



WORK PROGRAMME

ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26



Prepared by

WellingtonNZ

July 2026

"Great to have both industries participate in the same event."

The "On the Front Foot" event brought cross-sector communities together for practical learning, shared discussion, and new connections across the primary sector.

14 APR
Buddy to boss

BOOK NOW
CATHORNE MASTERTON
9.00 - 1.00PM
FACILITATED BY NEVIS TRAINING

"It has definitely helped to solidify our priorities and identify a couple of opportunities."

Capability Boost helped participating businesses clarify priorities, identify opportunities, and understand the capability needed to support future growth.

"Security of supply to protect our economy and jobs are significant considerations that we can no longer ignore."

Wairarapa MP Mike Butterick quoted by The Wairarapa Times Age, 15 January 2026 regarding the findings of A Case for Action report.

Wairarapa Process Water Plant

Wairarapa Process Water Plant is owned and operated by Cathorpe Limited and provides non-potable water to businesses located within the Wairarapa region.

The construction of this project was greatly supported by the Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit and the Wairarapa District Council.

For more information on the project and the services provided by Cathorpe Limited, please contact the Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit.

Wairarapa Process Water Plant

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"Great confidence to lead within our team. Really helpful and inspirational"

Participant quote from Waihost Buddy to Boss workshop held on 14 April 2026.

"The podiatry profession is in desperate need of more podiatrists. It's always fun speaking to people considering a career in health about podiatry, which may be an unknown career option."

Brian Hudson, Masterton Foot Clinic – Business Feedback Form, Quick Fire Connections – Health Industry Event, 18 June 2026.

Book Online:
wairarapaosteopathy.nz

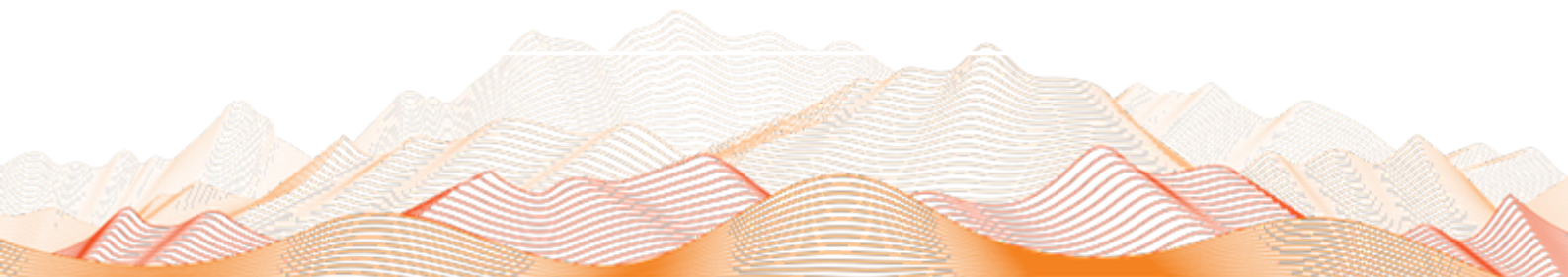
"Very very very cool. I can see this benefitting a whole lotta people who are slipping through the gaps...nice mahi e te tuahine"

Quote from Tūhono user, May 2026.

WAIRARAPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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WAIRARAPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During 2025/26, the WEDS Work Programme converted regional priorities into coordinated action across food and fibre, workforce development and water resilience. Council investment enabled evidence gathering, capability development, partnership coordination and investment readiness, helping position Wairarapa for future growth and greater resilience. Guided by the three priority areas of Food & Fibre (Primary Sector), Skills & Workforce Development, and Water Resilience, WEDS invested in initiatives that address immediate regional challenges and begin advancing the work required to achieve longer-term outcomes. Throughout the year, the programme strengthened partnerships, improved understanding of regional opportunities, and supported practical actions designed to deliver meaningful outcomes for businesses, communities, and future generations.

Highlights this year include:

Capability Boost completed its Discovery Phase, providing valuable insights into the challenges, opportunities, and capability needs of nine food and fibre businesses representing more than 7,200 hectares across Wairarapa. The findings are now helping shape future capability investment and sector development initiatives.

Future Options for land use progressed from concept into implementation, with commercially viable diversification and value-chain opportunities including kiwifruit, strong wool and olives moving forward. Scoping conversations are continuing on potential support for a sustainable regional seeds and grain supply chain.

More than 180 young people engaged directly with local industries and workplaces through the Skills for Work initiative,

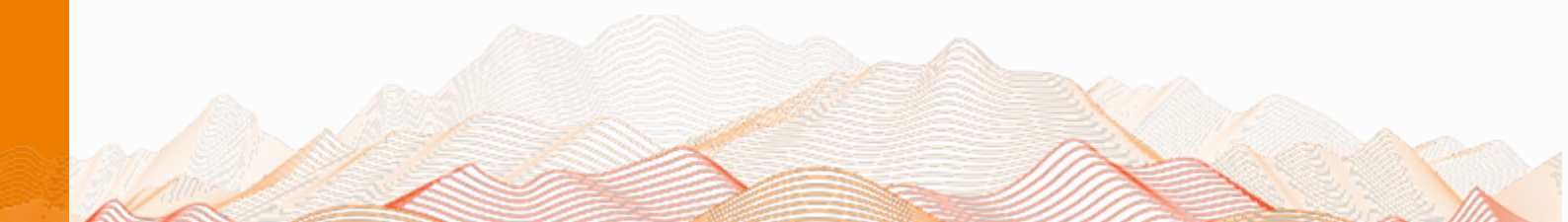
helping strengthen awareness of local pathways while improving connections between education and employment.

150 surplus MBIE laptops were secured to support digital inclusion and workforce development, creating new opportunities for schools, community organisations, and job seekers to access technology, build digital capability, and participate more fully in education, employment, and community life.

The publication of A Case for Action established a compelling evidence base for improving water resilience in Wairarapa, identifying the potential to generate up to \$1.5 billion in additional economic activity and approximately 3,800 jobs by 2050 through improved water resilience outcomes.

The WEDS Work Programme continues to leverage investment from the three Wairarapa District Councils, with delivery coordinated through WellingtonNZ as the Programme Management Office. All initiatives contribute to broader regional priorities and support long-term wellbeing outcomes through stronger businesses, a more capable workforce, enhanced regional resilience, and increased opportunities for investment and growth.

As the programme enters the third year of the current Memorandum of Understanding, WEDS is increasingly focused on demonstrating impact, measuring outcomes, and delivering practical value for the region. While significant change lies ahead across local government, infrastructure, water management, and the wider economy, the programme remains firmly focused on the priorities that matter most to Wairarapa and on creating a thriving community alive with opportunity.





\$3.8M

Central Government funding considered for arable sector projects through WEDS co-investment.



7,200+ha

represented by nine businesses in the Capability Boost Discovery Phase.



4

Food and fibre diversification & value-chain pathways progressed.



110

registrations for the "On the Front Foot" workforce capability event.



85

students connected directly with 24 health-sector professionals.



180+

young people engaged through Skills for Work activities.



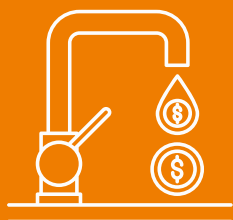
1

Tūhono directory launched to support workforce connection & access to local services.



150

laptops secured for Wairarapa through the transfer of surplus MBIE devices.



\$1.5Bn

potential opportunity identified through improved water resilience & up to 3,800 jobs possible by 2050.



110+

participants engaged across three Water Resilience Summer Series events.



1Mm3

storage facility assessed through the Carterton Demand Study, with indicative demand significantly exceeding proposed capacity.



13

Projects in delivery phase during 2025/26.



+158%

increase in WEDS social media reach or engagement.



\$215,000

invested by the three Wairarapa District Councils into the WEDS Work Programme.



\$218,400

Confirmed co-investment, partner contributions & assets leveraged through WEDS initiatives during 2025/26.

WAIRARAPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

SECTION 1: STRATEGIC OVERVIEW

The Wairarapa Economic Development Strategy (WEDS), adopted by South Wairarapa, Carterton, and Masterton District Councils in 2022, provides a shared vision for the region's future: to grow Wairarapa's comparative advantage by fostering enterprise that supports the future economy, while building resilience by protecting key assets and leveraging opportunities for investment and collaboration. As the WEDS Work Programme enters the third year of the current Memorandum of Understanding between the three councils, the programme has matured from initial planning and determining key priorities into coordinated delivery and contributing to measurable regional impact.

Strategy Implementation

The WEDS Work Programme focuses effort and investment where an economic development lens can have the greatest long-term impact for Wairarapa. The programme continues to prioritise three agreed strategic focus areas identified through regional engagement and sector analysis: Food & Fibre (Primary) Sector, Skills & Workforce Development, and Water Resilience. These priorities reflect both the opportunities and challenges facing the region and provide a framework for supporting sustainable economic growth through supporting job creation and spend, strengthening resilience, and improving outcomes for businesses, workers, and communities.

Operating Model

Delivery of the Work Programme is overseen by the WEDS Steering Group, which comprises representatives from the three Wairarapa District Councils, iwi, central government, and independent industry leaders with relevant expertise and regional knowledge. The Steering Group provides strategic oversight, ensures regional alignment, and maintains a strong focus on outcomes and impact.

WellingtonNZ delivers the Work Programme through a dedicated, Wairarapa-based Project Management Office (PMO), supported by specialist expertise from across the wider organisation. The PMO works alongside initiative leads, industry partners, education providers, councils, iwi, and community organisations to identify opportunities, coordinate activity, and support implementation.

Over the past year, both the Steering Group and PMO have continued to strengthen their effectiveness and regional presence. Increasingly, WEDS is playing a catalyst role by connecting people, sectors, and ideas, helping turn shared challenges into collaborative action that delivers long-term value for the region.

Economic and Sector Context

Wairarapa remains a region of opportunity, underpinned by a productive food and fibre sector, a strong sense of community, growing interest in diversification and innovation, and a population that continues to grow and evolve. At the same time, businesses and communities are operating within an environment characterised by economic uncertainty, workforce pressures, infrastructure challenges, and increasing environmental and climate-related risks.

The region continues to face several long-term challenges, including an ageing workforce, the need to attract and retain skilled people, pressures on productive land use, and the importance of ensuring water remains available to support communities and economic growth. Broader changes across local government, water reform, infrastructure planning, and national policy settings are also reshaping the environment in which the region operates.

The 2025/26 WEDS Work Programme was delivered in direct response to these challenges and opportunities, focusing on practical initiatives that build business capability, strengthen workforce pathways, support regional resilience, and position Wairarapa for future growth and investment.



SECTION 2: WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY AREAS - FOOD & FIBRE (PRIMARY) SECTOR

Food and fibre remain at the heart of Wairarapa's economy, supporting businesses, employment, exports, and the communities that depend on them. Guided by the WEDS Implementation Plan, the food & fibre initiatives have focused on helping businesses adapt to changing market conditions, explore new opportunities, and build the skills, connections, and confidence needed to thrive in an increasingly complex operating environment. Together, these initiatives are helping create a more productive, resilient, and future-focused food and fibre sector for Wairarapa.

CAPABILITY BOOST

What was delivered

The Wairarapa Capability Boost pilot completed its Discovery Phase, with nine food and fibre businesses undertaking detailed one-on-one capability assessments. Participating businesses represented a diverse mix of sheep and beef, dairy, horticulture, and viticulture operations covering more than 7,200 hectares across the region. The programme explored leadership, workforce planning, governance, financial management, succession planning, and business growth aspirations, resulting in a regional Capability Insights Overview to help guide future investment and programme design.

Why it matters

Many businesses are actively pursuing growth, diversification, and productivity improvements, but often face similar challenges around leadership capability, workforce development, strategic planning, and financial readiness. The Discovery Phase provided participating businesses with an independent assessment of their strengths and opportunities while creating a clearer understanding of common capability needs across the wider sector.

Impact

The programme identified demand for structured capability support for businesses showing high-potential and a readiness to take the next step in their development. By helping businesses clarify priorities, strengthen decision-making, and prepare for future growth opportunities, the initiative is building the capability, confidence and investment readiness needed to support increased productivity, resilience and investment across Wairarapa's food and fibre sector.

FUTURE OPTIONS

What was delivered

The Future Options programme progressed from identifying opportunities into detailed investigation and validation. Priority workstreams focused on kiwifruit, strong wool, and olives have moved into procurement and delivery, while discussions have commenced around opportunities to support the

development of a sustainable regional grains and seeds supply chain. The WEDS PMO also explored lessons from Venture Taranaki's successful Branching Out programme to help inform future delivery approaches in Wairarapa.

Why it matters

Changing environmental conditions, water availability, labour supply, and market expectations mean that many food and fibre businesses are considering how to diversify income streams and build greater resilience. Future Options helps identify commercially viable opportunities that enable businesses to adapt while supporting long-term regional prosperity.

Impact

The programme has moved commercially viable diversification and value-chain opportunities from concept into action. Industry partners are now actively shaping projects that have the potential to create new revenue streams, strengthen regional value chains, and support more resilient land-use choices for future generations.

LOWER NORTH ISLAND ARABLE PROCESSING & STORAGE FACILITY

What was delivered

WEDS provided co-funding to complete the financial forecasting, project budgeting, legal structuring, and supporting documentation required for a complete Kānoa - Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit funding application. This targeted support helped move from feasibility into an investment-ready position, while enabling the project to maintain momentum after the closure of local capacity in June 2025.

Why it matters

The proposed facility would restore regionally based arable cleaning, storage and processing capability, reducing reliance on out-of-region facilities and supporting the viability, productivity, and diversification of the lower North Island arable sector. A regionally owned facility would also strengthen local supply chains, reduce transport costs and emissions, support improved market access, and create opportunities for value-added production and future land-use diversification.

Impact

WEDS support enabled the development and submission of a complete, robust funding application for Central Government consideration. It also strengthened the project's commercial foundations by supporting financial modelling and the development of an appropriate ownership and governance structure.

Following Ministerial consideration, the project has entered a transition towards private investment, with Wairarapa Harvest Hub Limited established to lead the next stage of commercial delivery.

The project is now focused on confirming investor commitment, strengthening grower participation, and progressing the staged development pathway. If delivered, the facility has the potential to improve grower returns, support up to 12 direct employment opportunities and contribute to wider supply-chain employment as the sector grows.

SHARED NARRATIVE PROJECT

What was delivered

The Wairarapa Shared Narrative Project moved from concept into delivery. A project brief was completed, an independent research and engagement partner was appointed, and preparations commenced for a region-wide engagement programme designed to capture perspectives from across Wairarapa's food and fibre sector and wider community.

Why it matters

While Wairarapa has many strengths, regional businesses have not always had a consistent way of telling the story of their place. Developing a shared narrative helps put a strong sense of identity into words, provides a framework for regional promotion, and supports collaboration across businesses, communities, and industry groups.

Impact

The project is creating the foundation for a clear and authentic story about Wairarapa's food and fibre sector. Over time, this could support investment attraction, strengthen regional pride, and help communicate the value of the sector to customers, investors, future workers, and visitors.

The 2025/26 Food & Fibre work programme focused on creating the capability, connections and opportunities needed for long-term sector success. Through targeted capability building, diversification opportunities, workforce development, and the development of a shared regional narrative, WEDS has helped move the sector from identifying challenges toward implementing solutions. While many of these initiatives are still in the early stages, they are already strengthening collaboration, improving investment readiness, and creating new opportunities for businesses across the region. Collectively, this work is positioning Wairarapa's food and fibre sector to be more productive, innovative, resilient, and competitive in the years ahead.

WORKFORCE CAPABILITY INITIATIVE

What was delivered

WEDS partnered with DairyNZ and Beef + Lamb New Zealand to develop a cross-sector workforce capability programme for Wairarapa's primary sector. Planning, programme design, partnership coordination and speaker arrangements were completed during 2025/26, with delivery commencing through the introductory "On the Front Foot" event on 7 July 2026. The session attracted 110 registrations with 85 attendees to explore leadership, communication, team performance, and people management. It was designed to provide immediate value while demonstrating what could be achieved through a more comprehensive workforce capability programme.

Why it matters

The event generated 36 expressions of interest in a longer programme and provided valuable feedback to shape content and delivery model. By bringing businesses and industry partners together around shared workforce challenges, the initiative is creating a platform for ongoing capability development that can strengthen leadership, workplace culture, staff retention, and business resilience across Wairarapa's food and fibre sector.

Impact

The initial event has created a strong platform for ongoing cross-sector capability development. It brought businesses and industry partners together around shared workforce challenges while demonstrating the value of practical, sector-relevant learning. Insights and participant feedback from the taster event will inform the design of a longer programme, supporting the delivery of targeted development opportunities that build leadership capability, strengthen workplace culture, and improve workforce resilience across Wairarapa's food and fibre sector.



CASE STUDY

TURNING AMBITION INTO ACTION

Our Goal: To help Wairarapa's food and fibre businesses turn ambition into action through stronger leadership, planning, and business capability.

When people think about the future of Wairarapa's food and fibre sector, conversations often focus on new products, new markets, or new technologies. Yet behind every successful business is something just as important: the capability, confidence, and leadership needed to turn opportunities into reality.

The Wairarapa Food & Fibre Capability Boost Pilot was developed to better understand what local businesses need to thrive in an increasingly complex environment. The pilot Discovery Phase was completed with nine businesses representing sheep and beef, dairy, horticulture, and viticulture operations taking part in detailed one-on-one assessments exploring their aspirations, challenges, and future plans. Together, these businesses represent more than 7,200 hectares of productive land and reflect the diversity and strength of Wairarapa's primary sector.

What emerged was an encouraging story. Business owners were not short of ambition. Many are actively exploring growth opportunities, diversification, succession planning, value-add production, tourism ventures, and new revenue streams. The challenge was not a lack of ideas, but the capacity and capability needed to prioritise opportunities and confidently move forward.

Across the businesses involved, common themes emerged. Leadership development, governance, workforce planning, succession, strategic decision-making, and financial forecasting were identified as areas where additional support could make a significant difference. Many businesses also highlighted the heavy reliance placed on owners and key decision-makers, creating potential risks as operations become larger and more complex.

A valuable outcome was the recognition that these challenges are not isolated to individual businesses. Similar capability needs are being experienced across the sector, creating opportunities for shared learning, targeted support, and future investment that can benefit the wider region.

The Capability Boost Pilot demonstrates the value of investing in people and businesses before challenges become barriers to growth. By helping businesses identify capability gaps and strengthen their foundations, the programme is supporting more resilient enterprises that are better equipped to adapt, diversify, and seize future opportunities.

While the Discovery Phase is only the beginning, it has confirmed something important: Wairarapa's food and fibre sector has no shortage of ambition, innovation, or potential. The next step will ensure businesses have the tools, skills, and support needed to turn that potential into lasting economic benefit for the region.

"Our experience from this phase was great and better than expected. Building effectively on this foundation will be crucial to the overall success of the programme."

Participating business, June 2026.

WAIRARAPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

SECTION 2: WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY AREAS - SKILLS & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Developing a skilled, connected, and future-ready workforce remains critical to Wairarapa's long-term economic success and resilience. In 2025/26, the WEDS Work Programme focused on strengthening pathways between education and employment, improving workforce readiness, supporting employer capability, attracting and retaining key workers, and reducing barriers to digital participation. Together, these initiatives brought schools, employers, iwi, education and training providers, and community organisations closer together around shared workforce challenges.

ATTRACT, CONNECT, STAY

What was delivered

The Attract, Connect, Stay initiative continued to strengthen workforce retention and connection through the Strategic Connector role.

Key achievements included:

- Provided tailored support for three qualified health professionals new to the area in FY 25/26
- Tūhono directory: 265 health and related service providers listed.
- Better Health Workplaces: 75+ health professionals and related workers participated during FY25/26.
- Connected Communities: Two events delivered during FY25/26.
- Strategic Connector role: One role created within Tū Hauoranga Trust, with funding secured for FY25/26.
- Attract, Connect, Stay network: Annual subscription secured for FY25/26.
- Better Health Workplaces: Three years of external funding secured, covering 2026–2028.

Through these activities, Tū Hauoranga Trust strengthened relationships across health providers, education providers, iwi, community organisations and workforce partners, creating a more connected and coordinated approach to workforce attraction, retention and wellbeing.

Why it matters

Attracting skilled workers is only one part of addressing workplace shortages. Retention is influenced by the wider experience of living and working in a community, including workplace culture, professional networks, access to support and a sense of belonging.

A connected workforce ecosystem helps individuals and families settle successfully while supporting employers to create workplaces where people can develop and build longer-term careers. This is particularly important in health, where recruitment and retention pressures can directly affect the availability and sustainability of essential services which can result in weaker regional resilience.

Impact

The initiative demonstrates the value of investing in relationships and coordination before workforce challenges become more difficult to address. Through this work, Tū Hauoranga has strengthened a network of sector connections better positioned to support workforce attraction, connection, and retention across Wairarapa.

DIGITAL FLUENCY

What was delivered

The Digital Fluency programme progressed with baseline testing commencing at Mākoura College, with 95+ Year 9 and 10 students completing testing to date. Testing continues, with Years 11 to 13 into 2026/27.

The WEDS PMO brokered the donation of 150 surplus MBIE laptops for Waitech Trust. This has provided an important opportunity to improve community access to technology while strengthening the foundations for a more sustainable regional approach to digital inclusion.

Why it matters

Digital capability is increasingly essential for education, employment and everyday life. Improving access to technology and digital skills helps reduce barriers to participation, strengthens workforce readiness and equips communities with the skills needed to succeed in an increasingly digital economy.

Establishing a clearer picture of digital skills needs helps ensure future support is targeted appropriately. Access to suitable devices also complements skill development by enabling people to practice and apply their learning.

Impact

Baseline testing will establish an initial picture of student digital fluency, creating a benchmark that future support and progress can be measured against. The 150 laptops provide practical infrastructure that can support ongoing learning, workforce participation and community access.

By combining baseline assessment, device access, and partnerships across the region, the initiative is establishing the evidence and partnerships needed to support and inform a coordinated approach to digital participation.

WAIHOST

What was delivered

WaiHost continued to build workforce capability through practical, industry-focused training that strengthened leadership, supervision, workplace training, customer service, and communication skills. WEDS co-funded delivery of four workshops in 2025/26 involving 67 participants from local businesses. Strong demand from businesses supported the development of a further delivery round for 2026/27, with the programme evolving to include additional follow-up support and opportunities for businesses to apply their learning within their workplaces.

Why it matters

Skills such as leadership, communication, supervision, and customer service influence productivity, staff retention, and the quality of the experience provided to customers and visitors. These capabilities are especially important for small and medium-sized businesses, which may have limited access to affordable, practical professional development. A cross-sector programme reduces duplication and enables businesses to learn from common challenges while building capability that is relevant beyond a single industry.

Impact

WaiHost has provided accessible, practical development opportunities for businesses and employees across Wairarapa. Strong participation and demand have confirmed the value of workforce development delivered in a regionally relevant format. The programme is helping businesses strengthen workplace culture, support employee development, and improve customer-facing capability. Its continuation into 2026/27 will provide further evidence of how targeted workforce investment can support productivity, resilience, and retention across the region.

SKILLS FOR WORK

What was delivered

Skills for Work brought together schools, employers,

industry, education providers, and community organisations to strengthen pathways between education and employment. Building on the Industry Big Day Out, the initiative evolved into a coordinated regional programme involving Quick Fire Connections, workplace visits, support for the Wairarapa Whanaungatanga Careers Expo, and development of the Wairarapa Work Ready Passport. During 2025/26, these initiatives connected rangatahi with local employers and career pathways while developing practical employability and workplace skills. Activities included:

- 181 total youth participants across Skills for Work activities
- 6 of 10 secondary schools involved
- 35 employers/businesses involved
- 1x business workplace visit
- 24x health professionals at QFC
- 10x businesses took part in Industry Big Day Out

Why it matters

A strong future workforce starts with clear, visible pathways between education and employment. Connecting school students with local employers helps rangatahi understand the opportunities available in their own region, while giving employers an opportunity to build relationships with potential future employees. A coordinated regional approach also helps avoid duplication, improves alignment between schools and industry, and ensures workforce-readiness activity responds to the needs of employers.

Impact

Skills for Work has strengthened the connection between education and industry by bringing existing initiatives, organisations, and resources together through the Skills Wairarapa network. This has created a clearer and more consistent pathway for schools, employers, and young people to engage with one another.

The initiative is helping rangatahi build confidence, understand local career options, and develop practical workplace skills, while supporting employers to contribute to future talent pipelines.

The 2025/26 Skills and Workforce Development work programme strengthened the foundations of a more connected, capable, and future-ready workforce. Through Attract, Connect, Stay, WEDS supported collaboration and retention within the health sector; Digital Fluency improved understanding of regional digital needs while expanding access to technology; WaiHost supported practical workplace capability; and Skills for Work strengthened connections between education and employment.

Collectively, these initiatives have helped address workforce challenges from multiple angles: supporting people already in the workforce, helping employers create stronger workplaces, reducing barriers to digital participation, and building clearer pathways for young people. The greatest value of the programme has been its ability to connect existing strengths, reduce fragmentation, and support collaborative responses to challenges that no single organisation can resolve alone.



CASE STUDY

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS FOR BIGGER AND BETTER CONNECTIONS

Our Goal: To strengthen connections across Wairarapa's health and related workforces, building capability, supporting retention, and creating opportunities for wider community impact.

Strong communities are built on strong connections. For Tū Hauoranga Trust, the Australian model known as Attract, Connect, Stay provided a starting point for strengthening connections across Wairarapa's health and related workforces. Over time, these connections have created a foundation for the Trust to grow into a broader role — responding to community and workforce needs beyond its original focus.

Through its Strategic Connector role, the Trust has built or strengthened relationships across health, community, education and other sectors, creating opportunities to share knowledge, strengthen capability and identify where organisations can work together.

A key example of the Strategic Connector's use of time is in supporting the Better Health Workplaces series. This was created and piloted in 2025 and refined in 2026 in response to a recognised need to improve workplace cultures in the health sector. More than 75 health professionals and related workers participated during 2025/26, with strong positive feedback on the value of local professional development, connection and shared learning.

The success of Better Health Workplaces has created a strong foundation for its future, with an external three-year funding agreement secured for 2026–2028. This supports continued investment in the capability, connection and retention of the local health workforce. Together with the Trust's Connected Communities series, this growing network is creating opportunities for collaboration which helps to strengthen the Trust's activity in support of workforce development.

“Ngā mihi for creating these wonderful events. Just what our communities need.”

**Paetūmokai Kai Tahi,
February 2026.**

The Trust is increasingly applying its focus to wider community challenges. Starting from its Courageous Leaders programme in 2024/25 it now co-leads the multidisciplinary Youth Hub project.

This foundation has enabled the Trust's role to evolve in response to new opportunities that the community values. What started with a focus on attracting, connecting and retaining health and related workforces has grown into a broader role grounded in relationships, local knowledge and supporting community need through workforce collaboration. With a more connected workforce that works more effectively together, the Trust has received feedback that this kaupapa is positively affecting intention to stay.

The value lies not only in the individual initiatives, but in the connections between them — creating new opportunities to working together and enabling the Trust to respond to emerging opportunities across the community.

Attract, Connect, Stay (supported by WEDS) helped to provide a foundation. Tū Hauoranga Trust is now building on that foundation and the connections made to support the wider vitality and wellbeing of the Wairarapa people and the communities within.

WAIRARAPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

SECTION 2: WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITY AREAS - WATER RESILIENCE

Water remains one of the most significant long-term opportunities and challenges facing Wairarapa. Recognising its importance to industry, communities, and future economic growth, the 2025/26 WEDS Work Programme focused on initiatives that support the delivery of the Wairarapa Water Resilience Strategy while contributing to regional economic development outcomes. Throughout the year, WEDS invested in both strategic and practical actions that strengthen investment readiness, build sector knowledge, and encourage collaboration across the region. Together, these initiatives have helped strengthening the evidence base, partnerships and regional momentum needed to support more resilient water management and future economic growth.

A CASE FOR ACTION

What was delivered

WEDS funded the development of A Case for Action on behalf of the Wairarapa Water Resilience Governance Group, creating a shared evidence base to inform regional decision-making, strengthen advocacy efforts and support future infrastructure investment.

Why it matters

The report quantifies the potential long-term economic benefits of improved water resilience, identifying up to \$1.5 billion in additional regional economic activity and approximately 3,800 additional jobs by 2050. It has provided councils, industry, and regional partners with a shared evidence base to support decision-making and strengthen the case for future investment.

Impact

While infrastructure solutions require long-term investment, WEDS has helped position Wairarapa to advocate for future funding opportunities from a position of evidence rather than aspiration. The report establishes water resilience as both an environmental and economic priority, supporting the growth and sustainability of water-dependent industries and communities across the region.

WATER RESILIENCE SUMMER SERIES

What was delivered

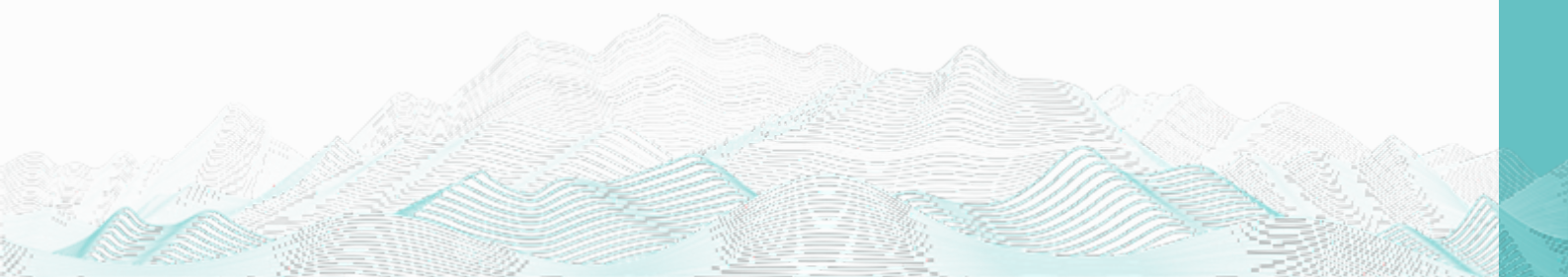
WEDS continued its partnership with the Wairarapa Water Users Society to deliver the Water Resilience Summer Series, bringing together farmers, industry representatives, iwi, government agencies, and rural professionals to explore practical approaches to water management and resilience. More than 110 participants attended the three events held across the region.

Why it matters

The series provided a practical forum for knowledge sharing, relationship building, and peer-to-peer learning, enabling participants to discuss real-world challenges and opportunities associated with water use, efficiency, and resilience.

Impact

Early evaluation indicates participants have increased confidence discussing water resilience issues and have begun applying new approaches to water management within their own operations. The programme is helping build a stronger regional culture of collaboration and continuous improvement, supporting the long-term resilience of Wairarapa's primary sector and communities.



CARTERTON WATER STORAGE DEMAND ASSESSMENT

What was delivered

The WEDS PMO supported Carterton District Council to complete a demand assessment for the proposed one-million-cubic-metre Carterton Water Storage Project. This work built on last year's initiative to increase water resilience at Waingawa. The assessment examined demand from surrounding landowners and existing industrial users, preferred supply arrangements, pricing expectations, future land-use opportunities, and barriers to uptake.

Engagement with landowners within two kilometres of the proposed storage site identified indicative demand significantly exceeded the proposed scheme capacity. The assessment also tested potential industrial demand and considered how future industrial development could influence long-term water requirements.

Why it matters

Reliable, fit-for-purpose water is a critical enabler of both primary-sector productivity and industrial development. The Carterton project could support more resilient farming systems, enable land-use diversification, and strengthen the ability of the Waingawa Industrial Estate to

attract and support water-dependent businesses, including food processing and manufacturing. However, the assessment also demonstrated that interest alone will not guarantee uptake. Price, connection costs, infrastructure design, consenting pathways, and the timing of land-use change will all influence whether demand converts into actual use. Understanding these factors early is important for managing investment risk and ensuring the project is designed around realistic customer needs.

Impact

The demand assessment has given Carterton District Council a clearer evidence base to inform investment, pricing, staging, allocation, and delivery decisions. It identified strong underlying demand while highlighting the commercial settings that will need to be addressed to support uptake and long-term financial sustainability. By connecting infrastructure planning with market demand, land-use potential, and industry needs, WEDS has helped position the project as more than a water storage investment. It is a potential enabler of broader economic development, supporting future productivity, diversification, industrial growth, and regional resilience.

The 2025/26 Water Resilience work programme has strengthened Wairarapa's readiness to address one of its most important economic and environmental challenges. Through A Case for Action, WEDS helped establish a compelling evidence base for future investment and advocacy, while the Water Resilience Summer Series continued to build knowledge, confidence, and collaboration across the region. Together, these initiatives have supported the outcomes identified in the WEDS Implementation Plan by improving investment readiness, strengthening regional coordination, and fostering a more informed and collaborative approach to water management. While the benefits of water resilience will be realised over the long term, this year's work has positioned Wairarapa to better respond to future challenges and seize opportunities that support sustainable economic growth and community wellbeing.



CASE STUDY

LOOKING BEYOND THE HORIZON: A CASE FOR OUR FUTURE

Our Goal: To build the evidence and investment case for water resilience as a foundation for Wairarapa's long-term economic growth, employment, and prosperity.

Water has always shaped Wairarapa's economy.

It supports the farms that produce our food and fibre, the businesses that employ local people, and the communities that call this region home. Yet as demand grows and water resources come under increasing pressure, ensuring a reliable and resilient water future has become one of the region's most important challenges.

To help address this challenge, WEDS funded the development of A Case for Action on behalf of the Wairarapa Water Resilience Strategy Governance Group. The report quantifies the economic opportunity that could be unlocked through improved water resilience across Wairarapa. Rather than focusing solely on water infrastructure, the report examines what water security could mean for the region's future prosperity, workforce, and communities.

The findings are significant. The report identifies the potential for up to \$1.5 billion in additional economic activity and approximately 3,800 additional jobs by 2050 if water resilience solutions are successfully implemented across the region. These opportunities span primary industries, manufacturing, emerging land uses, and supporting sectors that rely on a secure and dependable water supply.

"The best time to start this was yesterday so we should get on with creating a consensus around where and how we do it."

SWDC Mayor Dame Fran Wilde, 15 January 2026.

Importantly, the report is not a blueprint for a specific project. Instead, it provides a shared evidence base that helps councils, industry, iwi, government agencies, and investors understand the scale of the opportunity and the importance of acting together. It strengthens Wairarapa's ability to advocate for future investment and supports informed decision-making about where resources can have the greatest long-term impact.

This work reflects the role of economic development as both a catalyst and connector. By investing in the evidence needed to support future decisions, WEDS has helped position Wairarapa to move from conversations about water constraints toward conversations about opportunity, growth, and resilience. While the benefits will take time to realise, A Case for Action provides a compelling vision of what could be possible for future generations if the region invests in its water future today.

SECTION 3: FINANCIAL SUMMARY
REVENUE AND EXPENSES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 30 JUNE 2026

	NOTES	2025-26 ACTUAL \$
REVENUE		
Wairarapa District Councils funding (MDC, CDC, SWDC)		215,000
WellingtonNZ funding		214,885
Carried forward from FY24-25		154,270
TOTAL REVENUE	1	584,155
EXPENSES		
Project expenses		171,010
Programme operations (governance, events, comms/marketing)		20,276
Operational overheads (office, travel, personnel overheads)		10,764
Personnel costs		214,885
TOTAL EXPENSES		416,934
CARRY FORWARD FOR THE YEAR	2	167,221

NOTE 1: EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND INVESTMENT ENABLED

In addition to direct revenue, delivery of the Work Programme leveraged a further \$218,400 in contributions from external sources, including participating businesses, industry organisations, local partners and central government.

NOTE 1: LEVERAGED CONTRIBUTIONS FROM EXTERNAL SOURCES	
Participating businesses toward Capability Boost	4,500
Destination Wairarapa toward Shared Narrative	15,900
Beef + Lamb NZ / DairyNZ toward On the Front Foot event	1,000
FAR and project leads toward arable sector initiatives	81,000
Wairarapa Water User Society toward Summer Series	12,000
MBIE toward Digital Fluency initiative	98,000
Participating businesses toward WaiHost	6,000
TOTAL EXTERNAL CONTRIBUTIONS	218,400

WEDS activity also contributed to enabling \$28.8 million in potential investment into regional initiatives. This includes proposed Kānoa investment in Carterton Water Storage (\$20 million), led by Carterton District Council and supported by Water Resilience being established as a strategic regional priority through the WEDS Work Programme, which informed Kānoa's investment decision. It also includes potential CDC investment (\$5 million), supported by a water demand assessment delivered by the WEDS PMO to help validate the case for investment. Finally, proposed Kānoa investment in two arable sector initiatives (\$3.8 million) was enabled through WEDS funding to develop the project's investment application.

NOTE 1 (CONTINUED): POTENTIAL INVESTMENT ENABLED (pending decisions)	
Kānoa toward Carterton Water Storage; through WEDS priority framework	20,000,000
CDC toward Carterton Water Storage; through demand assessment	5,000,000
Kānoa toward arable sector initiative; through application funding	3,800,000
TOTAL INVESTMENTS ENABLED	28,800,000

NOTE 2: CARRY FORWARD FOR THE YEAR

\$167,221 was carried forward into the 2026–27 financial year, as permitted under the terms of the WEDS MoU. Of this amount, \$45,000 related to project expenditure contracted before 30 June 2026 and awaiting invoicing, while a further \$76,500 related to projects under procurement during June (contracts finalised in July).

The remaining \$45,721 has been allocated to the FY26–27 budget to support delivery of agreed initiatives in the refreshed WEDS Work Programme Implementation Plan.

NOTE 2: CARRIED FORWARD FOR THE YEAR	
Project expenses contracted	45,000
Project expenses under procurement	76,500
Allocated to FY26–27 Work Programme	45,721
TOTAL CARRY FORWARD	167,221

WAIRARAPA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

SECTION 4: LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026/27

The WEDS Work Programme enters 2026/27 with strong foundations, growing regional partnerships, and a clearer understanding of where coordinated economic development activity can make the greatest difference for Wairarapa. Over the past year tangible activity has been delivered across Food & Fibre, Skills & Workforce Development, and Water Resilience. The work completed to date has strengthened our evidence base, built sector confidence, and created new opportunities to deliver long-term value for the region.

As we move into the third year of the current Memorandum of Understanding between the three Wairarapa District Councils, the WEDS Work Programme remains focused on delivering practical initiatives that respond to regional challenges while building resilience and future opportunity. The updated 2026/27 Implementation Plan continues to prioritise Food & Fibre, Skills & Workforce Development, and Water Resilience as areas where coordinated regional action can have the greatest long-term impact.

LESSONS LEARNED

One of the most important lessons from 2025/26 has been that meaningful economic development outcomes are achieved through collaboration. The strongest initiatives were those developed alongside industry, community organisations, iwi, education providers, and government agencies, reinforcing the role of the WEDS PMO as a connector, facilitator, and enabler of regional action.

The year also demonstrated the value of investing in understanding challenges before designing solutions. Projects such as Capability Boost, Future Options, Skills for Work, Digital Fluency and A Case for Action have all strengthened the evidence base available to support future decision-making and investment. As initiatives mature, WEDS is increasingly focused on measuring outcomes and demonstrating the impact of collective investment, ensuring future resources are directed toward activities that provide the greatest benefit to the region.

Another key lesson has been the importance of maintaining a long-term perspective. Many of the opportunities facing Wairarapa, including workforce development, economic diversification, and water resilience, require sustained effort over many years. Progress often begins with building relationships, capability, confidence, and readiness before larger economic outcomes become visible.

OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS AHEAD

The year ahead is likely to bring significant change across local government, infrastructure planning, and national policy settings.

Implementation of Local Water Done Well, continued discussion around local government reform and service delivery models, potential changes arising from central government priorities, and the possibility of climate-related pressures, including an El Niño weather pattern, all have the potential to influence the operating environment for businesses, communities, and councils.

While these changes create uncertainty, they also present opportunities. The region is increasingly well-positioned to advocate for investment, leverage strong regional partnerships, and respond to emerging opportunities as they arise. The work completed through A Case for Action, ongoing food and fibre diversification activity, workforce development initiatives, and investment readiness projects has strengthened Wairarapa's ability to respond to future challenges from a position of greater knowledge and coordination.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR 2026/27

The 2026/27 Implementation Plan reflects a continued commitment to the three priority areas identified through regional engagement: Food & Fibre, Skills & Workforce Development, and Water Resilience. Across all three areas, the focus is on deeper implementation, stronger measurement of outcomes, and ensuring initiatives deliver practical value to businesses, communities, and the wider regional economy.

Over the coming year, WEDS will continue supporting business capability and diversification opportunities within the Food & Fibre sector, strengthening pathways between education and employment through Skills for Work, supporting the digital fluency within Wairarapa, and maintaining momentum around long-term water resilience as a critical enabler of future economic growth.

While the environment around us may continue to evolve, one thing remains constant: our commitment to working collaboratively with partners across the region to deliver meaningful outcomes for Wairarapa. By staying focused on regional priorities, strengthening connections, and investing in initiatives that build long-term resilience, WEDS continues to play its part in creating a thriving community alive with opportunity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The WEDS PMO acknowledges the ongoing commitment of the WEDS Steering Group members, initiative leads, iwi partners, industry representatives, and the three Wairarapa District Councils. Their collective investment, leadership, and willingness to work together continue to make regional economic development possible. As we enter the third year of the current delivery arrangement, we look forward to building on the progress achieved to date and continuing to work together on the opportunities that matter most to Wairarapa's future.

THRIVE WAIRARAPA

**A THRIVING COMMUNITY ALIVE WITH
OPPORTUNITY**



Prepared by

WellingtonNZ