



2021 Bay of Plenty Mayoral Forum Strategic Focus

This document has been developed by the Bay of Plenty Mayoral Forum. Through the eyes of local government, it contains the key features of the Bay of Plenty region*, relevant strengths and successes, the challenges currently faced, and key strategic opportunities for working with Central Government over the next three years.

The Mayoral Forum includes the Mayors of Opotiki District Council, Whakatāne District Council, Kāwerau District Council, Rotorua Lakes Council, Taupō District Council, Western Bay District Council, Tauranga City Council, and the Chair of the Bay of Plenty Regional Council.

*Noting that for each Territorial Local Authority there are unique propositions.

Our region

- › The **Bay of Plenty region** spans from the top of the East Coast in the east, to Waihi Beach in the west. Inland, the region extends generally to the ridges of the catchments of eight major rivers which drain into the Bay of Plenty, making up 21,837 square kilometres. The Bay of Plenty region includes 9,583 square kilometres of coastal marine area and 18 offshore islands.
- › **Our population** stands at approximately 324,000 people, with 25 percent of the population identifying as Māori. Our region has 39 iwi, around 260 hapū, and more than 200 marae, with over a third of the land in Māori ownership.
- › The **Local Government landscape** of the region includes six district councils, one city council, and the Bay of Plenty Regional Council.
- › The **region's GDP** was \$17.2b in 2019. We have sector advantages in food production, forestry and wood processing, and geothermal energy sources, along with the research and technology associated with these industries.
- › **Strong sub-regions** are a characteristic of our landscape. The Rotorua Lakes, the Eastern Bay and the Western Bay sub-regions, are distinct in their geographies, economies, strengths and challenges. Region-wide data often masks important sub-regional differences, as has been highlighted by the impact of COVID-19.
- › The regional economy has been delivered a sharp shock by the **COVID-19 pandemic**, however exports in key commodities (dairy and fruit) shielded the region from a deeper impact. This is sub-region dependent, for example, the tourism sector is a significant employer in the Rotorua sub-region and 35% of its visitor spend is from international visitors.
- › Our region is **strategically placed in the country** and with the Port of Tauranga having unrivalled sea connections to key export markets. The region has a long and accessible coastline, extensive geothermal resources, and climate and soils suited to **high value** production systems.
- › **Iwi Māori** in the region are more than ever positioning for a significant role in the economy. Treaty settlements have delivered significant investment funding into the region along with three co-governance arrangements over natural resources; with both likely to increase as more settlements are imminent. 39% of the land in the region is in Māori ownership, and much of this can potentially be considered underutilised, **presenting significant opportunity**.
- › Several strategic **Regional Development opportunities** are being progressed with Provincial Growth Fund support, including: Lakefront and Whakarewarewa Forest developments in Rotorua, the Opotiki Harbour and aquaculture development, high value horticulture, the Whakatāne Boat Harbour and Riverfront Revitalisation Projects, the Kāwerau Pūtauaki Industrial Development, the Taupō Airport upgrade and the Rangioru Business Park.
- › Our **communities are young** and with training and opportunity are positioned to be active contributors to our economy and communities.
- › There are a number of successful **connections between Local and Central Government** on policy initiatives and **Local Government** is very well **connected to local communities** and their needs and to the business communities (assisted in this by Economic Development Agencies).

Challenges

- › **Inter-generational poverty exists**, in all of our communities and is particularly overly represented in the communities in the east of the region and Rotorua. **Health and community support services** are fractured or often fail to meet the last 'kilometre' test, when national programme intention doesn't translate to local real delivery. **Homelessness** exists in all of our communities and is overly represented in Kawerau, Ōpōtiki, Whakatāne and Rotorua.
- › As the region develops there is more **pressure on some natural resources** such as lake water quality, lowland river water quality, and industrial air quality. We will have challenges adapting to the **impacts of climate change**, particularly increased intensity of extreme rainfall events for communities on flood plains and with communities located on estuaries and harbours, as our coastline has moderate to high sensitivity to erosion and inundation.
- › **COVID and the Whakaari disaster** has impacted our communities with tourism centric economies and employment in devastating and enduring ways, in particular in Rotorua, Whakatāne, and
- › Tauranga. The ongoing pandemic is impacting our horticulture, agriculture and forestry sectors in terms the availability of skilled labour and building our productive workforce.
- › **Pressure to grow and build homes and infrastructure** exists across the region. In particular in the west, in the districts of Western Bay and Tauranga the challenge is to grow a diverse range of housing including a commitment to affordable housing. Tauranga City is at the nexus of the growth challenge. Rapid and sustained growth has seen the city become the country's fifth city, with the fourth smallest territorial authority land area. Challenges include: limited greenfield land for development, constraints with the cost and delivery of infrastructure to service land, a transport system inadequate for current and future needs and natural environment constraints on future development. In the east the development challenge is shaped by a lack of models and processes to support whanau to develop whenua under multiple ownership.
- › **The quality of our transport linkages for products and people are inconsistent.** Access to the

Port of Tauranga from the sub-regions, connections to centres of growth in the Upper North Island, movement of goods and services in the Western Bay of Plenty, and achieving mode shift with our current settlement patterns and geography are among the challenges.

- › **Funding pressures on the local authorities and communities** continue in the region, from our largest city to our smallest district, as we struggle to meet the development and basic needs of our communities with a limited set of income streams and financial tools. Local government is challenged with continually doing more with less and by the weight of reforms. This also relates to the future of local government, in particular the funding and financing required to provide infrastructure for our growing communities and to match our changing roles.

Our challenges are unique but our opportunities are complementary...



Key Opportunities Together

In addition to local and sub-regional collaboration, we see the opportunity for:

- › **Creating a new relationship to work with local government, iwi leaders and central government** at the most senior level, for a locally responsive approach to government investment and development. The establishment of a regional leadership forum for the Bay of Plenty that brings together Central Government Ministerial representation, the elected leaders from local government across the region, and iwi leaders from the region could provide a forum to progress the opportunities identified and to respond collectively to the significant reforms that have been signalled.

Initial priorities for this leadership group could include:

- › Collectively addressing social inequity in this region with initial focus on Homelessness, Participation in education, and Access to mental health services for children.
- › Enabling homes for our growing population and people in need
- › Developing and backing a locally led approach to creating a low carbon regional economy and

ensuring the Bay of Plenty is adapting to a changing climate.

- › **Collaboration on the Future of Local Government.** Including the design and implementation of resource management reforms, implementation of spatial planning, three waters delivery design, climate change adaptation roles and place-making, and future funding tools for Local Government.

Other local, sub-regional and regional opportunities are:

- › Energising improved **outcomes for Māori** and the Maori economy. The Bay of Plenty has potentially the most complex iwi landscape in the country, along with an expanding experience of Local Government in responsiveness to Māori. We have a willingness and experience with new initiatives such as: the Te Arawa Partnership Model, iwi leaders' forum, relationship agreements, several co-governance arrangements, and with Māori constituencies for Council. Given this there is the opportunity for Central Government to use the region to test the application and impacts of potential policy initiatives. There is also the significant resource in the region of underutilised Māori land, along with the asset holdings in geothermal, aquaculture, tourism, forestry, horticulture resources.

- › Progressing a **Future Development Strategy** for the Western Bay of Plenty through the SmartGrowth partnership. Central government has joined the partnership and the first step is completing a joint spatial plan for the sub-region to comply with the urban growth agenda. Following the Joint Spatial Plan, work will commence on a Future Development Strategy for completion by 2023. The Rotorua (tier 2 urban environment) and Eastern Bay sub-regions may also complete Future Development Strategies in this period. This work directly dovetails with RMA reform and a Strategic Planning Act requiring a regional spatial strategy.

- › **Leveraging off** existing Provincial Growth Fund **investments** through central government working with and supporting Economic Development Agencies to identify strategic opportunities (and roadblocks) that ensure we reap the rewards from current investment. At a regional level there are strategic opportunities around building a low carbon future along with circular economy initiatives (e.g. dealing with waste), rebuilding a regional tourism industry in light of COVID-19 and Whakaari, development of the aquaculture industry and realising the productive potential from underutilised Māori land, that align regional priorities with national ones.

