

Belt up, Millies - it's a-coming

As an advanced boomer (1947) it behoves me to defend being something that sounds like a buck kangaroo denying its young the best grazing.

The term is now a dirty word, and I'm annoyed at that, especially when I think over a life dominated by hard work for modest income, and support given to the next generation in terms of money, life and job training, unwelcome advice and ridiculous Xmas presents.

Yes, we were the lucky generation for whom war was optional, education free, music revolutionary, sex freed from some consequences.

Yes, we continued environmental plunder and climate change started by previous generations, but most of us established that a safer, healthier life is a reasonable expectation for everyone, that freedom of choice is real, that drugs and alcohol aren't a compulsory adjunct (after a long period of testing, admittedly).

Many of us thought our political leaders needed to do better than adopt global fashions without due consideration.

Current debate centres on diminishing opportunities for the young to own a house, but I like what economist Tony Johnson has said – that affordability of home ownership and consumer goods is only one aspect of human happiness.

If that's your main measure of life's ease, he reckons you're ignoring the absence of war and famine, a fair legal system, degrees of respect for individual rights, and recognition of the rights of others.

My personal grievance at being called a climate-wrecker (I was the first New Zealand journalist to reveal in the early 1970s the extent of environmental despoliation) doesn't count for much though.

I still have to accept that boomers allowed politicians and bureaucrats to mess it up. We were too easily distracted from the repercussions of shallow thinking, meaning fundamental problems were papered over and meaningful reform postponed.

Economist Shamubeel Eaqub calls what boomers have done since the 1980s "malignant neglect". He says we profess to want and support progress, but also want low taxes and small government.

The irony is past boomer governments didn't actually shy from picking the right issues to address, and there were plenty of smart thinkers to work out what should happen. It's just nobody followed through properly.

Few leaders found it expedient to make changes that might have wrought a difference. They bowed before the political truism that a long game doesn't score votes.

Ignoring what's left of my own politics after a lifetime's confusion created by my job, I believe the present lot, too, have identified the right issues and seem to be seeking long-term solutions. But they face the same test - what will they do when all the studies and reports are in?

JT col for Nov 23 – booming back

Jacinda Ardern is our first non-boomer prime minister and judging by her decisions so far takes very seriously her responsibilities to those feeling aggrieved.

Despite the fact New Zealand is too small for its rapacious behaviour to have much impact on global climate, she has set a shining example in the eyes of supporters and is the darling of overseas counterparts.

Will she falter in the face of opposition here at home? Probably. The reality is while we're unlikely to get another prime minister from boomerville, boomers still wield significant voting force and that limits the pace of reform.

Which doesn't bode well, given forced change as overwhelming as that from world wars, great depressions or global epidemics seems likely in the next decade, and those of us being blamed already will suffer as much as our offspring.

The current focus on home ownership is distorting. While boomer domination of housing gives us a significant advantage, in the end it's a portable one that moves from generation to generation.

Pass-on is complicated by whatever influences are around at any one time – currently growing population, offshore investors, Airbnb, growing longevity, retirement villages, travel and others – but in the end the next generation in most families gets a share of mum and dad's estate when the time comes.

Most of my boomer friends speak no differently from their parents. That WWII generation was intent on leaving something for their children, the boomers, and I don't see our behaviour being any different. In fact, most of us have given already.

I realise some boomers will live too long, work too long, spend too freely, or have wealth sucked up by retirement village deals, but the comparatively higher value of our properties ought to balance some of that.

Calm down, Xers and Millies. It's coming.