

DESIGNWORKS ENTERPRISE IG
VISIONARY LEADER

Sir Roger Douglas

CHANGE AGENT



It is hard, say our judges, to look at this year's list of Top 200 companies and find any that do not bear traces of the legacies of Sir Roger Douglas. In their view, Douglas is the politician who, in the past two decades, has had the most pronounced visionary impact on our business community.

Credit can be laid at his door for a series of far-reaching and profound changes to the way New Zealand now does business. In a parliamentary career spanning three decades, Douglas spearheaded new thinking and a radical overhaul of our nation's economy: The deregulation of external trade barriers, the floating of the dollar, the establishment of a framework for a stable fiscal and monetary policy, internal deregulation to force more competition into the New Zealand economy and the reform of the public sector.

Douglas, say our judges, forced New Zealand to rejoin the world by opening up our economy, by leading the strategies which led to the disappearance – or huge reduction – in external barriers to trade, the removal of import licensing and exchange controls, and the start of what's been almost the elimination of tariffs.

Internally, he led the charge to deregulate many industries, providing the business world with a lot more flexibility and adaptability.

In the public sector, Douglas' reforms led to a large cut in the number of people employed and a big hike in productivity. They signalled the start of government easing its way out of commercial activities – pushing them out into the “real world” where many of them have since become listed companies.

Many of the nine state-owned enterprises created in 1987, for example, have subsequently listed. “In their earlier incarnations a huge drain on the taxpayer,” say the judges, “they are now virtually all profitable, taxpaying, dividend-paying, standalone enterprises.”

Such initiatives were not, of course, without objection. They forced many of our older protected enterprises to go through a process of huge and painful change which ultimately has enabled them to cope, survive and finally prosper in a much more deregulated world.

“Douglas didn't give the business world something that it was universally and unanimously asking for,” say the judges. “He gave them something that was in line with a vision that most people – in fact more and more people – look back on now thankfully.”

“Many people opposed his policies: whether they were farmers or in corporations. Only a few leaders of companies said that they would back him.

“What was extraordinary about him was that his vision transcended political parties. It was not the vision of his party. The fallout from that has changed the political face of New Zealand as well.”

Born in 1937 into a family steeped in the traditions of the trade union movement, Douglas entered Parliament in 1969 as the Labour Party MP for Manukau. In the third Labour government from 1972 to 1975 he was the youngest Cabinet Minister in nearly half a century, holding the broadcasting, post office, housing and customs portfolios.

It was during his time in opposition from 1975 to 1984 that he developed and fleshed out much of his thinking around economic policy and planning. Back in government from 1984 to 1988, he served as Minister of Finance, making many of the changes that still resonate with business today.

Douglas retired from Parliament in 1990 and was knighted the following year. He established Roger Douglas Associates, an international consultancy advising on economic restructuring and structural adjustment to clients around the globe, and has served on the boards of a number of leading New Zealand companies.

In 1993 together with Derek Quigley he co-founded the ACT Party as a vehicle to better promote his economic policies. Both stepped down as patrons in 2004.

He has published four books outlining his views: *There's Got to be a Better Way*, *Towards Prosperity*, *Unfinished Business* and *Completing the Circle*.

This year's Top 200 Awards judges say Roger Douglas is a unique and extraordinary man with great vision.