

# Letter from the RTNZ Chair

In August 2022 Regional Tourism New Zealand (RTNZ) embarked on developing a white paper to examine the future role, function and resourcing requirements of the Regional Tourism Network across Aotearoa | New Zealand.

The following white paper was commissioned in direct response to a high level of concern across all regions that the Government's focus on Destination Management as set out in the Aotearoa | New Zealand Government Tourism Strategy, and the subsequent investment in RTOs during COVID-19, has created significant expectations which will struggle to be realised without a clear mandate and dedicated funding for this expanded RTO scope and responsibilities.

RTNZ and its members have embraced the recommended 'Destination Management' approach and shared goal of enriching Aotearoa | New Zealand through sustainable tourism growth, and, with additional Government funding, 29 regions having completed future-focused Destination Management Plans (DMPs) aligned to MBIE's Destination Management Guidelines1 framework. Each plan provides a pathway for local communities to enjoy the prosperity and vibrancy that manuhiri (visitors) can bring, whilst simultaneously reducing the footprint of the visitor economy on our environment.

This process has involved a wide range of regional stakeholders coming together around a common cause and shared vision. DMPs have articulated the aspirations and priorities regarding what our communities want from tourism. Relationships have been formed and expectations created.

However, as of 1 July 2023, Government funding for this expanded mandate will cease. There is no clear pathway, nor designated resources, that gives RTOs and their stakeholders confidence as to how their DMPs will be implemented.

## So where does regional tourism go from here?

We know that RTOs have an important role to play in the national tourism system going forward; leading and facilitating a DM approach in their rohe (region). Their stewardship is critical to enabling coordination and collaboration across multiple actors in regional tourism, forging long lasting and authentic partnerships with their communities and stakeholders.

This white paper has identified that there are significant barriers and challenges holding back our industry and stopping RTOs successfully performing this broader role. Barriers which, albeit having been identified over 30 years ago, still exist today. RTOs have done an incredible job under difficult circumstances. The challenges they face are not a reflection of their skills, commitment, and passion for our kaupapa. Instead, today's RTOs are a

'recipient' and therefore 'product' of an inadequate tourism system which has not evolved over the last 30 years and is no longer fit for purpose, particularly at the regional level.

The two biggest barriers that have prevented implementation of repetitive tourism strategies is that: mandate has not followed mantra, and funding has not followed function.

## RTNZ is advocating for transformational systems change to address these unresolved barriers at the root cause.

We need enabling legislation that governs NZ's entire tourism system so that tourism delivers regenerative outcomes and puts our environment, community and mana-whenua at the heart of decision making.

This legislation should create the platform to guide tourism policy making, enable appropriate regulation if deemed necessary, encourage investment to sustainably grow the sector, enhance the visitor experience, and clarify and authorise tourism's institutional structures and mandates. It should also ensure tourism is fully integrated across government agencies and local government, and the sector is recognised and respected for the value it creates.

We need to establish a new governance structure, and sustainable funding model that has a dedicated focus on better serving the needs of the industry, regions and communities, and oversees strategy, policy and investment recommendations.

To achieve these outcomes, RTNZ calls for a review of the entire tourism system where we balance demand with supply, with appropriate leadership structures to coordinate our tourism system efficiently and effectively at a national and regional level. Lastly, we need an agreed vision and national strategy for our sector, where our community led DMPs are aligned, supported and funded and RTOs are recognised for the vital role they play within their regions and communities.

It is our hope that the knowledge shared in the following pages will bring together groups and individuals who share the desire to create a better tourism system that is fit for purpose for the future. One that is responsive, resilient, and regenerative and delivers incredible benefits to New Zealanders, whilst protecting the foundation upon which it rests; our people and our place.



David Perks  
Chair  
Regional Tourism New Zealand (RTNZ)