

Thursday 3 September

6:00pm	Drinks and nibbles in the Kobe Restaurant
7:00pm	Dinner in the Clubhouse

Friday 4 September

From 6:30am	Breakfast in the Clubhouse
8:30am – 10:00am	Session 1: Global geopolitics Millhouse Conference Centre
10:00am	Morning tea
10:30am – 12:00pm	Session 2: China and the Middle East Millhouse Conference Centre
12:15pm – 1:45pm	Lunch in the Clubhouse
2:00pm – 3:30pm	Session 3: The IT landscape Millhouse Conference Centre
3:30pm	Afternoon tea
4:00pm – 5:30pm	Session 4: Fusion energy Millhouse Conference Centre
6:30pm	Depart for dinner from Millbrook Reception
7:00pm	Dinner at Kinross Winery

Saturday 5 September

From 6:30am	Breakfast in the Clubhouse
8:30am – 10:00am	Session 5: Drones Millhouse Conference Centre
10.00am	Morning tea
10:30am – 12:00pm	Session 6: Fonterra – learnings Millhouse Conference Centre
12:15pm – 1:30pm	Lunch in the Clubhouse

If circumstances require, some details of this programme may change.

For more information contact our conference coordinator:
Tracey.Gabbitas@thehugogroup.com | ph. 027 443 8434

Drones

Drones have evolved from futuristic concepts and hobbyist toys into essential, intelligent, transformative tools with capability across air, land, sea and subsurface domains. The next decade is expected to see drone capability expand exponentially including hyper-autonomy and swarm technology, and urban air mobility.

The past decade of incremental innovation has transformed uncrewed aircraft into platforms that can reshape modern warfare, agritech and even search and rescue. What’s next?

Dr Andrew Shelley (by video)

Andrew holds a PhD in the law and economics of drones and counter-drone systems, a BBS in Information Systems, a Master of Arts with First Class honours in Economics and a Master of International Security with Distinction in Counter-Terrorism.

He is the managing director of Fenix UAS and Fenix Flight Training. The former is a specialist consultancy and training provider made up of professionals with backgrounds in commercial aviation, the military and regulation. Andrew works across these and related fields providing expert advice, training and commentary.

Saturday 8:30am – 10:00am | Session 5

Fonterra – learnings on resetting strategy

Fonterra has executed a major strategic reset focused on becoming a simplified, farmer-first cooperative. Back to the future you might say. The strategy centred on divesting its global consumer businesses and refocusing heavily on its core, high-performing ingredients and foodservice engines. With the benefit of hindsight there are rich learnings from the evolving and changing strategic direction of one of New Zealand’s most significant companies.

Graham Stuart

Graham is a director and board chair with over 30 years of experience spanning listed companies, co-operatives, government entities, and private organisations across New Zealand, Australia, and Europe. His executive career included: CEO of Sealord Group, CFO and Director of Strategy & Growth at Fonterra, and Managing Director roles at Lion Nathan. He currently chairs the board of Northwest Healthcare Property Management (manager of the NZX-listed Vital Healthcare REIT, with over \$3 billion in funds under management) and his governance experience spans a wide range of sectors.

He holds a Master of Science in Management from MIT, a Bachelor of Commerce (First Class Honours) from the University of Otago, and he is Fellow of Chartered Accountants Australia and New Zealand.

Saturday 10:30am – 12:00pm | Session 6

CEO Retreat

3 – 5 September 2026
Millbrook Resort

Now what?

Saturday 12:15pm | Lunch



Global geopolitics

Current geopolitical dynamics are reshaping international relationships, influencing economic stability and trade, and impacting security and conflict dynamics. Understanding these major geopolitical trends and why they matter informs how to navigate this uncertainty and complexity.

Dr Merriden Varrall

Merriden is a geopolitical analyst and strategist. She is the Founder and CEO of vantage geopol, providing in-depth-analysis and strategic insights. Merriden also provides training on geopolitics and business including with University of Sydney’s Executive Plus programme and the Macquarie University’s Global Leadership programme and she has presented at events and dialogues around the world.

Merriden previously led the Geopolitics Hub at KPMG Australia, where she helped business understand and navigate the complex geopolitical environment. A former UN diplomat based in China, Merriden was the Director of the Lowy Institute’s East Asia Programme.

Friday 8:30am – 10:00am | Session 1

China – the gift of the Middle East conflict

China is strategically positioning and otherwise taking advantage of opportunities arising from the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East. It has increased its diplomatic involvement, positioning itself as a neutral party that can facilitate dialogue between conflicting nations. China can leverage this position by investing in reconstruction efforts, including infrastructure and energy. The Middle East is a key region for China’s Belt and Road Initiative, aimed at enhancing trade routes. How might China play the hand of cards the conflict has given it?

Associate Professor Nicholas Khoo

Nick has a PhD and an MPhil in Political Science from Columbia University, a Master of Arts in International Relations from Johns Hopkins University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics from the University of California. He teaches and conducts research in the Politics Programme at the University of Otago and is a Principal Research Fellow at the Institute for Indo-Pacific Affairs in Christchurch.

Nick specialises in Chinese foreign policy, Asian security, great power politics, international relations theory, and Cold War history. His published books include: China’s Foreign Policy Since 1978; Return to Power (2020) and Collateral Damage; Sino-Soviet Rivalry; and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance (2011).

Friday 10:30am – 12:00pm | Session 2

AI and geopolitics are reshaping the IT landscape

As AI accelerates demand for digital infrastructure, organisations are becoming increasingly dependent on global platforms, networks and supply chains. The infrastructure that powers modern organisations is becoming more complex, more interconnected and more strategically important. At the same time, geopolitical tensions, cyber threats and vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure are exposing new risks to business continuity and economic resilience. From data centres and connectivity to data control and recoverability, leaders face important questions about where critical services reside, who controls them and what happens when disruption occurs.

How resilient is the digital infrastructure that underpins our economy, and are we prepared for the risks ahead? What should organisations be doing now to reduce dependency, strengthen resilience and prepare for an increasingly uncertain operating environment?

Greg Davidson

Greg was appointed to the role of Datacom Group CEO in 2018, following nine years as CEO of Datacom’s New Zealand business. Datacom is New Zealand’s largest tech company with reach across New Zealand, Australia and the Asia region.

Friday 2:00pm – 3:30pm | Session 3

Fusion energy technology

The successful development of fusion could be a game-changer for our energy security, the economy and environment. Fusion energy is an emerging technology that seeks to replicate the process powering the sun by fusing light atoms into a larger atom, releasing a vast amount of carbon-free energy.

OpenStar Technologies, led by Dr Ratu Mataira, is developing a different design approach to its competitors to achieve this, that offers advantages in stability, cost and capability. OpenStar is successfully using superconductor magnet technology to float its half-tonne levitated dipole inside its vacuum chamber named Junior and confine a cloud of super hot plasma: a feat that had been described as impossible. It is a major milestone toward producing nuclear fusion by smashing together hydrogen nuclei at millions of degrees Celsius.

Dr Ratu Mataira

Founder and Chief Executive Office of Openstar Technologies, Ratu is the co-inventor of the key enabling technologies. He founded OpenStar with a singular vision: that levitated dipole will define the future of fusion. With a rare blend of physics and economics he seeks to builds companies that win on both sides of the equation.

Friday 4:00pm – 5:30pm | Session 4

Professor Kjesten Wiig
Director and Chief Executive Malaghan Institute

The value of independent medical research

The Malaghan Institute is focussed on harnessing the power of the immune system in diagnosing and treating cancers, allergic and inflammatory disease, and infectious disease. Achieving significant breakthroughs and conducting ground breaking research the Institute is a world-class independent biomedical research charity owned by New Zealanders for the benefit of all.

Kjesten is also the Director of New Zealand’s RNA Technology Development Platform. She is an Adjunct Professor at Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington’s Ferrier Research Institute. A neuroscientist by training Kjesten’s career has spanned leadership roles in academia, industry and government.

Thursday 7:00pm | Dinner

Vangelis Vitalis
Deputy Secretary, Trade and Economic

The impact of geopolitical instability

Vangelis is New Zealand’s Chief Negotiator for the New Zealand-India Free Trade Agreement. He has also led negotiations for the NZ EU FTA, CPTPP, the ASEA-Australia-New Zealand FTA, the Malaysia-New Zealand FTA and was a member of the negotiating teams for both the NZ-China FTA and the P4 Agreement.

A senior diplomat and internationally respected negotiator, he well placed to speak on the impacts of the move away from rules based international trade and the increasingly volatile geopolitical situation.

Friday 12:15pm | Lunch

Honourable Judith Collins KC

What’s on my mind

A prominent politician and lawyer, Judith concluded her 24- year parliamentary career in May 2026. Elected in 2002 as the MP for Clevedon, she became the MP for Papakura in 2008, holding the seat until her retirement this year. During her career she held 18 different Ministerial portfolios, most recently serving as Attorney General and Minister of Defence. She served as Leader of the Opposition and Leader of the National Party from July 2020 to November 2021.

Friday 7:00pm | Dinner