



Briefing Note: Briefing on Geopark Visit

To:	Hon Jo Luxton, Associate Minister of Education		
Date:	3 August 2023	Priority:	Medium
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Purpose of the report

This paper provides background information on the recently opened Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark and logistical details associated with your upcoming visit on Tuesday 8 August 2023.

Recommended Actions

The Ministry of Education recommends that you

- a. **agree** that the Ministry of Education release this briefing in full once it has been considered by you.

Agree / Disagree

① *Tanner*

Dan Tasker
Senior Manager
International Cooperation and Engagement

3/8/2023

[Signature]

Hon Jo Luxton
Associate Minister of Education

5/8/23

Context: The recently launched Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark

What is a UNESCO Global Geopark?

1. UNESCO Global Geoparks designation gives international recognition to sites that promote the importance and significance of protecting the earth's geodiversity through actively engaging with local communities. UNESCO Global Geoparks are single, unified geographical areas where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed through a community focused approach to holistic protection, education and sustainable development.

The Geoparks Programme in Aotearoa

2. In 2018, the New Zealand National Commission for UNESCO established a UNESCO Global Geopark programme in Aotearoa. This involved the establishment of a Geopark Expert Advisory Panel to assess Aotearoa New Zealand applications and support nominations to the UNESCO Global Geoparks Network.

The journey of the Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark

3. Waitaki Whitestone Geopark was selected by the Expert Advisory Panel to become Aotearoa New Zealand's first candidate for the designation. The full application was initially submitted in 2018. In July 2022 – after a considerable delay due to the pandemic – two UNESCO Global Geopark assessors from Europe were finally able to visit and assess the site.
4. In September 2022, UNESCO headquarters announced that the Waitaki Whitestone Geopark application to the UNESCO's Global Geopark Council (GGC) was accepted. A decision to endorse the recommendation and complete the application process was made in May 2023. The designation recognises Waitaki Whitestone Geopark's outstanding geological and cultural heritage and its commitment to sustainable development, education, and community engagement.
5. The Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark was launched on May 31 during an official launch ceremony in Ōamaru opened by the Hon Peeni Henare, Minister for Tourism. Liz Longworth, Chair NZ National Commission for UNESCO; David Higgins, Upoko Te Rūnanga o Moeraki; Helen Jansen, Chair Waitaki Whitestone Geopark Trust; Gary Kircher, Mayor for Waitaki, also spoke at the event.

Proposed programme for your visit to Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark

1.00pm	Arrive at Ōamaru Opera House; whakatau led by David Higgins
1.15pm	Depart for a coastal tour of the UNESCO Global Geopark
1.45pm	Arrive at Te Kaihīnaki / Moeraki Boulders (via SH1)
2.40pm	Depart Te Kaihīnaki and return to Ōamaru via Kākaunui / Kakanui
3.15pm	Return to Ōamaru from the tour
3.30pm	Meet with community representatives to hear about next steps for the UNESCO Global Geopark and further implementation of the UNESCO Geopark programme
4.30pm	Visit concludes

6. You will be joined on the coastal tour by the following:
 - David Higgins, Upoko Te Rūnanga o Moeraki (founding trustee of the Geopark) <https://kahurumanu.co.nz/our-people/david-higgins/>
 - Carol Mutch, Education Commissioner, NZ National Commission for UNESCO

- Lisa Heinz, Manager Waitaki Whitestone Geopark
 - Sasha Morriss, Geologist and Educator Waitaki Whitestone Geopark
7. The meeting with the community representatives will also include the following:
- Helen Jansen, Chair Waitaki Whitestone Geopark Trust
 - Mike Gray, founding trustee of Waitaki Whitestone Geopark and currently Advisory Trustee
 - Prof. Ross Dowling (via Zoom), Trustee Waitaki Whitestone Geopark Trust, Emeritus Professor at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia
 - Rachel Plieger, Trustee Waitaki Whitestone Geopark Trust, Commercial lawyer
 - TK Buchanan (via Zoom), Trustee Waitaki Whitestone Geopark Trust, rūnanga appointee

Talking points

8. As Minister with responsibility for UNESCO, I am pleased to highlight the importance of UNESCO's work both globally and locally, especially in sharing knowledge and capacity building to support sustainable and peaceful futures.
9. It is a pleasure to visit the Waitaki Whitestone Aotearoa New Zealand's first UNESCO Global Geopark, alongside rūnanga as the first Aotearoa Global Geopark. Receiving this recognition is a significant achievement for the trust and community. The rich history, geology and story of the region make it a compelling attraction as well as it being one of the largest of the 195 UNESCO Global Geoparks.
10. I look forward to hearing from your community about your experiences with this geopark journey and how you see designation as a driving force for economic development, spanning local knowledge products, stimulate innovative local enterprises, new job opportunities and high-quality training courses as new sources of revenue are generated through sustainable geo-tourism.

Further background

11. The UNESCO Global Geopark is managed by a small team led by Manager Lisa Heinz, working closely in partnership with the Waitaki Whitestone Geopark Trust to share the natural, geographic, and rich cultural heritage of the region with the community and visitors.
12. A UNESCO Global Geopark Festival is planned for October 2023 to spread the word about the new UNESCO designation and its opportunities and to work with the community to increase social identity and pride.
13. The UNESCO Global Geopark undertakes a multi-disciplinary work programme that tells the stories of the land, culture and heritage and connecting visitors to the Geopark through educational programmes and engaging experiences and activities. The Geopark aims to support economic growth through sustainable tourism and development.
14. The important partnership with Ngāi Tahu Whānui has led to significant work with Te Rūnanga o Moeraki to better reflect Te Ao Māori in the co-design and the branding of the Geopark.

15. The Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark Manager and the Banks Peninsula/Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū Geopark Trust are proposing to set up an informal working group to scope the establishment of a New Zealand Geopark Council. This would be similar to the national network in the United Kingdom and Canada.
16. Work is underway to schedule a cross ministerial discussion on both further developments of the existing UNESCO Global Geopark and supporting other communities with aspiring geoparks. This work is being led by Minister Henare's office.
17. The NZ National Commission for UNESCO has funded a representative from Te Rūnanga o Moeraki, (also a member of the Waitaki Whitestone Geopark Trust), to travel to the 10th International Conference on UNESCO Global Geoparks in Morocco (7-11 September 2023). The conference will be a great opportunity for the rūnanga to share the unique geopark journey at the conference and to learn from other indigenous people's geopark involvement.
18. The NZ National Commission for UNESCO is supporting expanding the geoparks programme through working with the Banks Peninsula/Te Pātaka o Rākaihautū Geopark Trust to support their work to gain community support and develop the dossier required to apply for UNESCO Global Geopark status.
19. The Geopark received an MBIE Provincial Growth Fund in 2019 for the validation of the business case. For the current financial year 2023/2024, the Waitaki District Council has committed to \$140,000 of operational funding for the Geopark.