

A predator-free Mahia is their aim

by Luisa Knight

A MOVE to make the Mahia Peninsula predator-free is under way.

The first phase of a \$4.86 million project will focus on removing possums from 14,500 hectares of land on Mahia Peninsula within four years, as an initial step towards ridding the region of predators.

Iwi, community members, central and local government representatives, gathered at Tuahuru Marae at Mahia yesterday to discuss progress on the landscape scale project, aimed at enhancing biodiversity on the peninsula, alongside sustainable socio-economic outcomes.

Hawke's Bay Regional Council and Predator-Free 2050 Ltd launched a project in July aimed at creating a predator-free Hawke's Bay.

At the community meeting yesterday, the project was named "Whakaitipu Mahia – Predator-Free Mahia".

Rongomaiwahine chairman Moana Rongo found it a pleasure to share their community vision of a restored Mahia.

"The vision is embodied in the name 'Whakaitipu', meaning growth or rebirth," Mr Rongo said.

"We have a 200-year plan based on seven pillars that focus on our community's social, cultural, spiritual, educational, environmental, economic health and wellbeing.

"The timing is right. We can reset the clock by having Maori front the project.

"We need an interactive information centre where iwi have a say on what happens with tourism in the area.

"I don't want our people to have to poke their tongues out for \$25.

"We can be anything we want to be.

"We will always be here.
"We have the most to gain or the most to lose" he said.

Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage said she aims for a healthier environment and people through healthy and respectful relationships.

"A tui was chorusing the welcome karakia here today, I will take that as a good omen for what we are aiming to achieve here."

"I am extremely humbled by the work everyone has done.

"It takes a village to raise a child and it takes a community to save our wildlife.

"That's certainly the case at Mahia where iwi and hapu, community members, central government and local councils have all come together to work to make this special place a haven for our native plants and wildlife."

Following the community meeting, the minister was escorted on a trip to Onenui Station to showcase the leadership role landowners play in landscape-scale conservation through Nga Whenua Rahui kawenata agreements (conservation covenant for Maori landowners).

Onenui Station is a significant land block within the Mahia landscape, the third-largest tract of remaining forest on the Mahia Peninsula and the largest on the peninsula's south-eastern coast.

• The \$4.86 million Predator-Free Hawke's Bay was launched in July and is made up of \$1.62 million Government funding through a Predator-Free 2050 Ltd investment over four years.

The Mahia project is part of this funding. Other funding is coming from Hawke's Bay Regional Council's \$1 million, Department of Conservation, Mananaki Whenua-Landcare Research, Aotearoa Foundation, Maungaharuru Tangitu, Zero Invasive Predators and landowners.



WHANGAWEHI CATCHMENT HUI: It was a beautiful day at Tuahuru marae to discuss predator-free Mahia, the first phase of the \$4.86 million environmental project. From left are the chairman of the Whangawehi Catchment Group Pat O'Brien, senior community ranger Melissa Brignall-Thayer, Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage, chairman of Rongomaiwahine iwi Moana Rongo, Hawke's Bay regional council and catchment services manager Campbell Leckie, and executive assistant Predator-Free 2050 Kath Mead.

Picture by Liam Clayton