

National Dunes Trust conference in Mercury Bay

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Last week saw the coming together of around 90 members and associates of the National Dunes Trust in Mercury Bay for their annual conference. The event was combined with a series of presentations and field trips around the area. The group started their visit with a trip to Cooks Beach and Hot Water Beach on Wednesday 11 March. Otama and Whangapoua followed on Thursday and everyone ended up in Whitianga on Friday where a series of presentations took place in conjunction with the conference itself.

During the field trip to Otama, the group were hosted at the home of Michael Smither and Gian McGregor, both keenly involved in the debate around restoration of dunes in the Mercury Bay area. At Whangapoua the group were greeted by iwi representatives from Ngati Huarere, with a presentation from Wanda Brljevic. Local homeowner Doug Arcus also spoke about management of erosion at Whangapoua.

The National Dunes Trust is a combined professional and community body actively involved in dune restoration, with roughly two thirds of the group made up of members of community organisations and interested individuals from around New Zealand.

The Mercury Bay gathering included eminent archaeologist Dr Louise Furey,

high seas, to other parts of the same coast or beach. "These days there is greater emphasis on trying to understand coastal erosion and living with it where practical, rather than always trying to control it," Jim says. "This has seen planning procedures changing with a move away from building very close to beaches and dunes, to give space between buildings and the beach. These days, there is greater emphasis on coastal setbacks and restoring natural buffers, creating the space and the natural systems required for humans and beaches to co-exist. Nonetheless, will be achieved.

In addition to a focus on the ecological and cultural values of dunes, the National Dunes Trust also aims to promote improved understanding of coastal erosion and alternative methods to traditional engineering solutions. By coming together and sharing experience and the results from their work around New Zealand, the suite of solutions available for dune restoration and the management of coastal erosion are gradually extended.

Local scientist, Jim Dahm is an applied coastal scientist with 30 years' experience in the management of coastal erosion and was responsible for initiating coast care community-based dune restoration in New Zealand. Jim is one of the Trustees of the National Dunes Trust and he says that in the past there has been a lack of knowledge about the cycles of beach erosion and subsequent natural recovery. These can happen over a sustained period of time, with sands shifting from one part of a bay or coastline, particularly during storms and

traditional engineering solutions have been, and still are in some cases, the accepted solution. Our objective in the Trust is to see the majority of New Zealand dunes restored and sustainably managed using indigenous plant species by 2050."

The National Dunes Trust's involvement in restoration programmes along New Zealand's coastline is in the hope that over time, an improved balance - the people of New Zealand living more in harmony with our coastlines - will be achieved.



Participants in a National Dunes Trust field trip at the home of Michael Smither and Gian McGregor at Otama Beach on Thursday last week.

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