

Aquaculture and harbour development benefits highlighted

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Increased employment, increased household income and reduced welfare dependency are all on the cards for Ōpōtiki district.

A report delivered to Ōpōtiki District Council today has highlighted the significant social and community benefits of the Ōpōtiki Aquaculture and Harbour Development projects.

The assessment was focused on social benefits likely to come from the harbour development, marine farm, hatchery and processing factory, and various associated services in the area.

The report, produced by independent consultants, estimates that full utilisation of consented water space would result in 24,880 tonnes of mussels and the generation of 449 full time positions within 12 years of the establishment of the marine farm. An earlier report generated by URS in 2005 had estimated 930 full-time positions but had been based on manual processing.

Ōpōtiki District Council Mayor John Forbes said the report highlights the importance of locally-based processing to really gain the benefits for the people of the Ōpōtiki district.

"The aquaculture industry provides for a range of occupations, skill levels and working hours and offers opportunities for career development and promotion.

"The marine farm will open up employment for hundreds of people, both inside and outside the aquaculture industry. There will be a flow-on effect for employment such as fishing charters and tourism-based activities, not to mention the recreational benefits these will bring to our district," Mayor Forbes said.

The report estimates the total household income generated from the additional jobs created by the harbour development and only a 3,100 hectare marine farm will be in the vicinity of \$11.4 and \$17.4 million per annum. The assessment is based on mussel farming only, leaving scope for increased benefits through other higher value species, and the full development of the 3800 ha.

Case studies of the Havelock, Coromandel Peninsula and Banks Peninsula aquaculture industries were carried out to identify the range of potential benefits.

These studies showed that processing plants were the major generator of benefits for small communities, as in Havelock and Coromandel. Comparatively, very few benefits from aquaculture had come to communities in Banks Peninsula which did not have these facilities.

Whakatōhea Māori Trust Board Chief Executive Dickie Farrar said the provision of training programmes and initiatives were key factors to the success of the projects.

"Providing training and work-ready programmes focused on the skills required for the marine farm industry and subsequent employment generating initiatives is a priority, and engaging with education partners is vital.

"The marine farm development will increase our ability to regain our traditional strong economic base. The employment opportunities generated will encourage our iwi members to up-skill as well as bring home those who have left the area in search of work," Ms Farrar said.

"It is also expected that redevelopment of the harbour entrance will facilitate the aspiration of our Whakatōhea people to hold national waka ama events which could attract large numbers of visitors to Ōpōtiki as well as generating cultural pride and a greater sense of wellbeing among our people."

Other benefits highlighted by the report were a reduction in criminal offending, increased population and rating base for improving services, retention of young workforce, expansion of recreational activities, increased tourism and the contribution to national and regional aquaculture industry targets.

