

Important climate win, as massive underwater kelp forest guarded by Kawésqar Indigenous Peoples in Chile

PUERTO EDÉN, CHILE, July 21, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Kawésqar Indigenous Community residing at Puerto Edén, Chilean Patagonia, have secured over \$1 million USD from the Chilean government to protect and strengthen underwater kelp forests and the climate services they provide.

The community aspires to be the guardian of the climate regulating functions of the Bernardo O'Higgins National Park, the largest national park in Chile and part of the ancestral territory of the Kawésqar Indigenous community. This funding will support studies, protection and guardianship of the fjord and archipelago system within the park.

“Protecting and restoring kelp forests pays back major returns for local economies, ocean life and the climate. This commitment from the Kawésqar community is exemplary and inspiring for other regions of the world”, stated Dr. Colin Bates, director of Ocean Wise's [Seaforestation Initiative](#).

[Ocean Wise](#), a global NGO on a mission to protect and restore the world's oceans, is a member of the advisory group of the Jetárkte ethno-scientific station in Puerto Edén and is working to restore kelp forests worldwide.

Kelp is critical to combatting climate change

Chile is home to a third of the world's underwater giant kelp forests. These ecosystems are



Huiros Bernardo O'Higgins National Park. Credits Carolina Huenucoy 2021

widely recognized as critical for combatting climate change because they draw down carbon from the atmosphere. Kelp grows up to 30 times faster than plants on land, captures carbon in its tissue and stores a portion of this carbon in the seabed.

The world is waking up to what Indigenous coastal communities like the Kawésqar have known for millennia: underwater forests are critical to sustaining life above and below the water.

What research will this funding support?

The project led by the community seeks to estimate the contribution to global carbon capture made by the belts of giant kelp in its waters. This information will then enable the community to develop a conservation strategy that values ecosystem services – the services nature provides that we would otherwise have to pay for – and generates benefits for residents.

“The Puerto Edén community is overjoyed about the potential with this study. It can offer improved and lasting protection of the kelp forests that are so important to the community, ecosystem and climate. With this commitment, we can say that Puerto Edén is now the climate capital of Western Patagonia”, states Juan Carlos Tonko, President of the Kawésqar Indigenous Community Residing at Puerto Edén.

An extensive support network has been formed to oversee this study and protection of the kelp forest in the 4.3 million hectare park. This network is called the Territorial Assembly of Puerto Edén, and includes the Puerto Edén Artisanal Fishermen's Union, the Kawésqar Indigenous Community Residing at Puerto Edén, the Huilliche Lafken Mawida Indigenous Association of Puerto Edén and the Puerto Edén Neighborhood Council.

[Images available for download here.](#)

Interviews available with:

Dr. Colin Bates
Director, Seaforestation, Ocean Wise
colin.bates@ocean.org

Media Contact
Jeremy Douglas
Executive Vice-president, External Relations, Ocean Wise
jeremy.douglas@ocean.org
+1 778 991 4392

About Ocean Wise®

Ocean Wise is a globally focused conservation organization on a mission to protect and restore

the world's oceans. Through research, education, direct-action conservation and field projects, we empower communities to take action for ocean health. We're focused on tackling three major ocean challenges: overfishing, ocean pollution and climate change. Ocean Wise is headquartered in Vancouver, British Columbia with initiatives across the world.□

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The Kawésqar Indigenous Community residing at Puerto Edén

The Kawésqar Indigenous Community residing at Puerto Edén gathers the last 25 traditional Indigenous canoeing-seafarers of Western Patagonia. UNESCO, in 2009, recognized the Community as a Living Human Treasure for its struggle to keep alive its ancient language and customs.

Kawésqar contact

Mr. Juan Carlos Tonko

President of the Kawésqar Indigenous Community Residing at Puerto Edén

juancarlostonko@gmail.com

Jeremy Douglas

Ocean Wise

+1 778-991-4392

[email us here](#)

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