

James Evans MS Trip to New Zealand 2023



Purpose of trip

This was an opportunity to carry out official Senedd business whilst in the country on a pre booked personally paid trip to New Zealand. My aim was to learn more about the New Zealand political system, their policies and practices in order to enhance my role as a Senedd Member for Brecon & Radnorshire. This visit would build closer relationships between the two Parliaments. My areas of focus included mental health given my role as Shadow Minister for Mental Health and on agricultural policies and practices, farming systems, environmental practices and diversification. It was an opportunity to see what good practices/lessons can be learnt for us here in Wales and in my constituency of Brecon & Radnorshire.

I met with representatives of the New Zealand Parliament to foster and build relationships between the two countries. I met with MP's and Committee Chairman to discuss Mental Health, Education, Trade and Agriculture to gain a better understanding of government policy and see what can be learnt to benefit my work as the Senedd Member for Brecon and Radnorshire across Wales. I met with the New Zealand Deputy High Commissioner to discuss the trade policy with the UK Government to see how trade deals will benefit/detriment my rural constituents and to get a wider understanding of the work of the High Commission.



Day 1

When I was in New Zealand I had the opportunity to visit the ANZCO meat production plant and in Ashburton where I was introduced to Steve Dickie, Head of Foodservice and Tim Raines, Head of Sales – International in the South Island. ANZCO are multinational company and one of New Zealand's largest exporters. They have sales of \$1.9 billion annually and customers in more than 80 countries. All of the beef and lamb going through the plant must meet strict national standards. They are working very closely with the industry to encourage our farmers to meet the New Zealand Farm Assurance Programme criteria. The New Zealand Farm Assurance Programme focuses on integrity, traceability, bio-security, sustainability and animal welfare.



Following the visit to the ANZCO plant I travelled to Mt Somers Station to meet with Kate Acland, Beef and Lamb New Zealand's Farmer Director for Northern South Island. Mt Somers Station is the family property of David and Kate Acland, together they run the 3800ha farm. The property runs from the Ashburton River at an altitude of 400m to the boundary of the Conservation park at the base of the Mountain, an altitude of 700m. Mt Somers Station runs over 13,000 breeding sheep, 1300 Dairy Cows and 200 head of Beef Cattle. The property also includes 500ha of Native vegetation and Beech forest which has been retired from grazing, this vegetation provides ample food source for the 400 hives we have on the property producing Manuka and Honeydew honey's in addition to the clover honey produced from the lower terraces. The Station has 12 full time staff, most of whom live on the property.



Day 2 & 3

When I was in the North Island I was very fortunate to meet with the Deputy High Commissioner to New Zealand in Wellington, Sam Pass. During the meeting the Deputy Commissioner outlined what work the commission had been doing in New Zealand to prepare the ground work for the future trade deal that was signed between the UK & NZ Government. We discussed in detail the opportunity for young people to work in both countries via the new working holiday visa being extended. We also discussed the opportunities for Welsh businesses in the manufacturing and renewable sector to work in New Zealand. A large proportion of the meeting was discussing the UK's entry into the Trans-Pacific Partnership and the great



opportunities that provides to Welsh Businesses to export their goods into one of the largest markets around the world.

I was able to meet with a number of MP's across parties to discuss a number of issues that are common between both Wales and New Zealand. I firstly met with Paul Eagle MP, who is a member of the Labour Party and also a member of the Transport and Infrastructure Committee. We discussed the need for greater infrastructure development in both Wales and New Zealand and the challenges posed by climate change and the need to reduce carbon emissions. I outlined the work that the Welsh Government has been doing in this area and Paul was keen to learn more about the strategies in Wales about de carbonising our infrastructure and transport.



Following the meeting with Paul I was given a tour of the New Zealand Parliament and was introduced to the New Zealand Parliament by their speaker during Prime Ministers questions which was a honour and a privilege.

One of the most insightful conversations I had was with Matt Doocey MP, who is the National Party spokesperson on mental health and suicide prevention as well as youth. During the meeting with Matt we discussed the pressure on young people's mental health following the pandemic and the pressure being inflicted by the over use of social media. I discussed the new roll out of the NHS 111 press 2 service in Wales and the together for mental health strategy. He explained to me some of the work the NZ government had been doing in this area but was keen to see how the initiatives we are doing in Wales could be replicated across New Zealand.



The other MP's I had informal conversations with were Rachel Brooking MP, Naisi Chen MP, Hon Paul Goldsmith MP, Melissa Lee MP, Hon Todd McClay MP, Greg O'Connor MP, Tim van de Molen MP & Hon Michael Woodhouse MP.



Day 4

On the 4th and final day of my Senedd Business in New Zealand I was visited Wairere Rams in Masterton a farm in the Wairarapa region in the North Island to witness first-hand the impact carbon farming is having on North Island hill country farms. The impact agri forestry has had on New Zealand's agricultural industry was staggering. Over the last 5 years 175,000 hectares have been sold for carbon forestry. This means that New Zealand has lost over 1 million stock units from the land and has directly caused the loss of 1600 rural jobs. The revenue lost to the country in terms of export equates to \$245 million dollars and the loss of annual equates to \$170 million at the farm gate, at 2021-22 prices in New Zealand. This is a cumulative production loss of \$540 million dollars at the farm gate from progressive planting replacing livestock from 2017 to 2022. This is why when we are exploring these schemes in Wales we must be very aware of the knock on effects that planting trees can have on our economy and our rural way of life.



Conclusion

It was striking how closely Wales and New Zealand are in terms of the issues and challenges they face and their direction of policy. It was a very informative and insightful trip. This visit raised the profile of the Welsh Parliament and will foster closer links between the two Parliaments.

The New Zealand Government is following what many western governments are advocating, pushing for further environmental regulation to reduce livestock numbers to address climate change challenges. The farmers I met shared their concerns over striking the right balance between future food production and food security and environmental protections.

One of the main stand out observations was that farmers and rural communities in New Zealand share the same challenges we face here in Wales. Impacts of rising costs, increased environmental regulation and the growing urban/rural split.

The visit showed me that if we work together and not in conflict we can provide many opportunities to young people, businesses and the wider economy to the benefit of both Wales and New Zealand.

On my return to the Senedd, I intend to promote the opportunities for Welsh citizens to travel to New Zealand. This visit will inform my contribution to debates in the Senedd especially so around agriculture, agro forestry and striking the right balance between environmental aims and food security.

