

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Manawatū-Whanganui Economic Action Plan progressing well**

Since its launch in August last year, significant progress is being made in implementing many of the identified opportunities in the Manawatū-Whanganui Economic Action Plan under the banner of Accelerate25.

Over the past six months, a number of project teams have been formed to help lead the implementation of key actions in the Plan, with involvement from business, iwi, local, regional and central government.

One of the nine identified opportunities within the Action Plan is Te Pae Tata: Realising Māori Potential. A huge step towards realising this opportunity is a regional strategy focused on the Māori economy. Te Pae Tawhiti, a complementary strategy document to the wider Manawatū-Whanganui Economic Action Plan has been developed and was launched in Ohakune in November 2016.

Accelerate25 Lead Team member, Pahia Turia has been heavily involved with the creation of the document and believes that now is the time for iwi to work with each other to help grow the whole Region's economic potential.

"Now the hard work really begins, as iwi around the Region put their heads together to implement the strategy," he says.

Meanwhile the New Zealand Transport Agency, District and City Council Mayors, and the Regional Council Chairman, are rapidly progressing with the development of business cases for State Highway and local road improvements to improve access to central New Zealand.

Manawatū Mayor Helen Warboys says "developing better access and distribution via our State Highway network is important for the whole Region". Bruce Gordon, Horizons Regional Council Chairman agrees.

"With the Whirikino Trestle being replaced, the upgrading of State Highway One, and now the plans for accessing central New Zealand developing, it is really pleasing to see the Region's Land Transport Strategy being implemented," he says.

Significant progress is also being made on plans to redevelop the Whanganui Port to provide for both industrial and recreational opportunities.

Whanganui Mayor Hamish McDouall says "we have been working closely with the community and central government to develop a masterplan aimed at revitalising the Port area which will be finalised in the next couple of months, with business cases to follow".

“Businesses are already looking to set up or relocate to the port in response to this initiative,” he says.

Advances in the primary sector will feature in workshops at the Central Districts Field Days, particularly around the benefits of reticulated stock water. In addition, projects around the Region are focusing on farm mentoring, farm extension, developing high value crops, agri-food and technology.

“Implementation is being led by farmers and we are making real progress,” says Shelley Dew-Hopkins, chair of the Primary Sector Implementation Group.

“We have teams currently working in Manawatū, Taumarunui and Whanganui.”

In the Rangitikei a project to look at the supply of rural water in the Tutaenui area is funded by the Ministry for Primary Industries and led by Rangitikei District Council.

“A reliable supply of water can really help key parts of the district make the most of high quality land. Some areas of our District have very fertile, versatile soils so farmers could consider intensifying current production or try new crops or horticulture,” says Rangitikei Mayor Andy Watson.

Mānuka production continues to feature strongly in the Region with companies such as True Honey Co., based in Dannevirke, recently launching their premium quality product in the United Kingdom.

Mayor of Tararua District Tracey Collis noted the importance of the primary sector to the Region and is pleased to see efficient and responsible use of water is a key priority in the primary sector.

“Here in Tararua, we have a thriving primary sector from dairy through to sheep and beef and Mānuka Honey. The Manawatū-Whanganui Economic Action Plan places great importance on using our resources in a sustainable way and the primary industry is very wary of that,” she says.

Last year Manawatū-Whanganui experienced the ninth highest annual regional tourist spend ahead of Regions such as Hawkes Bay, Marlborough and Taranaki. Implementation of the tourism opportunity is being led by Visit Ruapehu and supported by Ruapehu District Council. The team includes local iwi and the Department of Conservation (DoC). DoC is progressing consideration of the Tongariro National Park Management Plan to allow development of a mountain bike trail from Turoa to Ohakune. The team is also working on the offerings available to tourists visiting the wider Region.

Ruapehu Mayor Don Cameron says “the district and Region are aiming to make the most of New Zealand’s booming tourism market and many local attractions”.

“Last year Manawatu-Whanganui as a whole experienced an 8.2 per cent growth in tourism spend so we are certainly heading in the right direction.”

The Region is also fortunate to have Massey University and FoodHQ as centres of international excellence. As part of government’s support for Accelerate 25, Food HQ is in the process of recruiting an international business development manager.

Palmerston North City Council is one of the founding partners of FoodHQ and Mayor Grant Smith believes it has huge potential.

“The collective of research organisations provides jobs, opportunities and attracts new innovation to the Region. Further development of FoodHQ’s international business is vital,” he says.

Meanwhile in the Horowhenua District, the Horowhenua District Council, business leaders and community groups are looking at innovative ways to provide better professional services and facilities, along with greater accessibility for the older population.

To find out more about Accelerate25, the people involved and the opportunities identified for the Manawatū-Whanganui Region, visit [www.accelerate25.co.nz](http://www.accelerate25.co.nz).

## **ENDS**

Editors’ notes: The Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment’s most recently released statistics relating to annual tourism spend can be found here <http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/sectors-industries/tourism/tourism-research-data/monthly-regional-tourism-estimates>

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