

**New Zealand and the European Union, Gibbons, Matthew (ed.)
Pearson, Auckland, 2008, pp.172, ISBN: 9780733993831.**

As Sir Frank Holmes notes in the foreword to *New Zealand and the European Union*, there has been no in-depth examination of European Union-New Zealand relations since 1991. Given the fundamental changes the European Union (EU) has undergone during that time and the resulting shifts in the nature of the EU-New Zealand alliance, Matthew Gibbons' book is thus a long overdue and much needed examination of the relationship.

While the EU is New Zealand's second largest trading partner, and a vital source of inspiration for many social and foreign policies for the country, since the 1990s, political interest in Europe has waned in New Zealand (NZ), as the editor notes in the introduction, with an increasing focus on New Zealand's more immediate geographic region, the Asia-Pacific. Scholarship too, on the EU-NZ relationship, at least until very recently, has been relatively sporadic, and has tended towards issue-specific analyses, rather than attempting to paint a broader picture. Gibbons' book, therefore, is a welcome and comprehensive attempt at filling a void in the literature.

The book itself is both edited and co-authored by Gibbons along with several contributors, and is primarily the result of research conducted during a two-year post-doctoral fellowship undertaken by the editor at the National Centre for Research on Europe at the University of Canterbury in NZ.

The book begins by setting the context of the relationship with particular emphasis on the accession of the United Kingdom to the European Economic Community in 1973. As the editor notes, this was a key moment for NZ and would shape the nature of the future EU relationship because 'New Zealand was uniquely successful among developed countries in extracting concessions from the EEC' (p. 9), as a result of its "special" trading relationship with Britain. Since then, trade – particularly in agricultural goods – has been the cornerstone of New Zealand's relationship with Europe, and at times retaining access for those goods has been hotly contested, as the editor notes (p. 10). Chapters 1-4 pick up on the importance of this trading relationship, and examine it in greater detail. Carol Neill's chapter first examines historical trade, and Gibbons then uses brand new data to explore contemporary EU-NZ trade in the remaining three chapters. Chapter Four outlines the personal experiences of NZ exporters to the newer EU Member States, with data drawn from a series of in-depth interviews conducted by the author during his fellowship. The responses are revealing, and indicate that negative perceptions about the new EU members may be hindering full exploitation of these newer markets, however better prepared exporters of manufactured goods do appear to be overcoming these obstacles (p. 93).

Chapter Five by Gibbons and Martin Holland moves beyond trade and looks to people-to-people and political linkages in the relationship. The shift makes a welcome change from the heavy economic focus of the remainder of the book. Importantly, the chapter notes that despite the strong migration and

tourism links between NZ and the EU Member States, the mainstream media in New Zealand view the EU as irrelevant (pp. 109-110), and the general NZ public continue to regard the EU primarily as an economic power with little or no political influence (*ibid.*). These perceptions are presented in contrast to the political emphasis of the 1999 and 2007 Joint Declarations on relations between the two partners, which Gibbons and Holland note were key in creating the much stronger political dialogue which now guides the relationship.

Returning again to trade, Chapter Six, by Caroline Saunders, was a highlight, focusing on the food miles debate; a vital contemporary issue for NZ's agricultural exports to the EU. Food miles advocates claim that sourcing food as close as possible to where it is produced is less harmful to the environment, as less fossil fuels are produced during transportation. Given the distance travelled by NZ food exports to Europe, the popularity of the food miles campaign could have dire consequences for NZ exporters. Saunders, however, cites evidence from a study conducted at Lincoln University which found that even accounting for energy associated with transport, NZ food production uses dramatically less energy than the same British industries do, primarily as a result of the more efficient NZ farming practices. Saunders argues strongly that NZ exporters will have to work harder to overcome the negative perceptions surrounding New Zealand food exports, and will have to work even harder to lessen the environmental impact of agricultural production in order to maintain their strong trade with Europe in this area, as the EU becomes increasingly known as a global environmental champion.

New Zealand and the European Union is heavily trade-focused, and is also particularly reliant on official statistics in parts, which can make for rather dry reading for the non-economists among us. However, as the nature of the EU-NZ relationship has indeed been primarily trade-oriented in the past, this focus by the editor was not altogether unexpected. Nevertheless, more might have been made of the contemporary political relationship. Despite recognising the role that the Joint Declarations have played in extending the relationship beyond its traditional trading disputes, the book allocates only one chapter to exploring non-trade issues. The Joint Declaration references EU-NZ cooperation on global security, aid and development, particularly in the Pacific, as well as human rights and science and technology, yet none of these issues are discussed in the book. Future publications would compliment Gibbons' effort by addressing some of these other vital components in the relationship. Gibbons notes in the final chapter that there is an importance imbalance at play in the relationship as with the Union being considerably more important for NZ, than NZ is for the EU. The editor concludes with the hope that follow-up studies will find the EU is given the greater recognition it warrants by the political and media sectors of New Zealand. This is a hope that those of us who specialise in EU-NZ relations share.

New Zealand and the European Union is a clear and concise offering from Gibbons and his contributors. While the book perhaps lacks a little flair and style, it makes up for this with up-to-date data and analysis that paint an accurate and clear-cut picture of the EU-NZ relationship. For anyone with a

serious interest in the European Union's role and influence in New Zealand, this book will be a useful companion.

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