



# Muy simpatico, Mr Tabuteau

In 1988, then Trade Minister Mike Moore led New Zealand's first ministerial mission to Latin America. In the 40 years since, a succession of senior New Zealand government ministers and officials have visited the region and the presidents of Argentina, Chile and Mexico; and numerous ministers have been welcomed to New Zealand.

In the diplomatic flurry New Zealand's representatives have forged durable relationships with key influencers, and showcased New Zealand technology and products throughout Latin America.

Now all the effort is poised to pay handsome dividends, particularly for New Zealand trade through the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the Pacific Alliance and Mercosur trade agreements.

The Labour/New Zealand First Government has appointed the affable NZ First Deputy Leader, Fletcher Tabuteau, as Parliamentary Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, with a particular responsibility for strengthening New Zealand's relationships with Latin American countries.

Tabuteau noted in an interview with *BusinessPlus* that one of the criticisms of New Zealand foreign policy is that it is mainly focused on landing trade deals, when its scope is far wider and includes foreign aid, co-operation in multilateral forums and growing people-to-people links.

While acknowledging trade is one of the overarching imperatives of foreign policy, Tabuteau stressed that the uniqueness of his Under Secretary role, distinct as it is from trade responsibilities, gives him



Article writer Thomas Manning (l) discusses Latin America with NZ First Deputy Leader and Parliamentary Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, Fletcher Tabuteau.

opportunities in areas outside of trade to build confidence and trust in New Zealand.

## Busy in Latin America

Despite only six months in the Undersecretary role, Tabuteau has already visited Chile to represent New Zealand at the inauguration of Chilean president Sebastián Piñera; addressed the Pacific Alliance Observatory in Peru; and formally opened New Zealand's embassy in Bogota, Colombia.

Tabuteau says the new embassy in Colombia shows his new government is committed to deepening New Zealand's engagement with the Latin American region, and specifically is tangible proof of New Zealand's commitment to assist Colombia in humanitarian areas and in building stronger democratic institutions, now that insurgent hostilities have ceased.

The appointment of a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Deputy Secretary, Lucy Duncan, as our first resident ambassador to Colombia was deliberate, Tabuteau says, as the appointment of such a high official shows the importance our Government places on Colombia and the region as a whole.

On the trade front, the new embassy will assist New Zealand businesses investing in Colombian dairy development, water catchment

management projects, agribusiness, food processing, retail, construction, aviation and health sectors.

Negotiations are continuing for a free trade agreement (FTA) with the Pacific Alliance comprising Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru that represent GDP of \$3.85 trillion. Tabuteau says the negotiations should be successfully concluded this year.

Facilitating the participation of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Pacific Alliance trade has been a key New Zealand objective in the negotiations, as, while New Zealand's largest companies are big enough to look after themselves in new markets, SMEs individually lack the resources to go it alone. As one example, having access or otherwise to advice and assistance from in-market government entities such as New Zealand Trade and Enterprise (NZTE) can make or break SMEs as exporters.

Tabuteau acknowledges the important contributions that NZTE, TourismNZ and EducationNZ make to trade with Latin American, and says they will continue to receive the resources they need to assist exporters.

An FTA with Mercosur (a free market between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela with a combined GDP of \$4 trillion) is definitely in prospect after New Zealand Trade Minister David Parker met senior Mercosur ministers late last year and they agreed to study the concept.

The Government's intention to deepen engagement with Latin America will be especially well-served by Tabuteau's open and gregarious nature which is, as a Latin American ambassador described to this writer, "muy simpatico" (Spanish for extremely likeable).