

Ray Watters, Distinguished New Zealand Geography Award, 2009

Ray Watters has made a lasting and immense contribution to Geography in New Zealand, in research, teaching and communication of significant development issues relating to the Pacific, Latin America as well as New Zealand.¹

After attaining a BA and MA (Hons.) from Auckland and Victoria Colleges, in 1956 Ray completed a PhD from the London School of Economics for a thesis on the historical Geography of Samoa. He taught at Victoria University of Wellington for 38 years, giving courses on Latin America, Historical Geography, the Pacific, and Chinese Peasantry. His teaching style will be remembered as forceful, sometimes idiosyncratic but always passionate, especially where issues of poverty, development and justice were concerned.

As a researcher Ray was one of the pioneers (along with Buchanan, Franklin and McGee) of the so called “Victoria School of Geography” with its (then new) emphasis on development, culture, colonialism and political economy. This perspective was best articulated in the pages of the Victoria Journal *Pacific Viewpoint* (now *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*), which he edited for about 20 years.

Ray is a renowned field-based researcher. He led research projects on the Solomon Islands, resulting in three PhDs; The Gilbert and Ellice Islands project, yielding 6 major reports and five PhDs; The Ministry of Foreign Affairs project on Small Island States (with Geoff Bertram), out of which came the famous MIRAB model. The original academic paper on the MIRAB model has had more citations than any other single paper in the history of *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* and those central ideas still being vigorously debated today. In other significant projects Ray worked in Peru, Venezuela, Fiji, and China.

This immense field work achievement was translated into eight books, 42 scholarly papers, over 10 project reports and 5 monographs. Ray’s latest book, *Journeys Towards Progress: Essays of a Geographer on Development and Change in Oceania* (VUW Press 2009) is testimony to his commitment to scholarship.

It is the longevity of his research as well as the originality and volume of Ray Watter’s contribution to Geography that makes him a worthy recipient of the prestigious Distinguished NZ Geographer Medal.

Philip Morrison and Michael Crozier

¹ A full account of Ray Watter’s research may be found in Morrison, P.S. and J. McKinnon 1995 “The challenge of social change: the work of Ray Watters” *Pacific Viewpoint* 36(1): 39-56