



MEDIA RELEASE

'Exciting' regional development ahead

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Environment Bay of Plenty is to continue leading and facilitating economic development across the region that is becoming "unstoppable and exciting", the council heard this month.

At this month's council meeting, councillors agreed that there was a strong case for continued involvement. It has been almost three years since the council agreed to lead and facilitate economic development through a Regional Governance Group following a change in Central Government's regional development policy in 2007.

Chairman John Cronin said that over the last 12 months a range of activities had been achieved as a result of having the regional economic development strategy, Bay of Connections, in place, and having Environment Bay of Plenty lead the overall implementation. They included:

- A regional Food Strategy.
- A regional Aquaculture Strategy – a New Zealand first - launched in November 2009. Foundations and relationships are now in place to start developing the 3,800 ha site 8 km off Opotiki.
- Technical feasibility and business case developed for the proposed Marine Precinct in Tauranga.
- A draft regional Energy Strategy
- Initial support from the Regional Governance Group for an emerging titanium industry in the Bay of Plenty.
- Website development of www.bayofconnections.com and media publicity in local and regional papers, TV Central and Rotorua TV.

He said there was growing momentum across the region to work together, with strong links with CONNECT, Community Outcomes Bay of Plenty, Smart Economy Action Group, good business links and interest from a range of central government agencies. It was important not to underestimate the value that strategies were having for the region.

"For example, the Aquaculture Strategy is a New Zealand-first, and we have gained a large amount of traction by having it in place. It is opening doors for us that did not previously exist and it is proving to be a catalyst for the Aquaculture industry in the Eastern Bay.

"The same is true for Energy – there are increasing links at a national level, especially in the areas of bioenergy and geothermal. And there will be strong links between the forestry and energy strategies. There is a momentum building in the Bay of Plenty that is becoming unstoppable and exciting."

In May the Regional Governance Group submitted a Regional Strategy Fund application to NZ Trade and Enterprise for several projects in aquaculture, energy, forestry and wood processing, supply chain and logistics, and to review the Bay of Connections action plan. A decision on the funding is due by the end of this month.

An independent report painted a positive picture of economic development in the region, and the role of Environment Bay of Plenty in facilitating this.

"As a council we are seen as proactive through collaboration and facilitation, and our reputation for driving regional development is growing. We are seen as a council that is making a positive difference across the region. This is also recognised at the national level," Mr Cronin said.

"We carry out this role on minimal resources, with just one full time employee committed to this, and input from others when required. The Regional Governance and Regional Management Groups remain satisfied with the advice and support we provide them, and our relationship with them remains strong. We have put in minimal financial commitment for the results we have achieved."

He said it was important to maximise the returns from the Regional Strategy Fund projects to build a strong case for alternative future funding sources.

"A key point to note is that it is not always funding that is required for projects. At times, all that is needed is the right type of facilitation. This is something that we have always had a strong focus on with the Bay of Connections work, and we have been successful in this area."

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For further media information please contact Linda Thompson, Senior Communications Advisor, on 0800 ENV AUTO (368 288) ext 8149 or (021) 923 339.
