



*Media release – Sunday 29 September 2024*

## **Kahikatea make a come-back in ambitious restoration project**

New Zealand's tallest native tree, Kahikatea (white pine / *Dacrycarpus dacrydioides*), is once again reaching for the stars in Tiromoana Bush, the 407-hectare regenerating lowland forest in Waipara.

Kahikatea trees have been planted around the Kate Pond wetland in Tiromoana Bush to establish a kahikatea forest. It's part of the ambitious restoration project being undertaken by Transwaste Canterbury Ltd (Transwaste) who owns Tiromoana Bush and the adjacent landfill in Kate Valley.

Transwaste Chair Gill Cox says restoring the native forests that once grew in Tiromoana Bush to their original condition has proven more successful than anticipated.

'Restoring native vegetation within Canterbury is a difficult task as dry soil conditions often make it extremely hard for newly planted seedlings to survive', says Mr Cox. 'Kahikatea were first planted by Kate Pond about fourteen years ago and these are now 6 metres tall. The success of those early plantings has led to a focus on creating a kahikatea forest and wetland around Kate Pond where the conditions can give the kahikatea the best chance to thrive.'

Kahikatea would have been common in swampy and poorly-drained areas throughout Canterbury, including the coastal hills and valleys north-east of Waipara, such as the Mount Cass and Tiromoana area. A large landslide occurred in the mid-reaches of the Kate Valley about 10,000 years ago. This caused the valley upstream of the slip to flood and fill with silt over the following hundreds of years, making it silty and probably perfect habitat for swamp forest dominated by kahikatea.

Human settlement brought burning, land drainage and farming that cleared much of the forest, with only remnants remaining in places such as Tiromoana Bush. One very well-known and significant remnant elsewhere in Canterbury is Riccarton Bush. Restoring the kahikatea forests will take time. It started with enhancing and expanding the existing natural wetlands in the lower Kate Valley. The Kate Stream used to dry up in summer, which meant the wetlands consequently dried up. A weir was built across the valley outlet to hold back the water. By collecting rainwater further upstream and releasing it slowly year-round, the Kate Pond wetland is no longer seasonal, and has grown in size to 12 hectares. The wetland provides an ideal habitat for trees that like a damp environment, such as kahikatea. Though kahikatea are relatively slow growing trees, in a narrow conical shape, they can reach 50-60 metres in height and live for over 600 years.

Mr Cox says recent weather patterns have helped the kahikatea get established.

'The forest restoration has been helped by several years of La Nina conditions (prior to this year's moderate El Nino) bringing the eastern coast higher than average rainfall', says Mr Cox. 'The valley floor and slopes of Tiromoana Bush have been wetter than normal which has given the small plants a great start to their long lives.'

Over 1,000 kahikatea trees along with other appropriate species, including mānuka, mingimingi, harakeke (flax), tī kōuka (cabbage tree), kōwhai and other native species are planted annually on the valley floor by Kate Pond to continue creating the mixed kahikatea forest and wetland. A QE2 Covenant protects Tiromoana Bush for perpetuity.