



THE WEST COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

25 July 2017

Untamed Natural Wilderness wins LGNZ EXCELLENCE Award

The West Coast Regional Council has won the LGNZ EXCELLENCE Award for Best Practice Contribution to Local Economic Development for its role in the development of the brand 'Untamed Natural Wilderness'.

The awards recognise and celebrate the key leadership role that local government plays in communities around the country.

Andrew Robb, chairman of the West Coast Regional Council and the Governance Group overseeing the Regional Growth Programme, said it was great to have the brand work undertaken recognised in this manner.

"We are absolutely rapt to receive this award. The calibre of entries in this category was particularly high."

Tourism figures continue to improve with a 7.5 percent increase on guest nights for the month of May in comparison to 2016.

"Untamed Natural Wilderness is a brand that truly reflects what our region has to offer," said Mr Robb. "I am extremely proud of what Kevin Stratful, our economic development manager, and the team at Tourism West Coast, have achieved."

The brand spearheads a comprehensive marketing strategy for the West Coast seeking to increase visitor numbers, dispersing visitors throughout the region and increasing their length of stay. While minerals and dairy will continue to be critical sectors for the West Coast, the West Coast Regional Growth Study saw tourism as the major immediate opportunity to increase investment and employment in the region. This is reflected in the Economic Development Action Plan, with seven of the Governance Group's 14 headline initiatives relating to growing the West Coast visitor economy.

The previous 'West Coast of the Southern Alps' brand was not resonating with visitors and the region was experiencing a decline in tourism. Following consultation with tourism operators from Haast to Karamea, the 'Untamed Natural Wilderness brand' was adopted.

Since being launched in May 2016, the impact on tourism on the West Coast has been dramatic.

West Coast tourism expenditure is up 13.1 percent (\$61 million) year end March 2017, compared to 9.1 percent for the South Island. Since then the Brand has increased its growth rate to 14 percent in May 2017 and the West Coast number 1 performing region in tourism for the last 6 consecutive months. Bed nights have increased 85,170 between February 2016 and February 2017.

"Growing tourism numbers on the back of the new brand, "Untamed Natural Wilderness", has demonstrated how getting the message right can stimulate growth in an unprecedented manner," said Mr Robb.

Local authorities were invited to submit award applications in five categories:

- Fulton Hogan EXCELLENCE Award for Community Engagement
- Creative New Zealand EXCELLENCE Award for Best Creative Place
- Air New Zealand EXCELLENCE Award for Environmental Impact
- Chorus EXCELLENCE Award for Best Practice in Infrastructure
- Crown Fibre Holdings EXCELLENCE Award for Best Practice Contribution to Local Economic Development

Judges for the awards were former Wellington Mayor Kerry Prendergast, Chair of EQC Sir Maarten Wevers and The New Zealand Initiative's Executive Director, Dr Oliver Hartwich.

The finalists in the Crown Fibre Holdings EXCELLENCE Award for Best Practice Contribution to Local Economic Development included:

- Hastings District Council – Papakainga Development Policy & Implementation Project 2007-17 - Leadership by the council has seen strategic issues that were preventing development of Māori land investigated and resolved, enabling well-supported developments to get up and running.
- Hauraki District Council – Economic Development Strategy “Toward 2025” - “Toward 2025” builds on the highly successful strategy adopted in 2013, using a range of proactive and practical intervention projects to focus the community on achieving development goals that have already seen more than \$100 million in investment coming to the region, including major international investment.
- Rotorua Lakes Council – Rotorua Mountain Biking Strategy - The strategy to establish Rotorua as a globally recognised mountain bike destination has seen visits to the Whakarewarewa Mountain Bike Park increased from 55,000 in 2005 to 250,000 in 2016, with resulting job growth coming from increased investment in retail and support businesses.
- Selwyn District Council – Izone Business Park Development - The Izone Business Park is New Zealand's largest fully consented and development-ready industrial park with 68 new businesses employing 1,200 people. Another 800 jobs are forecast as development work is completed by land purchasers.
- West Coast Regional Council – Untamed Natural Wilderness - The West Coast's exciting new brand has dramatically boosted tourism in the region, and is an ideal antidote to the decline in other major economic sectors that was damaging the social fabric of local communities.

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