

# Aussie approach works: Gattung

Alan Wood

AUSTRALIA and New Zealand are being urged to set aside business culture differences and work more closely on exports, such as a joint food supply chain to feed hundreds of millions in Asia.

Former Telecom chief executive Theresa Gattung says a global challenge in the next decade would be to feed the world, and the two countries should come together to take advantage of the need for food.

Ms Gattung was part of a panel at an Australian Institute of Company Directors conference in Christchurch this week looking at the culture of the two countries and how they might better fit.

"Australia and New Zealand could jointly come together in terms of how do we jointly feed 200 million people," she said.

"It's not an accident [that the Chinese] are buying protein and productive land; how do we turn that into a competitive advantage for our two countries? I think there could be some advantages in doing that jointly, rather than separately."

Australians tended to be more direct, confident and more comfortable with the expression of wealth, and wanted to win in the world of business more than their Kiwi counterparts, Ms Gattung said.

"There's a certain toughness in Australians, a certain resilience. I think Australians are mentally tougher than Kiwis. I can't tell you



**Business cross-pollination:** Theresa Gattung says Australians are "mentally tougher" than New Zealanders and Kiwis can learn from their direct and confident manner when it comes to doing business.

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the number of times I have watched the All Blacks lose in the final few minutes or the Silver Ferns fail to get the one goal they need to beat Australia."

A worrying statistic mentioned at the conference is that the average per capita income for Kiwis has fallen by 35 per cent relative to Australians over the past 100 years.

"[Australia] is a country that actually celebrates business and its

role in wealth accumulation," Ms Gattung said.

The New Zealand Government is seeking to narrow that income gap over the next 15 years, and the conference panel said New Zealand and Australia should work together for success in the global arena.

Presenting alongside Ms Gattung, who chairs both Wool Partners International and insurer AIA Australia, were Origin Energy

chairman Kevin McCann and Fletcher Building director Gene Tilbrook.

Mr Tilbrook and Mr McCann said the size of a country and the scale of business did matter in some areas, and New Zealand and Australia could co-operate to compete better on the global stage, for example on energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Ms Gattung said in terms of

differences and similarities between the two nations, one of the most important on the business and political front was Australians' ability to make public criticisms without necessarily sparking antagonism.

For example, Victorian Premier John Brumby had recently been willing to criticise Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd over education policies, but in the New Zealand context, Wellington Mayor Kerry Prendergast would not publicly take on Prime Minister John Key in that manner.

"Whether it's in business, whether it's personally, in politics or in any forum, in the public domain Australians are more direct," Ms Gattung said.

"You might think they're more aggressive or it's a more aggressive society or there's more conflict [but] that actually isn't my experience. My experience is Australians do go at things more overtly hammer and tongs than Kiwis, but often in that very lively debate... when a policy is settled upon it actually has quite good stickability."

In contrast, in New Zealand the political or business cycle saw policy introduced then removed, Ms Gattung said.

"Look at compulsory superannuation [in Australia] and what that has done - a wall of cash that equipped Australian managed funds... and how good that has been not just for the ASX but indeed for all of Australia."