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MEDIA REPORT

**New Zealand Mainstream Media Framing of the
EU–NZ Free Trade Agreement and
Environment/Climate Issues in 2022**

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August 2022 Media report, Dr Serena Kelly and Brittany Baugh, *University of Canterbury, New Zealand*

The summary below highlights key points found from the media analysis conducted from leading media outlets in New Zealand from 1 January – 31 December 2022, focusing on framing of the EU–NZ FTA and Environment/Climate Issues.

Due to their importance, this final DIPLO summary discusses both the way in which the EU–NZ Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and the EU in relation to environmental protection and climate change, were addressed in New Zealand mainstream media during the period January–December 2022. The focus on these two themes, rather than Ukraine related stories, was due to the minor actor status of the EU in Ukraine related news.

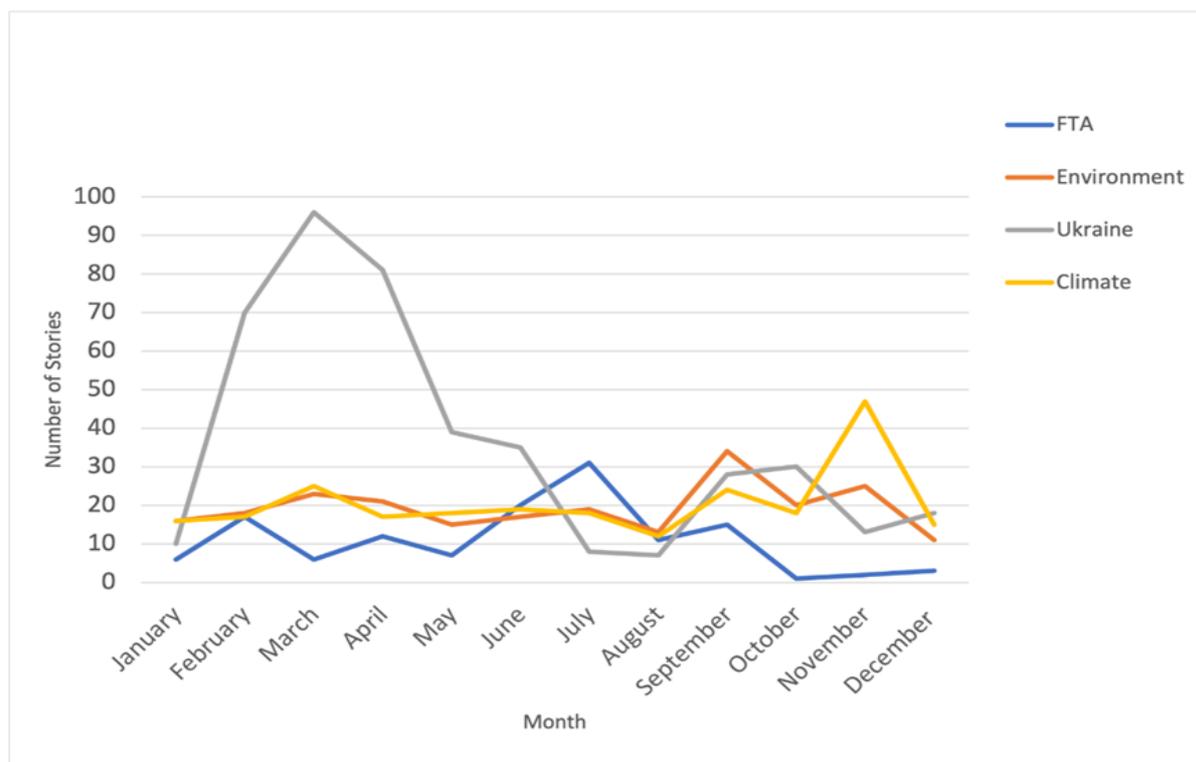
The EU–NZ FTA negotiation process began officially in 2018 and culminated on 30 June 2022. On the New Zealand side, the 1.8-billion-dollar trade talks were concluded by Trade Minister Damien O'Connor and chief negotiator Vangelis Vitalis¹. In the data presented in Figure 1, the FTA refers specifically to the EU–NZ FTA and not to other FTAs which were also prominently reported in the media (e.g. the UK–NZ FTA). The media coverage on the EU–NZ FTA comprised 113 stories in 2022, by comparison to 89 stories in 2021.

Stories which presented the European Union alongside the theme of climate change and the environment were naturally more diverse than the FTA discussions, which could account for the high volume of coverage comparatively. In 2022, a total of 246 stories including climate change were published under the EU media coverage. By comparison to the 2021 data, the number of climate related stories was similar at a total of 293. In the same period, there were 131 new items covering the EU–NZ FTA and 435 on the on-going war in Ukraine (see Figure 1). In the second half of 2022, media coverage of the Russia invasion of Ukraine declined to similar levels of coverage as the other news frames. Since not all climate-related news in New Zealand explicitly framed the EU as an Environment actor, Figure 1 includes news items that are both climate change related, as well as more broadly Environment related. For instance, the peak of climate related news in November corresponded with the Conference of Parties

¹ Coughlan, Thomas (2022) New Zealand wins \$1.8b trade deal with EU at eleventh hour, *NZ Herald*, 1 July. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/politics/new-zealand-wins-18b-trade-deal-with-eu-at-eleventh-hour/JMOMOJUUSR3RT2T27YWACDOFY4/> (accessed 30 June 2023)

(COP) 27 Summit, which resulted in New Zealand news framing the EU as an economic and political actor related to climate change funding, rather than an environmental actor, with 192 of those categorised under the EU as an Environment actor. News which related the EU to climate policies accounted for 17.4% in 2021 and 20.2% in 2022. The increase of coverage under the framing of articles is arguably positive for conceptions of the EU as an environmental actor.

Figure 1: Framing of Stories under the FTA, Environment and Ukraine



The media framing and degree of centrality is discussed below, followed by the media coverage evaluations. This is followed by a discussion of how the FTA and climate related issues have been presented in the media.

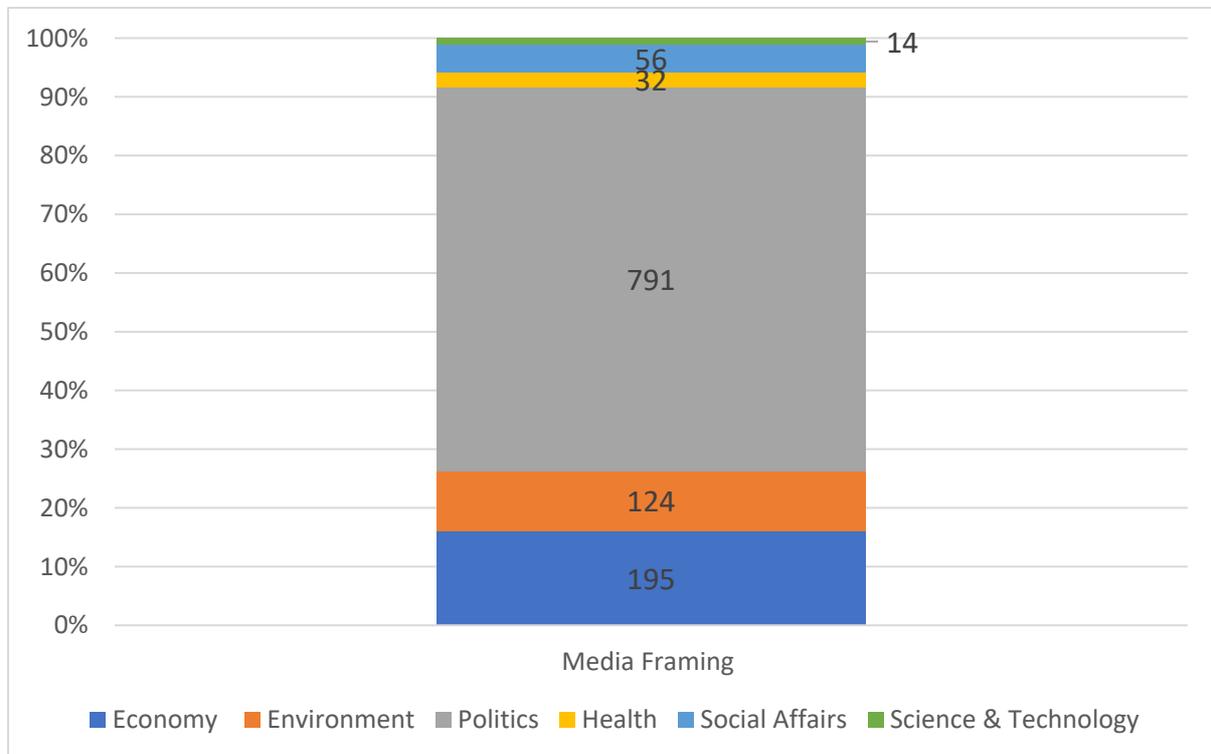
Media Framing of the FTA and Climate Related Stories

As shown in Figure 2, in 2022, stories concerned with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia dominated the first half of the year. March saw the highest publication of stories which mentioned the EU (140). Of these, 96 were on Russia’s invasion of the Ukraine (around 68.5%). By comparison, news pertaining to the EU–NZ FTA were surprisingly low, peaking at only 19 items in July, directly following the announcement that the agreement had been concluded. Perhaps the low number of items concerning the FTA in the first half of the year

could be attributed to the focus on Ukraine, but despite a drop in reporting on this in the second half of the year, the FTA still remained of low in visibility.

The number of news items presenting the EU as an environmental actor remained relatively stable until they peaked at 34 stories published in September (see Figure 1). In total, there were 246 stories which concerned the EU and climate change actions, and 123 stories framing the EU as an environmental actor between January and December. On average, these categories combined correlates to around 20 stories per month -- higher than the total number of articles pertaining to the FTA, which totalled 113. As demonstrated in Figure 2, the Environment related stories accounted for just over 10% of total stories framed -- the third highest category following Politics (65%) and Economy (16%).

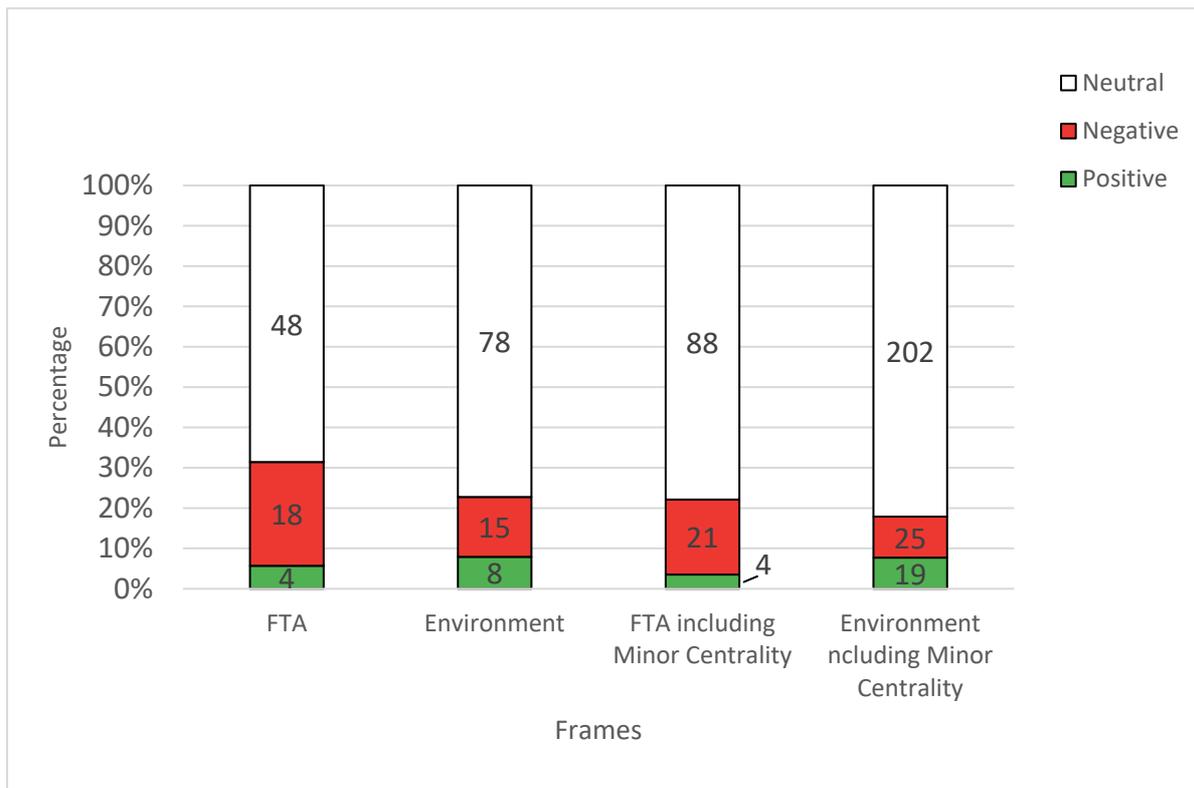
Figure 2: Media Framing of All Stories, 2022



The evaluation of the EU in media coverage across the two categories -- the FTA and climate related stories -- is shown in Figure 3. Overall, the evaluation of the EU in these news items was mostly neutral, at 78.5% of the media coverage. Figure 3 splits the evaluations to show inclusions where the EU was only a minor actor, and the other excludes it. Climate and environmental protection related stories which included the EU as a minor actor had 246 news items, over double the those that presented the EU as a major and secondary actor (101). Despite the difference between these numbers, the ratio of negative, neutral, and positive evaluations of the EU remained similar.

By comparison, evaluations of the EU in articles pertaining to the EU–NZ FTA tell a different story – 55 stories presented the EU as either a major or secondary actor, in comparison to 58 items that framed the EU as a minor actor. The number of positive evaluations of the EU in relation to FTA media coverage was considerably low at only 4 stories, despite the economic benefits expected over the next decade in the post-signature stage. Comparatively, major and secondary degrees of centrality had a high percentage of negative evaluations at 24% of the stories in comparison to 17.6%. In terms of the degree of centrality, 55 of the stories were either secondary or major, with 58 stories framing the EU as a minor actor.

Figure 3: Evaluation of the EU in Media – FTA and Climate (N=530)



Discussion: The EU-NZ FTA

The FTA was in the ratification phase by the end of 2022, following the final negotiations in late June of that year, after four years of negotiations. The deal is set to remove tariffs on 91% of NZ exports upon signature,² and support the EU's status as New Zealand's third largest trading partner. The FTA was predicted to feature prominently in the 2022 news coverage in New Zealand due to the final stages of the negotiation rounds. In 2022, only 113 of the total

² RNZ (2022) EU boss says trade deal with NZ a gold standard for future agreements, 23 September. <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/political/475335/eu-boss-says-trade-deal-with-nz-a-gold-standard-for-future-agreements> (accessed 30 June 2023)

1213 news coverage gathered pertained to the FTA. Of these 113 stories, the majority framed the EU as an Economic actor (77). This was followed by stories framing the EU as a Political actor (29) and an Environment actor (7). The majority of these news items evaluated the EU neutrally (see Figure 3). Considering that the FTA negotiations were finalised on 30 June, it was surprising to see a lack of visibility of stories over the 12-month period (an average of only around 9 per month). Stories framed under the FTA peaked in July – with 31 reports published, but continued to decline, with low visibility in November and December. The drop off in stories is interesting as the FTA is set to bring in substantial returns post-ratification, as well as changing the trade landscape domestically through the introduction of the Geographical Indicators system³.

The lack of stories published on the FTA could be attributed to some of the negative reactions seen from those in industries affected. For example, a story published by the *New Zealand Herald* in July included comments from the Meat and Dairy industries' associations condemning the FTA as “not commercially meaningful” and “extremely disappointing”⁴. Chief executive of Beef + Lamb New Zealand Sam McIvor also expressed disappointment over the lack of commercial access for those in the red meat industry.⁵ Despite the backlash from some the meat and dairy industry, the deal is set to eventually lead to 97% of New Zealand's exports to the EU being duty free.

Discussion: Environment and Climate Related News

Environment and climate related news is important due to the EU's focus on climate change policies such as the European Green Deal and Fit for 55. Articles framed as Environment and/or mentioning climate change in relation to the EU in 2022 are discussed below. 80 out of the 246 stories framed the EU as a major actor, or 32.5% or articles that mentioned the EU in environmental matters. This is a positive finding for the EU, which views itself as a climate leader with a substantial policy focus on climate change. Including the news that framed the EU as a secondary actor, this amounts to a combined total of around 41%. The majority of the 29 stories focused on the oil and gas ramifications of the invasion for Ukraine and for wider Europe.

³ Beehive Releases (2022) “NZ–EU FTA – Key Outcomes” New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade. <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-07/NZ%20EU%20FTA%20-%20Explainer.pdf> (accessed 30 June 2023)

⁴ New Zealand Herald (2022) Letters: Well done, health system, free trade agreement, concrete jungle, and Trump's legacy, 4 July. <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/letters-well-done-health-system-free-trade-agreement-concrete-jungle-and-trumps-legacy/SRSPXBY4C2YVOCK3YUYWGIKTNY/> (accessed 30 June 2023)

⁵ Beef + Lamb New Zealand (2022) EU–NZ Free Trade Agreement outcome disappointing for New Zealand's red meat sector, 1 July <https://www.mia.co.nz/news-and-views/eu-nz-free-trade-agreement-outcome-disappointing-for-new-zealands-red-meat-sector/> (accessed 30 June 2023)

A lack of reporting on the Pacific's nexus with climate change and the environment was surprising. Especially with the publication of the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* in September, after approval at the 51st Pacific Islands Forum in July. As New Zealand was part of the *Partnership for the Blue Pacific Initiative*,⁶ it was expected that news articles pertaining to this would be visible. This is especially stark due to the high involvement of EU Member State Germany and the attendance of France, as well as the EU in an observer role at the Pacific Islands Forum. Only one story mentioned the Pacific Islands Forum, published on 12 July 2022, and focused on the withdrawal of some PIF members such as Kiribati.⁷ The lack of reporting on the summit was considered significant due to the close bilateral relationship between New Zealand and the Pacific, as well as the EU's role and cooperation with NZ and the PIF. Out of the 264 climate related stories, only 12 mentioned the Pacific, but these did not focus directly on the climate crisis currently facing the islands. The most recurrent climate related issue was energy, specifically gas, at 62 stories. 44 items contained mention of the climate related issue of energy, as a result of the Russian invasion of the Ukraine. The high media coverage can be attributed to the EU's efforts to minimise reliance on Russian gas and Gazprom due to production halts as a consequence of the invasion.⁸ This coverage was high in New Zealand due to the impact it had on local gas prices. ASB Chief Economist Nick Tuffley noted that a decrease in oil prices was unlikely in New Zealand as the EU continued to detach itself from Russian gas imports.⁹

Conclusion and discussion

In our consideration of the media landscape in New Zealand in 2022, pertaining to the EU–NZ Free Trade Agreement and environmental/climate-related news, several noteworthy patterns emerged. The disparity in coverage between the two themes potentially reveals interesting insights into the priorities and depth of media attention towards the EU in New Zealand.

The EU–NZ FTA, while a significant milestone in trade relations, garnered inconsistent attention throughout the year. The peak in July, immediately following the conclusion of negotiations, highlights the transient nature of public interest in trade-related news. However,

⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade “Join Statement on Partners in the Blue Pacific Foreign Ministers Meeting” <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/media-and-resources/joint-statement-on-partners-in-the-blue-pacific-foreign-ministers-meeting/>.

⁷ RNZ “More Pacific Islands Forum Summit leaders pull out” (12th July 2022) <https://www.rnz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/470765/more-pacific-islands-forum-summit-leaders-pull-out>.

⁸ RNZ “Fears over emissions goals as EU ministers seek deals on climate laws” (27th June 2022) <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/world/469866/fears-over-emissions-goals-as-eu-ministers-seek-deals-on-climate-laws>.

⁹ The Dominion Post “Petrol prices hit record for unleaded and super” (14th May 2022) <https://www.pressreader.com/new-zealand/the-press/20220514/283910231501036>.

the subsequent decline in coverage suggests a limited sustained curiosity, potentially indicating a disconnect between public perception and interest and the FTA's potential long-term impact.

The diminished coverage both pre- and post-negotiations for the FTA could be attributed to industry apprehensions, evidenced in critiques from sectors such as meat and dairy. This disparity between industry perceptions and potential economic benefits raises questions about the depth of understanding and interest in trade matters among the public regarding the FTA's implications.

Conversely, the EU's portrayal in climate and environmental narratives showcased a more sustained presence. The EU emerged as a prominent figure in climate discussions, perhaps a testament to its perceived leadership in environmental initiatives. Yet, the lack of emphasis on the EU's role in the Pacific's climate challenges unveils a gap in the coverage, potentially hindering a comprehensive understanding of the EU's global impact. The limited focus on the Pacific's climate challenges, despite the EU's involvement in the region, could underscore the need for a broader scope in environmental reporting – it plays an important role in bridging gaps in understanding and highlighting connections and cooperation.