



□ Bags of rubbish... Joe Hedley talks to the Mahia Beach clean up team at the end of the event.

# Beach clean-up

## Mahia takes action on pollution issue

COMMUNITIES in and around the Mahia Peninsula were inspired by a New Zealand charity to herald the next decade with a clean-up of their beaches.

Sustainable Coastlines initiated a beach clean-up at the beginning of January that covered 270 kilometres of the East Coast, from Te Araroa to Mahia.

In the wake of the clean-up, organisers are encouraging people to take responsibility for their rubbish to keep their local coastlines clean.

Nuhaka School principal Nick Chapman co-ordinated the Mahia clean-up which covered Nuhaka, Opoutama, Mahanga, Mahia and Whangawehi beaches.

"I identified key people in each of these areas — Nuhaka (Denise Raroa and Allison Maru), Opoutama (Julie Batters), Mahanga (Lis Batters), Mahia Beach (Jo Hedley and Jocelyn Zame) and at Whangawehi (Waiwhakaata Greening and Rae Te Nahu) — who networked with their communities and holidaymakers and came to the party as the ultimate volunteers for such a great cause," he said.

Nuhaka residents Bob and Colleen Wesche co-ordinated the rubbish removal from the beach drop zones.

Age was no barrier to getting involved, with volunteers ranging in age from one to 77.

In total, nearly 12 tonnes of rubbish were picked up by hundreds of volunteers.

Volunteer Jane Pares said many participants were surprised just how much rubbish there was.

"Here on the East Coast we are incredibly fortunate to enjoy some of the most pristine beach environments and clean seas on the planet — but how long will this last?" she said.

"These volunteer groups around the Nuhaka and Mahia areas have made a stand and assisted in a very effective and successful local clean-up."

Ms Pares urges people to think twice before tossing

any rubbish on the ground and in particular, plastics, which are now virtually everywhere.

"8000 kilometres away on the diagonally-opposite side of the Pacific Ocean a gigantic soup of plastic rubbish the size of Texas is slowly circulating to the northeast of Hawaii.

"The waste is drawn in from all over the ocean to form the biggest rubbish dump in the world.

"It is estimated that pieces of plastic in the area outweigh surface zooplankton — the tiny animals

forming the base of the marine food web, by six to one.

"Take a look around your home and count what is made of plastic — you'll be amazed.

"Plastic's durability and stability which make it so useful to us are the very qualities that make it so harmful to marine creatures.

"Petro-chemical-based plastics are non-biodegradable, and according to US-based Research Triangle Institute chemist Tony Andrady, every little piece of plastic manufactured in the past 50 years that made it into the ocean is still out there somewhere," she said.

Ms Pares said while plastic was not biodegradable, it was photodegradable, meaning

that over time sunlight breaks it down into ever-smaller fragments and eventually plastic dust.

"These small fragments are mistaken for food by small marine creatures which are then eaten by others, causing higher and higher concentrations of plastic chemicals to accumulate near the top — ultimately ending up on people's dinner tables!

"Plastic bags are serial killers to marine life. The fish, whale, turtle or bird that ingests the bag dies and decomposes around the bag, which then floats off ready for its next victim.

"Each one of us is in a powerful position to take responsibility for our actions if we remember that — plastics don't pollute — people pollute."



□ Rae Te Nahu, Lakesha Lee and Markis Walsh clean up Whangawehi beach as part of the Sustainable Coastlines East Coast clean-up.