



THE WEST COAST REGIONAL COUNCIL

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Untamed Natural Wilderness brand a finalist in LGNZ EXCELLENCE Awards

Growing tourism numbers on the back of a new brand, “Untamed Natural Wilderness”, has propelled the West Coast Regional Council into the final of the Local Government New Zealand (LGNZ) EXCELLENCE Awards.

The awards recognise and celebrate the key leadership role that local government plays in communities around the country. The entry is in the Best Practice Contribution to Local Economic Development section.

Andrew Robb, chairman of the West Coast Regional Council and chair of the Governance Group overseeing the Economic Development Action Plan, said that with a decline in other major economic sectors on the Coast, there was a clear need for tourism to grow to fill the gap.

“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), compared to 9.1 percent for the South Island. Bed nights have increased 85,170 between February 2016 and February 2017.

“The 0.4 percent increase in tourism market share, from 5.1 to 5.5 percent, reversed six years of losses in less than a year,” he said.

Untamed Natural Wilderness is a living brand. When feedback from China indicated some concern about the meaning of “untamed” – that it might mean tourists may be bitten by snakes – specific Mandarin translations were developed to explain the brand wording:

- Untamed: a place not crowded which nature created
- Natural: as nature intended
- Wilderness: land not sea, untouched, remote, beautiful, clear and vast

Judges said the four West Coast councils realised they needed to come together to develop a brand for the region to make sure it was best placed to capitalise on the burgeoning tourism industry.

“They did it smartly and now have a very clear marketing approach which has been recognised by other industries. It is a brilliant initiative with immediate results.”

LGNZ President Lawrence Yule said the finalists in the EXCELLENCE Awards showcased outstanding leadership being provided by local government throughout the country.

“Local government is at the centre of every community in New Zealand, helping shape the environment in which we work and play,” Mr Yule says.

“Being named as a finalist is a great achievement and reflects the vision shown by councils and the innovative work being done by staff. The finalists include some truly exceptional projects that are having a profound impact on communities.”

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 are 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 include:

- 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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