

Aquaculture and Opotiki – the future's looking bright!



The forward looking vision of Whakatohea Iwi and Opotiki people was celebrated and acknowledged at a recent public event co-hosted by Whakatohea Maori Trust Board and Opotiki District Council. Seventy-five people packed the Council Chambers to hear about progress towards a viable local aquaculture industry for the District, which has for years been in population decline due to loss of industry.

Early results very promising, business plan estimates indicate hundreds of local jobs

The meeting heard that determined leadership and investment by the Iwi and their business partners in securing offshore water space, and investigating the commercial viability of species is revealing positive news. Trials to grow mussels at the site which is eight kilometres off the Opotiki Coast are producing high levels of local spat (aka baby shellfish) and great quality unique mussels – and they are growing at a rate more than double what was anticipated. This is great news, and bodes well as an early result. The meeting was informed that business plans based on available data estimate the need for 228 positions to operate the core business within five years of starting, rising to 547 by year twelve. These estimates do not include all of the additional local jobs which will be necessary to support the industry.

Joint Interdependent Projects, and the need for regional and central government investment alongside that of local people

Realising the economic potential of the marine farm locally fully depends on the Opotiki Harbour Development. The local community is well aware of this, and they have strongly supported the resourcing and planning for it. Joint planning for the twin projects, the Marine Farm and Harbour Development, are happening in tandem, and people at the meeting heard about the draft business cases being prepared in readiness for Ten Year Planning by both the Regional and District Councils. These Plans have to be in place by June 30 2012, and Opotiki is hopeful of a \$15million commitment to the harbour development by Bay of Plenty Regional Council. A similar amount is also needed from central government. Public investment in the Harbour Development infrastructure will be essential.

Opotiki and NZ's opportunity to help feed the world, sustainably, and earn well from it

This exciting news about progress, presented by Ian Craig (Aquaculture Project Leader, Whakatohea Maori Trust Board) and Aileen Lawrie (Chief Executive Opotiki District Council) was set against a solid

backdrop of information about New Zealand’s potential place in helping meet rapidly growing world demand for seafood, through aquaculture. Graeme Coates, one of New Zealand’s leading aquaculture experts, and Chair of the Bay of Plenty Aquaculture Strategy Group, spoke about the leading edge open ocean work which Opotiki is involved in, and the high level of interest both nationally and internationally. “New Zealand’s strict quality assurance standards are a huge attraction to markets internationally, and provide a huge incentive for us to persist with environmentally sustainable aquaculture practices.” Graeme also spoke about the enormous potential value-add to the local and regional economy if Marine Farm product is then processed into high value exports such as nutraceuticals.

Whakatohea Maori Trust Board General Manager, Dickie Farrar commented that “The stars are aligning. We have fantastic collaboration among the partners locally and regionally. It needs all of us working together to achieve this vision which will bring jobs and wealth to our people and to the Opotiki community”.

Full copies of presentations made at the meeting are available at www.opotikiharbour.co.nz

