.com](http://www.nzcpd.com)).

So, the question of whether we feel better off today than we did five years ago, depends to a large extent on whether social democracy works for you. Clearly, if you are a family, which qualifies for Labour's massive wealth redistribution programme through the working for

families welfare package, then you will undoubtedly feel better off.

If you are living in a state house with a cheap rent, a business picked for an economic development subsidy, an employee in a union that has won a major pay round, or a special interest group that has been granted significant privileges, then your life will probably be better today than it was five years ago.

But if you are an ordinary family struggling to pay the mortgage and feed the kids, then you may very well feel worse off. Not only is it harder to make ends meet financially, as your costs continue to rise, but you will be feeling the discomfort of the government regulation noose tightening around your neck: from having to microchip the family dog, to having many more hoops to jump through if you are building a house, to extra compliance measures if you do charitable work, to a never-ending stream of bureaucracy being imposed by newly appointed government regulators and commissioners.

At local body level, rates continue to relentlessly rise around the country, made worse by the fact that central government has given local authorities new ways to increase their rate-take. But that's not all. There is a tsunami of regulation sweeping through, from trees being given a status seemingly higher than human life, to water quality standards being increased to satisfy the demands of a global Green movement concerned about water quality in Africa, and, to cap it all, under the guise of District Plan reviews and Resource Management Act requirements, massive land grabs and property rights confiscations are currently underway.

These days, the standard reaction to anything going wrong is a call for more regulation. Just this week, in response to a report about a tragic boating accident, officials began calling for all boats and boaties to be registered. Yet, with tens of thousands of boating

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activities taking place around New Zealand every day and a minimal number of accidents, the sensible answer is better education and proper enforcement of the rules that already exist.

One possible explanation for this regulatory tsunami is the fact that there is now a massively expanded public service that is out there collectively hunting for jobs to justify their existence! Over the last five years, the state sector has increased by around 30,000 employees to an army that is almost 290,000 strong.

Yet, in spite of such a massive increase in staff, the services provided by the government are not improving across the board. While some areas that have embraced IT are doing well, in many critical areas, performance levels leave much to be desired: health and education services are struggling to cope, police are unable to get on top of crime, the prison system and CYFS lurch from crisis to crisis, ACC remains expensive and unfair, and with the government having monopoly control over electricity generation, a power crisis is looming.

It is little wonder that five years on, many New Zealanders feel that the country is going backwards - grossly overtaxed and overregulated, with the freedom to live our lives as we see fit, slowly being eroded away.

The census asks us a variety of personal questions including our marital status, income, educational qualifications, whether we have a disability, and our ancestry. But what it doesn't ask us is whether we are a New Zealander!

Australians are asked in their census if they are Australian, Canadian are asked if they are Canadian, in the US, they are asked if they are a United States' citizen, and in Britain, whether they are British. But in New Zealand, there is no question that allows you to state that you are a New Zealander.

This has caused such indignation that someone recently put pen to paper to produce an email message "Are you a New Zealander?" It asks people to read it then pass it on. So far I have received it 54 times!

The message states: *Many of us consider that we, and our families, have been in New Zealand for long enough now that we should be able to claim that as who we are... regardless of where our ancestors may have come from many centuries ago or what the colour of our skin or shape of our face might indicate. If you support us in our desire to be*

*recognised as New Zealanders in our own country then there is only one way that this can be achieved: On the 2006 NZ Census form, when you are asked for your ethnicity, choose the option "Other" and state your ethnicity as "New Zealander". If enough people do this then maybe, just maybe, the powers that be will sit up and realise that we are proud of who we are and want to be recognised as such, not divided into sub-categories and all treated as foreigners in our own country!*

This weeks poll. This week's poll asks, Do you think question 11 of the Census should include the option "New Zealander"?

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The support levels range from a subscriber who receives Newman Weekly and has an opportunity to participate in our discussion forums, to those who would like to be foundation supporters or benefactors.

Thanks so much for your interest in Newman Weekly and taking the time to read this message. To find out more about how you can support us visit [www.nzcpd.com](http://www.nzcpd.com).