Tawa Historical Project: How I remember Tawa

Written by Steve Avery and edited by Mike Steer, this record is based on recollections from Peter Dunne on some of the influences, events and actions in his political career of over three decades. Peter addressed the 2024 Annual General Meeting of the Tawa Historical Society and provided further reflections in subsequent written communications between himself and Steve and some statistics and dates from Wikipedia.

This record is a contribution to a THS project for gathering recollections from Tawa people.

Peter Dunne: A political life

A Tawa Historical Society record of a man who represented much of Tawa in Parliament and made a very significant contribution to politics for over three decades.



Peter Dunne had a remarkably long and varied career in Parliament lasting 33 years. He started off as a Member of Parliament in 1984 in the tumultuous Fourth Labour Government of 1984 to 1990. That government had three prime ministers, David Lange until 1989, Geoffrey Palmer for just over a year and then Mike Moore for two months. Peter Dunne ended his career in 2017, retiring at the election as a coalition ally and Minister in the National Government of Bill English. Throughout the continuous thirty-three years as a Member of Parliament, Peter was an electorate member in a seat that changed geographically over time but was always based predominantly in the west and north of Wellington City. Peter was very much a man suited to and a result of the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) voting system that started in 1996. As an electorate MP he had a long association with Tawa, a distinct geographical suburb in the northernmost valley of the Capital City. From 1989 a substantial part of Tawa was in his electorate.

Peter was born in 1954, undertaking his secondary education at St. Bede's in Christchurch, subsequently gaining an MA in political science at Canterbury University. and then studying business administration at Massey University. Peter was always a leader, both at school and university. A prefect at school, and a student politician at university, he served on the Executive of the University of Canterbury

Students' Association for three years from 1974 to 1976, as well as being Vice-President in 1974 and President in 1975.

Peter worked in the Department of Trade and Industry for two years and then for the Alcoholic Advisory Council, being its Deputy Chief Executive between 1980 and 1984. Looking back at why he took up politics Peter reminisced that from an early age when he was about 11 or 12, and for reasons which he did not fully understand, he had a strong sense of an obligation to serve, his preference for the Labour Party following the influence of his maternal grandfather who had grown up with and knew many of the leading figures of the First Labour Government including Robert Semple, Paddy Webb, Dan Sullivan and others. His grandfather regaled Peter with their stories. These three politicians were strong with clear and radical ideas and were skilful politicians for their times. Robert Semple is remembered as the radical organiser for the New Zealand Federation of Labour, known as the Red Feds, during 1910-1913. He was a flamboyant Minister of Public Works in the first New Zealand Labour Government of 1935-49. Dan Sullivan was a French polisher, trade unionist, journalist and a Labour politician. In parliament from 1919 until his death in 1947, throughout that time he was Minister of Industries and Commerce and Railways. Paddy Webb, a radical union leader who was anti-conscription in World War I, was given the position of Minister of Mines by Prime Minister Michael Joseph Savage in 1935.

In the landmark snap election of 1984 Robert Muldoon's National Government was heavily defeated by the David Lange led Labour Party after nine very controversial years. Issues of note included the growth of stagflation, supplementary minimum prices for sheep farmers, and Māori claims for land including the Raglan Golf Course and Bastion Point. There were also the Think Big projects designed to build infrastructure, the Springbok tour of 1981, and strong support for an alliance with the United States that involved our cooperation with ships, nuclear-armed or powered, visiting New Zealand, and the pugnacious and polarising leadership of Robert Muldoon. Peter Dunne won the Ohariu Electorate for Labour in the snap election.He defeated Hugh Templeton, a senior minister, in part because Bob Jones, a rich property developer and founder of the fleeting New Zealand Party, split the centre and right-wing vote.

In 2025, many New Zealanders have no idea of how different their country was before 1985 because the Lange Douglas era saw social and economic upheaval rapidly forced unannounced on the country that made the pre-1984 land a different country. The free market policies now seen by many citizens, economists, business people and politicians as untouchable, poured down from the Labour Cabinet for six explosive years, establishing the neo-Liberal thinking that dominates today's society. The same ideology was characteristic of Ronald Regan's USA and Margaret Thatcher's UK in the 1980s. Throughout the Fourth Labour Government of 1984 - 1990, Peter was a strong supporter of the Douglas-led reforms. Roger Douglas, Minister of Finance for much of the Fourth Labour Government, is recognised for his key involvement in New Zealand's radical economic restructuring in the 1980s. His economic policy became known as Rogernomics which implemented neo-Liberal economic policies. Peter Dunne became a strong advocate of Douglas and his associate reformers in the Lange Government. Peter believed the county was in an appalling mess in 1984, and the old, controlled economy approach was no longer working. The open market reforms made sense at the time, so hence Peter's support.

In 1987 the then David Lange led Labour Government initiated a reform of local government. The subsequent proposal resulted in some fiery discussion between Peter and councillors of the Tawa Borough over amalgamation. At this time Peter became a Parliamentary Under Secretary in the Government and in 1990 he was made Minister for Regional Development, Associate Minister for the Environment and Associate Minister of Justice. This role involved him in the local government reorganisation and working with Brian Elwood who was a lawyer and Mayor of Palmerston North for 14 years and President of The Municipal Association from 1976 to 1979. Brian Elwood had stood unsuccessfully for National in Palmerston North in 1981 against his friend Trevor de Cleene. Brian was Chairman of the Local Government Commission from 1985 to 1992. In 1989 this Commission, backed by Local Government Minister Michael Bassett who was also a historian, reduced the number of councils from more than 800 to fewer than 100. Peter Dunne realised the principal objection to amalgamation from Tawa Councillors and voters was possible amalgamation with Porirua. Peter talked with Jim Belich, Mayor of Wellington from 1986 to 1992 and suggested to Belich that David Watt. who had just become Mayor of Tawa, could be deputy mayor when the amalgamation was completed. This suggestion helped diminish the opposition in Tawa to the Commission's proposal.

After the general election victory of the Jim Bolger led National Party in 1990, Peter was in the Opposition. Mike Moore, who had very briefly been Prime Minister, appointed him spokesperson for Revenue, Regional Development and the Environment. Peter won the electorate, then named Onslow but largely comprising the old Ohariu, again in 1993. In 1994, Labour saw right wing representatives including Roger Douglas and Richard Prebble resign and Peter became an independent MP.

Peter decided to leave Labour as he felt increasingly out of step with the direction Labour was taking under Mike Moore and saw the opportunity with the looming advent of MMP (Mixed Member Proportional) to establish a more liberal centrist brand. He soon established the Future New Zealand Party. The next year he joined with defectors from both National and Labour in the United New Zealand Party and together they established a coalition with National. After the first MMP election held in 1996, only Peter Dunne had retained a seat in the House of Representatives from the United New Zealand Party as the member for the new Ohariu-Belmont electorate. Peter joined the Cabinet as Minister of Revenue and Minister of Internal Affairs. Reflecting, he thinks the United Party failed to establish its brand as a liberal centrist party and clearly state what its role in an MMP Parliament would be. Yet he retained his seat in 1996, in his opinion in part because National did not put up a candidate against him and in part because he was able to hold on to most of the Labour vote that had voted for him in previous elections.

National formed a majority coalition with New Zealand First after the 1996 election and did not need the support of other parties. Prime Minister Jim Bolger kept Labour's anti-nuclear and environmental legislation, and demoted radical monetarist Finance Minister Ruth Richardson after the 1993 election but never reversed Rogernomics - rather the Government added to and reinforced them. Jim Bolger did not favour electoral reform but did keep his promise of a referendum on proportional representation. Jenny Shipley held several senior portfolios under Bolger including Social Welfare and Health. After the coalition broke up in 1998, by which time Jenny

Shipley was Prime Minister, a group of small parties comprising ACT, United and some New Zealand First dissidents kept the Government in power until the 1999 election. Impatient with the slow impact of the government, Jenny Shipley had successfully carried out a coup in December 1997. Not formally supporting National after the 1996 election, Peter Dunne was not part of the National/New Zealand First coalition, so did not feel obliged to support it. His approach was to support the Government on a case-by-case basis to ensure that it would have to talk to him in advance if it wanted his support for legislation. He met regularly with Jim Bolger and Bill Birch, Minister of Finance from 1993 to 1999 in the Fourth National Government, and with Jenny Shipley after she became Prime Minister in 1997. With this being the first government under MMP, making the new system work was the biggest challenge, along with the perennial economic issues.

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National did not put up a candidate in the Ohariu electorate in the 1999 election which Peter Dunne won with the national result being Helen Clark leading Labour to victory. In 2000, Peter combined United New Zealand with the Future New Zealand Party, not the same one he had earlier founded but a new party being named United Future. The initiatives of Helen Clark's Fifth Labour Government, which became the Government following each of the 1999, 2002 and 2005 elections, included Kiwi Bank, the New Zealand Superannuation Scheme, the Emissions Trading Scheme, and KiwiSaver as well as the Foreshore and Seabed Act. In 2004 Helen Clark's Government sent troops to Afghanistan (but not to Iraq in 2003) and then ordered a deployment in 2006 to the East Timorese crisis. New Zealand was the first developed nation to sign a trade agreement with China. Peter did not pledge support to any other party in the first term of the Helen Clark Government of 1999-2002 simply because it was not needed considering how the number of seats fell after the votes had been counted. The Labour Party won 49 seats in parliament. However, Its 49 combined with the 10 seats won by the Alliance was still two seats short of being able to govern. Then support from the Green Party, which came to parliament as an independent party, previously being part of the Alliance. Labour and the Alliance thus had a clear majority. This coalition broke up at the outset of the 2002 election campaign.

During the 2002 election campaign, Peter Dunne's performance won a surprising 6.69 per cent of the Party vote probably because of his measured, clear and calm presence during a key television debate between a panel of party leaders. Never again would Peter Dunne reach anything like this figure. His memories of the 2002 election campaign focus on the "worm" debate and the unusual circumstances of that campaign. The worm gave a response by the television studio audience to speakers in the debate. Because both the National/New Zealand First and Labour/Alliance coalitions had failed to last the distance, voters were looking for an alternative sensible moderator, so Peter Dunne took the opportunity to boost his party's share of the vote. Many believed a coalition was very much on the cards in 2002, but Peter chose not to pursue or force it because of the political inexperience of his new MPs. He did not want to expose them as novice Ministers, even though it meant passing up the possibility to become Deputy Prime Minister. In 2002 Winston Peters' New Zealand First Party overcame its losses in the previous election. Once the final distribution of seats was determined, it was clear that Labour would be the major party in the Government, and it would be allied with the Progressives. However, Labour did not have a majority for confidence and supply, as the two parties together fell short of an absolute majority. Labour preferred an "agreement" rather than a full coalition like the

one that existed with the Greens prior to the 2002 election. Helen Clark had ruled out a deal with New Zealand First during the election campaign. Despite negotiations, Labour was unwilling to accept the Greens genetic engineering policy to secure Green support. In the end Labour and the Progressives remained in power, with support in confidence and supply from United Future. During this term of parliament Gordon Copeland opposed the Green Party's Sue Bradford's private members bill banning corporal punishment by parents and left the party.

In the 2005 election Labour ended up with two more seats than National led by Don Brash, his party having gained 21 more seats than in 2002. The Party Māori led by Tariana Turia, recently formed, won the four Māori electorates from Labour. Most of the other parties polled lower than in the previous election, losing votes and seats. Peter Dunne had Judy Turner and Gordon Copeland as colleagues, United Future having won 2.67% of the party vote. Helen Clark again concluded a coalition agreement with the Progressive Party and again had confidence and supply from United Future, but this time also had the same support from New Zealand First. Winston Peters and Peter Dunne became Ministers of the Crown outside of Cabinet with the latter becoming Minister of Revenue. The Greens also gave confidence and supply to Helen Clark. It had not been Peter Dunne's intention to support the Labour government in its third term, but the deal Labour offered during negotiations was in Peter Duinne's words "simply too good to turn down". In 2005 he was not in a position to propose a coalition. Peter always had the highest personal regard for both Helen Clark and Michael Cullen, the Government's Finance Minister. Even though he disagreed with them on many things, they always got along extremely well. Peter believes their government was very successful.

In 2008 the National Party, led by John Key, an MP since 2002, who had been brought up in a state house, but had become a very successful banker and had built a good fortune, won the largest share of the party vote. Soon after the election John Key announced he would lead a National Party minority government with support for confidence and supply from the ACT, United Future and the Māori parties. After the 2008 election United Future declined to just Peter Dunne being an MP. Peter gave his support to National and in fact gave his support to National for all nine years from 2008 because in every post-election agreement with successive Labour and National governments, his focus had always been on the policy concessions that could be secured. So, he supported National from 2008-17 simply on that basis. In 2011 John Key's National Party won 47.3% of the party vote, earning 59 seats, two short of a majority. National renewed its confidence and supply understanding with ACT and United Future and the Māori Party that ensured a seven-seat majority. 2014 saw National win 47.0% of the party vote and 60 of the 121 seats. National again constructed a confidence and supply understanding with ACT, United Future and the Māori Party. During this three-year term of office John Key unexpectedly resigned, deciding it was time for him to retire from politics, and Bill English became Prime Minister.

When National, still led by John Key, formed the Government in 2008, Peter Dunne retained his Minister of Revenue position and was also given Associate Minister of Health with both positions being outside of Cabinet. Peter was the Chair of the Emission Trading Scheme Review Committee in 2008 and 2009. He gained acceptance of the United Future policy of allowing couples raising dependent children

up to 18 years of age to split their incomes for taxation purposes. Peter was also the Minister responsible for the 2013 Act which created a market for psychoactive substances and the New Zealand 2015 National Drug Policy. He further achieved some momentum towards cannabis-based medicines becoming legal. When Peter was Minister of Internal Affairs from 2014 to 2017 the term of passports was extended from five to ten years, Fire and Emergency New Zealand were established and a specific site at the National Library saw the 1835 declaration of Independence, the Treaty of Waitangi and the 1893 Women's Suffrage petition displayed there. Peter's integrity was questioned in 2013 when he refused to hand over all 86 emails between himself and journalist Andrea Vance relating to the inquiry into the leaking of the report by the head of the Government Communications Bureau (GCSB) following its illegal spying on Kim Dotcom, a Finnish-German Internet entrepreneur and political activist who lives in New Zealand and was granted permanent residence in New Zealand on 29 November 2010. The United States has for years wanted him extradited to the US citing fraud charges, In September 2025 the extradition is still before the court system. Prime Minister John Key told Peter that if he did not cooperate with the inquiry. he would have to resign his ministerial positions. This eventuated, but in December 2013 the Parliament's Privileges Committee found that Peter was legally allowed to decline the David Henry Inquiry access to his emails. The Committee slated the Henry Inquiry. The Chief Ombudsman ruled that the emails did not contain official information so were not required to be released. On 28 January 2014, Peter Dunne was reinstated as Minister of Internal Affairs, Associate Minister of Health, and Associate Minister of Conservation in the third term of the National Party-led Government. His view of the challenge to his integrity over leaking a report by the GCSB is that there was definitely a political motive for this attack on his integrity. To this day he is uncertain as to where it came from. At the time he gave, very briefly, consideration to tossing it all in when obliged to resign, which Peter thinks it was assumed he would do, but quickly decided to stay to fight to clear his name. This was done a few months later when the Privileges Committee and Chief Ombudsman found in Peter's favour. He thinks that at that point Prime Minister Key had no real option but to reinstate him. At the time and looking back, it was a very bleak six months in the wilderness, including the toll it all took on Peter's family.

On 2 September 2024 Peter Dunne gave a speech to the Tawa Historical Society Annual General Meeting of which he is Patron. Peter recalled that he regularly held electorate clinics in the then main meeting room of the Tawa Borough Council which is now known as the Community Centre. Tawa was a very enjoyable part of his MP's load. He became a strong supporter of the Tawa lifestyle. The commitment to education evident in the Tawa Community impressed Peter. He developed a strong link with Bruce Murray who had returned to Tawa College as Principal where he had previously taught from 1966 to 1977. Reflecting on his frequent contact with Bruce during his 14 years as Principal, Peter found him very impressive as a principal characterised by a philosophy of being a servant leader. Peter also enjoyed the high standard of musical events the College Music Department put on.
Sometimes Pater visited Arohata Women's Prison at the southern end of Tawa where he talked to inmates who were both frank and intelligently reflective about life. One woman, he still remembers, pointed out to him that when she went to jail her parents had to look after her children and they were all collectively punished, not only the prisoner. Peter became sympathetic to her point of the innocent being punished. One evening at Arohata Peter was advised by prison staff to show no weakness so when

a prisoner found guilty of murder spoke of her facing life in prison, he later found out she had only been in jail for two weeks. He retorted she was lucky because not that long ago she would have been hanged. His abiding memory of Arohata was the sound of doors being locked.

For a period at every clinic Peter had in Tawa, a woman turned up and respectfully raised the topic of what would happen to the inmates of the Kimberley Centre on the outskirts of Levin, which figured prominently in the recently completed Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care. Two-thirds of Peter's constituency work was concerned with immigration. At one of his clinics a 'Tampa boy' turned up, nine years after the original event. In late August 2001, the Australian Government refused permission for the Norwegian freighter 'Tampa', carrying 433 rescued refugees mainly from Afghanistan from a distressed fishing vessel in international waters, to enter Australian waters. When the 'Tampa' entered Australian waters, Prime Minister John Howard had the ship boarded by special forces and the asylum seekers were sent to Nauru. Subsequently New Zealand took around 150 of them as refugees. For all that time the 'Tampa' man had had no word of his wife and child who were also on the ship. Despite many repeated appeals to immigration authorities, he was always rebuffed with the advice to forget it. Despite a casual response from officials to an inquiry from Peter, he insisted they follow up the case. The mother and child were found in a Malaysian camp, without the internet and computer systems now commonplace. They were lost and no one knew where to put them. Peter used this case as an example of how sometimes a local MP can make a huge difference in the life of a citizen.

One visitor to a clinic paced up and down while going on about contrails. Later as he was leaving the clinic Peter looked up at the sky and saw about six contrails. As part of his electorate work Peter sometimes went out in a security car with voluntary citizens. Once, before traffic police were amalgamated into the police force, he was out with a traffic cop in a car when a vehicle sped past at perhaps near 100k an hour, they pulled up the car to find the three occupants were plain clothes police hurrying to forestall a crime they had been tipped off about. The traffic cop told Peter that this was not an uncommon occurrence, and Peter received a call the next morning to confirm that the men were genuine police on a job.

Over the decades as an electorate Member of Parliament Peter got to know and work with many community groups. Their people were all about serving the community over non-political issues. One example was the Tawa Volunteer Fire Brigade. Another was the Tawa Badminton Association which approached Peter asking him to help to change their constitution. Their issue was years before different local clubs had formed an association but another change in the structure of the sport in Tawa changed meant they had to go to court. Peter helped them through the process.

Peter Dunne reflected on his relationships over the years with Wellington City Council Mayors and councillors. In general, Peter maintained good links with all the Mayors and Councillors of Wellington over the years. There were seven Mayors during his time in Parliament. Peter was especially close to Sir James Belich, Mayor 1986-92; and Dame Fran Wilde, Mayor 1992-95. Belich was in Peter's view heavily underrated. He probably had the most impact of any mayor on the modern shape of Wellington. The construction of the Moa Point sewage scheme, the development of the city's cafe

culture from the late 1980s and the opening up and upgrading of the city's waterfront began in Sir James Belich's era. Peter worked closely with Fran Wilde, founded on their days in Parliament together. They worked on major projects such as the development of Te Papa and Sky Stadium. Peter also had a good working relationship with Celia Wade Brown when she was Mayor from 2010 to 2016. Of the councillors, Peter probably worked most closely with David Watt. This cooperation began from David Watt's time as Mayor of Tawa, then when Deputy Mayor of Wellington, and subsequently in his role with Heritage New Zealand.

Peter worked well with Malcolm Sparrow and Ngaire Best as local councillors from the Northern Ward and residents of Tawa, and Ian McKinnon during his time as Deputy Mayor. Of the non-politicians, the late Peter Hansen was one person who stood out. Peter Hansen was the husband of former Tawa College Deputy Principal Ina Hansen who was really respected by pupils and teachers and undertook several key roles at the College. Ina's husband took several key roles in the Wellington retail sector and regional development generally.

Reflecting on wider political issues and the role of an MP, Peter made the point that when MMP began it was widely assumed that there would be two categories of MP, ministers without an electorate and MPs generally out of Cabinet who would have an electorate. However, in 2025 many leaders and ministers represented an electorate. List MPs have a much lighter load than those who have an electorate and have that choice of associating with an electorate that is very far from where they live. A consequence of this is that list MPs spend a considerable amount of time trying to shore up their ranking on the party list and thus they may have a narrower party view.

Peter Dunne was never a fan of MMP - he preferred the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system. When MMP came in in 1996 the area of his electorate was much enlarged and was roughly divided into two parts, part of the Hutt and much of the northern Wellington suburbs. He felt lucky living in Wellington and representing a local electorate because the sad reality of being an MP is the very artificial life you live. Family life is sacrificed, but because he represented a local electorate Peter could generally have regular if rather limited family time each week. He is aware that many MPs voted out in an election are deeply traumatised. He observed that there is nothing more-ex than an ex-MP. The job of being a contemporary MP is now so much harder because of social media, phone cameras and the non-stop news cycle. In Peter's early years MPs were not given any staff; very often it was the partner who had to take all the vicious phone calls. Now, everywhere a public figure goes they are public property. An example Peter mentioned was later in his political career when he and his wife holidayed in Rarotonga. Sometime later when he was at a function a woman he did not know came up to and gave him an envelope. Inside were some not very flattering photos of Peter sunbathing during his Rarotonga holiday. At that time this was unusual.

I conclude this profile of an enduring Member of Parliament, using largely Peter's own words. He generously gave much worthwhile information and ideas in email responses to questions I posed to him. The guiding principles Peter held when first elected to Parliament in 1984 were set out in his Maiden Speech in August 1984 – a commitment to social justice, opportunity through a modern economy and respect for personal freedom. Reflecting over three decades later, Peter wrote "I think I adhered to these

guiding principles throughout my time in Parliament". Sir John Marshall, who became a friend and a mentor, advised Peter early on to go back every now and then and re-read his Maiden Speech to make sure he was remaining true to his values. He thinks he was able to be elected so many times while a member of a small party because as "Sir John Marshall told me at the outset to be loyal to my electorate, and it would be loyal to me. I followed that advice throughout. I also think Ohariu cottoned on to tactical voting from the outset, working out that by voting for me they not only got a strong local advocate, but also someone who was likely to play a key role in government."

Peter Dunne commented that it was difficult judging success in politics, and deciding what achievements he was most satisfied with, he described as a hard question. "A few politicians get to make significant and lasting changes. Most do not. For me, some things I was able to do stand out. I look at the various changes I made to simplify and reduce taxes while Minister of Revenue, including business and personal tax cuts, and abolition of outdated taxes like Gift Duty. As Minister of Internal Affairs, I was able to bring 40 different firefighting organisations together into a streamlined national organisation, Fire and Emergency New Zealand – something many of my predecessors had tried and failed to achieve over the previous 20 years. I was also able to extend the term of a New Zealand passport from five to ten years and make significant changes to the arrangements for storing our precious documents like the Treaty of Waitangi, the 1835 Declaration of Independence and the Women's Suffrage Petition. As an Associate Minister I began the long overdue overhaul of our drug laws, which has sadly stalled since I left office. As Associate Minister of Conservation I established the Game Animal Council to better manage both game animals on the conservation estate and a stronger recognition of the role of recreational hunters. Through various confidence and supply agreements, I secured the establishment of the Walking Access Commission, and stronger support for victims of crime advocacy. I was also able to secure the funding under National to get the Transmission Gully highway built after 100 years of delay. Beyond that, perhaps my biggest satisfaction came from being able to help during my years in Parliament literally thousands of constituents with personal issues."

Of the things where he would have liked to achieve more, "I would have liked more time to work on digitising government services, a project I had begun in 2014 as Minister of Internal Affairs, and which is ongoing. I also would have liked more time to work on my drug law reform plans. As an inherently impatient person, my frustration was always with how long it took to get things done." Asked to name some key politicians he deeply respected and some you think contributed little to improving New Zealand he succinctly answered the question. "Of all the politicians I knew and worked with, there are probably four that stand out – Helen Clark and Sir Michael Cullen, Sir John Key and Sir Bill English. I also had a high regard for Sir Geoffrey Palmer with whom I worked closely as Associate Minister of Justice and Associate Minister for the Environment, during his time as Prime Minister. I will give those who contribute and, in some cases, still contribute little that is positive, the charity of my silence."

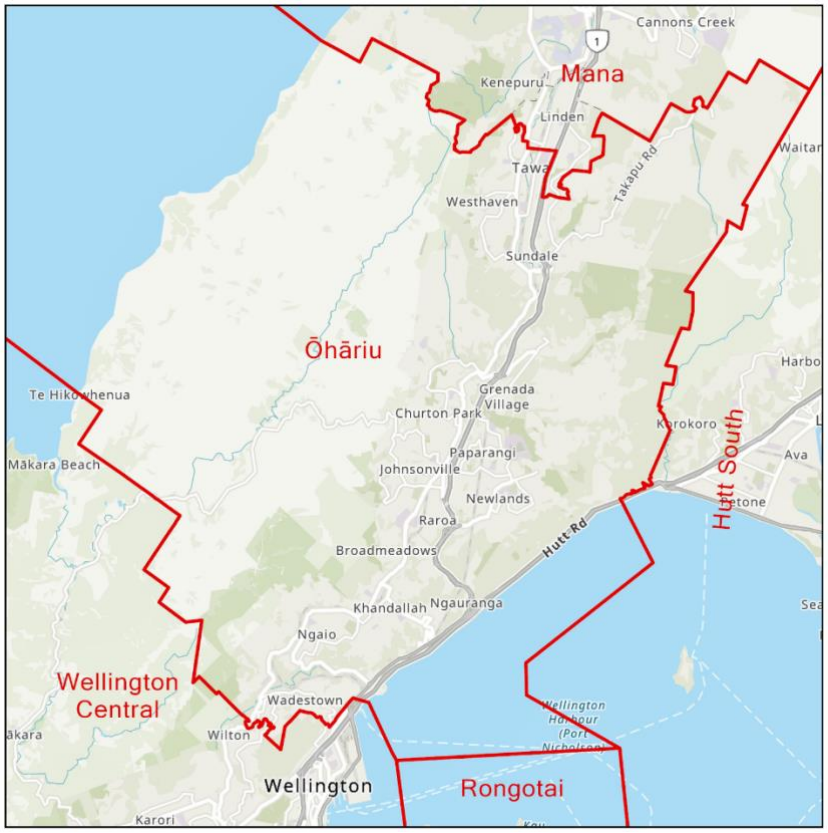
Throughout his long political career Peter sought a balance between core values and pragmatism, seeking to remain true to core values, while recognising that there were times when a more pragmatic approach was required, either to make incremental gains, or as the trade-off for securing a policy win in some other area. His ultimate view was that if a conflict arose between values and pragmatism, values should win,

but he frankly never reached that ultimate point. He maintained his links with the people in the electorate over three decades, an important factor in keeping a majority at the many elections he won. Peter Dunne always attended as many local events as he could and held regular Monday morning and Saturday morning constituent sessions across the electorate. In addition, he maintained two full-time electorate offices and staff to help keep him in touch.

Peter Dunne is still energetically involved in civil society. He is Chairman of the Board of the United Fire Brigades Association which supports the interests of firefighters. It advocates for over 14,000 firefighters and support personnel from volunteer and career, urban and rural, defence, industry, airport and Cook Island fire brigades. Peter is also Chairman of Trustees at Cosine Primary Care Network. This is a Primary Health Organisation formed in January 2011. It has two large provider practices, Karori Medical Centre in Wellington, and Ropata Medical Centre in Lower Hutt. Media outlets use him as a political commentator.

One example of his continuing contribution to public debate was in RNZ's *Nine to Noon's* political commentators programme of 29 September 2025. He discussed politics with the host Kathryn Ryan and Lianne Dalziel, a life member of the Labour Party and a former MP and Cabinet Minister. They gave their views on current issues. Peter thought the Coalition Government's proposals of when citizens could enrol for the election was a step too far. It should have only been changed back to 4pm the Friday before the Saturday polling day. He observed that counting votes is never perfect, it takes time, and the new legislation will not speed up counting of results. The Coalition's decision not to recognise Palestine as a state was in Peter's opinion a lack of leadership. The policy rejected the moral perspective and was weak all-round. It ignored most other countries; they decided for recognition while New Zealand rejected their collective wisdom. He thought that the policy announced by Winston Peters had been poorly handled by the Government parties. The Cabinet might well have been split on this issue. The Cabinet was perhaps trying to shift the responsibility for not recognising Palestine as a state to foreign affairs advisors. Peter thought the Government policy was not credible, it was naive or arrogant. Speaking about Coalition policy on energy, Peter foresaw, accurately, that the announcement later in the week would do little for consumers, and would have near zero effect. Talking about legislative changes to sick leave, Peter thought it sounded good, but he would wait and see how it works out, the changes might yet create larger problems.

When asked in my correspondence with Peter to reflect on the political, economic and social state of New Zealand in 2024 he was clear in his opinion. "I think New Zealand is broadly headed in the right direction, but the journey will be a slow one, with social, economic, environmental and political challenges to be overcome. My biggest worry is that the rising tide of intolerance right across our political spectrum will become too strident and will derail our social cohesion." Asked what New Zealand might be like in 2040, 200 years after Waitangi, he commented "unfortunately, I do not have a crystal ball. I would like to hope that by then New Zealand will be a thriving multicultural and independent republic." The one thing that is the most important reflection to pass on to an aspiring politician was clear: "I would say define and understand your fundamental values and stick to them without becoming dogmatic. To that end, be prepared to modify your position on specific issues when and if the facts at the time warrant so long as that remains consistent with your core values."



Peter Dunne's electorate as at 2023, now dissolved and divided into two electorates for the 2026 election.

UnitedFuture

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