

E ngā mana, e ngā reo, e rau rangatira mā
Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa

*(To all authorities, all voices, to the many chiefs gathered here
Greetings, greetings, greetings to everyone)*

Ko Liz Longworth toku ingoa. He Kaihautū o Te Komihana Matua o Aotearoa
UNESCO ahau – ngā mihi mahana kia koutou katoa

I am delighted to be here today, along with all five Commissioners. We are
thrilled to be joining with you in celebrating and recognising officially, the
very first UNESCO Global Geopark in Aotearoa New Zealand. (In fact the first in
Australasia!)

I want to begin by acknowledging the crucial support, collaboration and
generosity of Kai Tahu. Thank you to Te Runanga o Moeraki – especially former
trustees David Higgins and Trevor McGlinchey as well as current reps
TK Buchanan and Mauriri McGlinchey - and I also want to acknowledge Kati
Huirapa Runaka ki Puketeraki for their support.

In terms of the trust and respect that has been forged, it is fair to say this
journey began with a few wrong turns, but after stumbling at times we
received the gift of your understanding and guidance, such that we were able
to find the path we should have been on and have been travelling the road
together ever since. The collaborative relationship that has ensued typifies the
legacy of a successful Geopark.

There have been many other critical success factors, such as the unerring support of the Waitaki District Council. I will talk more about those we wish to recognise a bit later. I would like to acknowledge and thank the Minister of Tourism, the Hon Peeni Henare, for his support today.

The UNESCO Global designation may have had a long gestation since the business case was developed in 2018, but the news of Waitaki being granted this incredible international status is hot off the press.

Zuleika and I just arrived back from Paris where Waitaki's application was considered by the Executive Board, meaning it had to be approved by 58 Member States. This is not automatic and is a testament to the vision and hard mahi of so many of you that the application jumped these hurdles to meet the international standard - so now you are all the proud kaitiaaki of the Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark - a massive congratulations. This is truly worth a celebration.

So, what exactly is a Geopark? Why is this designation such an exciting development for the people of this region?

UNESCO was founded in 1946 in response to the horrors of WW II - the mission was to try and build a better world, using the tools of education, the sciences, culture and communication. UNESCO, both globally and locally, stands for the sharing of knowledge that can bring out the best in our communities and help us work together on the solutions.

Not too far from here there is an outstanding UNESCO World Heritage site, Fiordland National Park. And to the south, Dunedin is an UNESCO Creative City of Literature. And now we have another such designation concept, our first

UNESCO Global Geopark - by which we are sharing with the world 7,200 square kilometres of our unique geological and cultural heritage, stretching from Moeraki, Oamaru, Palmerston, along the beautiful Waitaki River Valley, to Omarama, Lake Ohau and into the magical Ahuriri valley.

I have visited these areas many times in the recent years, marvelling at the land and rock formations. But now, as well as the geology or the whakapapa of the land, we will be able to tell the story of the people and communities who have a special connection with the land. It is the story of the creation of the natural landscape, alongside the area's social and cultural heritage. And so, a Geopark is a single, unified geographical area where sites and landscapes of international geological significance are managed with holistic objectives of protection, education and sustainable development.

At present, there are 195 UNESCO Global Geoparks in 48 countries. Not only is Waitaki Whitestone Aotearoa New Zealand's first UNESCO Global Geopark, it is one of the largest.

UNESCO Global Geoparks have huge promise. They help promote awareness of a region's potential, whether for conservation purposes such as to protect certain geological features, or for scientific research, or posterity. I am thinking of the far-sighted community of Vanished World who knew the value of curating locally the fossils unearthed near Duntroon.

The awareness generated by a Geopark can increase the sense of pride locals may feel in their region and strengthen identification with their community. Understanding who we are and where we come from builds a unique sense of place, a binding purpose and identity.

Geoparks are an important vector for community engagement. They should have a strong education programme for schools, community learning and the research community. Educating for sustainable development is an important element. It is very pleasing to see the education focus of the Waitaki Whitestone Geopark.

Geoparks can also be a driving force, partnering with local businesses to promote 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. They have a significant role in promoting regional economic development. It is hoped that they attract the type of visitors who want to experience the natural environment through an educational and sustainability lens.

Waitaki Whitestone will now be able to use the registered 'UNESCO Global Geopark' brand as an internationally recognised mark of quality. The Geopark will benefit from the use of common promotional tools and have a forum for finding new partners for international cooperation, exchanging experience, and funding-raising.

It is my hope that soon we will be able to tell this story to an international audience of how the Waitaki Whitestone UNESCO Global Geopark came into being. We are already thinking practically about the opportunities. UNESCO internationally greatly appreciates hearing what communities have been able to create and their insights. And this is already a powerful story.

I hope my comments have given some insight into why we are excited by this designation. The Waitaki Whitestone Geopark is now part of a network that raises awareness of our geological heritage on a global scale. This

helps promote the Waitaki region to a domestic and international audience and provide international support networks that will further the growth of the Geopark. There is potential for significant benefits to the local community, and Aotearoa New Zealand as a whole.

It has been an honour to support Waitaki Whitestone Geopark on its journey to becoming a UNESCO Global Geopark. A lot of vision, passion, patience and sheer hard work has gone into enabling Aotearoa New Zealand to become the proud holder of a UNESCO Global Geopark. This room today is full of people who have put their heart and soul into making this happen. Our deepest appreciation to all those involved.

I would like to extend warm and sincere thanks to Waitaki Geopark Trust (including Chair Helen Jansen , Trustees past and present, Geopark Manager Lisa Heinz), as acknowledged earlier Kai Tahu , Te Runanga o Moeraki , Mayor Gary Kircher, and Waitaki District Council (Council's support has been critical), Vanished World (no longer quite so vanished), the University of Otago Geology Department, GNS Science, Tourism Waitaki, OceanaGold and the Waitaki district community for all that you have done to result in Aotearoa New Zealand being added to the list of countries in which a UNESCO Global Geopark resides.

As UNESCO Chair, I would also like to thank our former Sciences Commissioner Geoff Hicks for all the hard work he put into making this become a reality. Alongside our previous Chair, Robyn Baker and Secretary General Vicki Soanes, Geoff spent a considerable amount of time setting up the Geopark programme in Aotearoa New Zealand and then supporting Waitaki in their bid. Thank you, Geoff and the members of the Geoparks Advisory Committee who provided

technical advice on the development of the dossier and the application. And thank you to the rest of the team at the National Commission, many of them who are here today, who have supported Waitaki in their journey.

I would like to close with the following whakatauki that to me is expressed in the Waitaki Whitestone Geopark

‘Ko au te whenua, ko te whenua, ko au’ – ‘I am the land and the land is me’.