



WORK PROGRAMME IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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Prepared by

WellingtonNZ



INTRODUCTION

WAIRARAPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy 2022-2030 (WEDS) sets a shared direction for building a more resilient, prosperous, and future-ready Wairarapa. It is jointly owned by the three Wairarapa district councils — South Wairarapa, Carterton, and Masterton.

The WEDS Work Programme focuses effort and investment where an economic development lens can have the biggest impact for the region. Programme oversight is provided by the WEDS Steering Group, which comprises economic development representatives from local councils, iwi, central government, and independent industry leaders with relevant expertise.

The WEDS Work Programme is reviewed annually and currently targets three strategic priority areas: Food and Fibre (Primary Sector), Skills and Workforce Development, and Water Resilience. These priority areas reflect the region's aspirations to support sustainable economic growth, strengthen community wellbeing, and build readiness for the challenges and opportunities ahead.

This document provides context for each priority area; highlights progress to date and outlines the actions and outcomes that will guide delivery over the coming year.

Together, these efforts aim to enable Wairarapa's people, businesses, and communities to thrive — now and into the future.

WAIRARAPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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THE WAIRARAPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2022 - 2030

The Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy (WEDS) is a regionally owned strategy designed to support a resilient, future-focused economy that reflects the unique identity, strengths, and aspirations of Wairarapa and its people. At its core is the vision of Thrive Wairarapa – a thriving community alive with opportunity.

The Strategy provides a long-term framework to guide regional collaboration, investment, and action toward initiatives that strengthen economic resilience, support sustainable growth and improve wellbeing outcomes across the region.

From Vision to Strategy: How WEDS came about

In 2019, the three Wairarapa district councils — Carterton, Masterton and South Wairarapa — initiated the development of the WEDS strategy with support from Central Government and regional partners. Recognising that meaningful economic development must reflect local priorities and aspirations, the Strategy was shaped through regional engagement.

A series of hui, workshops, interviews and feedback sessions were held with:

- Iwi and hapū
- Business and industry leaders
- Education and training providers
- Social service organisations
- Community groups and residents.

This engagement process helped identify the region's key strengths, challenges, and future opportunities grounded in local knowledge, lived experience, and supporting economic evidence.

The result is a strategy that reflects the values and aspirations of Wairarapa communities while recognising the distinct characteristics and opportunities across both rural and urban areas.

The WEDS strategy was formally adopted by Carterton, Masterton, and South Wairarapa District Councils in 2022 and continues to provide the foundation for coordinated regional economic development activity.

WEDS Vision

The vision of WEDS is:

“Thrive Wairarapa” – a thriving community alive with opportunity.

The vision is supported through two interconnected objectives:

- growing comparative advantage (opportunities) by fostering enterprise, innovation, and opportunities that support the future economy.
- building resilience (enablers) by protecting existing assets, strengthening regional capability, and leveraging partnerships and investment opportunities.



THE WAIRARAPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2022-2030

The Strategy focuses on the areas that matter most for Wairarapa's long-term success. It recognises the region's unique strengths and challenges, while building on the significant work and relationships that already exist across the region.

WEDS Focus Areas

The Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy identifies ten primary focus areas that represent either opportunities for growth or key enablers that support long-term regional success. These are grouped under five strategic themes that together reflect the foundations of a thriving regional economy:

- People Focus — capable people and sector development
- Business Focus — business acceleration and robust businesses
- Iwi Focus — sustainable relationships with iwi and growth of the iwi/Māori economy
- Land Use Focus — adequate water and optimised land use
- Digital and Technology Focus — enabling infrastructure and advanced digital and technology adoption

These focus areas continue to guide the WEDS Work Programme and inform the initiatives prioritised within this Implementation Plan.

WEDS WORK PROGRAMME - TURNING STRATEGY INTO ACTION

The Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy Work Programme translates regional strategy into coordinated, practical action. It exists to respond to real regional challenges and opportunities in a way that is intentional, collaborative, and focused on long-term impact.

Since the adoption of the WEDS, a regional prioritisation process undertaken in 2023 has helped refine the focus of delivery for 2024–2027. This process brought together iwi, business, local government, education, and community leaders to ensure the Work Programme reflects shared regional priorities and readiness for action. Through this process, three priority areas were confirmed for targeted investment and delivery:

- Food & fibre (primary sector) growth
- Skills & workforce development
- Water resilience

These priorities do not represent the full breadth of economic development in Wairarapa. Tourism, hospitality, small business growth and the Māori economy remain critical contributors to regional prosperity and are embedded across the wider Work Programme.

However, these three areas were identified as those where coordinated, regionally-led action through the WEDS Project Management Office (PMO) can deliver the most sustained impact, addressing key system gaps and leveraging existing momentum.



Challenges, Opportunities and Initiatives

The WEDS Work Programme is structured around a clear and practical delivery approach:

- **Understanding** the challenges that constrain regional growth,
- **Identify** opportunities where Wairarapa can thrive; and
- **Designing** and delivering initiatives that generate meaningful, measurable impact.

Each initiative is intentionally aligned to one or more of the strategy's ten focus areas, spanning people, business, iwi, land use, and technology enablers. Together, these initiatives form a connected and adaptive programme of work grounded in regional need and shaped by collaboration across partners.

WAIRARAPA - KEY INDICATORS AT A GLANCE



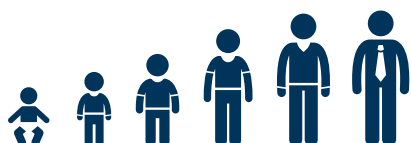
Wairarapa population now grown to **51,400**.



20% of the population identifies as Māori (**10,180**).



Population growth in Wairarapa averaged **1.0%pa** over 5 years

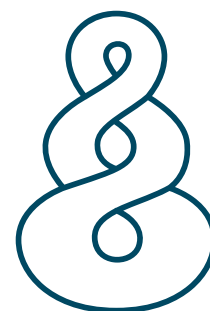


58.2% of population within working age, below national average of 64.9%



6,609 registered businesses - most small and medium-sized enterprises.

276 Māori-owned registered businesses.



4,513 self-employed, representing around **20.6%** of the total workforce.



Māori employment accounted for **17.7%** of total employment.



+1% annual job growth over the past 5 years.



Unemployment is low **4.1%** (below NZ average of **5.0%**).



NEET rate sits at **8.1%** (well below NZ average of **12.9%**).



83.8% of school leavers attained NCEA L2 or above in 2024. Higher than NZ average (**76.1%**)



Food & Fibre is Wairarapa's top growth driver and biggest strength. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing grew **3.7%** in 2025, contributed **\$9.2m** to regional total growth.

The industries in which Wairarapa has the largest comparative advantages are electricity, gas, water and waste services (**location quotient=1.7**), manufacturing (**1.6**) and agriculture, forestry and fishing (**1.6**).

WEDS WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY AREAS

FOOD & FIBRE (PRIMARY SECTOR)

The food and fibre sector sits at the heart of Wairarapa's economy, communities, and identity. In 2025, the sector contributed approximately \$598 million in regional GDP and employed 4,240 people across farming, viticulture, processing, transport, and supply chain services.

As one of Wairarapa's foundational industries, the sector reflects both our heritage and our future - combining generations of expertise with emerging opportunities in innovation, diversification, technology adoption, and value-added production. The strength of the sector has a direct influence on the resilience and prosperity of the wider regional economy.

Issues and opportunities

Like many rural regions, Wairarapa's food and fibre sector continues to face significant pressures. Productive land use is under increasing scrutiny, while market volatility, rising operational costs, workforce shortages, succession challenges, and changing regulatory and environmental expectations are placing pressure on traditional business models.

At the same time, the region is well positioned to leverage new opportunities. There is growing interest in diversification, value-added production, technology adoption, alternative land use options, and niche market development that aligns with Wairarapa's strengths, scale, and story.

To realise these opportunities, the sector requires strong leadership, improved business capability, better connections across the innovation ecosystem and practical support that enables businesses to adapt with confidence. The WEDS Work Programme seeks to play a strategic enabling role – helping identify gaps, connect partners, and support initiatives that strengthen the long-term resilience and competitiveness of the sector.

Actions to Date:

- **Food & Fibre Capability Development (ongoing):** In partnership with industry, the WEDS Work Programme piloted a capability development initiative in early 2026 involving ten businesses from across the food and fibre value chain. Participating businesses undertook comprehensive business reviews to identify operational strengths, capability gaps, and areas requiring targeted support. The programme was designed to ensure businesses are building strong operational foundations before scaling, diversifying, or investing in future growth opportunities. Insights from the pilot are helping shape future sector capability initiatives that respond directly to the needs of regional businesses.
- **Future Options (ongoing):** Building on previous research and regional engagement, WEDS has narrowed its Future Options workstream to four diversification opportunities that have shown early signs of commercial viability. Initial pathway mapping has been completed for each opportunity, with work now focused on progressing these options for the region while supporting landowners, growers, and rural innovators to test and demonstrate new approaches that respond to changing environmental, market, and consumer expectations.
- **Workforce Capability (ongoing):** WEDS has partnered with industry to deliver a cross-primary sector workforce initiative focused on leadership, communication, and team performance. Sector engagement identified that while technical capability within businesses remains strong, there is increasing demand for support that strengthens people leadership, workplace culture, staff engagement, and retention.

WEDS WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY AREAS

FOOD & FIBRE (PRIMARY SECTOR)

The initiative seeks to support businesses to build high-performing teams and create more resilient workplaces across the sector

- **Shared Narrative (ongoing):** Delivered in partnership with Destination Wairarapa, the Shared Narrative project is developing a community-backed regional story and messaging framework that consistently and authentically articulates what makes Wairarapa unique. The initiative aims to capture who we are, what we value, and the qualities that distinguish the region. This shared narrative will support Wairarapa to better communicate its value proposition and enable sector development — whether attracting visitors and residents, promoting the provenance of regional products and services, or encouraging investment into the region.
- **Seed and Grain Processing and Storage Facility (2025-26):** WEDS has supported the development of a proposed Lower North Island seed and grain cleaning, processing, and storage facility at Waingawa to strengthen regional supply chain resilience and support value-added production. The initiative seeks to improve local access to processing, storage, and logistics infrastructure for growers, while increasing competition and reducing reliance on out-of-region facilities. WEDS supported the development of a robust funding application and associated commercial groundwork, helping position the project for investment consideration. The project continues to progress through investor engagement and commercial structuring, with strong alignment to wider regional priorities around water resilience, food and fibre diversification, and industrial development at Waingawa.
- **Good2Great Leadership Programme (2021-23):** Delivered in partnership with Business Wairarapa and the Ministry for Primary Industries, the Good2Great Leadership Programmes (2021–2022 and 2023) supported businesses to strengthen leadership capability, workplace culture, and team performance. The programme demonstrated strong regional demand for practical business capability support tailored to the realities of food and fibre businesses.
- **Wairarapa Food & Fibre Innovation Forum (2023):** The Wairarapa Food & Fibre Innovation Forum in 2023 brought together local producers, researchers, funding agencies, and sector support organisations to strengthen connections across the innovation ecosystem. The forum improved awareness of available support pathways relating to research and development, commercialisation, export growth, and technology adoption, while reinforcing the value of collaboration and knowledge sharing across the sector.
- **Agritourism Pilot Programme (2023):** WEDS supported an agritourism workshop series in 2023, supporting rural businesses to explore opportunities to diversify income streams through visitor experiences and destination-based offerings. The programme highlighted the growing intersection between the primary sector and visitor economy, particularly for businesses seeking to strengthen resilience through diversification.
- **Strategic Planning for Sector Development (2024):** A regional food and fibre strategic planning project commissioned through the Regional Economic Development Plan (REDP) helped identify long-term sector priorities, capability gaps, and opportunities for coordinated investment and delivery.

WEDS WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY AREAS

FOOD & FIBRE (PRIMARY SECTOR)

This work informed the next phase of sector development initiatives and strengthened alignment between Wairarapa priorities and wider Wellington regional economic development objectives.

Outcomes for Wairarapa

Short-term outcomes

- **Improved understanding of sector needs:** Stronger engagement across the food and fibre sector has provided clearer insight into regional challenges, capability gaps, and emerging opportunities. This has helped focus activity on areas where coordinated support can deliver the greatest value and avoid duplication of effort.
- **Better alignment across the system:** Relationships developed across industry, councils, central government, education providers, and support agencies are improving coordination and enabling a more connected approach to sector development.
- **Capability priorities identified:** Key capability themes — including governance, leadership, workforce development, succession planning, strategy, and investment readiness — have been identified as critical enablers for long-term sector resilience and growth.
- **Foundation initiatives established:** Early - stage initiatives and pilot programmes have created strong foundations for a more structured and sector-informed programme of capability and innovation support moving forward.

Expected long-term outcomes

- **Greater sector resilience and sustainability:** Improved leadership capability, stronger business fundamentals, and increased confidence in strategic planning will help businesses better adapt to future environmental, economic, and workforce challenges.
- **Increased productivity and innovation:** A stronger innovation ecosystem and improved investment readiness will support businesses to diversify sustainably, adopt new technologies, improve productivity, and explore higher-value opportunities.
- **Stronger economic contribution:** A resilient and future-focused food and fibre sector will continue to play a significant role in supporting regional prosperity through employment, value-added production, export growth, and local investment.
- **Culture of continuous improvement:** A more connected and capability-focused sector will support ongoing learning, collaboration, and long-term business development rather than reliance on short-term interventions.
- **Commercial relevance of diversification pathways:** Future options work will help improve understanding of commercially viable diversification opportunities for Wairarapa under changing market and environmental conditions, supporting evidence-based decision-making for landowners and investors.

Initiatives for 2026/27

INITIATIVES	EXPECTED OUTCOMES	ACTION	LEAD
Increase productivity and resilience in Wairarapa's food & fibre sector by equipping businesses with the knowledge, skills, and support needed to drive efficiency, innovation, and sustainability.	- Businesses adopt improved practices that enhance operational efficiency and profitability. - Increased collaboration and knowledge-sharing across the sector. - Demonstrated improvements in resilience (e.g. cost management, diversification, risk planning). - Strengthened reputation of the sector as innovative and future-focused.	Deliver and evaluate the Capability Boost programme , supporting a cohort of businesses to identify and implement practical improvements.	WEDS PMO
Strengthen the resilience and growth potential of Wairarapa's food & fibre sector by progressing priority value-add opportunities and enabling pathways to market.	- Viable value-add opportunities are advanced toward implementation. - Increased sector confidence to explore new products and markets. - Strengthened connections between producers, processors, and markets. - Attraction of investment and partnerships aligned to priority opportunities.	Progress identified future options , with current focus areas including kiwifruit, wool, olives, and seeds and grains, through targeted feasibility assessments, partnerships, and enabling activities. This work will support potential implementation while retaining flexibility to investigate additional opportunities as regional priorities and market conditions evolve.	WEDS PMO
Develop a strong, shared narrative for Wairarapa's food & fibre sector that enhances visibility, strengthens connections, and supports market positioning.	- Increased recognition of Wairarapa's food & fibre strengths locally and nationally. - Improved engagement with buyers, investors, and stakeholders. - Greater sense of identity and connection across the sector. - Enhanced ability to attract talent, investment, and opportunities	Deliver a targeted programme of sector profiling and storytelling , showcasing local producers, innovation, and value chain strengths.	Destination Wairarapa
Strengthen workforce capability and resilience in the food & fibre sector by supporting industry-led training aligned with the Wairarapa Skills & Workforce Action Plan.	- Improved alignment between industry needs and training provision. - Increased access to practical, relevant training opportunities for the sector. - Enhanced workforce capability to support productivity, sustainability, and innovation. - Evidence of sector demand to inform future workforce development initiatives.	Deliver a cross- primary sector workforce initiative focused on leadership, communication, and team performance.	B+LNZ, DairyNZ, WEDS PMO

WEDS WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY AREAS

SKILLS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

A strong, skilled local workforce is the backbone of a thriving regional economy. In Wairarapa, our people drive productivity across farms, factories, healthcare, hospitality, tourism, and innovation. But with a changing population, evolving industries and rising skill demands, we need to invest in our people — ensuring they are equipped to succeed now and in the future.

That is where Skill Wairarapa (formally Wairarapa Skills Leadership Group) comes in. Supported by the WEDS Project Management Office (PMO), Skill Wairarapa brings together employers, industry, educators, iwi, and community leaders to agree on initiatives that will make the largest impact on shared themes, issues and opportunities. This in turn supports growth in capability, enables more career pathways and future-proofs the Wairarapa's workforce pipeline.

Issues and Opportunities

Wairarapa needs to grow, attract, and retain a skilled workforce that can adapt to technological, environmental, and industry changes. While the region benefits from strong educational outcomes and community connections, challenges remain. These challenges include limited local pathways for skills development, digital capability gaps, constrained access to skilled workers, and the need to ensure employers foster positive, supportive workplaces.

Retention of talent is a priority, requiring a “whole-of-family” approach to attract and keep professionals in the region, reflecting Wairarapa's unique lifestyle and community strengths. Building better connections between schools, training providers, and employers will enable smoother pathways into local employment, reducing youth outmigration and supporting a sustainable workforce pipeline. There is a significant opportunity to strengthen Wairarapa's workforce by:

- Aligning education and training with industry needs.
- Developing our rangatahi's skills for work.
- Connecting schools with our local employers and showcasing pathways.
- Increasing digital readiness and reducing digital inequality.
- Building leadership and employer capability to create great workplaces.
- Showcasing the region as a welcoming, values-driven place to live and work.

Collaboration across sectors will enable Wairarapa to future-proof its workforce while strengthening the region's reputation as an attractive, supportive place for workers, businesses, and investment.

Current Initiatives in Delivery

- **Skills for Work:** Coordinated and funded by WEDS and co-delivered through WEDS and Skill Wairarapa. This initiative aims to improve workforce outcomes by ensuring young people are work-ready and workplaces are youth-ready. This initiative will strengthen awareness and understanding of the local opportunities, education, training and employment pathways in Wairarapa with a focus on supporting young people who intend to live and work locally.
- **WaiHost:** WEDS has funded Business Wairarapa to facilitate the delivery of the WaiHost Programme to lift frontline service capability in customer-facing roles, helping to deliver a premium Wairarapa visitor experience.
- **Digital Fluency Programme:** Coordinated by Waitech Trust and funded by WEDS, this programme is assessing and building digital skills for secondary students, supporting the development of a future-ready workforce.

WEDS WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY AREAS

SKILLS AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Outcomes for Wairarapa

Short-term outcomes

- **Stronger youth transitions into local employment:** Young people gain clearer visibility of local career options, workplaces improve their readiness to support youth, and early employment outcomes strengthen.
- **Employer capability and mindset shifted:** Businesses adopt more inclusive, development-focused workforce practices, improving retention, productivity, and workplace culture.
- **Skilled workforce retention and wellbeing:** Employers, community organisations, and workforce partners continue to support skilled workers and their families to successfully live and work in Wairarapa through strong local connections and positive workplace experiences.
- **Uplifted frontline service capability:** Customer-facing roles demonstrate improved confidence, professionalism, and consistency, contributing to higher service standards and visitor satisfaction.
- **Foundational digital capability strengthened:** Secondary students build practical baseline digital skills aligned to real workplace needs, improving future job readiness and employer confidence.

Expected Long-Term Outcomes

- **Future-ready workforce:** Students and workers develop the skills required for modern workplaces, strengthening local business resilience, productivity, and capacity for innovation.
- **Youth retention and sustainable talent pipelines:** Clear local education and employment pathways reduce youth out-migration and support rangatahi to transition confidently from education into work, supported by youth-ready workplaces.
- **Connected workforce ecosystem:** Skilled professionals and their families, both domestic and international, are supported to live, work and stay in Wairarapa through stronger connections to employment, housing, services and community life.
- **Connected workforce ecosystem:** Cross-sector collaboration reduces fragmentation, strengthens regional planning, and enables shared responses to workforce challenges.
- **Reduced digital inequality:** Equitable access to digital skills training enables participation across rural and urban communities, supporting inclusive economic growth.
- **Culture of collaborative leadership:** Purpose-driven local leaders are developed to drive sector improvement, workplace wellbeing, and community-led solutions.
- **Enhanced regional reputation:** A people-focused, coordinated workforce approach positions Wairarapa as an attractive place to live, work, and invest, underpinning long-term economic and community wellbeing.

Initiatives for 2026/27

INITIATIVE	EXPECTED OUTCOMES	ACTION	LEAD
Improve workforce outcomes by ensuring secondary school students are work-ready and workplaces are youth-ready , while strengthening awareness and understanding of local education, training and employment pathways in Wairarapa. This initiative focuses on supporting rangatahi to successfully transition from school into further education, training, and meaningful local employment opportunities.	- Secondary school students are better equipped with practical, industry-relevant work-ready skills. - Employers are better able to recruit, develop and retain young workers. - Increased engagement between secondary school students and local employers. - Improved understanding of local education, training, and employment pathways. - Improved alignment between education and industry needs. - Increased participation and equitable access for Māori, Pasifika, and all young people. - More coordinated and visible workforce development activity across Wairarapa.	Deliver Skills for Work – a coordinated programme of workforce development initiatives focused on supporting secondary school students to successfully transition from education into employment. The programme strengthens connections between schools, training providers, employers, and industry across Wairarapa. Key activities include the development of a Wairarapa Work-Ready Passport to help rangatahi build the employability skills valued by employers; Quick Fire Connections events that connect students with industry and develop professional skills; earn-as-you-learn opportunities that bridge the gap between learning and workplace experience; career expos and workplace visits that increase awareness of local career pathways; and practical work-readiness activities delivered in partnership with schools, employers, and education providers. Work with employers, educators, and workforce partners to identify and develop initiatives that strengthen employer capability to attract, support, develop, and retain young workers, including improving youth-friendly workplace practices, onboarding, supervision, and pastoral support.	WEDS PMO and Skill Wairarapa
Strengthen workforce capability across Wairarapa through accessible, cross-sector training that improves customer service, supervision, leadership, and workplace culture, with a particular focus on supporting SMEs and visitor-facing sectors.	- Improved customer service, supervision, and leadership capability across Wairarapa businesses. - Increased workforce resilience, retention, and readiness to meet changing customer and business needs. - Strengthened business capability, performance, and workplace culture, particularly within tourism, hospitality, and other customer-facing sectors. - Greater access to practical, affordable workforce development opportunities for SMEs across multiple sectors.	Deliver a programme of WaiHost workshops focused on customer experience, supervision, management, and workplace training capability, alongside structured post-workshop mentoring and follow-up engagement to support practical implementation within workplaces. Continue to evolve WaiHost as a cross-sector workforce development programme responsive to local business needs, while recognising and promoting businesses and staff applying WaiHost principles.	Business Wairarapa
Build digital capability across Wairarapa by improving digital fluency among students, schools, businesses, and communities, supporting the development of a future-ready workforce and more resilient local enterprises.	- Increased workforce readiness for technology - enabled jobs, education, and business environments. - Improved access to digital learning opportunities, particularly for rural and underserved communities. - Stronger local business capability to adopt digital tools, improve productivity, and adapt to future change.	Pilot a digital fluency baseline assessment and learning programme with secondary school students, supported by digital learning resources, access to devices, and capability-building workshops. Progress implementation planning for wider rollout across Wairarapa schools, while supporting digital technology learning opportunities and capability development for schools, businesses, and communities.	Waitech Trust

WEDS WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY AREAS

WATER RESILIENCE

Water remains one of the most critical long-term issues influencing Wairarapa's economic future, environmental sustainability, and community wellbeing. Reliable and resilient water systems underpin the region's productive capacity, support business confidence and investment, and enable communities and industries to adapt to increasing environmental and climate pressures.

The Wairarapa Water Resilience Strategy 2021 (WWRS) established a shared regional framework for improving water resilience across Wairarapa and was subsequently recognised as a regional priority through the Wellington Regional Economic Development Plan (REDP).

During 2024-26, progress was made toward advancing coordinated delivery of the Strategy through a shared Work Plan. The report "A Case for Action" was delivered, with economic modelling demonstrating that a water-resilient future could yield substantial economic and employment benefits, including a \$1.5 billion increase in GDP and approximately 3,800 more jobs by 2050, compared to a constrained scenario.

At the same time, wider national and local government reform processes affecting water resilience continue to evolve. This includes the introduction of Local Water Done Well, Resource Management Act reform, changing local government structures, and ongoing planning and infrastructure reviews across the region.

While these changing settings can be a challenge to further implementation of actions under the WWRS, water resilience remains critical to long-term economic development for Wairarapa. Maintaining visibility of the issue, supporting regional understanding, and ensuring readiness for future strategic action remain important components of the WEDS Work Programme.

Issues and opportunities

Water challenges in Wairarapa are complex and interconnected, with economic, environmental, cultural, and social implications. Issues relating to water availability, security, quality, allocation, storage, and infrastructure capacity continue to influence the region's productive potential and future growth opportunities.

Despite these challenges, there remain significant long-term opportunities to improve regional resilience through smarter allocation, innovative water capture and storage solutions, improved efficiency, and stronger alignment between land use and water management practices.

The current changing environment presents an opportunity for the region to better understand emerging national policy settings and ensure future work is aligned with evolving regulatory, infrastructure, and governance frameworks.

Actions to date

- **A Case for Action:** The WEDS Work Programme funded the "Case for Action" project under the Water Capture pillar of the WWRS Work Plan. The project helped build a clearer evidence base around the long-term importance of water resilience to regional productivity, growth, and investment readiness, while supporting future strategic planning discussions.
- **Wairarapa Water Resilience Strategy Work Plan:** Together, the three local District Councils, regional council and iwi developed a regional Water Resilience Work Plan, identifying priority projects and opportunities across five key pillars: attenuation, allocation, capture, land use, and efficient use. This work established an important strategic foundation for future regional water resilience initiatives and investment discussions.

WEDS WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY AREAS

WATER RESILIENCE

- **Infrastructure investment at Waingawa Industrial Estate:** With co-funding from Carterton District Council, Kānoa – Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit (MBIE) and WEDS, process water infrastructure is now delivering non-potable water at the Waingawa Industrial Estate. This infrastructure supports improved water resilience for existing industry, reduces reliance on potable water supplies, and helps enable future industrial and economic development opportunities within the region.
- **Water Resilience Summer Series:** The Water Resilience Summer Series, delivered by the Wairarapa Water Users Society and supported through the WEDS Work Programme, has continued across the 2023–24, 2024–25 and 2025–26 seasons. The series has created a valuable platform for regional discussion and knowledge sharing, bringing together farmers, industry support services, regulators, environmental interests, and community stakeholders to explore innovation, practical solutions, and emerging issues relating to water use and resilience. The continuation of the series reflects the ongoing importance of maintaining regional dialogue, relationships, and awareness while broader strategic and policy settings continue to evolve.
- **Strengthened relationships and regional dialogue:** Initiatives such as the Water Resilience Summer Series have continued to support cross-sector engagement and collaboration, helping maintain constructive regional conversations around water use, innovation, and future opportunities.
- **Readiness for future strategic action:** Foundational work completed to date positions the region to respond more effectively when future national policy, governance, and infrastructure settings become clearer.

Expected Long-Term Outcomes

- **Improved water security for communities and industry:** Long-term investment in resilient and fit-for-purpose water infrastructure has the potential to support business continuity, future growth, community wellbeing, and more sustainable resource use across the region.
- **Better alignment between water, land use, and economic development:** Future regional planning approaches can support more integrated decision-making across water management, land use, environmental outcomes, and economic development priorities.
- **Increased investment readiness:** The strategic and collaborative work completed to date improves Wairarapa's ability to respond to future funding and infrastructure opportunities as they emerge.
- **Stronger regional collaboration around water:** Ongoing engagement and relationship-building across sectors is helping support a more collaborative and informed regional approach to water resilience over the long term.
- **Long-term regional resilience:** Maintaining visibility of water resilience as a regional priority ensures Wairarapa remains focused on one of the most significant long-term enablers of economic, environmental, and community wellbeing outcomes.

Outcomes for Wairarapa

Short-term outcomes

- **Continued regional visibility of water resilience:** Water resilience remains visible as a long-term regional priority within the WEDS Work Programme despite the current pause in formal implementation activity.
- **Improved understanding of regional water challenges:** Previous planning and evidence-gathering work has strengthened understanding of regional water demand, infrastructure constraints, and long-term resilience challenges facing Wairarapa.

Initiatives for 2026/27

INITIATIVE	EXPECTED OUTCOMES	ACTION	LEAD
Maintain regional visibility and strategic alignment of the Wairarapa Water Resilience Strategy as a long-term economic development priority for Wairarapa while national and local government reform settings continue to evolve. Support opportunities that strengthen water resilience as an enabler of economic growth, land-use diversification, sector development, and future investment.	- Water resilience remains recognised across the region as a critical enabler of long-term economic, environmental, and community outcomes. - Strong regional relationships and collaboration are maintained across councils, iwi, industry, regulators, and community stakeholders. - Wairarapa remains well-positioned to respond to future funding, infrastructure, and policy opportunities as enabling settings become clearer. - Regional understanding of emerging water resilience challenges, opportunities, and innovation pathways continues to strengthen. - The region continues to support resilient water-reliant sectors and future economic growth opportunities.	Support regional engagement, visibility, and communication around completed and ongoing water resilience work. Maintain strategic alignment, relationships, and readiness for future opportunities and implementation pathways.	WEDS PMO
		Advocate for and support opportunities that strengthen water resilience, including water storage as an enabler of economic growth, sector development, land-use diversification, and future investment in the region.	WEDS PMO
Support water users to improve efficiency, resilience, and collaboration through targeted education and networking initiatives.	- Increased adoption of water-efficient practices, with water users demonstrating improved awareness and uptake of approaches that enhance efficiency and resilience. - Stronger connections across the water user community, enabling knowledge-sharing and collaboration between farmers, industry, iwi, and stakeholders. - Improved understanding of water challenges and opportunities, including efficiency, storage, and environmental considerations. - Enhanced sector readiness for change, with water users better prepared to respond to regulatory, environmental, and climate-related pressures. - Validated demand for ongoing capability-building initiatives to inform future delivery and potential scaling.	Collaborate with the Wairarapa Water Users Society to deliver a Water Resilience Education & Networking Series, building on the Summer Series model.	WWUS



DELIVERING THE WORK PROGRAMME

The Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy (WEDS) Work Programme is coordinated by the Programme Management Office (PMO) within WellingtonNZ. The PMO supports delivery by working with initiative leads to progress actions, unlock opportunities, and connect initiatives to funding and partners, where appropriate. It also plays a key role in shaping and developing initiatives in response to emerging regional needs.

WellingtonNZ currently employs two team members based in the Wairarapa, supported by specialist expertise from across the wider organisation. This regional presence ensures local capability to drive delivery, foster relationships, and enable responsiveness on the ground.

Oversight of the Work Programme is provided by the WEDS Work Programme Steering Group, comprising representatives from the three Wairarapa district councils, iwi, central government, and regional industry leaders with relevant expertise. Progress, delivery updates, and financial reporting are provided quarterly to ensure transparency, accountability, and ongoing alignment with regional priorities.

Strategic priorities within the Work Programme are reviewed annually with the Steering Group to ensure continued relevance and impact. The current delivery arrangements for WEDS are in place until 30 June 2027, at which point commitments will be reviewed as part of the Long-Term Plan (LTP) cycle across the three councils.

As the Work Programme matures, there is an increasing focus on measuring outcomes and demonstrating economic impact. WEDS is continuing to strengthen its approach to monitoring and evaluation, including the development of meaningful outcome measures that capture the benefits delivered to businesses, sectors, and communities. This evidence-based approach will help inform future investment decisions, ensuring resources are directed toward initiatives that demonstrate tangible economic benefits and contribute to the long-term aspirations of the Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy.

WAIRARAPA IN THE WIDER REGION

The WEDS Work Programme plays an important role in ensuring Wairarapa has a clear and coordinated voice within the wider Wellington regional economic development system. It helps align local priorities with broader regional strategy and investment while ensuring the specific needs and opportunities of rural economies are visible and addressed.

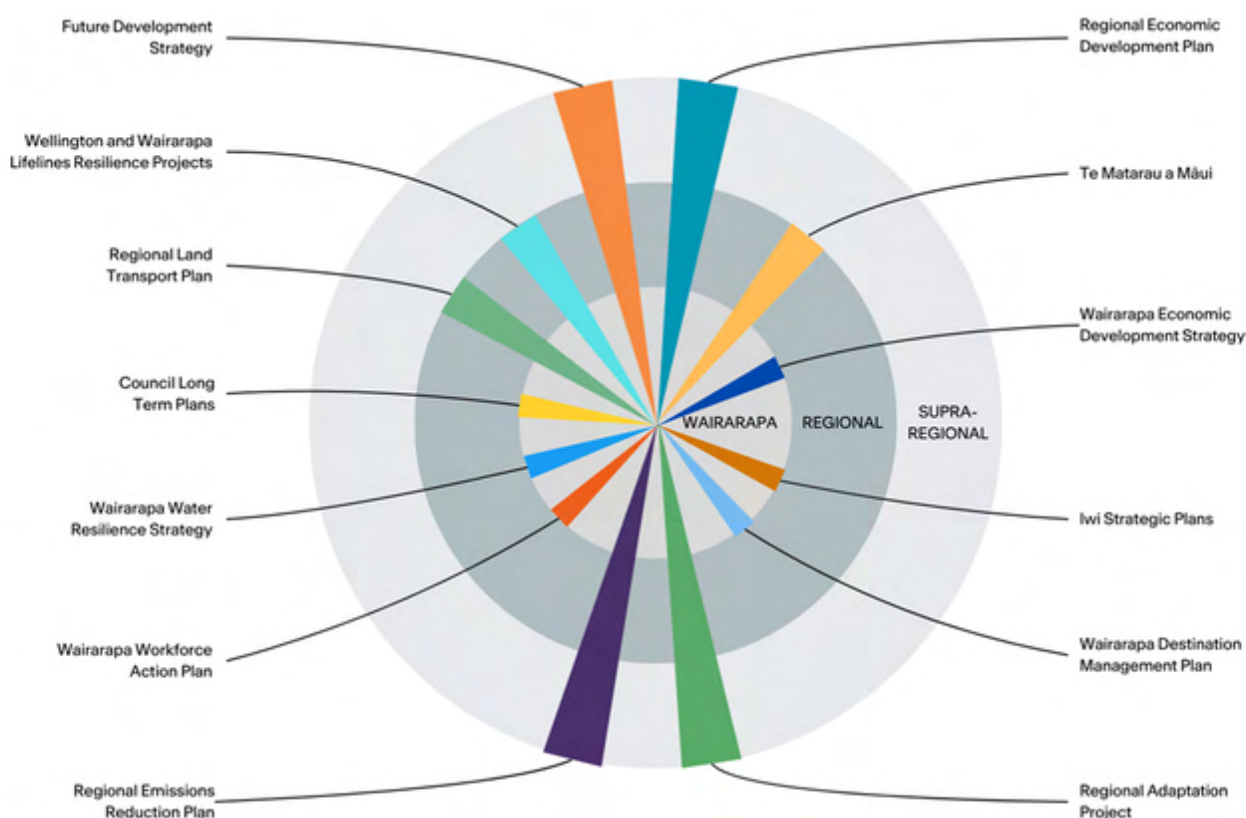
WEDS operates alongside other key regional and sub-regional strategies, including the Wairarapa Water Resilience Strategy and the Wairarapa Destination Management Plan. It is also complemented by council Long-Term Plans and iwi-led strategic priorities, which together contribute to a broader ecosystem of regional development activity.

At the wider regional level, WEDS is aligned with the Wellington Regional Leadership Committee, which brings together territorial authorities and iwi across the greater Wellington region, supported by central government advisors.

The Committee oversees the Regional Economic Development Plan (REDP), which identifies food and fibre, skills and workforce development, and water resilience as long-term regional priorities that strongly align with Wairarapa's own focus areas.

Two initiatives with strong relevance to Wairarapa's long-term development — the Five Towns Trail network and Dark Sky development — are also recognised within this broader regional framework.

WellingtonNZ acts as the Programme Management Office for the REDP, supporting alignment across work programmes and enabling integrated reporting across Wairarapa initiatives where appropriate, ensuring coherence between local delivery and regional strategy.



THRIVE WAIRARAPA

A THRIVING COMMUNITY ALIVE WITH OPPORTUNITY



Wairarapa
Economic Development Strategy

Rautaki Whanaketanga Ohaoaha o Wairarapa

Prepared by

WellingtonNZ