

Climate Action Week Marlborough, 19-23 February 2024

This week-long event, organised by Catherine van der Meulen just wrapped up and was perhaps the most successful Climate Action Marlborough event so far. Representatives from principal sponsors Yealands Estate Wines and Kiwibank were in attendance for most of the week, as were representatives from a number of Marlborough businesses, as well as Marlborough District Council and Climate Karanga Marlborough. The Council provided the venue for most of the sessions at the Lansdowne Pavilion in Blenheim.

Day 1 focused on finance with presentations and contributions from ASB, Kiwibank, Westpac, ANZ and Motion Capital. There was lots of discussion about how sustainable business practices and emission reduction efforts are in lenders best interests in the long term. There were also presentations on seaweed farming, an example enterprise exercise for Marlborough that the group worked through during the week.

The theme for Day 2 was “Transitioning to a low carbon emissions economy and was held at Yealands Estate Winery. It included presentations by Catherine on transitional transport options from The Netherlands, on Post-growth (or Degrowth) by Jennifer Wilkins of Heliocene, simplified carbon emissions accounting by app developer Cogo and other talks on decarbonising supply chains. There was also a tour of Yealands’ sustainability projects, including a demonstration of a small continuous feed biochar retort. Yealands is considering adding biochar to their compost to improve soils.

Day 3 focussed on “Energising Marlborough’s Future”, with presentations on emissions reduction efforts by Hortus and in NZ Wine. Round table topics included community energy networks, hydrogen fuel, rooftop solar generation, remote community electrification, zero waste and embedded generation for businesses. It is interesting to note that Hortus, the large Marlborough labour contractor, is planning to deploy hydrogen fuelled vans for transporting and supporting workers in the vineyards. The day also included a trip to ThymeBank greenhouses outside Blenheim where hydroponic lettuce and herbs are grown without pesticides.

The theme for Day 4 was “Creating a Bio-Diverse Marlborough”. The morning session had an interesting presentation on viticulture practices to reduce herbicide usage and round table discussions of organic & regenerative farming, soil health, minimising chemical usage and ocean biodiversity. After lunch, the group went to Pinoli Pinenut orchard west of Wairau Valley, where organic pine nuts are grown and packaged. The afternoon session was held at Vines Village where Mike Casey of Forest Lodge Orchard, Otago, spoke about electrification of NZ farms. Mike has been able to completely electrify his cherry farm and generate & store most of his own power, resulting in considerable long-term cost savings.

Day 5 (Friday) was spent in the Marlborough Sounds, with the theme of “Regenerative and Emerging Economies”. We met at the Picton Wharf and took a brief cruise around the harbour and Shakespeare Bay with Port Marlborough representatives discussing their environmental and sustainability efforts. The boat docked at Kaipupu Point nature sanctuary where we were given a short tour and talk by sanctuary representatives. After morning tea at Le Café, we boarded

another boat to Lochmara Lodge to hear about their sustainability efforts and have lunch. The final event of the day was a presentation by Mick Norton on Tory Channel Kelp Farm and his pioneering work making fertiliser out of fermented giant kelp. This fit in nicely with the enterprise exercise that the group had been working on all week.

I attended all 5 days and found the presentations quite enlightening, particularly with respect to the diversity of ideas and methods being explored by local businesses to reduce emissions and promote sustainability. I was also encouraged to see so many young and mid-career professionals engaged in these efforts. It tells a hopeful story about business here in Marlborough. I believe the conference did a good job of connecting attending local businesses with the many new ideas being developed to reduce emissions and promote sustainable business practices. It was well worth the week.

Tom & Catherine