

Media release – Monday 20 June 2022

Wetland documentary draws in a crowd

A documentary celebrating the restoration of wetlands by communities around New Zealand attracted a crowd of local residents to the Amberley School Hall last Thursday night. Over 40 people ventured out to see the screening of *Rohe Kōreporepo: The Swamp The Sacred Place*, made by filmmaker Kathleen Gallagher who also attended the event.

The screening was organised by the Hurunui Biodiversity Trust. Trust Chair Dave Nicholls says the turnout is exciting for the future of biodiversity in Hurunui.

“We organised the screening to help people understand the importance and value of wetlands for Hurunui’s biodiversity”, says Nicholls. “Wetlands are the most diverse ecosystems on earth and support 40% of the world’s species, including many endangered native species. Despite being just 5% of the earth’s land surface healthy wetlands hold 20% or more of the world’s carbon so they’re our best defence for combating the climate crisis with its droughts and floods.”

The documentary took a tour around New Zealand visiting 60 communities of local iwi, farmers, fishers, scientists, artists, healers, teachers and students as they protect, restore and expand our remaining wetlands and explain their vital importance. In the last 150 years over 90% of New Zealand’s swamps and wetlands have been drained to enable productive land uses, despite recognition of water in the Treaty of Waitangi as a taonga or treasure. Swamps and wetlands are wāhi tapu sacred places and mahinga kai food gathering places, in addition to providing essential habitats for native biodiversity. Restoring the rohe kōreporepo (swamps and wetlands) of Hurunui District will support native biodiversity and enhance cultural wellbeing.

After the screening an open discussion was started by invited speaker Greg Byrnes, director of the Tūhaitara Coastal Park Trust (area from the Waimakariri River mouth to Waikuku Beach). Other speakers included Greg Bennett and Kate Steel who discussed other wetland projects in North Canterbury. Steel described wetlands as the ‘kidneys of the earth’, removing the nutrients and sediment that otherwise pollute and degrade the water. In response to a question about the cost of losing productive farmland to restored wetlands, filmmaker Kathleen Gallagher spoke about how some dairy farmers in Raglan, Waikato have retired 25% of their farms bordering waterways. Despite the drop in herd size the farmers have increased production, proving it can be economic to restore wetlands. The discussion was a lively event, according to Dave Nicholls, with many people wanting to know more about wetlands projects.

“People see value in wetlands and biodiversity and want to be part of the solution to our many environmental challenges”, says Nicholls. “The task for the Biodiversity Trust is to harness that enthusiasm to restore, enhance and protect biodiversity including wetlands across the district. Achieving successful biodiversity outcomes requires motivating and supporting landowners, guardians and volunteers. We hope this documentary has provided the necessary motivation.”

While there are no confirmed dates for future screenings of the film elsewhere in the district, the enthusiasm shown by the audience in Amberley makes it a real possibility says Dave Nicholls.

“The film clearly struck a chord for many people so we’d like to give residents elsewhere in the district the opportunity to get inspired by what’s being achieved with wetland restoration”, says Nicholls. “We’re determined to build on the enthusiasm, which is why our next event is a community meeting on Wednesday 29 June where we’ll be asking people for input into a new project to create a resource to help landowners and community groups better manage and protect biodiversity across Hurunui.”

The Community Meeting, entitled *Hurunui Biodiversity Action*, is being held on Wednesday 29 June at 7pm in the Waipara Memorial Hall. All are welcome to attend.

For more information contact:

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