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Title:

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Date:

2020-08-01

Citation:

Bedford, R., Kearns, R., Kennedy, D., Le Heron, R., Longhurst, R., Mansvelt, J., Pawson, E., Peace, R. & Roche, M. (2020). The New Zealand Geographer reaches 75. New Zealand Geographer, 76 (2), pp.93-99. <https://doi.org/10.1111/nzg.12266>.

Persistent Link:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/276893>

COMMENTARY

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The New Zealand Geographer reaches 75

The 75th volume of the *New Zealand Geographer* was published in 2019. Fifty year and 100-year anniversaries tend to attract attention. The 75th anniversary of the journal should, however, not go unpassed, if only to observe that from this point on it will appear only in digital form. In the New Zealand context this also defines the journal as having been in existence longer than many other social science and earth science journals. To mark the passage of 75 years, former Editors and the inaugural Managing Editor were asked to reflect on their time with the journal. The personal responses which follow this introduction, take us back to 1991 when Richard Le Heron assumed the editorship (after a decade as Assistant Editor). In 1991 Nelson Mandela was released from imprisonment, the Hubble telescope was launched, and Jim Bolger was Prime Minister of New Zealand. The Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF), capped enrolments, and the merging of departments to create much larger 'schools' whereby geography largely disappeared from unit names were still in the future for New Zealand universities. Richard Le Heron's tenure still reaches back to only the fifth decade of the journal's existence. The passing of Ray Hargreaves early in 2019 (Hearn, 2019) severed an even earlier link. Hargreaves served from 1965-1969 as the fourth editor after Ken Cumberland (1945-1955), Jim Fox (1956 to 1962) and Murray McCaskill (1963 to 1965). In his Foreword to the first issue of the journal in 1945, the editor Dr (later Professor)

This is the author manuscript accepted for publication and has undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the Version of Record. Please cite this article as doi: [10.1111/nzg.12266](https://doi.org/10.1111/nzg.12266)

Ken Cumberland (1945, 2), indicated that ‘perhaps the principal justification for its publication at this time is that there exists a “common curiosity” about New Zealand’ both for international and domestic audiences. But there were other aspirations, Cumberland evoked G.P. Marsh’s, *Man and Nature* and referred to the scale and speed of environmental transformation in New Zealand to conclude with the remark that ‘here lies further justification for this journal and for research in the social sciences’ (Cumberland, 1945, 3).

RICHARD LE HERON (EDITOR 1991 - 1996): *Promoting the visibility and standing of New Zealand geography nationally and internationally*

The New Zealand Geographical Society was established in 1944 as a high-status, subscription based, apolitical forum for reporting on national development issues and progress. From 1945 it published knowledge about the country’s geography in its flagship, the *New Zealand Geographer* and later in conference proceedings, and self-published scholarly books. Publications catered especially to the public, academics and teachers, and government officials. Gradually the Society and its publications became entangled in complex and emerging local and global socio-political influences that re-defined what the Society and publications could be.

My editorial time was part of the 1980s and 1990s re-positioning efforts aimed at giving new standing and impact to the *New Zealand Geographer*, in the context of trying to identify who the journal was speaking to and to stay membership decline. My recollection was that three major shifts dominated the time of my involvement: speaking to the new politics

beyond national development that was emerging in New Zealand with restructuring; convincing students that geographers were widely employed outside teaching; and making visible New Zealand geography to the international geographic community.

The 'Alternative Perspectives' special issue of the *New Zealand Geographer* in 1987 was a bold intervention in the politics of geographic knowledge and an addition to the main Society effort marking 50 years of university geography which was captured in *Southern Approaches* (Holland and Johnston, 1987). Judith Johnston and I as co-editors worked with papers that conceptualised and theorised bodies of geographic knowledge in and from New Zealand, to increase local understandings and to connect to critical and radical international currents in discipline. The issue's contents took up the challenge to explicitly create social knowledge. They included – 'Feminist Perspectives in Geography: A Collective Statement' (Evelyn Stokes, Louise Dooley, Louise Johnson, Jennifer Dixon, Susan Parsons); 'A Deepening Stream' (Judith Johnston, Richard Le Heron); 'Maori Geography or Geography of Maoris' (Evelyn Stokes); 'The Social Production of Urban Space' (Eric Pawson); 'Regions and Restructuring in New Zealand: Issues And Questions in the 1980s' (Stephen Britton, Richard Le Heron); 'Impacts of computer technology-a critical review' (Lex Chalmers, Pip Forer); 'Privatising Hospital Care in New Zealand: Curse or Blessing' (J. Ross Barnett); 'Marketing Structures and Rural Land Use Change' (Warren Moran); and 'Perspectives on the Impact of Short-Term Climatic Change in New Zealand' (Chris de Freitas). The breadth of the papers signalled intensifying ambitions in the New Zealand geography community and was a portent of the two *Changing Places* books in the 1990s dealing with the geography of restructuring (Britton, Le Heron and Pawson, 1992; Le Heron and Pawson 1996).

My brief as Assistant Editor (1980-1990) was to commission short papers with an applied emphasis that would give more visibility to the contributions of geographers' in influential positions and so portray by example that a geographic education was a worthwhile career direction. There is no way to gauge whether this initiative strengthened geography's career profile or whether students found any article compelling. The general effort of trying to excite student interest through stressing employability went to a new level, however, when, mimicking the University of Canterbury *Geographers at Work* initiative (Pawson, 1991), the Society produced *Jobs in Geography* (Pawson, 1998) for wider distribution.

The concerns for the journal when I followed Pip Forer as Editor in 1991 were the desires to strengthen the refereeing of submitted papers (to involve three referees, at least one being international) so enhancing standing of the *New Zealand Geographer* and to encourage submissions from prominent international geographers from different fields to help break away from the mostly regional mould of copy. This was a rocky road made so by the eclectic mix of submissions and slow communication in largely pre-internet days. This was coupled with the realisation that the journal format looked jaded amidst significant re-designing and re-sizing of journals by overseas publishers. Working with Mike Roche, the Production Manager, an A4 format featuring a colour photo apposite to a paper in the issue was trialled in 1994. This was also adopted for the *New Zealand Journal of Geography*. This experiment was phased out in 2005 when the Society journals were linked to an international publishing house and combined as *New Zealand Geographer*.

ROBYN LONGHURST, RICHARD BEDFORD, AND ROBIN PEACE (EDITORS

1997 – 2002): *Change aplenty; co-editing, including diverse voices and a shifting journal landscape*

Re-reading editorials and articles from 1997 to 2002 prompted us to think about the considerable change that took place in the discipline of geography during this time. It seems somewhat trite to talk about change since things never stay the same but there was definitely change aplenty at this time. To begin, the way the editorial team was constituted represented a change from the past. In 1997 Professor Richard Bedford invited two ‘junior’ women staff members – ‘the Robi/yns’ – Robin Peace and Robyn Longhurst - to join him as co-editors of the *New Zealand Geographer*. This was not the norm. We recall being both elated and terrified by Dick’s suggestion that the three of us co-edit. Dick was hugely experienced but Robin and Robyn were both still learning the ropes of academia.

Other change at the time involved staff. Some influential geographers passed away, others retired and many new staff members were appointed. There was also institutional change including geography departments being restructured, the relocation of the Head Office of the New Zealand Geographical Society, and the declining readership of both the *New Zealand Journal of Geography* and the *New Zealand Geographer* that prompted discussion about moving away from in-house publication to contract with a major international publisher. Perhaps most importantly though the intellectual, social and political landscape was changing. As Richard Le Heron has already noted, he and Judith Johnston edited a special issue of the *New Zealand Geographer* devoted to ‘Alternative Perspectives in Geography’ in 1987. A decade later we were seeing a lot more copy addressing some of these perspectives

thus making it an exciting time to edit the journal that had a new sense of direction and possibility.

Towards the end of our time as editors we decided to commission a special issue titled 'Evelyn Stokes and Geography at the University of Waikato' (Bedford and Longhurst, 2005). It marked the University's 40th anniversary. Professor Evelyn Stokes DNZM was a distinguished and committed historical geographer – a scholar who devoted the greater part of her life to furthering the rights of Māori through, amongst other things, serving on the Waitangi Tribunal and the New Zealand Geographic Board. Evelyn's contribution to improving the wellbeing of the nation did not stop there, however. She also helped shape much of the debate in indigenous geographies, feminist geographies and geographical education – all disciplinary areas that were explored during our two terms as co-editors.

ROBIN KEARNS (CO-EDITOR 2003-2009): *Commercial publication, design and production changes, and the value of editorial voice*

My time as an editor spans the transition from the *New Zealand Geographer* being something of a 'cottage industry' to its relaunch in its present form initially under the Blackwell's brand. When I assumed editorship, which began with a hand-over from Robyn Longhurst, the *modus operandi* was receiving from authors three paper copies of manuscripts for review in the mail, reading then filing one and posting the other two off to referees whose willingness was established by an approach via a personalised email. Images were often stored on an accompanying CD-Rom. It was all a bit cumbersome looking back and the flow of copy was

modest. In fact, at times we probably pursued and shepherded along some papers in a very hands-on, copy-editing mode, simply to fill issues. On occasion I had to 'enter correspondence' with disappointed recipients of rejection verdicts or the occasional author who deemed their work so important they couldn't make their point in under 10k words. Pushing a reject button these days is so much easier for editors than having to write personal letters or emails to people as we did before the Blackwell's online editorial platform. On the 'plus' side it was all very good for building networks and developing a sense of a research community.

The key person involved in production at the time was Elaine Bliss at Waikato who patiently worked on the layout and assembly of each issue which, at the time, was A4 size and held together by staples. When we were short of a cover image, I dipped into my photographic collection or employed alternatives such as using a piece of my daughter's artwork (a six year old's view of the water cycle). However, the financial viability of the journal in its form at the time began to be called into question at New Zealand Geographical Society Council meetings. Another key person in the journal's history then emerged: Eric Pawson. In his role as Chair of the Editorial Board, he deftly navigated negotiations with Blackwell Publishing that resulted in the *New Zealand Geographer* as we know it now.

For me one of the more enjoyable opportunities associated with editorship was regularly crafting editorials in which the value of the journal could be creatively asserted. A personal favourite looking back is one I named 'The land between us' (Kearns and Nichol, 2004) alluding to a Finn Brothers song released that year to suggest the close but apart sibling-like relationship between human and physical geography. To quote 'to maintain the relationship

we surely need to keep looking across the river and knowing the processes on the other side. We need to know the lay of the land, literally and metaphorically' (Kearns and Nicol, 2004, 1). Cotton and McCahon also appeared in the commentary. It felt freeing to write in a style that that the formality of journal articles does not usually allow.

There were numerous rewards in my tenure as an editor. First, working with a physical geographer as co-editor. Scott Nichol helped keep me attuned to the pulse of that part of our discipline). Second, seeing papers submitted by PhD students and 'emerging' researchers reach acceptance and publication; third, being there when the first issue under the Blackwell Publishing format arrived in 2005. As I jotted in a coauthored editorial in that issue 'our striking new cover speaks to the possibilities of standing out with all the distinctiveness and tenacity of the NZ cabbage tree (*cordyline australis*)' (Kearns, Nicols and Flaws, 2005:1). This was followed closely by other satisfactions such as the journal gaining Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) listed status in 2007. Special issues are always memorable as previous writers have indicated. During my editorship, it was a pleasure to propose such a special issue of papers from a pre-IGU Health and Environment Commission meeting on Waiheke Island in 2006. One paper from that issue remains the most cited within *New Zealand Geographer* (Fleuret and Atkinson, 2007) and is a reminder that a novel conceptual paper can have considerable international reach.

DAVID KENNEDY (PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY EDITOR 2008-2011): A *challenging publication landscape, but a critical role for the New Zealand Geographer*

My term of Physical Geography editor spanned an interesting period in the New Zealand Tertiary landscape with the introduction of the PBRF (which also led to the successful application for ISI listing in 2007). This outputs-based funding model significantly accelerated an obsession with research metrics that had been building over the past decade (Cupples and Pawson, 2012). Such a focus on 'international impact' was, and still is, one the major issues for journals such as the *New Zealand Geographer*. As a regional publication the *New Zealand Geographer* is often regarded as 'local' rather than 'international' in impact and therefore is not valued as highly as it should. Such parochial attitudes are a detriment to scientific advance and the sustainable management of a planet under stress. They are also incorrect in an online publishing and referencing environment in which articles in the *New Zealand Geographer* are just as accessible as something in *Nature*. In only striving for the international the real danger is the uniqueness of the local (e.g. Traditional Owner experience) is lost.

The critical role of the *New Zealand Geographer* is that it allows for the dissemination of many local case studies. Such work is fundamental in scientific advance in providing the catalogue of diversity of the landscape and impact of humans. For example, to truly understand the impact of rising sea levels we need to know how beaches respond under all conditions. A single case study might not have global impact, but it provides a data point for testing global level models. The drive for global relevance in the absence of underlying understanding is why so many management interventions fail in the natural environment. In addition, for the local land manager, the lack of knowledge of boundary conditions at the small scale mean it is near impossible to apply a global model to sustainably manage the

specific problem at hand. This, in my view is the key gap that the *New Zealand Geographer* fills and one which is lost in today's academic environment.

Looking back on my time with the *New Zealand Geographer* (2008-2011) the standout was the publication of the special issue on the New Zealand Coast, where we reviewed the state of understanding and knowledge development across the Tertiary sector and in the field. That issue had the largest print run at the time being distributed in hard copy to all members of the New Zealand Coastal Society. On reflection, during this period physical geography was also on the cusp of a new revolution in field techniques. Light Detection And Ranging (LiDAR) was becoming more commonly used as was high-resolution Global Positioning System (GPS) surveying enabling fundamental questions of the frequency and magnitude of landform development to be unravelled. Then, as is still the case, New Zealand offers an ideal field laboratory to understand change given the turbo-charged nature of landform development. I see the *New Zealand Geographer* as well placed to continue this excellent work. The greatest risk is for academics to shun the journal as 'low impact'. A New Zealand voice can be maintained much better through a flagship New Zealand geography journal.

MICHAEL ROCHE (HUMAN GEOGRAPHY EDITOR 2010-2012): *Online submission, the challenges of PBRF, and the development of virtual issues*

Having served as Review Editor of the *New Zealand Geographer* for nearly a decade, followed by shorter spell as Production Manager, and as Associate Editor, from a distance it might have seemed inevitable that I would ultimately become the Editor. This was not actually the case in

that when the opportunity arose it coincided with other new and time-consuming administrative responsibilities at Massey University and the role with regret was passed up. Some years later, quite unexpectedly I had a second chance and this time accepted.

Perhaps idealistically, certainly naively, I had imagined that the requisite tasks could be carried out in a contiguous block of time on Friday afternoons. As it happened, I returned when the journal was now published by Wiley-Blackwell and available electronically and I had responsibility only for human geography submissions. Earlier editors in contrast also had a more demanding suite of tasks and responsibilities. Not that it was all smooth sailing, however, for the journal had just moved to online submissions via Manuscript Central. There was the inevitable steep learning curve. Subsequently I found that the system was replete with automatic messaging about new submissions and reminders that referees needed to be approached and or that reports were overdue. On the one hand this destroyed any illusions that I had about devoting solid blocks of time to the task, but on the other hand it did mean that more papers were submitted on a wider range of topics from a broader range of authors. Indeed, I was fortunate to have a good stream of copy a luxury former editors had not always enjoyed. Manuscript Central also meant that it was easier to draw on the experience of referees both within and beyond New Zealand. That said, the influence of PBRF and journal ranking schemes on a university system under neo-liberal direction did mean that some excellent locally authored studies on the geography of New Zealand that might in earlier years have been offered to the *New Zealand Geographer* were published in overseas journals.

Special issues were by now a regular portion of the production sequence; part of a Society business plan and designed originally to raise revenue. While I can claim no credit at all for

two of those produced during my term as editor, these being adeptly handled by the editors of the respective issues, I was particularly pleased with them [2009 Counter cartographies; 2010 Practicing new regional geographies] especially for the fashion in which they engaged with new ideas in human geography. The third in which I was more directly involved had a history of geographic thought theme – an area still much neglected by local geographers.

One consequence of the closer association with Blackwell Publishing negotiated by Eric Pawson was an increase in the number of institutions subscribing to the journal which jumped from the order of a jump from 400 to 4000. As a general geography journal with a regional focus the *New Zealand Geographer* seems destined to struggle with regard to impact factor rankings. Downloads of articles, however, increased quite substantially during this time; a further sign of the increasing reach of the journal.

Beyond the narrower editorial role, I have enjoyed exploring the possibilities of virtual issues thematic repackaging of sets of previously published papers, though it would be fair to say my enthusiasm is not that widely shared. Nevertheless I still think this is a way to present useful assemblages of material which might not so easily be retrieved by using the search function on the journal's website.

When the first issue of the *New Zealand Geographer* appeared in 1945 Dr Kenneth Cumberland, its first editor offered a confident assessment about its future. That the *New Zealand Geographer* should now mark its 75 year would not surprise him, though its form now being entirely electronic, its content, and reach, doubtless would.

ERIC PAWSON (MANAGING EDITOR 2003-2011): *A new era and the transition to an international publishing house*

I was the Managing Editor from 2003 from early 2011; during that period, I was responsible for combining the Society's two self-published journals into one title and arranging for our move to Blackwell Publishing (subsequently Wiley-Blackwell, and later Wiley). This was a big - and somewhat consuming - task at the time; it was undertaken at the request of the New Zealand Geographical Society executive as problems of declining circulation began to bite.

The things that I'm proud of from that era are the great improvement in design and production standards, the new cover, about which Robin Kearns and Scott Nichol wrote an eloquent editorial in the first new issue in 2005, the huge increase in circulation and profile, the gaining of ISI listing and the first impact factor in 2007-9, the new internal sectioning of the journal to accommodate key aspects of the its predecessor and, not least, that we managed to get the new journal appearing regularly on schedule in its cover date month. We were something of a catch to Blackwell Publishing in those days as we completed a quartet of what they saw as regional journals: the *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, *Asia-Pacific Viewpoint* and *Australian Geographical Studies* (now *Geographical Research*).

Responsibility for production of the journal was assumed by Blackwell Publishing in 2004. This was as the result of a lengthy exploration of possible options by the Editorial Board and the production of a business plan by the then Treasurer, Richard Bedford. I was asked to join the executive of the Society (as 'Chair of the Editorial Board') in 2003 for this

purpose; the executive (and then Council and the Annual General Meeting) voted to accept the arrangement made with Blackwells.

The term 'Managing Editor' was a self-invention to better describe the role that was needed to coordinate production and editorial positions, and the links to the Blackwell Publishing regional office in Melbourne. The old Editorial Board was dissolved as a consequence of this arrangement, at about the same time as the Society adopted a new Constitution which said in effect that it would no longer be responsible for conference proceedings and books.

The new journal under Blackwell Publishing replaced two Society journals: the *New Zealand Geographer* (founded 1945) and the *New Zealand Journal of Geography* (from 1969). Both up to that point were published twice annually. The latter was aimed at schools; there were ongoing complaints from the Board of Geography Teachers that it rarely had anything of value in it for them. Our research in 2004 revealed that most school members of the Society either took both journals or just the academic journal; very few took the *New Zealand Journal of Geography* alone. The proposal that I made to the Society was to merge the two journals into one, issued three times a year. It has probably long been forgotten that when the Society self-published, the journals never appeared in the cover month and were often weeks, even months, late. Since 2005, they have always appeared in the cover month.

The journal was redesigned to have a Research section, compiled by the two editors that the Society had for the *New Zealand Geographer*, one physical and one human. It was also to have a Geo-Ed section, to replace the *New Zealand Journal of Geography*. These two

sections were to be complemented by a Geo-News section and by Reviews. An opening Commentary or Editorial was added later, about 2007, to attract big topics and names, and assist with profiling the journal. The original plan has largely survived. Blackwells also digitised the entire back file from 2004 to 1945. When Blackwell Publishing became Wiley-Blackwell, our editorial and production functions became divided between Melbourne and Singapore in 2010. One issue a year had been set aside as a special issue, as that was part of the business plan of 2004.

By 2011 we were in 4000 libraries, mostly as part of e-bundles. Our profile and production values were high enough for us to have got ISI nomination before either the *Geographical Research* or *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*. We received our first impact factor in 2009. It was a privilege to work on the *Geographer* during a time of significant change, and to see that the initiatives that we took helped to position the Society and its journal to carry forward its mission with greater security.

AFTERWORD

The seventy-fifth year of publication of the *New Zealand Geographer* in 2019 is certainly something to celebrate. It also provides a moment to reflect on the substantial time and commitment of all who have been involved during the lifetime of the journal, the journal editors, those who helped produce the articles in journal format (a task now undertaken by Wiley production editors), the input of the wider editorial board, the many article and book

review contributors and a substantial network of reviewers within New Zealand and internationally.

In 2012 Etienne Nel had taken over as Chair of the Editorial Board and Managing Editor of the journal from Eric Pawson. As mentioned previously, the role of Managing Editor had been established after Wiley-Blackwell began publication of the journal in order to ensure clarity of responsibility in connecting with the publishers, managing the online portal for journal submission (now Scholar One) and interacting with the sub-editors (human and physical geography research editors, and the book review editor). Following an amendment to the Constitution of the New Zealand Geographical Society in 2017 the editorial responsibilities for the journal were separated again. In 2018 when Etienne Nel stepped down after six years of service. Associate Professor Nick Lewis took over as Chair of the Editorial Board and assumed the strategic role of overseeing the journal and participating in Executive Committee discussions, while the task of managing the articles submitted through the Scholar One portal and dealing with the publisher was assigned to me (Juliana Mansvelt) as Managing Editor. As Managing Editor many of the comments of predecessors resonate with me – the pleasure of seeing special issues come together under the oversight of special issue editors (to date a special issue on Mobilities edited by Maria Borovnik and Gail Hutcheson, and another on Regional Development edited by Etienne Nel and Sean Connolly), the making of connections with scholars from around the globe in my requests for reviewers, and the broadening of my sense of geography as I read and edit contributions from across the geography discipline.

The complexities of the online-submission system (now Scholar One) for editors has already been mentioned, but an advantage of this system has been that Etienne was able to retain access to the system, and ease the transition for me as I adjusted to the new position, and for this I was most grateful! Embracing diversity of geography and of geography in Aotearoa and the South Pacific has been a focus of the journal for many years. An ongoing challenge is soliciting papers from across the breadth of geography, and specifically, maintaining physical geography contributions, and also contributions from geographers working outside of tertiary education. The journal also continues to encourage submissions to its Geo-Ed section, and including reflective pieces on the state of geography in education (Binns, 2019; Taylor, 2019).

During my time as Managing Editor world events have continued to impact on the journal – the 2018 Cambridge Analytica Scandal and the 2018 implementation of revised EU Privacy laws [General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679] have instigated the formation of a code of conduct for New Zealand Geographical Society which deals with how personal information collected by the journal from authors and reviewers is handled. Standardisation of the journal format has been a feature of the commercial publication of the journal, and while this makes for more consistent presentation, retaining the diversity in how scholarship is written and formatted through negotiations over publisher stylesheets has been a learning process for authors and editors. The shift to the digital only publication of the journal has had its advantages in spreading editor workload more evenly across the year with papers able to go on early-online view prior to publication in the three journal issues per year, and with fewer restrictions on issue size. In 2019 the decision was made to also put book reviews up

on early-online view providing a much quicker turnaround between a book's publication and subsequent review.

PBRF and what Cupples (2019, Early View) describes as the 'geoscientisation' of geography continues to configure the academic landscape in Aotearoa/NZ. The Editorial Board still very much sees the merit in retaining the *New Zealand Geographer's* identity as a regional journal. We receive annual Publisher reports on publications metrics (including downloads and citations) and are keen to increase the journal's reach and readership. For these reasons the current Editorial Board endeavours to be proactive in encouraging submissions to the journal (including from new and emerging scholars), promoting the journal at geography conferences, and in sending out calls for special issues. While commentaries have long been a feature of the journal, more recently we have sought commentaries from a range of international scholars with a connection to New Zealand, and from our own scholars on topical and challenging issues within the discipline, with the first of these to be published in 2020. We are delighted that Wiley, the commercial publishers of the journal, have also agreed to sponsor annual prizes for best papers which we are able to award to authors including new or emerging scholars. Currently, we are able to make a small number of papers free access, reducing the barriers for institutions and individuals to access journal material. It will be interesting to see how the *New Zealand Geographer* is able to evolve within a publication environment in which new forms of open access are emerging, and in which there is increasing demand for publicly funded research to be open access.

Commemorating 75 years of the journal also provides the opportunity to look forward. My hope is that as an editorial team we can continue to build on the legacy of previous editors,

producing a journal that remains a reflection of contemporary geography in Aotearoa, one which provides a critical and scholarly lens on the matters facing people and environments. As a flagship journal for the discipline in Aotearoa it is important that the editorial board, editorial advisory board and the journal reflects a variety of people and subject positions (including more women and Māori). It is also essential that the journal continues to grapple with diverse ideas and perspectives and that it does not shy away from discussing the issues that affect us as geographers working within and outside the academy.

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