



AGENDA

Regional Growth and Resilience Committee Meeting

Date: Tuesday, 12 May 2026

Time: 9:30 am

Location: Council Chambers
Waikato Regional Council
Level 1, 160 Ward Street, Hamilton

Members: Cr Keith Holmes – Chair
Cr Tipa Mahuta – Deputy-Chair
Cr Robert Cookson
Cr Ben Dunbar-Smith
Cr Gary McGuire
Cr Jennifer Nickel
Cr Garry Reymer
Cr Angela Strange
Cr Warren Maher

Alternate: Cr Mich'eal Downard

Regional Growth and Resilience Committee

Ngā Tikanga Whakahaere | Terms of Reference

1. *Mana ā-Ture | Status*

This Committee was established by Council under clause 30(1)(a) of Schedule 7 of the [Local Government Act 2002](#). It is a discretionary committee that can be created or disestablished by Council resolution.

2. *Ngā Kawenga | Responsibilities*

The Committee provides strategic leadership and governance oversight of Council's work in regional economic development and resilience issues including community adaptation planning, water and energy security.

3. *Ngā Apatono | Powers*

The Committee has the following powers required to carry out its responsibilities:

- a. Overseeing the development, implementation and review of the Regional Economic Development Strategy and related plans, ensuring alignment with regional and national policy frameworks.
- b. Guiding Council's role in regional development advocacy, partnerships and engagement with economic development entities, including but not confined to iwi investment partners, tertiary and research institutions, the business sector and the Mayoral Forum.
- c. Considering opportunities to co-opt or invite participation from key economic enablers (for example, but not limited to infrastructure, education and good governance) to strengthen strategic insight and collaboration.
- d. Exploring and promoting innovation, technology, and artificial intelligence as enablers of regional economic growth and sustainable development.
- e. Overseeing the implementation of the regional Water Security Plan and Regional Energy Strategy and other strategic initiatives that enhance resilience and productivity.
- f. Making recommendations to the Strategy and Policy Committee in respect of emerging economic or resilience issues on matters relating to the Committee's responsibilities.
- g. Recommending to Council related infrastructure investment initiatives.
- h. Monitoring and reporting on key regional economic indicators, including GDP growth, employment, productivity, and investment trends.
- i. Overseeing regional community adaptation planning and natural hazard risk management, promoting integrated approaches that connect environmental, economic, and community wellbeing.
- j. Overseeing Council's climate change initiatives, including activities related to leveraging the Emissions Trading Scheme and biodiversity credits.

4. *Ngā Tūranga | Membership:*

4.1 *Ngā Mema | Members*

The Committee has nine members as follows:

- a. Eight councillors appointed by Council
- b. Chair of Council

4.2 *Ūpoko me te Ūpoko Tuarua | Chair and Deputy-Chair*

The Chair and Deputy-Chair are appointed by Council in accordance with clause 25 of Schedule 7 of the Local Government Act 2002.

4.3 *Ngā Kairiwhi | Alternates*

The Deputy-Chair of Council is the alternate for the Chair of Council on this Committee, unless otherwise appointed.

5. *Ngā Hui i te Tau | Frequency of meetings*

Bi-monthly *or* as required.

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7	Karakia Whakamutunga	51

Meeting Runsheet

Time:	Report Title:	Presenter:
9.30am	1. Karakia Timatanga	-
9.32am	2. Apologies	-
9.34am	3. Confirmation of Agenda	-
9.36am	4. Disclosures of Interest	-
-	5. Minutes for Confirmation or Receipt (NIL)	-
6. GENERAL BUSINESS		
9.38am	6.1. Regional Growth and Resilience Committee – Cost of Activities	Karen Bennett Executive Manager, Chief Executive’s Office
9.48am	6.2. Draft Regional Economic Development Strategy	Tariq Ashraf Regional Economic Development Lead
10.20am	6.3. Chair’s Commentary	Cr Keith Holmes Committee Chair
10.30am	6.4. University of Waikato Economic Development Opportunity	Professor Neil Quigley Vice Chancellor, University of Waikato Dr Nicole Barrett Fundraising Director, University of Waikato
11.00am	BREAK – 10 MINS	
11.10am	6.5. Ministry for Primary Industries foresight and insight	Jarred Mair Director – Sector Policy, Ministry of Primary Industries
12.10pm	7. Karakia Whakamutunga	-

1 KARAKIA TIMATANGA

Whakataka te hau ki te uru	Cease o winds from the west
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga	Cease o winds from the south
Kia mākinakina ki uta	Bring calm breezes over the land
Kia mātaratara ki tai	Bring calm breezes over the sea
E hī ake ana te atakura	And let the red-tipped dawn come
He tio	With a touch of frost
He Huka	A sharpened air
He hau hū	And promise of a glorious day
Tīhei mauri ora!	Behold we live

2 APOLOGIES**3 CONFIRMATION OF AGENDA****4 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Members are reminded of the need to be aware of maintaining a clear separation between personal interests and duties and their role as an elected member.

If any member has an interest that creates an actual, or could be perceived to create, a conflict in relation to any item on the agenda, it is recommended that this be disclosed.

5 MINUTES FOR CONFIRMATION OR RECEIPT

Nil

6 GENERAL ITEMS

6.1 REGIONAL GROWTH AND RESILIENCE COMMITTEE - COST OF ACTIVITIES

Rā | Date: 30 April 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Karen Bennett, Executive Manager

Kaituku | Authoriser: Karen Bennett, Executive Manager, Chief Executive's Office

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report meets a council requirement to provide each of the council's standing committees with an overview of current activities, costs and value to help inform 2027-2037 Long Term Plan discussions.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. One of the Chief Executive's key performance indicators (KPIs) for the current and next financial years includes the requirement to provide information to councillors to help inform the 2027-2037 Long Term Plan (LTP) decisions by reporting an overview of current activities, costs and value to all council standing committees within their terms of reference. The intention is to ensure committees understand the investment or disinvestment decisions they wish to pursue as they develop the LTP.
3. The Regional Growth and Resilience Committee has responsibility for strategic leadership and governance oversight of the council's work in regional economic development and resilience issues including community adaptation planning, and implementation of the water security and energy strategies. The powers required to carry out its responsibilities set down in the terms of reference are listed in the background section below.
4. The activities to deliver on the committee's terms of reference can be largely grouped into three areas: 1) regional resilience, 2) regional economic development, 3) resource efficiency and resilience (including implementation of the energy and water security strategies, and business and organisational sustainability).
5. This report details budgeted labour and direct costs against these three areas. Councillors are asked to note the following:
 - costs associated with energy and economic development stakeholder forums, communications, and economic insights are incorporated into these budgets;
 - costs associated with the implementation of the water security strategy will be reported separately to the Strategy and Policy Committee;
 - the cost of servicing committees will be reported separately to Finance and Performance Committee.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Regional Growth and Resilience Committee - cost of activities* (Regional Growth and Resilience Committee, 12 May 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

6. One of the Chief Executive's key performance indicators (KPIs) for the current and next financial years includes the requirement to provide information to councillors to help inform the 2027-2037 LTP decisions. The KPI states that each committee is to receive an overview of current activities, costs and value within their terms of reference. The intention is to ensure committees understand the investment or disinvestment decisions they wish to pursue as they develop the LTP.
7. Under its terms of reference, the Regional Growth and Resilience Committee has the following powers required to carry out its responsibilities:
 - a) Overseeing the development, implementation and review of the Regional Economic Development Strategy and related plans, ensuring alignment with regional and national policy frameworks.
 - b) Guiding Council's role in regional development advocacy, partnerships and engagement with economic development entities, including but not confined to iwi investment partners, tertiary and research institutions, the business sector and the Mayoral Forum.
 - c) Considering opportunities to co-opt or invite participation from key economic enablers (for example, but not limited to infrastructure, education and good governance) to strengthen strategic insight and collaboration.
 - d) Exploring and promoting innovation, technology, and artificial intelligence as enablers of regional economic growth and sustainable development.
 - e) Overseeing the implementation of the regional Water Security Plan and Regional Energy Strategy and other strategic initiatives that enhance resilience and productivity.
 - f) Making recommendations to the Strategy and Policy Committee in respect of emerging economic or resilience issues on matters relating to the Committee's responsibilities.
 - g) Recommending to Council related infrastructure investment initiatives.
 - h) Monitoring and reporting on key regional economic indicators, including GDP growth, employment, productivity, and investment trends.
 - i) Overseeing regional community adaptation planning and natural hazard risk management, promoting integrated approaches that connect environmental, economic, and community wellbeing.
 - j) Overseeing Council's climate change initiatives, including activities related to leveraging the Emissions Trading Scheme and biodiversity credits.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

8. As noted above, the committee’s work programme can be grouped into three broad areas - 1) regional resilience, 2) regional economic development, 3) resource efficiency and resilience (including implementation of the energy and water security strategies, and organisational sustainability). Budgets, key projects and risks and issues for each area follow below.

Regional resilience

9. A large part of the council’s regional resilience work is covered by the Understanding and Adapting to Natural Hazard Risk Programme. This is a key multi-year initiative within the 2024-2034 Long Term Plan (LTP), building on the business case first developed for the 2021-2031 LTP. The Programme strengthens Waikato Regional Council’s capability to understand, manage, and support communities to adapt to natural hazard risks in the context of climate change, evolving legislation, and increasing expectations for coordinated regional resilience planning.

10. Delivery of the programme is dependent on the Regional Resilience Team, which also fulfils core functions under the Regional Hazards and Emergency Response Group of Activities.

11. Key projects

- Hauraki Plains Adaptation Planning – Risk Assessment
- Review of region wide risks
- SIDF Implementation Stage 1
- Waikato regional water resource modelling
- WRC LIM natural hazard information
- WRC natural hazard resilience framework and action plan.

12. Budget

Funded by: \$1,945,651 (UAGC – Regional Hazards Rates) and
\$11,850 (direct charges).

Labour budget (full year): \$571,986

Direct cost budget (full year): \$436,000

Capital Budget: \$975,000 (over 3 years)

13. Risks and issues

- Severe weather/disaster event response requirements impact ability to deliver the programme because when Civil Defence and Emergency Management response is activated, the Regional Resilience Team is required to support the response.
- Changing legislation and national direction diverts resourcing away from the planned resilience programme.

- Key internal staff are unable to support the programme requirements due to the growing needs of the emergency flood management requirements that the team fulfils.
- Staff wellbeing and workloads are a concern due to high workloads since Cyclone Gabrielle, particularly in the flood response space. There have been four weather events in the current calendar year.

Regional Economic Development

14. Waikato is a distinct regional economy, defined by its natural boundaries. Its climate, natural resources, location, people, infrastructure networks, capabilities, history, partnerships with kingitanga and local iwi, influence its economic strengths and industries. The regional economic development approach can facilitate partnerships with external investors and scale up/spread benefits (economies of scale, intra-regional and inter-regional connections). Waikato Regional Council contributes to economic development through a range of complementary roles that are best delivered at regional scale: efficient delivery of its functions; procurement; strategic, spatial and transport planning (including regional policy); regulatory functions (consents etc); land transport operations; biosecurity; “active” economic development (such as evidence and insights, regional leadership, coordination). Regional functions are required to be delivered for the benefit of the whole or a substantial part of the region.

15. Key projects

- Economic development strategy, accord and initiatives
- Regular provision of evidence and insights on the regional economy
- Convening of regional economic development advisory groups
- Digital one-stop platform for all regional development inquiries.

16. Budget

Funded by: \$50,000 (general rates) and
\$250,000 (Regional Development Fund reserve).

Labour + direct costs (full year): \$300,000

The regional economic development funding was provided for two years only, with the expectation the council would decide next steps and future funding through the LTP.

17. Risks and issues

- Economic impacts of the 2026 Iran war (e.g. scarcity and higher price of fuels, fertilisers, materials)
- February 2026 storms (isolation and damage to agricultural land)
- High power prices for industry
- Weak and unstable national economic recovery
- Lower incomes and productivity in region v NZ; lower incomes and productivity in some areas v region

- Pressure on water and land resources (quantity and quality)
- Urban/rural land use competition
- Biosecurity
- Lower education and higher unemployment/NEET than NZ
- Low innovation and under investment in beneficial activities
- Lack of coordination.

Resource efficiency and resilience

18. As stated in the terms of reference, the committee is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the regional Water Security Plan and Regional Energy Strategy and other strategic initiatives that enhance resilience and productivity. The council's flagship energy and water security strategies are key to improving resource efficiency, resilience and affordability.
19. Costs associated with implementation of the energy strategy, which includes the establishment of a region-wide energy forum, are covered in the existing project budget for 2025/26 and 2026/27.
20. Costs associated with the implementation of the water security strategy will be reported separately to the Strategy and Policy Committee at a later date.
21. Business and organisational sustainability activities (including climate change mitigation and resilience) contribute to the council's climate change response, organisational risk framework, and delivery of the Climate Action Roadmap as part of business-as-usual operations, with particular emphasis on energy efficiency, asset performance, and embedding climate change risk management into organisational projects and processes.
22. This programme also supports the council's outward-facing climate change mitigation and resilience work, ensuring climate adaptation and emissions reduction are embedded across regional programmes, partnerships, and strategic initiatives. This work plays a key role in aligning the council's internal capabilities with the aims and objectives of the council's partners and stakeholders.
23. Key activities
 - Organisational climate change risk assessment and management
 - Energy and emissions efficiency reduction plan
 - Targeted operational efficiency projects (delivered with asset teams)
 - Annual carbon inventory reporting
 - Waste reduction initiatives
 - Enabling organisational delivery of the Nature+ Framework, identifying integrated, nature-based projects on council-owned land that deliver multiple outcomes across biodiversity, water quality, and flood resilience.

24. Budget

Funded by: \$144,189 (general rates)

Direct cost budget (full year): \$135,250

25. Risks and issues

- Lack of evidence in decision making increases the risk of liability and maladaptation, leading to higher long-term costs and reduced regional resilience.
- Competing priorities across the council work programmes can affect alignment and sequencing, and increase inefficiencies.
- External policy, funding, and regulatory changes influence delivery focus and resourcing

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

26. By presenting an overview of current activities, costs, and value across regional resilience, regional economic development, and resource efficiency and resilience, the committee is well positioned to understand the implications of existing investments and future choices. The council will be discussing where to maintain, increase, or disinvest in council activities through the development the 2027–2037 Long Term Plan. This paper provides information to help align costs, strategic intent, council responsibilities, and long-term outcomes for the region, in line with the Regional Growth and Resilience Committee’s terms of reference.

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

6.2 DRAFT WAIKATO REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Rā Date:	4 May 2026
Kaituhi Author:	Tariq Ashraf, Regional Economic Development Lead
Kaituku Authoriser:	Karen Bennett, Executive Manager, Chief Executive's Office
Mana whakatau Delegation Status:	Committee has delegated authority to make the recommended decision

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To seek the committee's feedback on the draft Waikato Regional Economic Development Strategy.
2. To seek the committee's endorsement to:
 - (a) share the draft with stakeholders for feedback
 - (b) undertake close consultation with business stakeholders to assess the feasibility and attractiveness of proposed initiatives
 - (c) confirm contributions and develop the implementation plans for the recommended 2026/27 initiatives.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. This report seeks the committee's endorsement to share the draft regional economic development strategy for feedback, undertake close consultation with business stakeholders and confirm contributions and develop the implementation plans for the recommended 2026/27 initiatives.
4. Staff propose to present the final draft strategy and 2026/27 implementation plan to a council workshop leading to adoption by the end of June 2026.
5. Staff developed the draft regional economic development strategy in consultation with parties in the regional economic development ecosystem. This included seeking proposals for new initiatives in 2026/27.
6. Staff are creating a digital platform and process for managing investment inquiries, and providing advice. It complements work underway across councils, and ongoing work by the council with partners to develop updated regional promotional assets.
7. Staff are continuing to work with others to provide evidence to support the regional economic development strategy, and insights to support this committee.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

1. That the report *Draft Waikato Regional Economic Development Strategy* (Regional Growth and Resilience Committee, 12 May 2026) be received.
2. That the Regional Growth and Resilience Committee endorses
 - (a) the Draft Waikato Regional Economic Development Strategy (Attachment 1)
 - (b) the release of the draft strategy for stakeholder feedback
 - (c) staff to undertake targeted engagement with business stakeholders to test the feasibility and attractiveness of proposed initiatives
 - (d) that staff confirm contributions and develop implementation plans for proposed 2026/27 initiatives.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

8. Following the committee meeting in February 2026, staff circulated an updated analysis of the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing the Waikato regional economy to parties in the regional economic development ecosystem for feedback.
9. Staff analysed a range of sources and prepared a draft vision and outcomes, identified the role of potential initiatives in contributing to these, and included the enablers of regional economic development.
10. Staff provided these as background when seeking proposals from parties for effective, short-term (1-3 years) initiatives that contribute to the strategy outcomes.
11. Staff also progressed analysis of sources, discussions with parties and drafting of the strategy, along with work on the direct contribution of the Waikato Regional Council to the strategy's outcomes.

TE TAKE | ISSUEDraft regional economic development strategy

12. The draft strategy complements existing sub-regional functions and identifies economic development priorities based on opportunities to build on the many strengths of the Waikato region.
13. The draft values are informed by critical success factors for regional economic development, reviewing iwi strategic documents and individual discussions with iwi partners.
14. The strategy is one component of the regional spatial plan that will align land use, infrastructure, environmental and cultural aspirations, and more. The strategy and the regional spatial plan will identify priorities for coordinated and impactful investment in the region by parties including businesses, iwi, central and local government.
15. Potential sources of investment include government initiatives such as the next wave of City and Regional Deals. The strategy and spatial plan will also inform plans and budgets such as the Regional Land Transport Plan and Long-term Plans.

2026/27 initiatives

16. New initiatives for 2026/27 to be included in the strategy are to be confirmed. Parties in the regional economic development ecosystem were asked to submit proposals with responses to the following questions:
 - (a) economic outcomes the proposed initiative contributes to over the next 10-30 years, and how
 - (b) the enablers of economic development over the next 4-10 years the proposed initiative relates to, and how
 - (c) the issue(s) the proposed initiative addresses
 - (d) who will need to contribute to the proposed initiative for it to be implemented, and how
 - (e) the next step for the proposed initiative, who will need to contribute to it, and how
17. Proposals for 43 initiatives were received from 14 parties (some including multiple partners), across nine sectors:
 - (a) business and industry associations
 - (b) industry sectors
 - (c) skills, training and workforce development
 - (d) sports organisations
 - (e) regional tourism organisations
 - (f) creative organisations
 - (g) local authorities
 - (h) business growth & development organisations
 - (i) education and training providers.
18. Assessment of proposals is ongoing. Some proposals are being developed further or progressed by multiple partners (such as coordinated inward investment facilitation by the Regional Economic Development group made up of staff from local authorities across the Waikato region). Further information is required about other proposals. Several proposals seek support for implementation of initiatives, from multiple parties, including through financial investment. Further proposals will be identified from time to time and some parties indicated they would submit proposals for implementation in 2027/28.
19. The draft strategy also acknowledges that there are many initiatives in progress already, led by various parties. These initiatives in progress will be updated as information becomes available.

Consultation

20. Staff consider that it would be beneficial to:
 - (a) share the draft strategy with stakeholders for feedback
 - (b) undertake close consultation with business stakeholders to assess the feasibility and attractiveness of proposed initiatives
 - (c) confirm contributions and develop the implementation plans for the recommended 2026/27 initiatives.

Regional council functions

21. To recap, the council contributes to economic development through a range of complementary functions:
 - (a) efficient delivery of its functions
 - (b) procurement
 - (c) strategic, spatial and transport planning (including regional policy)
 - (d) regulatory functions (consents etc)
 - (e) land transport operations
 - (f) biosecurity
 - (g) “active” economic development (such as evidence and insights, regional leadership, coordination).
22. With respect to active economic development, staff are creating a platform and process for managing investment inquiries received by the council. This will consist of a digital platform, and advisory services to connect investors with relevant internal and external stakeholders. It complements both the coordinated inward investment facilitation work underway across councils, and ongoing work by the council with partners to collate and develop updated assets to promote the region as a destination for workers, business investors, students and visitors.
23. Staff are continuing to work with others to provide evidence to support the regional economic development strategy and insights to support this committee, for example on the economic impacts of the 2026 Iran war.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

24. Staff propose to present the final draft strategy and 2026/27 implementation plan to a council workshop leading to adoption by the end of June 2026.

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **Draft Waikato Regional Economic Development Strategy – May 2026 - (Doc # 35721377)** [↓](#)

Title/cover page

Waikato regional economic development strategy 2026/27

DRAFT

[insert image]

Waikato economy at a glance

Waikato’s economy is large, growing and diverse. It can do even more for both New Zealand and people in the region.

<p>Working age population</p> <p>422,000</p> <p>10% of New Zealand. 1.6% per year growth over the last 5 years (compared to 1.2% for New Zealand)</p>	<p>Economic growth</p> <p>2.2%</p> <p>per year over last 5 years, (compared to 1.7% for New Zealand). Waikato GDP is \$38.8 billion, 9% of New Zealand’s GDP</p>	<p>Economic diversity</p> <p>21.3</p> <p>Waikato economic concentration index (greater diversity than 22.8 for New Zealand)</p>
<p>Household income</p> <p>\$118,000</p> <p>Mean household income is 87% of the New Zealand level. 4.5% per year growth over the last 5 years (compared to 4.1% for New Zealand)</p>	<p>Productivity</p> <p>\$152,000</p> <p>GDP per filled job is 97% of the New Zealand level. 0.5% per year growth over the last 5 years (compared to 0.4% for New Zealand)</p>	<p>Unemployment rate</p> <p>5.7%</p> <p>5.0% for New Zealand. 4.4% average over the last 5 years (compared to 4.1% for New Zealand)</p>

Waikato’s strengths-based priorities

Waikato has many, intertwined economic strengths that flow from its natural environment and people. These inform economic development priorities so that Waikato can play its optimal role nationally.

Priority	Leverage location advantages	Boost bioeconomy productivity	Increase electricity supply	Export & advanced manufacturing hub	Thriving and connected metro area	Partner with regional Māori
Waikato strength	1st in NZ for share of freight movements	1st in NZ for share of bioeconomy	1st in NZ for share of electricity generation capacity	2nd= in NZ for share of food manufacturing	3rd fastest growing urban area in NZ	1st= in NZ for value of Māori asset base
Selected evidence	40% of freight movements, the largest proportion in the country	18% of New Zealand’s bioeconomy* *This includes horticulture, farming, fishing and aquaculture, forestry and logging	37% of New Zealand’s electricity generation capacity	16% of New Zealand food manufacturing, equal with Canterbury	The Hamilton-Waikato metro area is the third fastest growing urban area in New Zealand (2020)	\$21.51 billion Māori asset base (2023), equal with Tāmaki Makaurau

Waikato's benign climate and rich natural resources have historically attracted economic activity from the first arrival of people. As the population and economic activity have grown, so too has the role of the region in the context of the upper North Island and beyond. These factors have made the bioeconomy nationally important, particularly for food production. Waikato's hydrological and geothermal resources make it a centre for electricity generation and distribution.

The region's economy has evolved to build several industry specialisations on these foundations (see Figure 1), particularly the manufacturing and export of food and other goods. The Hamilton-Waikato metro area plays a complementary role to its surrounding network of connected towns. The Waikato Māori economic thread has continued to run through all the others over time.

This Strategy identifies six intertwined opportunities to build on Waikato's strengths and increase employment, productivity and incomes. Waikato can build on its locational advantages to increase the value it earns within an upper North Island and New Zealand context. It can also increase productivity in its bioeconomy sectors through emerging and future platforms and greater use of technology. Waikato can use its untapped and emerging potential to increase electricity supply and electrification, and establish new industrial hubs.

Waikato can strengthen resilience by diversifying its solid base of manufactured exports to higher value ingredient, nutrition, and consumer premium products. Waikato can cluster economic activity in priority areas in the Hamilton-Waikato metro area, optimise the economic functions of surrounding towns and improve connections between them. Waikato can grow partnership with Waikato Māori through adding value to collectively-owned assets and the growing role of rangatahi Māori in the workforce.

Waikato can **lean into locational advantages in the upper North Island and beyond**, so that higher value activities are undertaken here. Waikato's natural resources are the foundation of its economic advantage: water resources are shared with Auckland and Bay of Plenty (BoP) and geothermal resources are shared with BoP. There is an opportunity to grow goods and services provided nationally and inter-regionally from Waikato. Waikato has strong commercial connections with Auckland, BoP, Wellington and Canterbury and Waikato includes labour market areas that overlap with Auckland, BoP and Manawatū-Whanganui respectively.

The region's upper North Island location between the largest ports makes it a key corridor for much of the country's exports, imports and inter-regional commerce. There is an opportunity for Waikato to add value to these goods rather than being a thoroughfare, and to increase the efficiency of logistics.

Waikato is the third-largest destination for international students and domestic visitors, attracted by its supportive environment, proximity to employment and natural

amenities. International visitors also travel through Waikato and to major attractions in the region. There is an opportunity to increase the value earned from tourism and international education. The New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine in Waikato exemplifies the opportunity to increase productivity, incomes and employment in the region by locating national tertiary education facilities or services here.

Waikato's winning combination of a favourable environment, location and talented people make it home to a network of internationally and nationally significant sports venues (such as two of seven national training centres for high performance sports), regional facilities, natural recreation environments (such as trails) and community sport spaces. It is home to major sports and recreation events and 34% of Tailored Athlete Pathway Support athletes. Sports (such as equine) and recreation are part of the regional economy. Waikato can leverage the Cambridge–Karāpiro high-performance sport cluster, strengthen the regional sport events portfolio, expand and connect tracks and trails, and integrate sport infrastructure with urban growth and active transport planning.

Waikato's nature, including the Waikato River, imbues the renowned and unique creative pursuits of Kiingitanga, and Tainui and Te Arawa waka iwi, and significant cultural events, facilities, writers, performers and artists in the region. There is an opportunity to integrate Waikato's unique creative identity for greater economic benefit.

Waikato can **increase productivity in its abundant bioeconomy industry sectors**. A disproportionately large amount of New Zealand's relatively limited supply of highly versatile land is within Waikato. It is the premier region for dairy farming (26% of the national total) and makes up a large proportion of sheep, beef and grain farming; horticulture and other farming; and forestry and logging. Coromandel accounts for 22% of national oyster farming and 27% of mussel production.

Productivity in agriculture, forestry and fishing in Waikato is higher than this industry sector nationally. However, it is lower in Waikato than sectors with higher capital inputs (such as utilities and mining). Productivity could be increased through emerging and future bioeconomy platforms (such as biomaterials, bioenergy and health), protecting the productivity of natural assets (such as soil), more productive use of resources (currently waste) and greater use of technology. Waikato is already home to significant businesses in the agricultural technology (agritech) and biotechnology (biotech) industries, which can support this.

Waikato's strong foundation of renewable generation and untapped and emerging potential (wind, solar and emerging green fuels) offer opportunities to **increase electricity supply to meet current and future demands** and increase employment and productivity.

Waikato exports two-thirds of electricity generated to other regions, particularly Northland, Auckland and BoP. However, rising electricity prices and high transport costs continue to erode export competitiveness. This is compounded by the impacts of the 2026 Iran war. Previously, the COVID-19 pandemic had challenged long, just-in-time supply chains. Greater electrification would increase economic resilience. Productivity (GDP per filled job) in electricity, gas, water and waste services is the highest of all industries in Waikato and is higher than this industry nationally.

Waikato is a centre of the geothermal sector, spanning generation, industries that use geothermal heat, services firms, research providers and policy/regulatory authorities. Co-location of geothermal fields and extensive central North Island forests offers strong potential for biomass and bioenergy industries, supported by electrified rail links for efficient transport. There is also potential for industrial hubs such as Tokoroa, Huntly and Wairakei/Taupō to offer further potential in renewable energy.

Advanced manufacturing for interregional and international customers offers opportunities to increase productivity. Manufacturing is a regionally important sector with several subregional specialisations. These are related to processing of primary sector production (food and forest products) and competencies that have developed as a result, such as agritech. Waikato is home to the highest concentration of agritech companies, with over \$1 billion of revenue (2023).

Waikato produces 14% of New Zealand's merchandise exports, behind only Auckland and Canterbury. Major exports from the region include food- and other manufacturing. In addition, Waikato's exports per person (\$27,200) were higher in 2025 than the more populous regions. This export orientation is an important source of dynamism for the economy, positively influencing innovation and productivity.

There is an opportunity to diversify export markets and the existing solid base to strengthen resilience and increase productivity, for example through higher value ingredients, nutrition and consumer premium products.

A thriving and connected Hamilton-Waikato metro area can increase regional productivity and incomes. This includes the fastest growing city in New Zealand and is linked to Auckland and Tauranga.

It is the region's primary centre of knowledge, innovation, economic specialisation and cultural assets. The Waikato River, a taonga and historical transport route, traverses this area, enhancing its amenity. The metro area facilitates trade and business in the region by providing a "super" market place. The Hamilton central business district is the regional and city centre. The metro area is surrounded by towns with unique local identities, heritage and culture and complementary economic functions.

Clustering of economic activity in priority areas in a denser urban agglomeration in the metro area with high amenities, optimising the economic functions of towns through activities such as local placemaking, and improving connections between them, could increase productivity and incomes. Storms in February 2026 flooded many roads and highways in the Waipā and Ōtorohanga districts. This emphasised the importance of maintaining connections within the region.

There is an opportunity to **grow partnership with Waikato regional Māori for shared prosperity**. Waikato is home to Kiingitanga, Tainui and Te Arawa waka, imbuing it with a unique identity and values. Iwi throughout the region exercise rangatiratanga to pursue economic outcomes. Iwi and Māori businesses are resuming a large role in the Waikato economy.

The value of the Māori asset base in Waikato grew by 88% from 2018 to 2023. Waikato has the largest share of Māori primary sector assets, which comprise around 40% of the Waikato Māori asset base. There are also significant asset bases in property, manufacturing and construction, and the public and professional services sectors. Waikato also has the third-largest number of Māori-owned businesses. There is an opportunity to add value, particularly to collectively-owned assets.

Māori made up nearly a quarter of the Waikato population at the time of the 2023 Census, are growing significantly faster than the general population, and have a much younger age profile than the general population. Rangatahi Māori are a growing part of the regional work force.

Figure 1 Waikato industry specialisations



About this Strategy

Multiple parties contribute to economic development in the Waikato region, which is nested within other outcomes and different geographic scales (see Appendix A). This Strategy helps achieve:

- **a shared vision** by defining what the Waikato region is trying to achieve and why
- **stakeholder confidence** through a well-articulated strategy that builds trust and credibility within the region and with external investors
- **efficient resource allocation** by helping prioritise initiatives that deliver the greatest impact regionally and nationally, ensuring resources are used effectively
- **comparative advantage** by identifying and taking opportunities that differentiate the region in a national context.

This Strategy complements existing sub-regional functions. Regional strengths or opportunities could be, amongst other things:

- region-wide, that is across all parts of the region
- in several parts of the region, such as industry sectors or labour market areas
- of nationally significant scale in one part of the region
- cross-regional, involving neighbouring or connected regions
- nationally or internationally connected.

The external environment of the Waikato regional economy can be characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. For these reasons, this Strategy takes a flexible and responsive approach to adjust actions based on changing internal and external conditions, while continuing to have a long-term orientation and involve multiple stakeholders from across the entire ecosystem (see Appendix B). Unlike traditional strategies that rely on fixed long-term plans, it emphasises continuous learning, experimentation and real-time responsiveness.

This Strategy has a rolling time horizon for maximising economic outcomes over the medium- (10 years) and long-term (30 years). There is greater emphasis on continually monitoring internal and external conditions and identifying, implementing and evaluating a small number of short-term (1-3 years) initiatives, which contribute impactfully to the medium- and long-term outcomes (see *Implementation*).

This Strategy employs a partnership approach. Parties propose initiatives that contribute to the outcomes. Parties contribute to progressing their proposed initiatives through the relevant steps (see Appendix C) – this could be through funds, labour or other resources (see Appendix D). If they are unable to meet the full requirements themselves, they can request partial support from other parties.

The Strategy on a page

Values	Kotahitanga Alignment		Kia eke panuku Ambition		Tūraru Appetite for risk	
	Mahi tahi Collaboration		Manawaroa Resilience		Tiaki taiao Nature positive	
Vision	Enable and promote a productive region that delivers shared prosperity and security.					
Economic outcomes	Increase household incomes		Increase productivity		Increase employment	
	See <i>Monitoring and evaluation</i>					
Actions	Information and insights		Coordination		Initiatives	
Partnership approach	Actors in the economic development ecosystem undertake initiatives, some in partnership. See <i>2026/27 initiatives</i> .					
Waikato’s strength-based priorities	Leverage location advantages	Boost bioeconomy productivity	Increase electricity supply	Export & advanced manufacturing	Thriving and connected metro area	Partner with Waikato regional Māori
Opportunities (See Appendix E)	National service provision, add value to goods, grow value of tourism/education, leverage sports & creativity	Emerging & future platforms, resource efficiency, greater use of technology	Untapped/emerging generation potential, biomass and bioenergy, industrial hubs	Higher value ingredients, nutrition, consumer premium products, diversify markets	High growth, cluster economic activity, optimise towns and improve connections	Add value to assets, e.g. collectively-owned. Youth growing part of in workforce
Strengths (See Appendix E)	Interregional connections, popular destination, sports assets, creative identity	Large scale of natural resources (e.g. land) and bioeconomy industries, agritech, biotech	Largest share of electricity generation, high productivity, geothermal and forestry	Large share of national merchandise exports and large manufacturing sector in region	Regional centre and “super” market place surrounded by complementary towns	Kiingitanga, Tainui and Te Arawa waka, large asset base and population

2026/27 initiatives

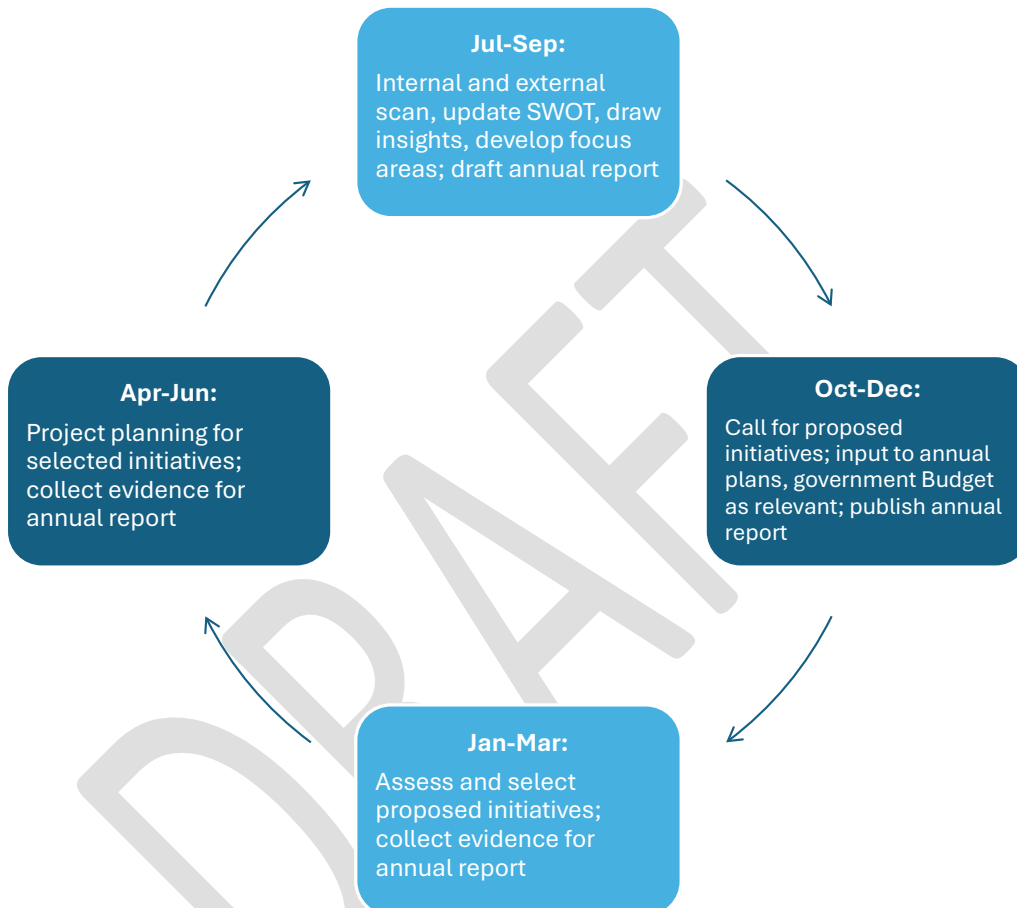
This Strategy identifies a small number of short-term initiatives with committed contributions from different parties. These are to be confirmed for 2026/27. Potential initiatives could be at any stage of implementation (see Appendix C). Potential contributions from each party to implementing an initiative depend on the levers available to it and can range from advocacy to providing the initiative itself (see Appendix D).

This Strategy also recognises that there are many initiatives in progress already, led by various parties. The initiatives will be updated as information becomes available.

Initiative	Lead
New	
Additional new initiatives TBC	TBC
Taakiri Tuu Te Matatini 2027	Waikato-Tainui
Waikato regional energy strategy implementation	Waikato Regional Council
Coordinated inward investment facilitation	Local authorities
In progress	
Mystery Creek water infrastructure upgrade	New Zealand National Fieldays Incorporated Society
Hamilton Airport runway extension	Waikato Regional Airport Limited
Ngāti Hauā Horticulture Project	Ngāti Hauā
Flood resilience tranches 1 and 2	Waikato Regional Council
GeoShot NZ (formerly known as the New Zealand Supercritical Geothermal Project)	New Zealand Government
New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine	University of Waikato
Te Huia passenger rail service one-year extension	Waikato Regional Council
SH1 Cambridge to Piarere	New Zealand Transport Agency
Hamilton Southern Links	New Zealand Transport Agency
North Waipā - South Hamilton Spatial Study	Future Proof
Hamilton to Tauranga Corridor Spatial Study	Future Proof
Hamilton central city transformation plan	Hamilton City Council

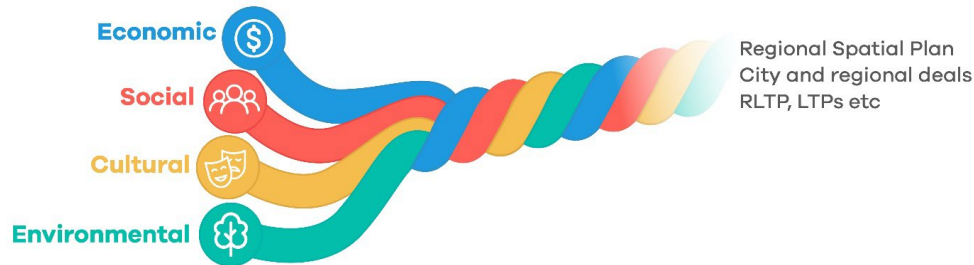
Implementation

The annual process for developing, implementing and reviewing this Strategy is flexible to the emergence of opportunities or threats outside the indicative cycle:



This Strategy is one component of the regional spatial plan that aligns land use, infrastructure, environmental and cultural aspirations, and more. This Strategy and the regional spatial plan identify priorities for coordinated and impactful investment in the region by parties including businesses, iwi, central and local government. Potential sources of investment include government initiatives such as the next wave of City and Regional Deals. This Strategy and the spatial plan also inform plans and budgets such as the Regional Land Transport Plan and Long-term Plans (see Figure 2).

Figure 2 Economic development, investment, plans and budgets



Monitoring and evaluation

An annual report will be published each year. This will monitor progress towards this Strategy’s outcomes, evaluate the implementation of key initiatives and the effectiveness of this Strategy itself (see Appendix F).

Indicative timeframe

Activity	Date
Evidence collection	By 30 June
Annual report drafted	By 30 September
Annual report published	By 31 October

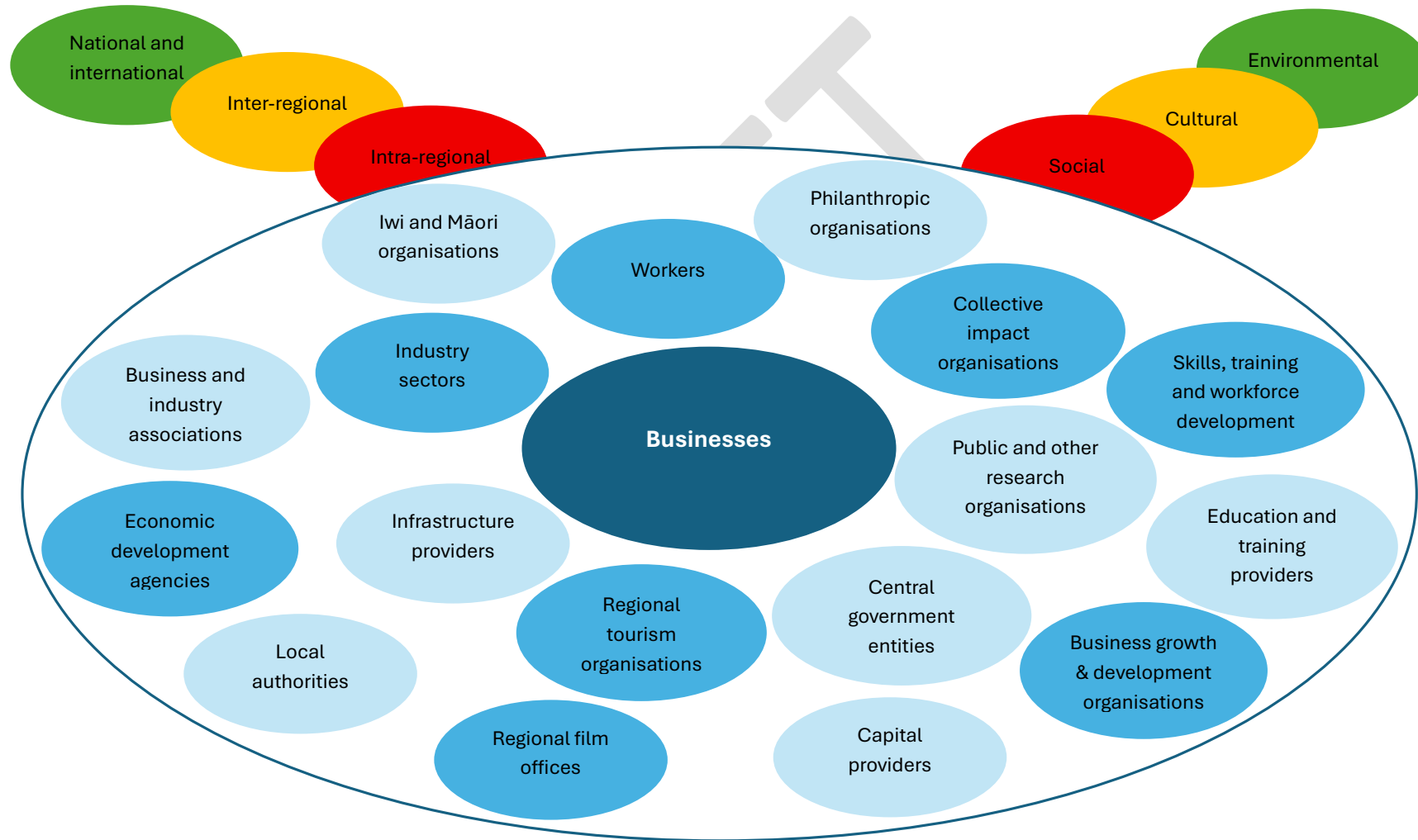
This Strategy uses *positive trends* rather than specific targets to monitor progress towards the economic outcomes. This is because these outcomes are long-term and system-wide and are strongly influenced by external factors unrelated to this Strategy. In addition, we want to encourage learning and adaptation.

We will seek to identify the net benefits associated with the initiatives and actions in this Strategy. Net benefits are the advantages of an initiative after subtracting its costs. Ideally, this will consider the outcomes of each initiative and compare them to what we would have expected to result if the initiative was not implemented.

The evaluation methodology is yet to be determined, but – given the diversity of initiatives – it is likely that it will need to vary from case to case.

We will avoid linking the actions of this Strategy to changes in high-level indicators (such as regional GDP), given the many forces beyond our control that are likely to have a much bigger impact on these indicators. For example, extremely high prices or physical shortages of diesel or fertilisers, droughts or other climatic events, or other shocks.

Appendix A: economic development ecosystem



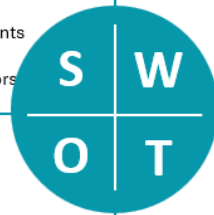
Appendix B: SWOT analysis

Strengths

- Relatively large area and labour force
- Relatively high economic diversity
- Favourable natural capital and environment (e.g. climate, Waikato River, rainfall, soils, coastal and marine, geology)
- Attractive place to live; and to invest when priorities agreed
- Popular amenities, visitor destinations and events
- Unique Māori identity and values: Kiingitanga, Tainui and Te Arawa waka
- Second-largest Māori asset base, growing talent & opportunity
- Relatively secure infrastructure (electricity, water)
- Leader in electricity generation and energy distribution
- Strong inter-regional links, e.g. with Auckland and BoP (goods, people, businesses)
- Abundant primary sectors, in vibrant rural communities
- Large and specialised role of metro area, supported by joint planning arrangements
- Excellent education and research organisations
- Nationally significant activities (including sports and cultural) and industry sectors
- Councils generally business friendly, some shared services

Opportunities

- Growing and young population in some areas
- Improve productivity of existing industries, e.g. through adding value
- Optimise economic role within upper North Island
- Build economic resilience and adaptability (e.g. resource efficiency, water storage, shorten supply chains)
- Grow newer activities/industries (e.g. energy-dense)
- Improve intra-regional, inter-regional and international connections
- Optimise economic advantages of metro area
- Better match business skill needs with regional education offerings
- Develop & promote region as a place to work, invest, study, visit etc
- Coordinate infrastructure planning and investment
- Increase efficiency of council functions, e.g. expand shared services
- Partner with Māori for shared prosperity, adding value
- Leverage government policy to grow housing supply



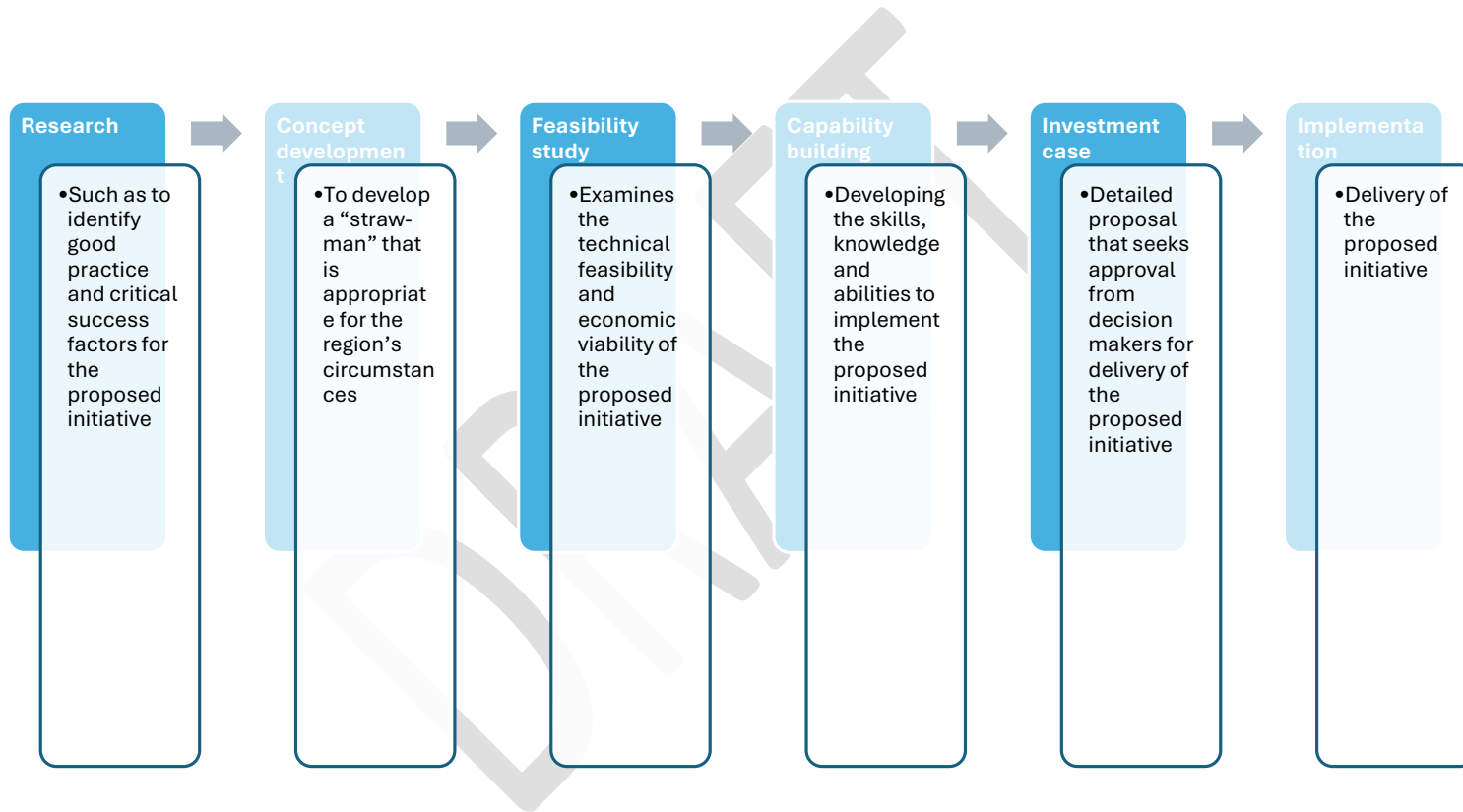
Weaknesses

- Low productivity compared to other regions and NZ
 - Pressure on resources
- Lower education and higher unemployment and NEET
- Competition (and proximity) between urban and rural land uses
 - High telecommunications fault rate per connection
- High electricity costs (national market structure and settings)
 - Relatively low productivity in metro area
 - Relatively low public R & D capacity
 - Attraction and retention of capital, talent etc
- Many council entities with varying priorities, inconsistent responses to business needs, regulatory complexity
- Housing supply/quality, particularly outside metro area

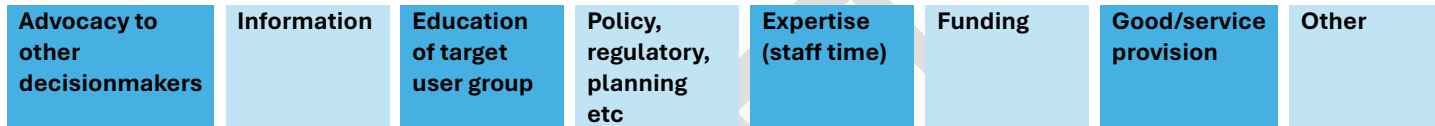
Threats

- Increasing number of dependents per worker in some areas
 - Biosecurity threats and other natural risks
- Constraints on expansion of existing and attraction of new industries, such as water and electricity
 - Constraints on capacity to meet domestic or international market requirements
 - Inconsistent planning or infrastructure across upper North Island
 - Hydrological risks to existing large-scale hydro generation
 - Diversion away of talent, capital and customers
 - Future risks to resilient infrastructure pipeline
 - Impact of shocks (e.g. February 2026 storms, 2026 Iran war)
 - International risks to imports or exports
- Central or local government policy shifts worsen business environment

Appendix C: potential implementation steps of proposed initiatives



Appendix D: potential contributions from each party to implementing a proposed initiative



Appendix E: enablers of regional economic development

<p>Labour productivity Economic output (GDP) per full-time equivalent (FTE)</p>	<p>Labour skills E.g. formal educational attainment and achievement, on-going development of skills</p>	<p>Ease of doing business Implementation of government regulations; development and implementation of local government policy, planning, consents etc</p>
<p>Transport services Modes and systems; land (road, rail and coastal shipping), air and maritime; intra-regional, inter-regional, international</p>	<p>Energy Generation and distribution of power for businesses, fuel for vehicles</p>	<p>Infrastructure investment Spending, stock and quality of energy, transport, telecommunications, water assets</p>
<p>Perception of the region Value proposition and image of the region among businesses and individuals onshore, offshore and within Waikato</p>	<p>Industry diversity or performance Diversity: the contribution of different industries to economic output</p>	<p>Innovation Business capability to undertake innovation, linkages between researchers and businesses, technical and knowledge-based skills, support for innovation</p>
<p>Entrepreneurship Business entry: proportion of new firms to existing firms Business growth: increase in business size, proportion of high-growth businesses</p>	<p>Culture Identity. Creativity. Beliefs, values and preferences: influencing economic behaviour; that promote and support entrepreneurship, innovation and economic development generally</p>	<p>Access to capital Access to capital for business innovation and growth at different business life cycle stages</p>
<p>Amenities The range of natural, cultural, sports and retail amenities available and access to facilities or services</p>	<p>Housing Affordability, quality, tenure</p>	<p>Commercial property Office, commercial and industrial property capacity, value and rentals</p>
<p>Business land Stock, availability and cost of different land types</p>	<p>Natural resources Stock and quality of land, minerals, forests, freshwater, coastal and marine, biodiversity</p>	<p>Inter-regional enterprise connections Connections based on enterprises employing people in multiple regions</p>

Appendix F: Intervention logic

This Strategy is intended to address several problems (market failures) facing the Waikato region. This is how its effectiveness will be evaluated:

Final outcomes (30-year horizon)	Increase household incomes	Increase productivity	Increase employment
Intermediate outcomes (10-year horizon)	Increase factor mobility Factors of production such as labour and capital move to priority activities that support the final outcomes	Reduce barriers To the entry or exit of businesses to priority activities that support the final outcomes	Shared direction Parties make aligned decisions, such as investment in areas with the greatest net benefits
Outputs and immediate-short term outcomes (3-year horizon)	Improve information and insights Fill gaps and develop new information to achieve efficient outcomes or maximise economic opportunities	Improve coordination Provide strategy and forums to bring together parties with common interests. Deliver/facilitate infrastructure to align activities around it	Positive spillovers Facilitate market solutions by establishing connections between parties, providing information, or subsidising positive activities in some way
Problems	Imperfect information Where parties lack perfect information, markets can fail to achieve efficient outcomes or to maximise economic opportunities	Coordination failures Opportunities missed because of independent actions across parties, which working together would have provided	Poor economic performance Under-provision of economic activities with positive spillovers contributes to sub-optimal incomes, productivity, employment

Appendix G: Glossary of terms

The following terms and definitions are used in this Strategy:

Term	Definition
<i>GDP</i>	Gross domestic product. All the income from work and from businesses, or the returns to labour and returns to capital
<i>Economic concentration index</i>	This index, more formally known as the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index, measures how concentrated an economy is. An index of zero would imply a highly diverse economy in which all industries contribute the same amount; the higher the index, the less diverse/more concentrated the economy is on relatively few industries.
<i>Kotahitanga</i>	Oneness of purpose. Shared direction and priorities
<i>Kia eke panuku</i>	Desire to achieve success
<i>Tūraru</i>	The level of exposure to trouble, harm, or loss. 1. tū → short form of tūpono (chance, contingency, something that may or may not occur); 2. raru → trouble, disruption, difficulty, issue
<i>Mahi tahi</i>	Collective action that involves combined effort and coordination
<i>Manawaroa</i>	Enduring inner strength, ability to endure through difficulty and disruption
<i>Tiaki taiao</i>	Active protection of nature

6.3 CHAIR'S COMMENTARY

Rā | Date: 4 May 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Dave Doggart, Team Lead, Democracy

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. The Committee Chair (Cr Keith Holmes) will table a presentation for discussion intended to support the development of a collective direction for the committee.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Chair's Commentary* (Regional Growth and Resilience Committee, 12 May 2026) be received.

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

6.4 UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

Rā | Date: 4 May 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Karen Bennett, Executive Manager, Chief Executive's Office

Kaituku | Authoriser: Chris McLay, Chief Executive

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. This report outlines how Waikato Regional Council and the University of Waikato (university) could build on their existing partnership model to enhance regional economic development.
2. It also introduces University Vice Chancellor Professor Neil Quigley and Fundraising Director Dr Nicole Bassett who will report to the committee on the opportunities for maximising value associated with the planned New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine opening in 2028.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

3. Universities are anchor institutions that contribute to regional development through skills and workforce development, research and innovation, and direct economic and social investment. These contributions are strongest when aligned with regional priorities and delivered in partnership with local government, iwi, health providers, business and community organisations. The planned New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine is one example of a shared regional development priority which was signalled through the Waikato City and Regional Deal proposal in February 2025, and also through the development of the Draft Regional Economic Development Strategy (on this committee agenda 12 May 2026).
4. The medical school is planned to open in 2028 and represents a significant opportunity for the Waikato region—supporting improved health outcomes, strengthening the local health workforce pipeline in rural communities, and attracting associated research, training and innovation activity.
5. The University of Waikato's Vice Chancellor, Professor Neil Quigley, and Fundraising Director Dr Nicole Bassett are scheduled to present to the committee on the opportunities associated with the new medical school.
6. A request to invest in clinical learning centres and associated student accommodation is expected to be progressed through the 2027-2037 LTP process.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *University of Waikato Economic Development Opportunity* (Regional Growth and Resilience Committee, 12 May 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND**Waikato regional economic development strategy and UoW**

7. The Regional Growth and Resilience Committee has a role in providing strategic leadership and oversight of the council's work relating to regional economic development and resilience, including partnerships with key regional enablers such as tertiary and research institutions.
8. The council and the university have for many years worked together under a memorandum of understanding (MoU) largely focused on research and regional development. The MoU has recently been reviewed and updated as a high-level partnership agreement. The agreement, still in draft, sets out how partners will work together to support shared growth and resilience priorities, how the relationship will remain durable through changes in leadership and priorities, and how the partners will stay flexible and responsive as opportunities emerge.
9. It is recommended that the proposed multi-party Waikato Regional Economic Development Accord identified in the draft Regional Economic Development Strategy would run parallel to the partnership agreement.
10. The university contributes to regional prosperity and resilience in multiple ways, including:
 - (a) educating and retaining skilled people
 - (b) attracting international and interregional students
 - (c) undertaking research and development and supporting innovation
 - (d) convening networks that connect local needs with national and global capability; and
 - (e) making significant direct economic and social contributions as major employers, purchasers and community partners.
11. The nature, scale and durability of these contributions mean they are most effective when aligned to regional priorities and delivered in partnership with others.
12. Given the significance of the university's contribution to the regional economy, it is recognised as an anchor institution and has been invited to become a signatory to a Waikato Regional Economic Development Strategy Accord. The signatories to the accord agree that the strategy is one potential contributor to maximised economic prosperity and that the strategy should be developed and updated periodically. The university has responded positively to this invitation and details about signing of the accord by the university and other parties will be provided in due course.
13. The economic development strategy employs a partnership approach, with parties proposing initiatives that contribute to the strategy outcomes. Parties contribute to progressing their proposed initiatives through the relevant steps and if they are unable to meet the full requirements themselves, they can request partial support from other parties. The university has proposed four potential initiatives to contribute to the 2026/27 implementation plan. These relate to educational networks, regional promotion, investment attraction and employment.
14. The establishment of the New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine is in progress. This is a key regional initiative that is discussed below. It is a prime example of the opportunity identified in the draft strategy to increase productivity, incomes and employment in Waikato

by leaning into the region's locational advantages in the upper North Island and beyond, so that the optimal activities are undertaken here for regional and national benefit.

TE TAKE | ISSUE

New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine – a regional priority

15. The University of Waikato's Vice Chancellor, Professor Neil Quigley, and Fundraising Director Dr Nicole Bassett are scheduled to present to the Committee on the opportunities associated with the planned New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine.
16. The medical school, planned to open in 2028, will expand medical training capacity and strengthen pathways into primary, regional and rural practice through partnerships with hospitals, general practices, iwi providers and community health organisations.
17. The medical school is expected to help address workforce shortages by training more doctors connected to the region, improve access to care over time through strengthened clinical training networks, and attract research, investment and skilled employment associated with health education and innovation. The presence of a graduate-entry programme and associated clinical learning model can also support wider regional resilience by strengthening local capability in the health system and creating long-term social and economic benefits.
18. While the purpose of this report is to enable the committee to discuss regional economic development opportunities presented by the new medical school, it also foreshadows a likely request to invest in clinical learning centres and associated student accommodation through the LTP process. Early partnership work will be important to identify potential roles for the council alongside other funders and ensure any proposal is aligned with the council's investment principles and wider regional objectives.

WHAKAKAPINGA | CONCLUSION

19. A high-level partnership agreement and the regional economic development accord provide a practical way to align university capability with the council and regional priorities, strengthen delivery across the wider system of partners, and maintain flexibility as shared priorities evolve. The planned opening of the New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine in 2028 is a timely opportunity to apply this approach. Early preparation for anticipated LTP investment requests will support effective decision-making and prioritisation.

ĀPITI HANGA | ATTACHMENTS

1. **NZGSM proposal May 2026 - Regional council - (Doc # 35814681)** [↓](#)



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

NEW ZEALAND GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



Transforming primary and rural healthcare for Aotearoa New Zealand

PROPOSAL

2026

NEW ZEALAND GRADUATE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE (NZGSM),

INTRODUCTION

New Zealand is facing its most severe healthcare workforce crisis in generations. For too long, our country has struggled with persistent shortages of doctors, especially in primary care, regional communities, and rural areas. These shortages affect thousands of families, put strain on regional health providers, and undermine equitable access to healthcare. Students wishing to study medicine in New Zealand traditionally can apply to either the University of Auckland or University of Otago medical schools after completing a preliminary first year medical entry course or they can apply as a graduate. Both are oversubscribed with applicants each year, with 1 in 3 being accepted. Applicants are primarily students in the top 10% academically at high school and come from the country's top schools. The lengthy and costly course means majority will seek to become hospital-based specialists with less than 10% seeking to become a general practitioner and even less seeking to work in rural communities and regional hospitals. Māori and Pacific students are the most underrepresented.

The number of medical student places is capped by government legislation and has remained unchanged for over two decades. Consequently, Aotearoa now produces too few doctors to meet growing community demand. Timely access to primary care improves health outcomes and reduces costly hospital use, yet 1 in 4 adults report unmet health needs due to long GP wait times. Current shortages across the country are estimated at around 1,800 doctors including 220 GPs and are projected to rise to approximately 3,400, including 870 GPs, by 2032 (*source: Health NZ Workforce Plan 2024*). New Zealand has one medical school for every 2.6 million people, less than half the availability of Australia. If we had a comparable ratio, we would now have five medical schools across the country (not two).

Persistent workforce gaps are particularly severe in rural and regional communities, where patients often wait weeks for appointments or must travel long distances for essential care. Frequently, faced with these barriers patients who should see a GP simply don't. Consequently, health outcomes are significantly worse in rural communities which often leads to hospitalization for severe illnesses that could have been prevented with timely primary healthcare intervention.

The establishment of New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine (NZGSM) is a once in a generation opportunity to transform health care provision for current and future generations.

BACKGROUND

Aotearoa New Zealand faces a sustained nationwide shortage of doctors, especially General Practitioners (GPs) outside major urban cities. In particular, the numbers of GP's in rural and provincial communities are particularly low with even lower Māori and Pacific representation. Compounding this is an aging primary healthcare workforce approaching retirement. The most recent workforce survey (2022) shows that 50% of rural GP's will retire over the following 10 years.

The GP shortage is exacerbated by the fact that the numbers of doctors trained in New Zealand no longer meets the countries growing healthcare demands. There is one medical school for every 2.6 million people in Aotearoa, in Australia, there is one for every 1 million people. If New Zealand had a comparable ratio we would have already opened a 5th medical school and be planning for a 6th.

-
- *Nationwide GP shortage, especially in rural areas*
 - *Half of rural GP's will retire by 2032*
 - *Not enough doctors being trained in NZ*
 - *High dependency on overseas doctors (~42%)*
 - *1 in 3 medical graduates don't stay in NZ*
 - *<10% Māori and Pacific doctors*
-

Every year more than 350 New Zealand students choose to study medicine in Australia because they cannot secure places here at home. Successive governments have been reluctant to raise the threshold for medical school student intake over the past two decades. New Zealand has the highest dependency on overseas-trained doctors in the OECD with 42% of rural doctors being internationally trained. These doctors have limited cultural knowledge and experience of the communities within which they work and have the highest turnover with these doctors only staying 2-3 years. Māori and Pacific doctors are hugely under-represented in current medical school training with less than 10% of all medical school intakes even though there is active priority given to school leavers. For Māori and Pacific students, there are few role models to inspire students to consider a medical career and many have been streamed out of science subjects early in their education. In addition, 1 in 3 New Zealand trained medical graduates do not stay in New Zealand. These factors are all contributing to a national crisis in primary healthcare.

In 2025, the Government approved a \$232 million business case to establish the New Zealand Graduate School of Medicine (NZGSM) at the University of Waikato. Government has committed \$83 million to the project, and the University of Waikato is

responsible for the balance of \$150 million from a combination of its own resources, community partnership and philanthropic support.

This bold national vision is for a four-year, graduate-entry medical programme offering 120 new medical training places every year. The focus is to train doctors in primary, community and rural care and embed the students in the communities they will work for once they graduate. The first cohort will start in 2028 and enter the workforce at the end of 2031.

New Zealand's first graduate-entry medical school

Proven Pathway to Rural Retention

International evidence has shown that rural-origin students trained in rural settings are six times more likely to return to and stay in rural practice. There are three key factors associated with increasing the chance of graduate students choosing to work in primary care and in rural settings.

*rural-origin students trained in rural settings are **six times** more likely to return to rural practice*

- **Recruitment of rural-origin students;**
- **Graduate-entry selection;**
- **Providing extended rural/community placements.**

NZGSM is designed around these principles, drawing on the successful University of Wollongong model that has produced higher rates of graduates working regionally and/or rurally and actively choosing general practice. This will be adapted for Aotearoa New Zealand with cultural safety and interprofessional learning at its core.

Unlike traditional programmes, the NZGSM specifically recruits students who already hold a bachelor's degree. These students are mature, community-minded, and wanting to commit to a medical career serving Aotearoa. Graduate-entry models dominate in Australia, Canada, and the United States and are proven to expand the pipeline of doctors entering primary and rural care. These students are unlikely to seek careers as a medical specialist in an urban setting.

Innovative, Digital-First Training

Construction of the purpose-built a four-story, state-of-the-art teaching facility began in December 2025. It will have an innovative, digital first approach to teaching and learning that will prepare students for a modern, data-driven health system.

- Digital anatomy laboratories
- VR-enabled case rooms
- Hospital-standard simulation wards
- Small-group collaborative learning environments.

Our four-year programme opens in 2028 with clinical placements networked across regional hubs, community clinical learning centres and primary care.

Programme at a Glance

- **Pathway:** Four-year graduate-entry Doctor of Medicine (MD).
- **Intake:** 120 students per year, from 2028; first doctors entering workforce in 2032.
- **Structure:**
- **Year 1:** Campus-based biomedical and clinical skills (digital-first pedagogy).
- **Year 2:** Year-long rotations in regional hospitals (medicine, surgery, paediatrics, women's health, mental health).
- **Year 3:** **40-week** longitudinal community placement (3 days GP, 1 day urgent/ED, 1 day community learning centre).
- **Year 4:** Trainee-intern aligned rotations and selective/elective (incl. remote rural or Pacific placements).

IMPACT

1. Training More Doctors for Frontline Care

The NZGSM will produce doctors who choose to work in primary care, general practice, and community health. The curriculum and selection model are uniquely designed to drive these outcomes.

2. Strengthening Rural and Regional Healthcare

By embedding students in rural and regional clinical placements, we build strong connections between trainees and the communities they will go on to serve. This approach has been proven to improve long-term retention.

3. Reducing Inequities in Access to Healthcare

Rural Māori and regional communities experience disproportionate barriers to care. Supporting the NZGSM means investing in a workforce equipped and motivated to serve those populations most in need.

4. Driving Economic and Regional Growth

The Hamilton-based health precinct will strengthen Waikato's regional economy, create highly skilled jobs, and attract further investment in health technology and innovation. Students spend on average \$20,000 each year on accommodation, hospitality and retail in their local community. An additional 120 first year medical students will add \$24 million each year in income to Hamilton-based businesses and will add substantial business revenue to the regional and rural communities that they are placed in during years 2-4. NZGSM will provide the greater Waikato region with a local solution for healthcare and will drive economic growth that will have a nationwide impact.

Regional Community Clinical Learning Centres

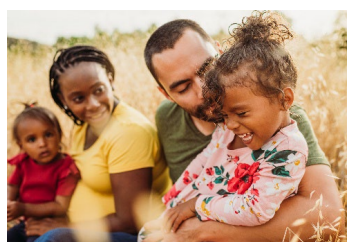
Overview

Regional Clinical Community Learning Centres are a cornerstone of the NZGSM model, ensuring that medical students complete significant portions of their education **in the regional and rural communities where doctors are needed most.**

This aligns directly with NZGSM's mission to train more GPs and strengthen primary care across Aotearoa.

Why this matters

New Zealand faces persistent GP shortages, with the most severe gaps in rural areas. Evidence shows that **students with rural backgrounds who undertake rural training are six times more likely to return to rural practice after graduation.**



By embedding students in rural communities throughout their placements, NZGSM is addressing this challenge head-on.

How NZGSM Will Deliver Rural Clinical Training

The University of Waikato is already working with regional communities nationwide to identify where rural placements will occur and where it is best to locate community clinical learning centres. These will be determined by a combination of local population based community need and the ability to provide students with clinical placements. These locations will be confirmed by the Ministry of health and Health New Zealand in mid 2026.

Key features of the Community Clinical Learning Centres:

- Longitudinal placements in rural and regional communities
- Clinical teaching provided by local GPs, rural hospitals, and iwi health providers
- Integration into community health teams, allowing students to build long-term relationships making it more likely they will stay in these communities
- Curriculum emphasis on general practice, community health, and rural medicine
- Use of digital-first teaching tools such as telehealth simulations, VR case studies, and digital anatomy labs to supplement rural training environments

Partnerships Supporting Rural Training

NZGSM has built a strong network to support rural and regional education:

- **Medical Advisory Board** bringing expertise in general practice, rural and community health, psychiatry, equity, and digital health.
- **University of Canterbury**, expanding placement opportunities across the South Island.
- **University of Wollongong (Australia)**, a global leader in rural medical education, collaborating on curriculum design.

These partnerships ensure community clinical training centres are grounded in best practice and international success.

Impact for Aotearoa New Zealand

Community clinical training centres will:

- Increase the number of doctors choosing general practice and community care
- Improve health equity in rural Māori and regional populations
- Strengthen local health providers through consistent student involvement
- Reduce long-term dependence on internationally trained doctors
- Support sustainable, community-centred healthcare delivery

This model is designed to deliver the workforce New Zealand needs and to place that workforce where communities need it most.

Timeline & Milestones

- **2025–2026:** Implementation business cases; procurement for main facility; clinical site selection & agreements.
- **2028: First cohort** commences (Year 1, Hamilton campus).
- **2029–2031:** Regional hospital rotations; Year-3 longitudinal community placements; Year-4 Trainee Intern-aligned rotations.
- **2032:** First cohort enters workforce as **PGY1**; ongoing evaluation and reporting as per benefits framework.

SUPPORT

Philanthropic support is vital to ensure that all the facilities and resources can be completed prior to students arriving in 2028. Your support will help us to accelerate impact beyond baseline Crown support and University capital.

A once in a generation opportunity to have a direct impact to reduce healthcare inequities in rural communities

With your support, we can ensure that this visionary initiative reaches its full potential and delivers the doctors New Zealand urgently needs.

There are five key areas that philanthropic support will have a direct impact;

- **Community Clinical Learning Centres**
Establish and equip a national network with simulation suites, teaching rooms, telehealth capability, and student accommodation where needed.
 - 12 Community Clinical Learning Centre's nationwide
 - 4-5 in the Waikato region
- **Scholarships & Student Support**
Scholarships for course fees will prioritize Māori, Pacific, rural-origin and career-change graduates and remove the financial barriers to training travel/accommodation support enabling longitudinal rural placements
- **Digital-First Teaching & Simulation**
VR-enabled case rooms, digital anatomy, ultrasound/imaging training, and hospital-grade simulation labs will anchor a modern primary-care-first curriculum.
- **Primary Care Placement Capacity**
Grants to support education and supervisor development in primary care practices and after-hours/urgent care exposure to ensure breadth and quality of community learning.
- **Equity, Māori Health & Community Partnerships**
Co-design with iwi and Māori health providers; community-identified health projects during longitudinal placements; kaupapa Māori approaches woven across the curriculum.

For further information contact:

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

6.5 MINISTRY FOR PRIMARY INDUSTRIES INSIGHTS

Rā | Date: 1 May 2026

Kaituhi | Author: Tariq Ashraf, Regional Economic Development Lead

Kaituku | Authoriser: Karen Bennett, Executive Manager, Chief Executive's Office

TE ARONGA | PURPOSE

1. To introduce Jarred Mair, Chief Insight Officer at the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). Jarred will present to the Committee on technology, future productivity and infrastructure choices.

KŌRERO WHAKATAKI | EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. At this meeting of the Regional Growth and Resilience Committee, Jarred Mair will present to the Committee on how technology is creating new business capabilities and driving shifts in value capture. Jarred will also present on a broad set of technologies or capabilities that are shaping future productivity and infrastructure choices.

TAUNAKITANGA KAIMAHI | STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the report *Ministry for Primary Industries insights* (Regional Growth and Resilience Committee, 12 May 2026) be received.

HOROPAKI | BACKGROUND

3. Jarred's presentation provides detail and insight on aspects of the draft Waikato regional economic development strategy you have received. For example, the draft strategy notes that Waikato can contribute more to increasing economic productivity for New Zealand. It has highly abundant primary sectors. Productivity could be increased through emerging and future biotechnology platforms and greater application of technology. Waikato is also home to large businesses in the agricultural technology and biotechnology industries.
4. Jarred leads MPI's Insights team. He has over twenty years working with the food and fibre sector holding senior roles in the public service and private sector.
5. The MPI Insights team takes a systems view to track and analyse the impacts from: geopolitics, trade, market shifts, new technologies, value chain enhancements, emerging business models, farming systems and inputs. It then maps the implications on New Zealand's economy.
6. In addition, it undertakes detailed studies into topics relevant to primary industries. Recent studies include: strategic framing of the primary industries sector, alternative proteins and genetic technologies.

ĀPITIHANGA | ATTACHMENTS

Nil

7 KARAKIA WHAKAMUTUNGA

Unuhia, unuhia

Unuhia mai te uru tapu nui

kia wātea, kia māmā,

te ngākau, te tinana, te hinengaro,

i te ara takatū

Koia rā e Rongo

e whakairia ake ki runga

kia tina! TINA!

Haumi ē, hui ē, TĀIKI ē!

Draw on, draw on,

Draw on to the supreme sacredness

To clear, to free

our heart, body and soul

Our pathway prepared

Lo, there is peace

suspended high above

manifest!

draw together!

Affirm!