

Tai Poutini Polytechnic Media Release

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Conservation Hub opening builds on West Coast partnerships

The Westport-based Conservation Training and Employment Hub was officially opened today by Buller District Mayor Jamie Cleine and Tai Poutini Polytechnic Board Chair Rebecca Keoghan.

Buller District Council and Tai Poutini Polytechnic are partnering to establish the Hub, which will improve equity and education access across the West Coast.

Today's opening signals the beginning of a community driven initiative where several progressive organisations are coming together to create the vision of how conservation training and employment can improve equity and inclusion for the Buller District, the West Coast and nationally.

Opening the Hub is the first stage in what will become a multi-layered approach to the support of a green economy in the Buller District and the wider West Coast.

Mrs Keoghan said "The Hub brings together West Coast employers, learners, mana whenua, local government and the vocational training sector to address local environmental needs and support the regional economy."

Buller District Mayor Jamie Cleine says today's opening of the Hub is a critical first step in realising our region's mission to strengthen and diversify our economy, recognising niche opportunities around conservation and biodiversity. Our community is behind our efforts to address climate change and sustainability and the Hub support the intent of our council's strategic direction.

"This is an exciting day for the local community, where a partnership between regional leaders, education providers and support agencies is established to create real, tangible benefits for people."

Tai Poutini Polytechnic Chief Executive Alex Cabrera says this is the beginning of the process and work will be carried out with mana whenua, conservation employers and community to develop and shape the hub.

"The Hub has been made possible through the reform of vocational education and the resources and partnerships Tai Poutini Polytechnic can leverage to create benefits for the West Coast. There are two key objectives to the work – providing benefits to the West Coast communities and having tangible examples of how the Te Pūkenga network can support remote regions to pursue innovative approaches to learning that work for their communities.

"It is a fantastic example of how Tai Poutini Polytechnic and Te Pūkenga are working with the local community to deliver on the various intents of the reform, including the removal of barriers for learners, creation of pathways to employment and support of mana whenua aspirations."

Minister Damien O'Connor said "The West Coast is surrounded by eight of New Zealand's 13 national parks, what better place to bring people who wish to have a career looking after our precious and unique biodiversity."

Kotahitanga mō te Taiao Alliance Co-chair Martin Rodd says the Hub is aligned with Te Whanaketanga Te Tai Poutini West Coast Economic Development Strategy 2050, recognising that the environment on the West Coast is an asset not only to the region but also to New Zealand.

Mr Rodd in mentioning the opening said "This is so relevant to the challenges we face not only for New Zealand but the globe. It's quite a unique way of operating where organisations leave everything at the door and focus on the vision and mission ahead of us.

"The focus around training to enable the capacity building to deliver what is needed, but it provides the opportunity to work in a special place in New Zealand and show case how some of the tools can work. Building expertise around resilience right within the Buller is a remarkable investment in the future.

"The Environmental Natural Resource area of the University of Vermont are keen to explore how they can share and work with us including possible exchanges."

Te Pūkenga Chair of Council Murray Strong says the Hub is an example of how the transformation of vocational education in New Zealand is creating collaboration opportunities and reducing barriers to education. We are encouraged by the work that has gone on across the West Coast to pursue an education opportunity that meets the needs of local employers and supports regional economic development.

"The rest of New Zealand will be looking to the Westport Conservation Training and Employment Hub as an example of what a new, collaborative approach to vocational training can offer communities."

Background

The Hub is opening today in Westport in recognition of the district's focus on conservation and biodiversity, the local challenges of climate change and a specific need in the area. However, learning opportunities will benefit the entire West Coast and further afield, with virtual and supported initiatives to be part of the detail.

The Hub is a perfect example of the benefits of the recent reform of vocational education in New Zealand as Tai Poutini Polytechnic can leverage off the power of the Te Pūkenga network to make the initiative happen on the West Coast.

The Buller District has been selected for this initiative for several reasons:

- A progressive Council committed to partnering for the betterment of the community.

- A long-term district plan that aligns strategically to the overall goals of TPP and Te Pūkenga in the support of equity and education access.
- Parts of the region has the highest deprivation score of any region in New Zealand and a system that supports people into learning and earning would lift people out of poverty.
- Westport is currently experiencing unprecedented challenges related to climate change.
- The Buller District has an economy driven by industries that are declining such as extractives and mining.
- The Department of Conservation and other conservation and biodiversity employers has expressed interest in developing training packages to support upskilling of existing staff, training new staff to support all regions.
- The Buller District has specific opportunities for education and training in resource management.
- There are several initiatives already underway for pest control and jobs for nature.
- The community is active in pockets and could be galvanised to create greater social impact.

The Hub will become a blueprint for the national vocational training sector, offering a positive example of how education providers and agencies can establish collaborative hubs specific to the training and employment needs of their regions.

This is just the first step in realising the potential of a Buller-based green economy. It will be rolled-out in conjunction with a flagship restoration project to engage learners, as well as potential sponsors and funders, and demonstrate conservation and restoration mahi in tangible ways.

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