

MEDIA RELEASE [1 July 2008]



7X7 Takes on NZ Big Opportunities

Ideas forum 7x7 is back to give Wellingtonians a fresh dose of inspiration and the chance to grapple with 35 leading minds on New Zealand's future.

Called "The Big Think: New Zealand 2008", this series of five events commencing July 22 at the Ilott Theatre will deliver a concentrated hit of ambitious ideas, innovations, success stories and provocations in the popular 7x7 format.

7x7 is presented by Wellington companies SweeneyVesty and Blair Wakefield Productions, and is sponsored by the Wellington City Council.

7x7 originated in Wellington in 2000 as an ideas forum focused on technology, entertainment and design. It ran quarterly in this vein for four years. In 2006 the event was reprised at the instigation of the Wellington City Council, with four events taking place around the theme of "Winning the World from Wellington".

Producers of 7x7 Brian Sweeney and Jan Bieringa have invited 30 leaders across economics, primary, science, technology, finance, media, and art to present big picture looks at the opportunities and issues facing New Zealand in 2008 and beyond, with an emphasis on economic transformation. Each speaker has seven minutes to present their vision.

The series is to be hosted by business and economic commentator Rod Oram, who will chair and lead audience Q&A with the speakers.

“With our economy, culture and environment in a state of rapid change and evolution, and with the 2008 election fast approaching, The Big Think will examine where we’re going as a country by asking big questions and putting aspirational answers on the table,” said Mr. Oram.

The themes and dates for the five sessions are:

- **Seven Foundations: Tuesday 22 July.** A reality check on where we are today, and where we could be 20 years from now.
- **Seven Trailblazers: Monday 4 August.** Insights from New Zealand entrepreneurs taking on the global market.
- **Seven Directions: Tuesday 12 August.** Bold steps for transformation – big ideas with the potential to change our society, our economy and our culture.
- **Seven Connections: Monday 18 August.** Creating the New Zealand Powerhouse through more dynamic relationships at home and with the world.
- **Seven Imaginations: Tuesday 26 August.** Things to do today – where change begins.

The lineup for the first session includes founding Chief Executive of The New Zealand Institute **David Skilling**, independent scholar and commentator **Dr Brian Easton**, leading agricultural scientist **Jacqueline Rowarth**, environmental advocate **Morgan Williams**, and 7x7 co-founder **Brian Sweeney**. *Bios for speakers follow overleaf.*

Wellington City Councillor John Morrison, welcomed the return of 7x7: “This is a unique opportunity to engage with a group of people who are passionate about New Zealand in a format tailor-made for big ideas and straight talking. For anyone who is ambitious about our future this is a series not to be missed.”

Co-producer and programmer Jan Bieringa says that the collaboration with the Wellington City Council heightens the “town hall meeting” aspects of 7x7. “We have programmed and priced 7x7 to attract anyone with an interest in where New Zealand is going over the next 20 years.”

Each event will be held at 6pm in the Ilott Theatre, Town Hall. Entry is \$7. Go to www.7x7.co.nz for more information. Tickets are available through Ticketek www.ticketek.co.nz. 0800 842-538.

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Speaker bios for Session 1: Seven Foundations – Tuesday 22 July

Dr Brian Easton – Dr Brian Easton is an independent scholar who researches, writes, works as a consultant and teaches in economic, social statistics, public policy and New Zealand Studies. His writings include the fortnightly economics column for *The Listener*, and occasionally for other journals and newspapers, books and academic articles. In 2002 he was appointed to the Prime Minister's Growth and Innovation Advisory Board.

Rod Oram (also host) - Rod Oram has 30 years' experience as an international financial journalist. He has worked in Europe and North America for leading publications such as the *Financial Times* of London and is devoted to the development of the new economy. He is currently a columnist for the *Sunday Star-Times*; a regular broadcaster on radio and television; a frequent public speaker on business and economic issues; and an occasional correspondent for the *Financial Times*. In 2007 Rod published his first book, "Reinventing Paradise" in which he talks about how New Zealand can become mobilised to "earn a bigger, sustainable living in the world economy".

Jacqueline Rowarth - Jacqueline Rowarth holds the Foundation Chair in Pastoral Agriculture at Massey University, where she is also the Director of Massey Agriculture. Her research over the past twenty five years has focused on efficient use of fertiliser (product yield and quality with minimum environmental impact), and evaluation of new plant species and cultivars (seed yield, animal growth and wool growth).

David Skilling - David Skilling is the founding Chief Executive of the New Zealand Institute, a think-tank that has been established to contribute new and creative thinking to the public debate on issues that matter for

New Zealand's future. Previously, David was a Principal Advisor at the New Zealand Treasury, and has also worked as a Teaching Fellow at Harvard University, at the OECD, McKinsey & Company, and Deloitte.

Brian Sweeney – Brian Sweeney devised 7x7 after years of attending the renowned TED conferences in Monterey and seeing a speaker get a standing ovation after a seven minute presentation. He is Chairman of SweeneyVesty, a Wellington-based international consultancy providing advice, strategy, communications and resources to corporate organizations and brands. In a private capacity, Brian is partner with Kevin Roberts in the idea of The New Zealand Edge and producer of their website www.nzedge.com.

Morgan Williams – Dr Morgan Williams was the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment for nine years, where he focused his team's work on sustainability concepts at a systems level, across many contexts including cities, oceans, energy provision, planning legislation and education. He has degrees in biology and ecology, drawing on research in Antarctica and the tropical Pacific, and 20 years experience working for MAF. Morgan has a keen interest in how people think about and relate to the natural world, particularly in the political and economic influences on the management of our natural capital.