

'Time to Treat our Constitution as a Blank Canvas'

www.EmpowerNZ.co.nz Project Launch

Today is three years since the Relationship and Confidence and Supply Agreement between the National Party and the Māori Party (16 November 2008) agreed to establish a group to consider constitutional issues, including Māori representation. The EmpowerNZ website is launched today as part of the Sustainable Future Institute's *Project Constitutional Review*. This website aims to create awareness and spark discussion around the current constitutional review so that all New Zealanders, and in particular 18- to 25-year-olds, can engage with the Constitutional Advisory Panel in an informed and considered manner.

Project Constitutional Review was established in mid-2011 in response to the government's announcement in December 2010 of a wide-ranging review of New Zealand's constitutional arrangements. The initial idea for the project came out of an event the Sustainable Future Institute hosted in March 2011, called StrategyNZ: Mapping our Future. Wendy McGuinness, chief executive of the Institute, notes, 'There was a clear appetite from participants to develop youth forums and find ways in which youth can become part of the solution. Participants clearly believed a national conversation on our constitution is a great place to start exploring our country's long-term future.' McGuinness continues, 'This is a very important matter for New Zealanders to address; it is the first time in our nation's history that we have had an opportunity to treat our constitution as a blank canvas.'

'New Zealand needs to start thinking about this review now in order to achieve tangible outcomes before the Panel reports back to Cabinet in 2013. After the 2011 General Election and Referendum, there will need to be a large drive to get New Zealanders interested and engaged in the constitutional review.'

EmpowerNZ and *Project Constitutional Review* will be closely following the progress of the review, with the aim of adding support to a debate that is vital for New Zealand's long-term future. By providing a place for public engagement in a new media format McGuinness hopes that 'the project will have particular appeal to young New Zealanders, ensuring they are not only part of the conversation but actively leading it.'

Constitutional change results from a societal groundswell pushing strongly for improvements to existing arrangements. The Institute wants to help facilitate that groundswell by helping New Zealanders become more informed and engaged with the issues, to ensure this rare opportunity to shape our constitution is not missed. The Institute will also be launching an EmpowerNZ Facebook and Twitter presence to coincide with the launch of the website.

For further information on *Project Constitutional Review* and the Sustainable Future Institute see the Institute's website at www.sustainablefuture.info

For more information on the Sustainable Future Institute, contact Wendy McGuinness:

t: +64 4 499 8888

f: +64 4 385 9884

Mobile: 021 781 200

e: wmcg@sustainablefuture.info