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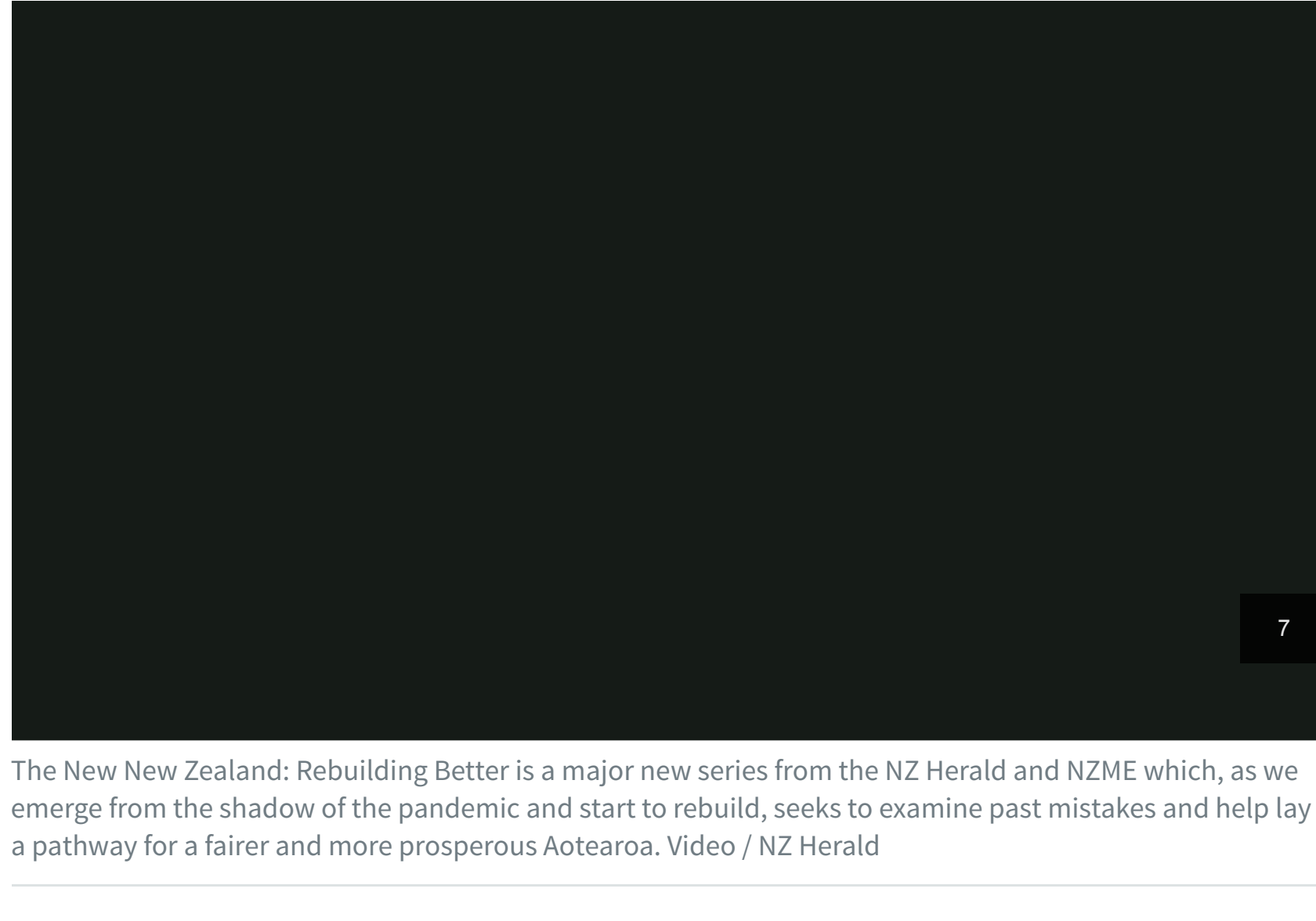
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NEW ZEALAND

# Debbie Ngarewa-Packer: It's time to break up the old boys' network and give land back

By Debbie Ngarewa-Packer 14 Nov, 2022 05:00 AM 97 Comments



The New New Zealand: Rebuilding Better is a major new series from the NZ Herald and NZME which, as we emerge from the shadow of the pandemic and start to rebuild, seeks to examine past mistakes and help lay a pathway for a fairer and more prosperous Aotearoa. Video / NZ Herald



### OPINION

As part of the New Zealand Herald's new series, 'The New New Zealand: Rebuilding Better', Debbie Ngarewa-Packer looks at how we can incorporate the lessons of iwi regeneration and Tikanga Māori into a more prosperous New Zealand for everyone.

Ever since Covid arrived on our shores, our people at the grassroots have been warning not just of the dire public health risks, but also of the increased material hardship that already struggling communities were likely to face.

Nearly three years later, our predictions have sadly come to pass. We see that in the cost of living crisis, the mental health crisis, and with the growing ram-raid phenomenon. Our people were driven further and even deeper into poverty and hardship than ever.

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We must now firmly focus on social wellbeing and economic recovery, and stop at nothing to not just get back to where we were pre-pandemic, but to work on eliminating the inequality and inequity that has defined the neoliberal post-1980s era. We must take this opportunity to reimagine and restructure our economy in a way that works for Māori and disadvantaged communities.

As we enter the recovery period and turn our focus to economic resilience, employment, and social hardship, we know that our people will continue to lead our own solutions as we have always done.

We really needed a Crown plan for this more than two years ago - a plan that would have dealt with this in a way that addressed the systemic drivers of Māori unemployment, underemployment, homelessness, and health inequities, rather than simply treading water. We needed policies that obligated Government and the private sector to employ Māori, and which ensured we had a voice at the decision-making table.

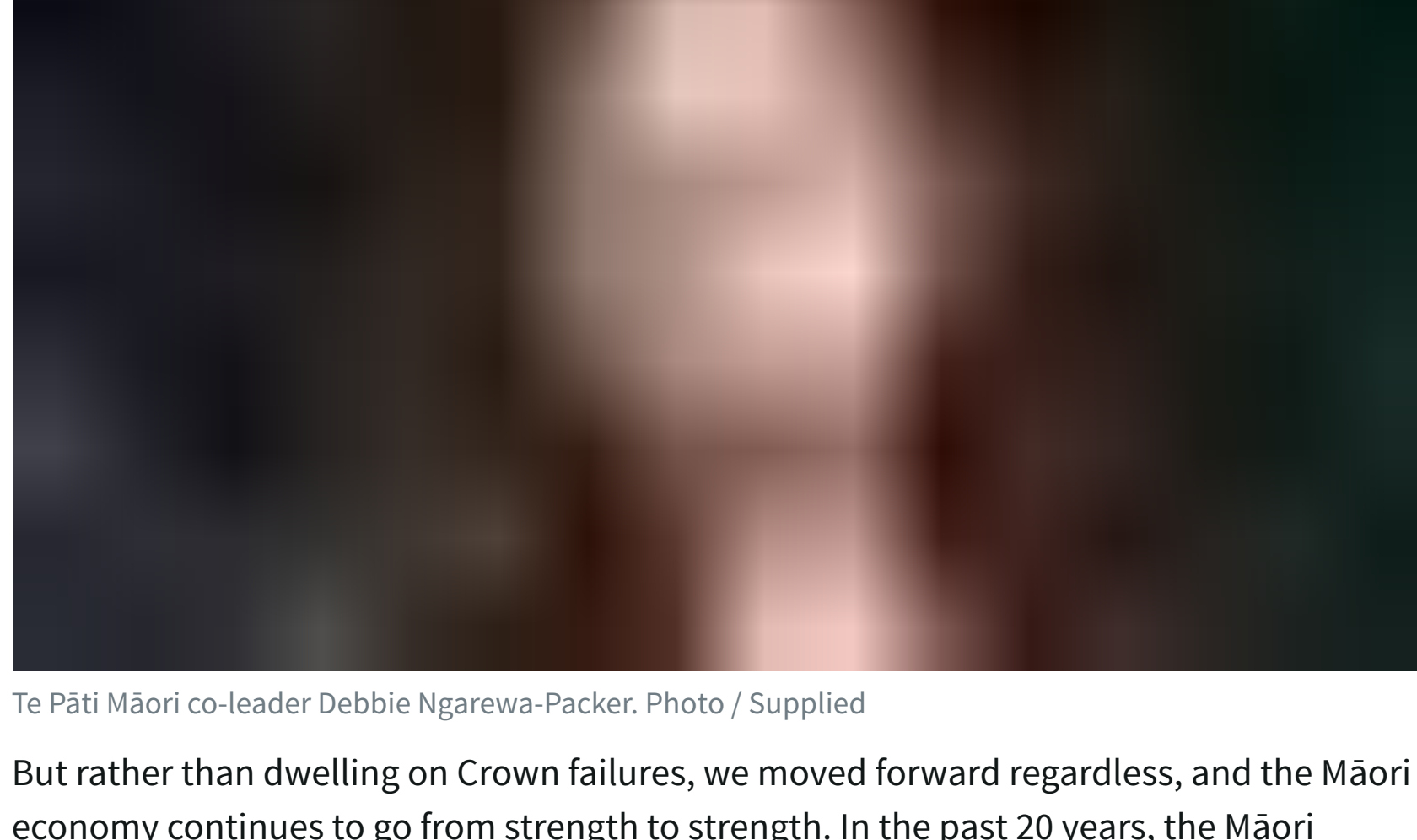
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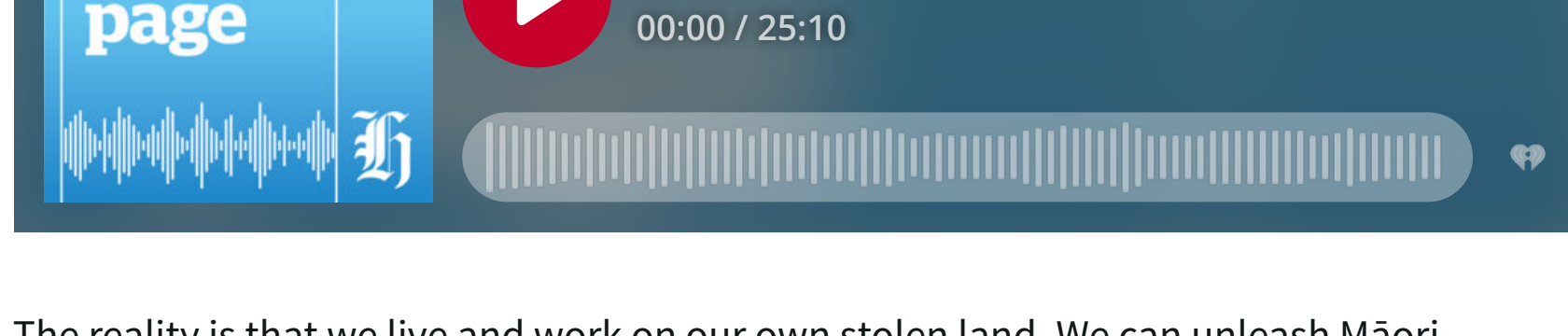
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Te Pāti Māori co-leader Debbie Ngarewa-Packer. Photo / Supplied

But rather than dwelling on Crown failures, we moved forward regardless, and the Māori economy continues to go from strength to strength. In the past 20 years, the Māori economy has grown from about \$16 billion to \$70b. In the past decade, the Māori asset base has been growing at 10 per cent a year - much faster than the overall economy.

As tangata whenua, our worldview is holistic. We don't plan quarters or years or even decades ahead. We plan generations ahead. We see the economy for what it is - not an all-powerful system that we must serve, but rather a tool that can serve us to manaaki our people and act as kaitiaki for our taiao. Therefore, the absolute best thing we can do to support the Māori economy and the growth of our economic power as tangata whenua is to make practical steps towards our vision of a Te Tiriti-centric Aotearoa through constitutional transformation and an aggressive 'Land Back' programme.



The reality is that we live and work on our own stolen land. We can unleash Māori excellence to a degree we can hardly yet imagine if we ensure productive and economically viable land is returned to our people.

The Crown must return land in its control to mana whenua, or settlements will never be durable. This includes conservation and local government land. We would also implement a right of refusal policy on private land, which would truly revolutionise the ability for Māori to achieve our self-determination and self-sufficiency, but would also lift all boats and grow the nation's economic potential.

Our Whānau First procurement policy announced in 2020 - which would guarantee at least 25 per cent of government contracts to Māori-owned organisations and businesses - would also be revolutionary. This is one of the keys to finally dealing with persistent and entrenched unemployment and precarious work for Māori.

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It's time to break up the old boys' network once and for all. We must end the days of monopolies and corporate favours for the upper class. Our people need a foot in the door, and to no longer be treated as second-class citizens in the economy.

The Crown has an obligation to live up to the Te Tiriti relationship by engaging with the Māori economy, but it so often fails to do this. Just recently, climate change announcements around forestry and agriculture have shown that the Government is sacrificing the interests of often less-profitable Māori landowners to protect already entrenched and powerful corporate interests, such as the intensive dairying sector.

Every day, our people demonstrate the economic power of Māori excellence. We export products all around the world. Our waiata now lead the charts every second week. Our rangatahi are at the forefront of innovation and the digital economy, despite the extra challenges they often face compared with their peers. Our people and our lands provide the basis for nearly the entire tourism sector, one of the biggest parts of the nation's economy.

It's about time the Government and major industry players caught up and realised that tangata whenua are taking up the driving seat of Aotearoa's economy. What is good for Māori is good for everybody.

**Debbie Ngarewa-Packer is a New Zealand politician, iwi leader and activist. She is a Member of Parliament and co-leader of Te Pāti Māori alongside Rawiri Waititi.**

### The New New Zealand series begins with a deep dive into the economy. What issue should we explore next?

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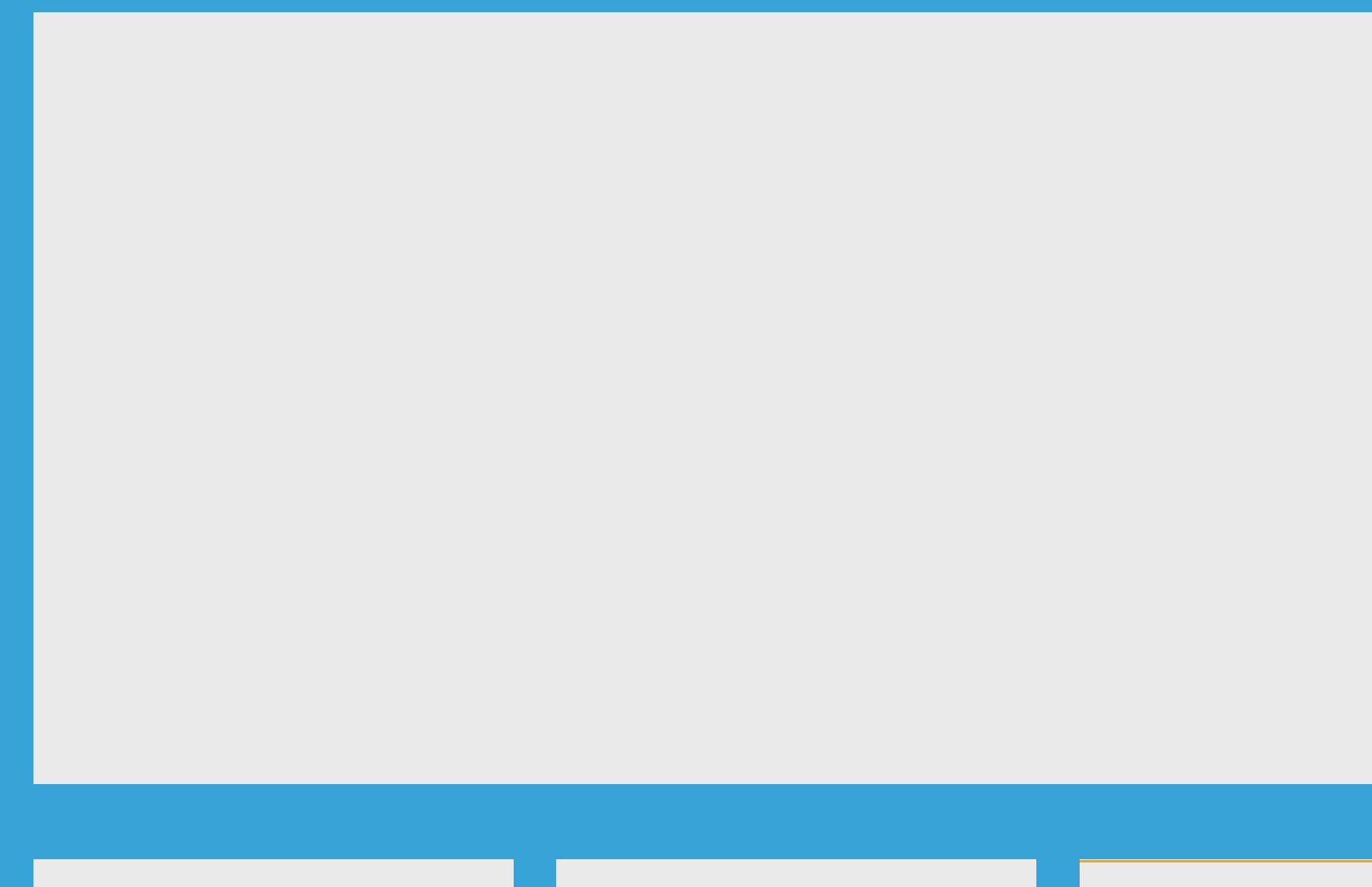
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