

Will ABs consider taking a knee?

A column of several topics this week in recognition of a time of multiple issues.

Firstly, taking a knee. There's a lot of talk about whether the Oz rugby team should do it, but no reference I've seen to whether the All Blacks also ought to make this powerful gesture in support of the US Black Lives Matter movement.

I know what some of you may be thinking - our national rugby team does the haka, surely one of the world's most impressive tributes to people of colour (as Americans coyly refer to those with African ancestry).

But what exactly is the rugby haka? Old footage gives the impression few Pākehā All Blacks for most of last century had much idea what it was really about but embraced it as a means of intimidating opponents.

Many of the current All Blacks - a name that surely resonates with the US movement - are "people of colour" and they and their Pākehā team-mates perform the haka with great commitment and authenticity.

But wouldn't it be a significant sight if the team also dropped to one knee during our national anthem, which despite beginning with a first verse in te reo Māori, still reverberates, dirge-like, from the days when we paid tribute to the biggest empire that ever existed, one that wreaked havoc among "people of colour" throughout Oceania - including Australia and New Zealand.

Second, a nod in the direction of regular *Taranaki Daily News* letter-writer Peter Moeahu, whose point about burdening low-income families with water meters may hold water.

They already pay for water via the rates or rent, but given the lack of information from NPDC about the effect meters might have on that "average" water payment, I'd like to know more and urge council staff to explain in detail.

On the election result: a key reason why Glen Bennett beat Jonathan Young in New Plymouth may have been the absence of a Green Party candidate. In the past, the Greens have usually taken a couple of thousand votes - roughly the number Young lost by - and this time most of those would have gone to the Labour candidate.

Can anyone recall why nobody stood for the Greens this time? Did the Green School grant/loan kerfuffle have anything to do with it?

NZ's handling of the Covid pandemic - seen as a central reason why Labour won - continues to attract admiration from other countries, an arresting example being a story in one of America's most prestigious newspapers, the *Washington Post*.

It hailed our re-emerging live concert scene as probably unique in the world, its account highlighting a group called The Beths and their impact with performances in small towns like Raglan.

Taranaki has its own connections to this musical revival, including family friend Victoria Girling-Butcher, a singer who works regularly with Dave Dobbyn.

She says Dave and his manager decided to tour small regional centres so they could get a crew back on the road and into work again. It's been a hard road to get to, given they had to cancel twice as the pandemic took its various twists and turns.

Called the "Open Up Tour", it employs 11 people and has taken Dave and Victoria to places who don't usually get to see them, given their regular venues are in the bigger cities. They have been playing to full houses.

Such success has encouraged another band, The Dudes, to bring forward to November a tour originally planned for March; Victoria has been booked for that one, as well.

Mention of March reminds me about one of the major Taranaki entertainment events of the year, WOMAD, whose next staging remains uncertain.

Given the energetic re-emergence of New Zealand's performance industry, I wonder if there's merit in re-branding it KWOMAD - Kiwi World of Music and Dance - and taking advantage of our country's own musical diversity.

A final word on Covid tracing. Despite Taranaki's recent brush with the disease via a visiting maritime worker, most of us seem convinced there is no serious threat here.

I watched the entrance to one of our biggest shops for 10 minutes on Labour Day and counted 110 customers coming in - and only 17 scanning the tracer code. One elderly woman wore a mask, and one used the hand sanitiser. Nobody practised social distancing. Do we think we're invulnerable?