

Funds for Buy New Zealand could be better spent

I have been watching with interest the discussion around Buy New Zealand Made versus Buy New Zealand.

Through our brands Snowy Peak, Merinomink, and Untouched World we sell our lifestyle fashion both locally and internationally.

We manufacture both in and out of New Zealand and focus on socially and environmentally responsible practice in tandem with our high quality requirements.

We are reinvesting in and maintaining our manufacturing in New Zealand for the long term, and we are at the same time growing our offshore manufacturing.

Allocating taxpayer funds to support either or both Buy New Zealand and Buy New Zealand Made just does not make sense.

There are issues so much bigger that will impact on every single New Zealander, and that need to be occupying the minds of us all.

Where a company manufactures a product is totally a free choice for that company.

It is a commercial decision based on a balance of factors including the values of the company and its customers. Customer purchasing decisions are complex once basic life necessities are met.

Most consumers of the products and services of New Zealand's economy both locally and internationally have some or a great element of discretion about how they spend their money.

This discretion is exercised on a mix of conscious and subconscious issues of value to the purchaser.

Increasingly included in that value mix are concerns about the how and where a product is produced in terms of social and environmental responsibility, along with "does the story of this product uplift me and make me feel good".

For example: "Do I feel better about drinking milk that I think has been grown under an unpolluted clear blue sky on a green paddock with fresh clean water running through it and white snowy



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mountains behind or milk with exactly the same chemical composition that has been grown inside in a factory farm feedlot?

"If I feel better about it, how much will I pay for that.

"What do I need to know that would make me pay more?"

As a nation we need to be thinking much more deeply and much further out than this year or next year's gross revenue and bottom line in purely fiscal terms.

We need to develop a much more sophisticated understanding of what will drive real economic gain (or loss) in the future.

The greatest opportunity New Zealand had was to create value in its brand, brand New Zealand, adding value to its exports be that of products, services, or intellectual property.

That value added could have been something that is almost priceless in most parts of the world — the 100 per cent pure, clean green, Lord of the Rings-inspired dream.

Two years ago New Zealand was the sexiest country on the planet in international marketing terms.

But over the next few weeks New Zealand's reputation as an aspirational country of origin will take more hammering, the beginnings of which have already been creeping into print in international media.

Rough Guide, the largest circulation

travel guide in the northern hemisphere, and often a traveller's first point of contact with New Zealand was once criticised as being joined at the hip to New Zealand's chamber of commerce because they were so positive about New Zealand.

In its 2002 edition about New Zealand Rough Guide wrote: "The country is, in fact, one of the most bizarre ecological disasters in the history of man."

In the current edition we find the following statements: "Dilution is New Zealand's typical solution to pollution . . . although many New Zealanders are trying to preserve the environment, their efforts are often hampered by a vacillating government and the paramount interests of big business — wildlife has had to pay the price for some short-sighted and flagrant profiteering."

And further it says: "Every day more than a billion litres of sewage and industrial waste is discharged into rivers and the sea . . . once clean waterways are now unsafe for swimming and drinking.

"New Zealand has the fourth worst record for CO2 emissions in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) . . . although it is perceived abroad as a country with enviably clean air, its quality in many cities, if measured, is shocking."

Lonely Planet is also believed to be coming out with a similar damning story to that of Rough Guide.

The money allocated to Buy New Zealand Made would have far greater positive impact on the economy and all the social indicators if it were used to mobilise the nation to understand these major threats to our overall economy, with a view that the understanding of this will be so compelling, change will be the outcome.

In summary, spend the money educating New Zealanders about looking after their environment, and it would be money better spent.

Peri Drysdale is the founder of the Snowy Peak and Untouched World fashion labels.