

**For release under embargo until 6am Thursday 27 August**

**Maximising opportunities for Māori through Aquaculture**

Waiariki iwi have come together in an effort to maximise the potential of their fisheries assets by exploring value-add aquaculture opportunities that will also help ensure a sustainable, resilient and world-class Bay of Plenty Māori aquaculture industry.

A report identifying potential aquaculture opportunities for the region was officially released at the Smart Māori Aquaculture Hui in Rotorua today <<sub: **Thursday 27 August**>>.

Commissioned by Ngā Iwi I te Rohe o Te Waiariki, the Opportunities Assessment Report is just the first phase in a three-stage strategy to identify potential key aquacultural pathways for Bay of Plenty iwi.

The report was supported by the Ministry for Primary Industries and Te Ohu Kaimoana, and includes input from key representatives from the Universities of Waikato and Auckland, Plant & Food Research, the Cawthron Institute and NIWA.

Key areas of opportunity identified in the report include hatchery development, the development of new technologies such as remote monitoring and artificial intelligence, co-operative models, workforce development and developing a unique brand story for Bay of Plenty aquaculture that leverages traceability and Māori identity.

BOP Iwi Aquaculture Project Leader and Te Arawa Fisheries CEO, Chris Insley, says the development of the report is “not an exercise in business as usual”.

“This kaupapa critically investigates alternative ways to supply kaimoana for whānau and valuable world food markets. We are focused on sustainable and resilient aquaculture opportunities – how we can do this together, care for our moana and importantly, support our whānau.

“The reality is that we need to plan ahead for a future decline in wild fisheries, so that we can meet the increasing global demand for protein and maximise the opportunities that will bring.

“Through an iwi-led, collaborative approach the partnership will develop a roadmap towards a thriving, sustainable iwi aquaculture industry that contributes to Māori development and wellbeing, and benefits New Zealand as a whole.”

Mr Insley says so much more could and should be done to take what iwi organisations are already doing and expanding those efforts to create more jobs for whānau and wider communities.

“For example, overseas hatchery production of key species is a fundamental aspect of successful modern aquaculture. There are opportunities for iwi to become involved in an existing initiative to establish a mussel spat hatchery in the Eastern Bay of Plenty, while we can also explore possibilities utilising our geothermal resources inland.

“We’re looking at leveraging new technologies within the sector, including high-value processing technology, remote monitoring and artificial intelligence, which offers a multitude of opportunities at every level of the aquaculture sector, from fishing vessels, through to processing, retail and exports.”

The kaupapa takes on a holistic approach, guided by Te Ao Māori.

“It recognises the importance of a long-term view, interconnectedness and a whole systems approach. It is imperative that social, cultural, environmental and economic aspects are all balanced and considered together, empowering kaitiakitanga,” says Mr Insley.

“We have a powerful opportunity to grow Māori careers in aquaculture. The University of Waikato and Toi Ohomai have expressed long-term intent to support learning and career pathways for communities across the Bay of Plenty region – opportunities that have never been more important than they are in the current COVID environment.”

**ENDS**

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