

20th September 2009

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT: In whose interests?

The last sentence of an article in the Herald, 10th September, shocked me. The article itself notes last minute changes to the Resource Management Act (RMA) which remove the right of Councils to require permits for trimming trees as of October 2009. They had anticipated a three year lead time during which they could list significant trees to be protected. Secondly the changes remove the right of the public to have a say in relation to proposed new developments. The sentence that disturbed me, attributed to government minister Dr Nick Smith, said “...he made no bones about the fact that the law change shifted the balance from public participation towards reducing the costs for developers.” This blatant dismissal of public participation in determining and maintaining the environment of the communities in which we live, seems to fly in the face of the public outcry for greater levels of participation. Such hope was clearly expressed in relation to the Supercity. Social theory agrees that where people feel ‘at home’ in a community, and are able to engage actively in some way in its policy making, there is less damage and destruction to the general environment and a greater sense of community cohesion. Surely in this time of increasing community fragmentation and social stress such a clear expression of priority for those who make profits out of clearing land and developing properties is unwise. “What about us the general public?” we might well ask. If the government is not willing to prioritise our public participation and wellbeing, including the health of the environments we live in, then who? Our Gospel framework asks us to be concerned for the wellbeing of those we live amongst; to understand ourselves as part of a community, and to act in ways that will protect and nurture respectful relationships, including the capacity of even the most marginal to participate. We need to keep these things in mind as we respond to government policy proposals as well as in relation to decisions we make personally. **Susan**