

Ecological footprints in focus

By EMIMA DAWE

IT'S a New Zealand first and Cromwell and Tarras are at the heart of it.

The Wanaka-based Otago Polytechnic's centre for sustainable practice, in conjunction with Victoria University, is carrying out a three-year project where it will study four communities to determine their ecological footprint.

Some Cromwell and Tarras residents will be interviewed for the project, and will represent the rural and semi-rural communities. Walheke, combined with part of the Waitakere ranges, will represent the urban communities, with one more urban community yet to be confirmed.

Project manager Ella Lawton, from Wanaka, said the aim of the New Zealand Footprint Project was to understand the resource requirements of different types of New Zealand communities and different types of New Zealanders. "In terms of resources, we're talking about what we need to supply people with the food they eat, the houses they live in, the electricity they use, the government services they need and their transport needs."

Miss Lawton said the study would measure resource use in terms of how much land was needed, instead of being measured in monetary terms - known as ecological accounting. On a worldwide scale, people were using more resources than what the land could sustainably provide, but New Zealand was unique in that the population was actually using less resources than what the land could provide, Miss Lawton said.

"However, that's only looking at what resources we use for our



Sustainable thinking: Footprint Project manager Ella Lawton will interview Cromwell and Tarras residents as part of the study that will look at the ecological footprint of four New Zealand communities.

own use. If we add on what resources we produce for our exports, then we're in overshoot (using more resources than what the land can provide)."

While this type of study had been carried out in the United Kingdom, nothing of its kind had been studied in New Zealand before, and Miss Lawton said she hoped the results would help communities plan for its future resource use as well as identifying poten-

tial resource scarcities in the future. The interviews looked at people's shopping habits, their travel needs, what types of houses they live in and what sort of food they eat.

"We don't want people to think they're doing something wrong. They're not."

"It's just an opportunity to discuss why they use the resources they use and how we can work together to reduce resource use,

particularly as they increase in cost in the future."

The project was almost halfway through its three-year timeline, with Miss Lawton currently interviewing volunteers.

She hoped to have her interviews analysed by the end of the year before holding community workshops to discuss her findings and invite discussion about how the community might plan for the future.

Be involved:

If you'd like to be part of the project and live in Cromwell or Tarras, you can register your interest by contacting project manager Ella Lawton on 021 735 981 or by emailing her at ella.lawton@op.ac.nz