

## Portable sawmill opens the door to affordable housing



Panapa Ehou is a co-founder and director of Hikurangi Enterprises Ltd, a group of innovative entities dedicated to regional economic development of the East Coast of New Zealand.

Hikurangi Enterprises are best known in New Zealand for being the first company to get a government licence to produce and supply medicinal cannabis products. Creating jobs and sustainable economic development is their focus, with an emphasis on sustainability. Panapa explains: “Our

philosophy is that everything is interconnected, the external and internal environment, the people; they are one and the same”.

The population of the East Coast of the North Island of New Zealand consists of 90% Māori, the indigenous people of mainland New Zealand. Māori on average have fewer assets and are prone to worse negative economic and social outcomes than the rest of the New Zealand population.

The Hikurangi Group has been contributing to change that. Panapa: “There are three prongs to looking after the basic needs of our people: provide them with meaningful work, provide them with healthy, affordable housing and provide them with healthy, affordable food.”

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This emphasis on sustainability also applies when Panapa talks about the housing problem. Hikurangi Enterprises has taken the initiative to enable people to build their own homes.

“Building houses doesn’t have to be done at the expense of the environment, said Panapa. “It was only three or four generations ago that our ancestors were building their own houses out of wood, clay and fibres sourced from ancestral lands. Somehow this tradition stopped.

## MILLER FEATURE

We wanted a way to enable our people to build houses using local resources, without having to buy building materials from elsewhere. That's where the idea to purchase a portable sawmill came in."

The plan is to design and build affordable light earth houses based on timber frames made from locally sourced trees. Because Panapa and his team already had a great experience milling with a borrowed Peterson Sawmill during a previous project, Hikurangi wanted one themselves.

To learn how to operate their new Winch Production Frame sawmill, a group of around 15 people travelled to the Peterson Head Office in Rotorua for a one-day training course. Peterson Portable Sawmills offers training (usually free) to new mill owners worldwide.



During their swingmill training, the group learned how to set-up their mill, undergo the recommended safety-check-and-start routines, and were familiarised with Peterson's swingblade design technology.

### **"Building houses doesn't have to be done at the expense of the environment"**

Our sawmill specialists Chris Browne and Aaron Kalan demonstrated how to line up the log and blade, make blade adjustments, and trouble-shoot any misalignments. At the end of the day the trainees returned home with a thorough understanding of what they need to do to get the cut they want.

One of the sawmill trainees was Richard, who was new to sawmilling and who works full-time for Hikurangi Enterprises. Richard says: "This project will provide housing and immediate employment, plus community pride, because it's about people."

Richard is passionate about helping his people in various ways.

"For me, it's all about opportunities based on local resources, with a strong focus on employment. Just like myself, everyone who did the Peterson sawmill training is highly motivated to build homes for ourselves and our families."



## MILLER FEATURE

Richard and his crew have been milling old man pine, very large macrocarpa trees and eucalyptus. The lumber will be used for exterior cladding such as board and batten, and floor and ceiling boards for their first light earth building. They hope to finish building their first 30m2 house in the next couple of months.

“I’m enjoying milling a lot. I guess the hardest part is getting logs ready for milling. The first time setting up the mill took us 45 minutes and breaking down the mill took 45 minutes too. Now we can do so in just 15 minutes.”



Richard and his team have used the optional Clip-on Slabber attachment to produce a huge macrocarpa slab measuring 1.4m wide by 6m long, and 2 inches thick. It took five guys to move it!

The group is excited to share their new knowledge with other interested Hapu (Māori subtribes) in the area. Their building initiative will have positive flow-on effects.

“The new mill will create jobs for our people,” says Panapa “There’s a lot of interest in this project from other Iwi (Māori communities). It’s a great way to bring communities together in rural and isolated areas.”

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