

During her tenure, she wrote numerous reports and submissions on a variety of environmental issues, including flood mitigations following Cyclone Bola, controlling marine oil pollution, the environmental management of coal mining, as well as rabbit and possum management.

In 'retirement', Helen became a member of the board of the Environmental Risk Management Authority for five years. She spent 13 years as a member of the Cawthron Institute Trust Board. She was also President of the Wellington branches of the Royal Society and the Federation of Graduate Women, President of the Wellington Combined Probus Club, and Clerk of the Wellington Quaker Meeting.

Helen wrote a biography of her father, *A Quaker Scientist*, published in 2005. She also published *Flowers of the South Pacific* in 1969, initially painting all of the flowers herself.

## HONOURS AND AWARDS

In 1990, Helen was awarded the New Zealand 1990 Commemoration Medal. In 1993, she was one of the first two people to be awarded honorary doctorates by the newly independent Lincoln University. Later that year, she was appointed a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in the 1993 Queen's Birthday Honours.



# HELEN HANNAH RIGG HUGHES

29 AUGUST 1929 – 23 NOVEMBER 2024

RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE  
MONCRIEFF STREET, WELLINGTON  
WEDNESDAY, 4 DECEMBER 2024

The Thanksgiving Service for the life of Helen Hughes is held in the manner of Friends.

The meeting is held in silence.  
Testimony to the life of Helen may be given  
by anyone who feels moved to speak.

The meeting is concluded with the shaking of hands.

Following the service, you are warmly invited to join Helen's family in the Tararua Tramping Club building for refreshments and signing the pages of the Memorial Book located there.



Helen Hannah Rigg Hughes served as New Zealand's first Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment from 1987 to 1996.

EARLY LIFE AND FAMILY

Helen was born in Nelson and was the daughter of agricultural scientist Sir Theodore Rigg (British), who became director of the Cawthron Institute in 1933, and Esther Rigg (née White, American). She grew up in the suburb of Tāhunanui, and was educated at Nelson College for Girls, where she discovered her passion for botany. Helen went on to complete a Master of Science degree with first-class honours in botany at Canterbury University College, graduating in 1952. Her thesis was titled *An ecological survey of the pakihī lands of the Westport District*. She was awarded a Fulbright grant to travel to the United States, and studied at Vassar College from 1952 to 1954, earning a second Master of Science degree.

Helen married David Crowther Hughes in 1955, and the couple had four children, Sally Ann, Rachel, Linda and David.

CAREER

After returning to New Zealand from the United States, Helen taught at secondary schools in Christchurch and later Wellington. In 2017, she recalled that jobs for women in science at the time were hard to come by and there was "a bit of an old boys network operating".

Helen's first science job was in Fiji, working for the Fiji Department of Agriculture looking at water weed issues. On returning to New Zealand, she worked for DSIR (Department of Scientific and Industrial Research) developing Environmental Impact reports. She moved on to become Assistant Commissioner for the Commission for the Environment, before becoming the first Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment in 1987.