

Muri meeting house reopened

THE MURI community celebrated the opening of the newly refurbished Are Uipaanga O Muri Enuu (community centre) and Health Clinic on Saturday.

The refurbishment was made possible with \$35,000 of funding from environment organisation Seacology and two and a half months of weekend working bees.

Muri Tapere Inc committee member and Muri Environment Group member Mii Kauvai says the project is a tribute to the spirit of the Muri community.

Traditional leaders, community leaders, landowners, local politicians and residents helped celebrate the reopening of the two adjoining buildings which had been virtually out of use.

The meeting house was built in 1980 and opened the following year – its architect Tearii Mave was also present for the ceremony on the weekend.

The project is the US-based Seacology's fifth in the Cook Islands. The non profit organisation provides assistance to many small communities around the globe for nothing more than a 'promise' to save endangered species and preserve important natural environments and cultures.

Kauvai says she was approached last year to look at how the Muri Environment

Group could apply for funds from Seacology to help preserve endangered species of plants and animals in Ngatangiaa.

She later found that a species of sea grass which grows only from Avana to Aroko could fit this description but it already had a raii (marine reserve) over it.

So the community has now agreed to place a raii over some of the shellfish in the Muri lagoon for a period of ten years in exchange for assistance from Seacology. The partnership has allowed the community to refurbish its meeting house.

"The challenge now is for us, the community, to honour our promise and to take the raii which is in place very seriously. It is our duty to be good custodians not only of the land that feeds us with its harvests but also of the sea that nourishes with its bounty. We are a people dependent on our environment and what nature provides so let us look after nature the way she looks after us," Kauvai told the gathering on Saturday.

She says Muri Tapere Inc is now appealing to the community to help with donations to allow them to purchase items such as chairs, kitchenware and an oven for the meeting house. They hope the community will make use of the renovated space for activities and functions.

■ Helen Greig



The Muri community worked on the refurbishment of the meeting house and clinic for over two months. Photo Pua Arther-Tua. 1008108