New Zealand Starlight Conference

Abstracts

Session 1

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Title: The hidden costs of light: How preserving natural darkness protects our world.

Abstract: Light pollution is increasing at an alarming rate of 10% annually, posing significant threats to our environment, health, and cultural heritage. This talk explores why reclaiming our night skies matters, highlighting the urgent need to reduce the overuse of artificial light and champion responsible lighting practices.

Excessive artificial light disrupts ecosystems, affecting nocturnal wildlife, including birds, insects, and marine species whose survival depends on natural darkness. It also impacts human health, contributing to sleep disorders, increased stress, and chronic conditions. Beyond these effects, light pollution erodes our cultural heritage, disconnecting us from the stars and the traditions tied to them.

The journey towards better lighting involves adopting practices like shielding fixtures, using warmer light temperatures, and illuminating spaces only when necessary. These actions can significantly reduce light pollution while maintaining safety and functionality. It's not just about turning off lights; it's about lighting smarter to protect our environment and well-being.

New Zealand has a unique opportunity to lead as a Dark Sky Nation, demonstrating how a country can balance modern needs with preserving its natural nightscape. By embracing innovative lighting policies, engaging communities, and promoting astrotourism, New Zealand can inspire others to take action. This approach offers environmental, economic, and cultural benefits, positioning New Zealand as a global advocate for the night.

This talk invites the audience to consider the broader impacts of light pollution and the collective actions needed to protect our skies. By making thoughtful choices, we can ensure the night remains a vital and protected part of our world, enhancing life on Earth for generations to come.