



Featherston Booktown Media Release

18 March 2020

Featherston Booktown Cancels May Festival

It is with great disappointment that, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the latest guidelines from the NZ Government – and following extensive consideration by the Featherston Booktown Board of Trustees, Featherston Booktown has decided to cancel the 2020 Festival scheduled for 7-10 May 2020.

In making this decision, the Featherston Booktown Board are putting the health and safety of the Featherston community, writers, volunteers, audience members and other guests above all other considerations.

Featherston Booktown Operations Manager, Mary Biggs, says she is sad but grateful to the Board of Trustees for making this very hard decision.

“We want to keep our Featherston community, our writers and visitors safe and well. An enormous amount of work has been done to get to this point, so it’s disappointing that the Programme launch can’t go ahead on the 31st March and that we can’t celebrate the artefact of the book at our Festival in May.”

Featherston Booktown would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused – but hope that in making this call when we have, any inconvenience will be minimised.

The Featherston Booktown Board of Trustees is considering rescheduling the festival to later in the year – or holding it in another form - but this will depend on Government requirements regarding crowd sizes and events.

“We shall continue to monitor the situation and advise the public on our decisions about the Featherston Booktown Festival,” said Chair of the Featherston Booktown Board, Peter Biggs.

ENDS

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About Featherston Booktown

A Booktown is a small rural town or village, close to major cities, in which second-hand and antiquarian bookshops are concentrated. Most Booktowns have developed in villages of historic interest or of scenic beauty. Their residents set up events around books – selling them, writing, reading, illustrating, printing, making and publishing them.

The majority of Booktowns around the world – including Featherston – have been established to revive once prosperous regional towns who have fallen on hard times. Through becoming a Booktown, these communities have positioned themselves distinctively and thereby grown visitation and significantly increased the spirit and unity of the local community and given it confidence in its own future.

The first Booktown was set-up in Hay-on-Wye, Wales, back in 1961. Now they're around the world, from Europe to Malaysia, South Korea, Japan and Australia. The International Organisation of Booktowns binds the towns together.

Featherston is New Zealand's only Booktown and holds their annual Featherston Booktown Festival each year over the second weekend in May. The first Featherston Booktown annual weekend took place in 2015, attracting 2,000 people. Further Booktown weekends were held in 2016, 2017 and 2018, resulting in growing numbers of visitors to the festival and to the town (and the South Wairarapa), along with increasing national interest in the distinctiveness of the event.

The 2017 Featherston Booktown weekend attracted 4,000 visitors. The 2018 Festival attracted almost 5,000 visitors and all the ticketed events sold out. Approximately 6,000 people attended the Festival in 2019 – all our big-ticket events were sold out to enthusiastic audiences and, thanks to Featherston Booktown's wonderfully generous sponsors and donors, all our children-focused events were free, and we were able to continue giving free book vouchers, worth \$15, to all the primary school children attending the five local schools.

The Featherston Booktown Festival has also become nationally well-known for its unique and highly popular Fish'n'Chip Supper, featuring high-profile speakers such as world-acclaimed special effects guru, Sir Richard Taylor; Booker Prize-winning novelist, Lloyd Jones; nationally celebrated writer for young adults, Kate De Goldi; and renowned playwright and novelist, Greg McGee.

Featherston Booktown now has events throughout the year, including, in 2018, an event within the New Zealand International Festival's Readers and Writers week. In February 2019, Joy Cowley, one of New Zealand's most beloved Children's writers, directed a weekend "Writing for Children" workshop. In 2019, we had seven events throughout the year – Joy Cowley's book launch of *Gobbledegook*, poetry readings and buskers during Phantom Billstickers National Poetry Day and four international authors who visited Featherston thanks to our collaboration with Verb Wellington and the New Zealand Festival of the Arts.

THE FEATHERSTON BOOKTOWN TRUST

The Featherston Booktown Trust oversees Featherston Booktown and is a rapidly expanding and successful literary charity. Not only does it run the annual Featherston Booktown Festival, it also delivers an annual programme of literature development activities in the wider Wairarapa region, centred on the town of Featherston and the South Wairarapa district.

The Trust seeks to develop new audiences for literature, help writers fulfil their potential, support the region's literature sector, and create opportunities for the region's diverse community, especially young people, to enjoy and learn through writing, reading and storytelling.

The Featherston Booktown Trust comprises: Peter Biggs (Chair), Pete Monk (Treasurer), Ross Vickery (Secretary), Liz Mellish, Kate Mead, Sam Duckor-Jones and Noelle McCarthy. All the trustees, who give their time and energy pro bono, are Featherston residents, or, in Sam's case, were recent Featherston residents.

The patron of Featherston Booktown is Featherston resident and internationally acclaimed writer, Joy Cowley. Lincoln Gould, previously CEO of Booksellers New Zealand and who conceived the original idea of Featherston Booktown, is Founding Kaumatua.