



**Wairarapa
Economic Development Strategy**

Rautaki Whanaketanga Ohaoha o Wairarapa

**ANNUAL
REPORT**

2024/2025

Prepared by

WellingtonNZ



"...experienced changes in perspectives and are now having different conversations about what constitutes 'health' and 'leadership'..." participant of the Courageous Leader Community Review, May 2025.



"The impact of this course is HUGE! Going to give me a voice I didn't have before." Renee, participant of Supervising Others - WaiHost Workshop, June 2025.

"Great nite, thanks so much for the invite, extraordinary people doing extraordinary things" Trish, attendee of MiBW Ba5 at Hiit Club Masterton, March 2025.



Left to right: Tū Hauoranga Trust Courageous Leader Series - Dr Phil Bagshaw, October 2024. Pump Station House at Waingawa Process Water Project, June 2025. Workplace Visit to The Runholder, November 2024. Water Summer Series Event at Kaiwaiwai Dairies, December 2024. Tū Hauoranga Trust's Attract, Connect, Stay Healthcare Workshop with Dr Anna Moran, August 2024. Māori in Business Wairarapa - Construction Connect Business after 5 Hui, May 2025.

Contents:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2024-25	5
SECTION 1: STRATEGIC OVERVIEW	6
SECTION 2: WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITIIY AREAS	7-9
SECTION 3: FINANCIAL SUMMARY	10-11
SECTION 4: LOOKING AHEAD TO 2025-26	12



Executive Summary

In 2024-25, the Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy (WEDS) Work Programme made tangible progress toward the strategy's vision of a thriving, resilient regional economy. With a sharpened focus on the three priority areas of Water Resilience, Food & Fibre (Primary Sector), and Skills & Workforce Development, the work programme enabled initiatives that both addressed immediate regional needs and laid the groundwork for long-term transformation.

Highlights this year include:

- Water resilience prioritised, refined, and progressed, through the establishment of the Wairarapa Water Resilience Strategy Governance Group, the creation of A Case for Action for water resilience, and investment from Carterton District Council and central government in water security and storage at Waingawa.
- Engagement with and prioritisation of actions for the Food & Fibre sector in Wairarapa: validated focus on innovation, diversification, resilience, and workforce; land use diversification opportunities in development; and capability programme scoped for launch in 2025-26.
- Over 300 participants engaged across workshops, capability-building events, and sector hui, demonstrating strong community uptake and cross-sector collaboration toward developing our present and future workforce.

The WEDS Work Programme leverages local funding from the three Wairarapa District Councils, co-funded and administered by WellingtonNZ as the Programme Management Office.

All WEDS Work Programme initiatives are aligned with wider regional priorities and directly contribute to intergenerational wellbeing outcomes through stronger economic opportunities, access to better infrastructure, and cohesive communities.

This year has been marked not only by tangible outcomes but also by a renewed energy and cohesion across the WEDS Steering Group and Programme Management Office. The Work Programme is now delivering, with strong alignment, high levels of engagement, and a sense of momentum that reflects the region's collective commitment to transform.

Highlights from 2024-25



**150+ people engaged
in water resilience
education workshops**



**1 water infrastructure
project progressing
(completion July 2025)**



**4 councils and stakeholders
co-investing to implement
the Wairarapa Water
Resilience Strategy.**



**1 regional case for water
resilience investment
developed (publication in
September 2025)**



**4 new initiatives identified to
support the food & fibre
sector**



**2 actions underway to
strengthen food & fibre
sector capability and
innovation.**



**70+ participants engaged
through Attract, Connect, Stay
workshops**



**100+ participants across 7
Courageous Leader
sessions**



**32 Māori businesses engaged
through quarterly hui**



**37 participants in WaiHost
programme to strengthen
customer service across sectors**



1,823 active website views

Section 1: Strategic Overview

The Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy (WEDS), adopted by South Wairarapa, Carterton, and Masterton District Councils in October 2022, sets a shared vision for the region's future: to grow Wairarapa's comparative advantage by fostering enterprise that underpins the future economy, and build resilience by protecting existing assets and leveraging partner opportunities for investment.

Strategy implementation

The WEDS Work Programme focuses effort and investment where an economic development lens can have the biggest impact for the region. It currently targets three strategic priority areas: Water Resilience, Food and Fibre (Primary Sector), and Skills and Workforce Development. These priority areas reflect a deliberate focus on initiatives with the potential to drive long-term economic outcomes for the region and align with central government priorities.

Operating Model

Delivery of the Work Programme is overseen by the WEDS Steering Group, which comprises economic development representatives from local councils, iwi, central government, and independent industry leaders with relevant expertise. The Steering Group ensures alignment, local ownership, and a focus on impact.

WellingtonNZ delivers the Work Programme through a dedicated, Wairarapa-based team which acts as the Programme Management Office (PMO) for the work programme. The PMO operates collaboratively with initiative leads, partners, and external advisors.

The Steering Group has matured into a highly collaborative and focused governance group, while the PMO is working harder to be a strong connector, enabler, and driver of implementation. Together, we are now operating with renewed energy and purpose, accelerating delivery and strengthening regional momentum.

Economic and Sector Context

Wairarapa is a region of opportunity, characterised by strong population growth (almost 8% over the past five years), a productive primary sector, and a well-utilised but ageing and relatively low-paid workforce. Despite resilience in key industries such as manufacturing and food and fibre, the region faces real challenges — including tightening labour conditions, and constrained economic growth (provisional GDP contracted by 1.2% in the year to March 2025).

Access to secure and sustainable water infrastructure is a critical enabler for economic development, particularly for Wairarapa's high-value, water-dependent industries such as viticulture, dairy, and manufacturing. Meanwhile, the region's demographic profile, including a constrained working-age population, underscores the need for a coordinated, future-focused response to workforce development.

The 2024-25 WEDS Work Programme was delivered in direct response to these challenges and opportunities.

2.1 Water Resilience

The WEDS Work Programme supports delivery of the Wairarapa Water Resilience Strategy (WWRS) by helping to identify and fund initiatives that improve water security for sector development, enable complementary land use opportunities, and build regional resilience. In 2024-25, activity focused on delivering practical initiatives, regional coordination, and strategic groundwork for long-term investment.

Waingawa Industrial Park Process Water Security Project

Goals: Improved seasonal and industrial water security; Increased investment readiness.

By elevating water resilience as a priority for industrial development in Wairarapa, the WEDS Work Programme played a critical role in assisting Carterton District Council to secure \$1.75 million funding from Kānoa in 2023-24, alongside WEDS co-funding. Led by Carterton District Council, this work is now nearing completion and expected to boost process water supply for key industries in Waingawa from July 2025, reducing demand on existing potable water supply.

In June 2025, Kānoa and Carterton District Council announced an additional investment of \$25m into water storage to further support water-intensive businesses and land irrigation at Waingawa. Led by CDC, this work was supported by aligning local and central government priorities for economic development in Wairarapa including through the WEDS Work Programme.

Water Resilience Governance Group and Action Planning

Goals: Regional coordination; Stronger water culture and shared value

The WEDS PMO worked with the three Wairarapa District Councils and Greater Wellington Regional Council to support the formation of the Wairarapa Water Resilience Governance Group, to lead the implementation of the Wairarapa Water Resilience Strategy (WWRS). The group was formally established in October, and a Programme Director role scoped and resourced by Councils to develop and implement a coordinated action plan for water resilience. The WEDS PMO provided input into the development of the WWRS Action Plan with an economic development lens, leading to the establishment of “A Case for Action” (see below).

“A Case for Action” – Strategic Positioning Document

Goals: Fit-for-purpose water solutions; Increased investment readiness

The WEDS Work Programme funded the development of a regional Case for Action document, to clearly articulate the economic imperative and return on investment associated with improving water resilience in Wairarapa. The document is intended to be a regional call for action, and will support future applications for infrastructure funding to balance water supply and demand, creating opportunity.

Water Education Summer Series

Goals: Stronger water culture and shared value; Broader engagement and collaboration

In collaboration with the Wairarapa Water Users Society, the WEDS Work Programme funded a three-part on-farm summer series exploring smart and collective approaches to water management. Events were held across the region, each attracting 35–50 attendees including farmers, industry representatives, government agencies, and rural professionals. The “field trip” style and woolshed conversations encouraged real-time knowledge exchange and relationship building, to improve water practices.

Collectively, these initiatives have advanced Wairarapa’s water resilience by delivering tangible infrastructure improvements, building a shared culture of sustainable water use, and uplifting the capability of our people. They have strengthened regional governance, successfully attracted investment, and created a platform to align future infrastructure funding with economic opportunities. Together, they position the region to better manage water resources, support industry growth, and enhance long-term community and environmental wellbeing.

2.2 Food & Fibre (Primary) Sector

The WEDS Work Programme is setting out to support Wairarapa's food and fibre sector to build long-term resilience, adapt to changing conditions, and unlock value through innovation and diversification. In 2024-25, activity focused on sector engagement to identify and validate priorities for development, and shape initiatives to address them.

Sector Engagement and Validated Priorities

*Goals: Improved understanding of sector needs;
Targeted programme design*

The WEDS Steering Group and PMO undertook targeted engagement with food & fibre stakeholders to identify the sector's most pressing priorities for growth and resilience. Through workshops, interviews, and cross-sector discussions, this work validated four focus areas: increasing productivity and resilience through business capability building; fostering diversification, innovation, and market access; developing a strong, shared sector identity; and strengthening workforce in alignment with the Wairarapa Skills & Workforce Action Plan. These validated priorities provided a clear framework to design the initiatives below, which directly address sector needs to deliver long-term economic benefit for the region.

Sector Capability Programme

Goals: Increase productivity and innovation; Greater sector resilience and sustainability

In collaboration with the sector, the WEDS PMO co-designed a tailored capability programme to build confidence and skills across areas such as business growth, governance, investment readiness, and workforce planning. The programme will respond directly to identified sector needs and will be delivered from 2025, co-funded by WEDS in partnership with regional providers, industry bodies, and sector leaders. The programme will empower participants to lift their productivity, and create necessary foundations for innovation.

"Future Options for Food & Fibre" – Land Use and Value Chain Diversification

*Goals: Commercial relevance and diversification;
Stronger economic contribution*

In alignment with sector aspirations, Leftfield Innovation Limited have been commissioned to identify commercially viable land-use options that align with changing resource constraints including water availability and labour, and evolving market demand. The project builds on earlier work and will identify viable land-use options, surrounding infrastructure requirements, and a clear pathway for innovation. Expected to be delivered in the second half of 2025, this groundwork will enable pilot trials to be developed with the sector in 2026.

Overall, WEDS Work Programme delivery has strengthened the foundations for growth and resilience in Wairarapa's food & fibre sector by clearly defining shared priorities. Initiatives have been initiated to build targeted capability, and explore concrete pathways for diversification and innovation. This activity has deepened sector collaboration and positioned Wairarapa to attract future investment into high-value land use, in alignment with environmental constraints and opportunities. Together, these initiatives set the stage for a more productive, sustainable, and competitive sector.

2.3 Skills & Workforce Development

The WEDS Work Programme supports a thriving regional economy by strengthening the pathways that connect people to skills, training, and meaningful employment.

In 2024-25, activity focused on strengthening the foundations for long-term skills and workforce development, alongside investing in initiatives to help retain skilled people in the region, and build the capability of our current and future workforce.

Refreshed the Wairarapa Skills & Workforce Development Action Plan

Goals: Cross-sector collaboration; Future-ready workforce

The WEDS PMO led the refresh of the Wairarapa Workforce Development Action Plan on behalf of Skill Wairarapa (our regional skills leadership group) to reflect changing workforce needs and priorities across a range of employment sectors and education. The refresh process was collaborative and identified shared themes, to proactively focus efforts on initiatives that meet the needs of multiple sectors.

Attract, Connect, Stay – Recruiting and Retaining Healthcare Workforce

Goals: Whole-of-community retention; Enhanced regional reputation

The WEDS Work Programme co-funded Tū Hauoranga Trust to operationalise the Attract, Connect, Stay model. A first in New Zealand, the initiative mapped workforce gaps and shaped a regional framework to improve health sector attraction and retention, through a series of workshops involving over 70 participants. Using the insights produced, the initiative received strong cross-sector support to progress to the next phase: the appointment of a Strategic Connector in August 2025 with further support from WEDS. The role will connect people recently attracted to Wairarapa and their families to local communities, to foster longer-term retention of the skilled people that our sectors need.

Courageous Leader Series

Goals: Culture of collaborative leadership; Leadership mindset shift

The WEDS Work Programme and PMO supported Tū Hauoranga Trust to deliver a leadership development series focused on values-based, inspiring leadership. The series attracted more than 100 people across seven sessions during the course of the year, connecting participants with inspirational leaders and creating a lasting impact. The initiative fostered a growing network of capable, informed local leaders committed to improving workplace wellbeing and outcomes across Wairarapa.

Māori in Business Wairarapa – Business After Five Hui

Goals: Strengthened Māori enterprise networks; Youth retention and pathways

The WEDS Work Programme continued to support the Māori in Business Wairarapa rūpū through funding to host quarterly hui to share knowledge, strengthen networks, and raise the visibility of Māori enterprise. The hui attracted 32 Pakihi Māori across four events, providing practical tools and culturally aligned spaces for connection and growth.

WaiHost

Goals: Enhanced regional reputation; Future-ready workforce

The WaiHost programme was developed in response to cross-sector local industry needs, to give employees in customer-facing roles and their managers practical training and tools to provide exceptional service. The WEDS PMO partnered with Business Wairarapa to facilitate the delivery of two workshops during the first half of 2025, with 37 participants attending sessions on Supervising Others and Courageous Conversations. More sessions are planned for 2025-26 to complete the programme, supporting our hospitality, retail, and wider services sectors to provide memorable experiences.

Collectively, these initiatives have strengthened Wairarapa's skills and workforce by increasing cross-sector collaboration and aligning priorities. They have created pathways to attract and retain skilled people, and build the capability of our current and future workforce, leaders, and young people. Together, they position the region to better meet future workforce needs, support business growth, and contribute to a more inclusive and resilient regional economy.

Section 3: Financial Summary

Revenue and Expenses for the year ended 30 June 2025

	NOTES	2024-25 ACTUAL \$
REVENUE		
Wairarapa District Councils funding (MDC, CDC, SWDC)		215,000
WellingtonNZ funding		228,340
Surplus carried forward from FY23-24	1	66,590
TOTAL REVENUE		509,930
EXPENSES		
Project expenses		111,035
Programme operations (governance, events, comms/marketing)		9,814
Operational overheads (office, travel, personnel overheads)		6,471
Personnel costs		228,340
TOTAL EXPENSES		355,659
CARRY FORWARD FOR THE YEAR	2	154,270

1. Surplus carried forward from 23-24

As reported last year, \$226,213 was carried forward from FY23-24 into this financial year FY24-25. Of this amount, \$154,834 had already been allocated to support specific projects and was spent accordingly.

Due to a June 2024 bill received a July 2024, a further \$4,789 was spent, resulting in an effective surplus carried forward from FY23-24 into this financial year FY24-25's budget of \$66,590.

SURPLUS CARRIED FORWARD FROM FY23-24		\$
Total carry forward from FY23-24		226,213
Less project expenses allocated from FY23-24 activity		(154,834)
Less additional project expenses from FY23-24 activity		(4,789)
TOTAL SURPLUS CARRIED FORWARD FROM FY23-24		66,590

2. Carry forward for the year

\$154,270 will be carried forward into the FY25-26 financial year, which is permitted under the terms of the WEDS MOU.

Of this amount, \$54,500 has been allocated to support specific projects and is pending invoicing.

The remaining \$99,700 is surplus for the year, which has been budgeted to support initiatives in the new financial year. This is a natural outcome of the focus we have had during the year on laying the foundations for new initiatives, and will enable the delivery of the refreshed implementation plan.

CARRY FORWARD FOR THE YEAR		\$
Project expenses allocated		54,500
Surplus		99,770
TOTAL CARRY FORWARD		154,270

Section 4: Looking ahead to 2025-26

The WEDS Work Programme enters 2025-26 with momentum. The groundwork laid over the past 12 months has created a strong platform for faster implementation, deeper collaboration, and new opportunities for investment. The Steering Group and PMO are well-positioned to sustain this trajectory and deliver even greater impact for Wairarapa.

Building on the foundations of 2024-25, the WEDS Work Programme will continue to drive tangible outcomes delivering long-term benefit for the region. The coming year marks both a continuation of the work to support the three priority areas of Water Resilience, Food & Fibre, and Workforce Development, and a new phase of implementation guided by insights gathered through sector engagement and by the groundwork delivered during the year.

Lessons Learned

A key lesson from 2024-25 has been the value of early cross-sector collaboration to strengthen alignment and improve programme quality. Success was also seen where existing local efforts were supported and elevated, reinforcing the WEDS PMO role as a connector and enabler, as well as a driver of implementation. Another important lesson has been the importance of communicating the impact of the initiatives in the WEDS Work Programme, and the role of the WEDS PMO in enabling their delivery. Telling the stories of people, partnerships, and progress is essential for deepening engagement and demonstrating the value of collective investment, and we remain committed to sharing the impact of our activities with clarity and consistency.

Strategic Priorities for 2025–2027

The WEDS Work Programme implementation plan has been updated and will be available on the soon-to-be refreshed www.thrivewairarapa.nz website. Over the next year, the Work Programme will continue to focus on the three priority areas of Water Resilience, Food & Fibre, and Workforce Development, and will see the delivery of new initiatives built on the engagement and foundations established this year. We look forward to leveraging new partnerships, piloting new delivery models, and attracting new investment, while maintaining focus on collaboration, clarity of purpose, and delivering measurable outcomes. By working together, we are building a stronger, more resilient Wairarapa economy, shaped by local priorities and sustained by collective action.

Acknowledgement and Welcome

The WEDS PMO wishes to acknowledge and thank the Mayors and Councillors across all three Wairarapa District Councils for their commitment to economic development over the past three years. Looking ahead, we welcome the opportunity to work with re- and newly elected members following the 2025 local body elections, continuing to build on this momentum and ensuring that the WEDS Work Programme stays anchored in priorities that reflect our communities, to drive long-term economic outcomes for our region.

WEDS

Find out more:

weds.nz

