Broadening the Context by Ken Ross
Speech notes: VKK AGM 2023

He views society through the lens of 3 gemstones.

1. Gem one: A Treaty of Waitangi lens from a Te Tiriti perspective (the Maori version). Te Tiriti has 3 articles, the first about governance, a second about ownership of land and important resources, and a third about human rights. (a 4th article dealing with religious freedom is being proposed, based on what was said at Waitangi at the time). In 1840, for the treaty signing, two versions were created – an English language version and a Maori language version. Because the two versions differ in their meaning it is important to understand the difference and the importance of the te reo version. 540 chiefs signed the Treaty of Wairangi but 500 of them signed the Maori version and only 40 signed the English version. The rule of 'contra proreferenta' is used to determine intent and meaning in cases of ambiguity – it favours the Maori language interpretation, and international law favours the indigenous version when the coloniser and indigenous versions differ.
2. Gem two was the environmental lens, and consisted of 4 inter-related perspectives:
    a. The strong sustainability model that tells us the biosphere is paramount, humanity is a subset of the biosphere and the human construct of 'money and economy' is a subset of society, so we need to think about them in that context. Money and economy is much less important than the environment and biosphere, and less important than people and we need to get our thinking and decision making into that order, if we are to stop living 'unsustainably' and move toward a relationship with the planet and all other life that is 'sustainable, we need to always put Gaia first and money last.
    b. The 'Doughnut' model (some are now calling it the 'Compass for the 21st Century'). This model comes from the work of Johan Rockstrom and Will Steffen at the Stockholm Institute, (Planetary Boundaries Modelling) and the later work of Kate Raworth. Rockstrom and his team proposed that humanity was totally reliant on 9 sets of environmental conditions that had remained relatively stable and benign for the 12,000 years of the Holocene period, and these conditions were not only critical in protecting Earth's life supporting systems, they had also enabled the development of complex human societies. These conditions were now being driven beyond safe limits ('boundaries') by the actions of humans, in what is now considered, the Anthropocene period. The team modelled these nine features in a circular graph. Six of those parameters have been breached and are in unsafe states, and two others (Ocean Acidification and Atmospheric Aerosol Loading) are approaching dangerous levels. Only Stratospheric Ozone levels are safe and showing signs of improvement. The model provides a 'ceiling' for safe living within the physical biosphere. Raworth refined the 9 Planetary Boundaries model/graph by including 12 social factors that were required for basic human living standards – creating a safe and just space for humanity (and all life on earth). This inner boundary is effectively a social 'floor' that people shouldn't be allowed to fall through. The completed model/graph therefore has a doughnut shape, within which people can live safely and with some dignity, and an area outside the doughnut where existence is imperiled.
    c. Ecological Footprint measuring as first proposed by Reece and Wackernagel. This is a really useful measure of the demands and impacts humans place on the living and non-living world. It is measured by considering the materials and resources humans use, and the wastes they produce. The unit of measure is the 'global hectare' (gha) and it can be calculated globally, nationally, by community or per family or person. At the highest level it shows two very stark facts – one that there is obscene inequality in the resources that are available to people, depending on where they live and how much wealth they have, and secondly, that in general, humanity as a whole is using the resources of the earth at a rate of 1.7 planets per year and this situation is worsening. For VKK to consider, the average NZ'er is well above the global average of resource accessibility, and if the entire population of the planet was to have what the average NZ'er has, we would need 3.7 planets to provide it. As an extra consideration, Kerikeri is above the NZ average and serious questions need to be asked about efforts to keep developing Kerikeri and giving it 'more' – especially when you consider the levels of poverty that surround the Kerikeri township.
    d. TNS Graph. The Natural Step organization produced a lot of graphs, but its 'funnel and bugle' graph is by far, the most profound. The graph plots the state of natural resources against time, and maps both human demand on resources and environment response to that demand. The graph shows three different zones of relationship trend. Zone one (the 'funnel') which we are currently in depicts a state of undeniable, unsustainability for the 8 billion people currently living on the planet. Zone two (the 'pipe') shows it might be possible for some of humanity to begin the transition away from current high impact life

styles to a lower impact way of life, while Zone three (the ‘bugle’) shows a hopeful time where humans learn to live in a truly sustainable relationship with Gaia/Papatuanuku.

3. Gem Three was a societal lens. It showed that modern humans have been living in organized family and societal groups for at least 10,000 years, and within those groups there was/is a sector of the group who is productive that produces more than it needs, so a non-productive part of the group (infants, sick, infirm and elderly) can be supported. In small human groups, all or many can participate in the decisions regarding how that happens. As groups increase in size the context of who makes the decisions and the value base of the decision making itself changes and becomes specialized and exclusive. Today, we have complex arrangements we call political and economic ‘systems’ in which those functions occur. Aotearoa/New Zealand’s (A/NZ) political system operates within the context of a representational, democratically elected parliamentary central government, with semi-separate regional and localised governance that is also elected democratically. The economic system in which we are firmly imbedded, is called ‘capitalism’, an economic system that has money as its core focus. That capitalism is failing the bulk of its ‘users’ is probably a contentious issue, so we will put it aside for another, rainy Saturday. That our current system of governance is failing its users is probably an accepted fact, so we can push on. There are many reasons why our particular strain of democracy is weak, ailing and dis-functional in A/NZ, but the necessary changes aren’t going to happen in the current setting, because it mainly requires the populace to take back much of the power they lent to a political elite. Before that can happen, the populace itself has to come together and organize, before they have sufficient ‘power’ to force the political elites to come to the table and view the situation seriously and sanely. Communities all across this nation have to become more civic and democratic in their thinking, actions and structures, to secure the changes that are necessary further up the chain. Wouldn’t that be a wonderful role for VKK!