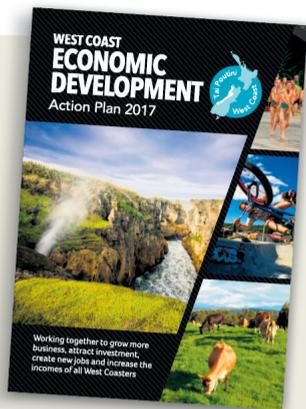




DEVELOPMENT WEST COAST

Planning begins to implement Regional Growth Study Action Plan



Development West Coast has this month begun preparing for the consultation to be undertaken with the various organisations where their economic development and tourism functions are proposed to be brought into DWC in order to implement the West Coast Economic Development Action Plan.

The Action Plan is the second phase in the Government's Regional Growth Programme

which last year identified several major areas of opportunity for the West Coast.

DWC Chief Executive Chris Mackenzie says the action plan will enable DWC to lead a new era for the region's economic development.

"The study recognised that the geography of the West Coast created a fractured approach to economic development, and to truly connect businesses and the tourism industry for a collective regional growth required a single unit

to have the oversight on the strategic direction for the region," he said.

"The Regional Growth Study Governance Group has identified 16 Priority Actions and our Trustees are enthusiastic about the direction this will take our region. We will be working with that group to implement the recommendations as quickly as is possible."

Those priority areas include capturing greater value from visitor growth, enhancing connectivity and resilience with more investment in roading, ultra fast broadband and cellular phone coverage, and encouraging investment in primary sectors. There will also be a new emphasis on cultivating the development of niche sectors, including the digital economy, indigenous wood processing, horticulture, food & beverage and whitebaiting.

Mr Mackenzie says DWC will have the overall responsibility for implementation and delivery of the Action Plan through its collaboration with the lead agency for each initiative.

"To oversee this new responsibility, a new Regional Economic Development Unit within

DWC is proposed to absorb the activities of DWC's current Business Development Unit, along with the West Coast Regional Economic Development Manager functions and tourism. This will aim to provide more effective support for West Coast sectors and businesses as they advance new opportunities for the greater good of the region. Tourism in particular will benefit from a far more co-ordinated approach between the tourism, economic development and infrastructure sectors, and we should all be excited about the prospects this will open up for tourism across the region," he says.

"The Growth Study has identified not just the gaps in our ability to grow the West Coast's economy in the way we most want to, but has also set out some very clear objectives and areas that will give us a new strategic direction. This study has the real teeth that have been needed to make a significant change and enable the potential of our economic growth to be realised.

The transition into the new arrangements are anticipated to be completed by April 2018.

The West Coast Economic Development Plan 2017 can be found at www.dwc.org.nz.

Change is inevitable – but could we lead the way?

From the Desk of Helen Wilson, Research and Innovation Manager

This year I have attended two forums that have stirred me to consider the lifestyle changes that we, as individuals, will face over the next 10-13 years. I say 13, not because it is a random or ominous number, but because 2030 has become somewhat of a deadline year for many reasons. I say 'lifestyle', but the same changes will also arise in the way we do business across the region, country and the globe. At least that's what the scientists, world leaders and policy makers are telling us.

I refer to the UN's "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", which the NZ Government has signed up to, as well as New Zealand's pledge under the "Paris Agreement" to reduce emissions by 30 percent below 2005 levels, also by 2030.

Do we as a region look like we care? And, why should we? How will it benefit the economy of the region and us as individuals to start making changes now instead of inevitably having them forced on us?

At the Sustainable Farming Fund gathering held in Lincoln a couple of months ago delegates were asked for a show of hands in terms of how many owned electric vehicles. No-one raised a hand, although one courageous farmer confessed to having an electric bike. We were then asked, "what will it take and how long will it take for you to change?" – because in 10 years' time we won't be having this conversation, you will own one." Those in my age group will have learned this lesson from the past. We reflect back with humour on our reaction to Bill Gates' big audacious vision (in 1978), that

there would be a computer in every home by 2008 – yeah, right!

Whatever our personal opinions or political persuasions are regarding climate change, we can hardly ignore the national strategies and global agreements in place. We do contribute to the national GDP after all and presumably we would quite like to contribute more. At the other end of the equation our major regional employers are already aware that they need to reconsider their energy processes because their largest markets demand it of them. That's the economic reality.

It's not going to be easy for our farmers especially, but it's a process that is already being tackled by the sector at large in terms of being able to deliver a premium product to overseas markets. "This is probably the most difficult task we have ever given ourselves, which is to intentionally transform the economic development model, for the first time in human history," said Christiana Figueres, Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC (the UN body overseeing the process of attaining a global treaty on climate change).

My second memorable forum attendance was in Invercargill at the evaluation of the 'Wood Fuels South' project. In 2014 the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority (EECA) partnered with Venture Southland to deliver the Wood Energy South project in the Southland region. The project aimed to lower energy-related carbon emissions in Southland, improve air quality, and demonstrate the cost and life cycle benefits of wood-chip and wood-pellet fuelled boilers utilising local waste wood. It also provided local employment and business opportunities. And it wasn't easy. The commercial benefits have proved to be positive and the investment story is a good one, not



DWC's Research & Innovation Manager Helen Wilson and Business Service Manager Fiona Hill.

just for the wood suppliers but also for all the individual businesses, schools, and council amenities that took part.

The Southland region also got to showcase the ability of both public and private sectors to have courage and work together on a regional project for the benefit of all. You can't underestimate how attractive that is to potential investors.

As one of NZ's regions that has a long tradition of mining and significant investment in dairy farming, the challenge ahead may look particularly hard for the West Coast. But is it?

There are several things in the region's favour. We are a pretty good looking region and our landscape, our mountains and rainforests represent all that is best about New Zealand in the world's eyes. We have the newly launched and award winning regional brand, "Untamed Natural Wilderness", that encapsulates our place and sells it so well. We already have the things that most of the world is running out of: space, water and clean(ish) air.

The recently announced funding for the NZ Institute for Minerals to Materials Research (NZIMMR) to be established here in the near future will have, as one of its focuses, "using innovative research and manufacturing techniques to convert minerals into higher-value products" - presumably in an environmentally suitable and sustainable way. So the region is poised to lead the way in this sector. And if we are going to continue to extract coal for the purposes of adding value to it, I presume we will need to use something else for process heat.

Meantime, there are still plans in progress for a renewable energy plant for the Buller district and I am aware of the developing local interest in biomass planting as a way of diversifying land use. Research into protecting the region against the impact of future events is underway and includes a government-funded project focusing on the development of an electricity distribution resilience framework for the West Coast. More renewable hydro energy projects are in the pipeline. Climate change will perhaps not be as calamitous for our region as it will for others, we can cope with a bit more rain, can't we?

In terms of profiling our region to the world outside our borders, it will be of benefit to have

a collective and clear vision, especially one that can define a new competitive advantage. The recently launched West Coast Economic Development Action Plan is just the beginning.

I am not sharing this view as part of some personal green agenda. My job is to consider future opportunities for business growth and investment. We can't be offering cheap coal in an effort to bring new people, businesses and industry to the region – those days are gone. We need a new story. If we bundle up all the new development activities happening in the region and planned for the near future we could sell an environmentally viable story and the way.

Economic development will always be about change. Understanding the changes that need to be made and the value proposition that those changes will bring with them in the long term will be an important process. Telling the story about how we as a region got on with it will be a big bonus.

As a first step, a West Coast Energy Forum, supported by EECA, is planned for late this year. If you are interested in contributing to or learning more about this Forum or commenting on the discussion above, please email me at helen@dwc.org.nz.

So, when will I buy my electric car? When I can wander down the road to the NZIMMR and be assured by the scientists that the required componentry has been extracted in an environmentally favourable way. Also, I will be needing it to be driverless, so I can get on with knitting my knee rug while on the way to my appointment at the new Greymouth Hospital to discuss my new locally made titanium hip replacement...



Chair's Comment

As the new Chair of DWC, I'm honoured to be taking up the mantle from John Sturgeon.

Being part of this organisation's governance body for the past nine months has given me a greater insight into the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for our region, and I am particularly looking forward to the work DWC will be doing in the coming years to further the intentions outlined in the Economic Development Action Plan. The plan is an excellent blueprint for West Coast businesses, industries and our numerous communities, and it will ensure that we collectively continue to build on our existing successes.

I've had first-hand experience as a DWC "client" through completing the 2014/15 Leadership and Governance Programme, so I know what a valuable asset this organisation is for our region.

There is a dedicated and professional team of staff and Trustees at DWC, who are working hard to ensure there are opportunities available for West Coasters to build on their knowledge and skills, and to work together to benefit our region, and I would encourage you to take a look at what is on offer through the dwc.org.nz website, or call in to the Greymouth office.

RENEE ROONEY
CHAIR