

Preparing for real challenges

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Our species is reaching the limits of many of the Natural resources and Ecological resources that our modern world requires. The focus of the NPF2040 on past trends, to project future needs, is missing out on the reality of the dangerous times we are heading into.

Many of the Geo political problems we are seeing worldwide are a direct result of declining resources whether water, food, energy, forestry, oceans or climate. Our economic system needs growth to contend with worrying levels of National debt, which are well passed the point of triggering another major economic crisis.

The growing nationalism is pushing many countries into a new era of protectionism and isolationism. We as a small open economy will have to deal with the consequences of this in the next two decades. It is highly unlikely that we will be able to maintain our exceptionally high levels of exports. Our reliance on FDI is likely to be a casualty of growing nationalism in our trading partners.

The inability of governments to meet their citizens aspirations is clearly behind many of the political upsets of the last few years. Any long term plan should have as it's key central thread an understanding of the need to maintain the legitimacy of democracy both by being able to meet it's citizens needs and by addressing the deeper needs of human beings to be seen as having value and purpose.

The next twenty years is almost certainly going to see a major energy crisis, high food prices, economic depression, increasingly erratic weather and geo political upheavels. Non of these should be surprising, we have seen too many stupid decisions internationally to still believe in business as usual. We are effectively entering a period of permanent disruption.

It is critical to look at every part of the NPF2040 and ask a few basic questions in relation to the likely threats we face in the next twenty years.

How will it deal with a prolonged economic depression?

How will it deal with Energy shortages or very high energy prices?

How will it deal with high resource prices particularly food?

How well prepared are we to accept 100,000s of refugees or returning Irish.

Demand side solutions will have a greater impact during periods of low economic activity than supply side solutions. The NPF needs to look more at increasing house occupancy rates and adapting current houses for multiple occupancy. It also needs to look more at smaller housing units.

As resource scarcity forces economic contraction, roads will become quieter and house sharing become more common. However the debt from financing infrastructure and housing will remain and will make us uncompetitive.

Ideally we need to develop a national vision which will give people purpose even when the economy is in the doldrums. During these "good" times we need to start developing the characteristics as a people we will need in the bad times ahead. Focusing only on infrastructure and past trends will not help us during incredibly complex times.

We will need to develop the resilience of our people to meet the challenges ahead. Part of this will be to develop a Vision of how we can make a difference as a country to the world. Our planning should enhance what is best about us as a people and a culture.

