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By the time I write this editorial, October is almost over - and so is the rugby fever. Only one more game to go, and the world will get back to normal. By the time you read this celebrations (or, heaven forbid: commiserations!) will have subsided.

The Rena disaster in the Bay of Plenty will not be over, though. Some of our readers might still be involved in the clean-up. Others might be motivated to do their own bit of environmental clean-up closer to home. The rubbish I find on our beach is, in comparison to the oil washed up on the Bay of Plenty beaches, benign, maybe apart from the odd bit of discarded fishing line (expected lifespan*: 600 years) that might entangle birds. Some of our local beach rubbish could be recycled, such as many, many plastic bottles (lifespan: around 450 years) and aluminium cans (life span: around 80 years). Then there are always odd sneakers and jandals (lifespan: 50 years), the odd T-shirt (lifespan: around 30 years), disposable nappies (disgusting, and so is their lifespan of around 450 years!).

I can also regularly find the odd bit of polystyrene. Now polystyrene is a wonderful, lightweight, versatile material. It can be easily carved and shaped. I don't particularly like the sound the polystyrene beads make, and getting the beads into a draft-stopper can be a bit of a mission. But what really got me is the polystyrene lifespan. Polystyrene is indestructible, and its lifespan is, according to my source, 'eternal'. Eternal is an awe inspiring word. Not much is eternal; it is a spiritual concept that sends shudders down my spine. I can accept that the fishing line, the plastic bottles and aluminium cans and even the disgusting disposable nappies would still be there long after I die if I didn't pick them up. But polystyrene is there forever. If I pick it up and throw it in the rubbish and my rubbish bag goes to the local landfill it will not budge and still be there when a next culture, in let's say 2000 years, does their archaeological digging. And they'll report on us and maybe label us as the polystyrene age, just as we talk about the neolithic or bronze age. I'm glad I won't be around then, as I'd be a bit ashamed...

Indi

*Lifespan according to "Pocket Guide to Marine Debris," The Ocean Conservancy, 2004

The response of NZ political parties

As part of the lead up to the general election we had planned a pre-election article about the policies of the different parties.

We sent a set of questions to each of the parties represented in Parliament during the last two terms. The questions related to international pensions, trade relations and recognition of Swiss qualifications. We also invited each party to provide some general statements about the issues they believe are most relevant to Swiss New Zealanders.

We received friendly and well considered replies. However we only received a small number of replies; from the Greens, the Maori Party, UnitedFuture and the Progressives who are winding up as a party at this election.

The small number of replies means that we feel unable to include the details of the responses to ensure fairness and balance in the pre-election period. We had hoped for a better response and to be able to include a comparison of what the parties had to say.

We may still complete a summary of the responses if further replies are received in coming weeks. We also hope to repeat the exercise in 2014, but this time with some more lead-in time.

So instead of being able to provide you with information to help you make a choice, we can simply remind everyone that you really only get one chance, using two votes, every three years to influence things. That's as close to a direct democracy as it comes in New Zealand. If you don't vote, don't complain at the outcomes.

Craig Press

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