



EARTHCHECK

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KAIKOURA DISTRICT COUNCIL, NZ

Nature-based tourism has always been a focus for New Zealand. With low population density and temperate weather conditions, man-made attractions were never likely to become a drawcard.

The country's rugged beauty has been sculpted by geological forces, and polished to perfection by the wind and the waves. The resulting topography is dramatic in the extreme and plays host to animal and plant species; up to 84 per cent of the latter believed to be endemic to the country.

Made famous by The Lord of the Rings and the 100% Pure tourism campaign, most visitors enter through the North Island gateway city of Auckland. But it's in the South Island where the most wondrous beauty can be found, and encounters with marine life are an everyday occurrence.

When the Maori people first migrated here some 1000 years ago, it is believed that almost 80 per cent of the land was covered in virgin forest. It was not until the arrival of Europeans that large-scale harvesting of sperm whales, New Zealand fur seals and other species occurred. These days, the locals have found better ways to utilise such natural resources.

Maori play a significant role in the country's booming green tourism sector as they have an innate connection to the land. No more so is this evident than in the small township of Kaikoura, which has undergone dramatic transformation thanks to its love of whales.

In 1999, Kaikoura District Council adopted what is now known as the EarthCheck Sustainable Communities Program. This provided them with a framework to reduce the environmental impact of the community's activities upon the increasingly popular region.

Kaikoura's spectacular scenery and natural beauty attract close to one million visitors annually. Residents share a common desire to protect nature's bounty and preserve it for future generations.

It was decided that a focussed program of initiatives was required and so Kaikoura District Council developed an Environmental and Social Sustainability Policy to help guide everyday activities.

EarthCheck was chosen as the environmental management system to help Kaikoura measure, monitor and manage the impacts of the town's broad-ranging activities.

Key achievements to date include:

In 2008-2009, Kaikoura reduced energy consumption to 98.8 GJ per person; **39% above best-practice**.

During the same period, the community reduced their waste to 0.18 tonnes per person; **47.9% above best-practice**.

Kaikoura consumed 252kL of potable water per person in 2008-2009, **27% better than the baseline**.

Since 2001, Kaikoura has reduced **waste sent to landfill by 75%**, extending the life of their landfill by ten years.

In 2009, through the *Warm Up Kaikoura* initiative, **300 homes were assessed for energy loss and fitted with appropriate insulation**.

Kaikoura introduced *Zero Organics* to landfill by **collecting organic household food waste for communal composting**.

The South Island township of Kaikoura was once better known for high levels of unemployment. But thanks to the ingenuity of three local families, Kaikoura has become a leading example of how a commitment to sustainable principles can bring about widespread, enduring prosperity and change.

In 1987, they mortgaged their homes and purchased the first of what would become a large fleet of whale watching vessels. These would bring visitors close to the town's largest attractions; sperm whales, dolphins and New Zealand Fur Seals.

The local Iwi (Maori tribe) had big ideas for their little town and how to rebuild their ties with nature. Legend had it that their ancestor Paikea had journeyed to New Zealand on the back of the whale Tohora, and so it only seemed fitting for Paikea's descendants to once again ride on the back of the whale to a new life.

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

The success of Whale Watch Kaikoura soon required the building of an entire marina in South Bay and helped rally the local community around a single goal.

Investment flooded in, resulting in the building of cafes, galleries and additional tourist accommodations, which in turn greatly benefitted local artists and craftspeople. It also helped spawn new tourism businesses that offered experiences such as seal and dolphin swims.

SOLID WASTE REDUCTION

In 1997, Kaikoura's small council became the first in the country to employ an environment officer. This person oversaw the implementation of a program to reduce waste to landfill by 70 per cent and make the district a Zero Waste to Landfill zone by 2015.

Kerbside rubbish collection has been halted to encourage residents to investigate recycling options and a free weekly recycling pick-up service took its place.

A recycling depot now processes electrical goods and wood for reuse and kitchen scraps are processed through a community composting system.

Each year, the annual Trash-to-Fashion Show celebrates how local artists transform everything from fishing buoys to toothbrushes into garments, accessories and gifts. This in itself has become a tourist attraction; in-keeping with underlying sustainability philosophies. It has also resulted in the opening of a Trash-to-Fashion Museum.

PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY

There are biodiversity schemes in place, such as rates relief for landowners who have set aside protected areas on their properties.

For visitors, the Trees For Travellers project results in the planting of native species in and around Kaikoura in a bid to reforest the area and offset emissions.

In a clever move, travellers are even emailed the GPS co-ordinates for "their tree" so they can return again to visit it and maintain a connection with the destination.

ENDURING SUCCESS

Today, the tiny township is recognised as the world's second EarthCheck Benchmarked Sustainable Community.

Kaikoura serves as a superb example of how a small community can uplift its economy, protect its wildlife and develop a sustainable economy for the benefit of all.

COUNCIL INITIATIVES:

Compost and recycling bins are provided for Council office and library staff. To reduce waste, staff have paper recycling bins at their work areas, but not rubbish bins.

The quantity of paper used has been reduced through using double-sided printing. Scrap paper printed on one side is kept for note paper and emails. Electronic transactions have replaced paper transactions and document and report printing is kept to a minimum.

Biodegradable chemicals are used for cleaning and all non-biodegradable chemicals are being replaced with biodegradable alternatives.

Paper towels and air dryers in staff rest rooms have been replaced with cloth towels, which can be washed and reused.

Staff are issued with warm vests to reduce the need for heating

In Council Reserves, Council has planted locally sourced, native species that are drought resistant.

Council's vehicle fleet has fit-for-purpose, low emissions vehicles and provides an office bike for local use.

Teleconferencing is encouraged to avoid long-haul travel to business meetings.

Council encourages contractors to use biodegradable chemicals for all of its spraying programs.

The Warm Up Kaikoura project was launched to insulate homes that were once holiday shacks.

