



EVENT BRIEFING

Meeting with Nelson Regional Development Agency

Date:	27 March 2025	Priority:	Medium
Security classification:	In Confidence	Tracking number:	REQ-0011930

Action sought		
	Action sought	Deadline
Hon James Meager Minister for the South Island	Note the information in this briefing to support you with your engagements during the meeting with the Nelson Regional Development Agency.	27 March 2025

Contact for telephone discussion (if required)			
Name	Position	Telephone	1st contact
Karl Woodhead	General Manager Strategy, Planning and Performance, Kānoa – Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit (Kānoa)	Privacy of natural persons	
Cory Hagenaaars	South Island Lead Advisor, Strategy, Planning and Performance, Kānoa	Privacy of natural persons	✓

Minister's office to complete:

☐ Approved

☐ Declined

☐ Noted

☐ Needs change

☐ Seen

☐ Overtaken by Events

☐ See Minister's Notes

☐ Withdrawn

Comments



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Purpose

To provide you with background information for your meeting with the Nelson Regional Development Agency on 28 March 2025.

Recommended action

The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment recommends that you:

- a **Note** the information in this briefing to support you with your engagements during meeting with the Nelson Regional Development Agency.

Noted

Karl Woodhead
General Manager
Strategy, Planning and Performance
Kānoa – Regional Economic Development &
Investment Unit (Kānoa), MBIE

27 / 03 / 2025

Hon James Meager
Minister for the South Island

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Your meeting with Nelson Regional Development Agency

1. On Friday, 28 March 2025, you are meeting with Nelson Regional Development Agency (NRDA), at Mahitahi Colab, 322 Hardy Street, Nelson.
2. You previously met with Fiona Wilson, Chief Executive, NRDA during your visit to Nelson on 30 January 2025.
3. Recent announcements relating to Nelson Tasman are attached at **Annex One** and information about wider Te Taihū region is attached at **Annex Two**.

Nelson Regional Development Agency overview

4. NRDA serves as the regional economic agency and tourism organisation for Nelson Tasman within Te Taihū. The NRDA was established on 1 July 2016, through the merger of the former Nelson Regional Economic Development Agency and Nelson Tasman Tourism. It is a council controlled organisation, wholly owned by Nelson City Council with funding from Tasman District Council.

NRDA Purpose

5. NRDA has made a commitment to fostering a thriving, resilient, and competitive economy in the region. NRDA aims to deliver on their purpose through three priority strategies¹, which guide its efforts to drive regional economic growth:
 - Attracting resources and economic activity: Aimed at bringing in new investment business activity and government funding to Nelson Tasman. This includes advocating for regional priorities, developing business cases, and supporting industries that can drive long-term economic growth.
 - Building capability: Aimed at creating a stronger, more competitive regional economy, NRDA is focussed on enhancing business capability, workforce skills, and innovation. This also includes leadership and delivery of the Regional Business Partner Programme² for Te Taihū.
 - Collaborating to compete: Aimed at being more nationally and globally competitive by getting more done together. Strengthening the region's economic position by fostering collaboration between businesses, industry groups and central government.

Key economic drivers and opportunities

6. Nelson Tasman focuses on developing core sectors as economic drivers, and these are explored in more detail below.

Blue Economy

7. The Blue Economy is a key priority due to the access to the ocean and associated competitive advantages the region provides. Success for this regional priority has the potential to boost productivity, create higher value jobs and stimulate export growth.

¹ [Our purpose](#) - NRDA three priority strategies.

² The Regional Business Partner Network (RBPN), or Regional Business Partner Programme (RBPP), is a New Zealand government-funded network connecting businesses with local experts, resources, and funding businesses to help them improve management capabilities and grow.

8. There are more than 400 blue economy businesses across Nelson and Tasman, accounting for more than 30 per cent of New Zealand's economic activity in fishing, aquaculture, and seafood processing.
9. On 13 May 2024, Hon Shane Jones, as Minister for Regional Development, attended and spoke at the SnapIT Scale Up project celebration on moving into their new premises and expanding its manufacturing capacity. Snap IT is a blue economy manufacturer of marine cameras and received \$2.5 million in funding through the Regional Strategic Partnership Fund³ towards this expansion.
10. SnapIT is a member of Moananui, which is a cluster of organisations across diverse industries working collectively to solve ocean challenges and accelerate growth of the blue economy.

High-value Food, Beverage and Wellness

11. In 2022, this sector was one of the largest contributors to regional GDP, providing \$588 million, in Nelson Tasman⁴. Furthermore, favourable growing conditions support this sector as the largest contributor to employment.

Horticultural Crops and Processing

12. Represent more than 4,000 jobs or 7 per cent of all employment in the region, compared to 2.5 per cent nationally. Horticulture is a priority due to the region's natural advantages of a temperate climate, high soil quality and sufficient water availability.

The Waimea Dam investment

13. The Waimea Dam is one of the region's most important infrastructure projects and the largest dam built in New Zealand for over 20 years. It provides opportunities to Tasman growers to increase productivity and diversify what is grown, increasing resilience. The dam aims to secure the region's water supply for the next 100 years, and provide an estimated economic benefit to the Tasman region of \$600-900 million in the first 25 years.

Forestry and Wood Processing

14. Approximately 5 per cent of New Zealand's plantation forests are in Nelson Tasman. The region has New Zealand's highest concentration of specialist processing, particularly in laminated and structural wood products.
15. Nelson Tasman is home to one of the largest Medium Density Fibre plants in the world and produces approximately 10 per cent of New Zealand's sustainable roundwood harvest. This sector accounts for more than 2,000 jobs, or 3.5 per cent of employment in the region, compared to 1.3 per cent nationally.

Research, Science and Technology (Knowledge Economy)

16. Per capita, Nelson has the second highest number of scientists of any New Zealand city. This is supported by the strong presence of science and research organisations that lead aquaculture research and innovation, such as the Cawthron Institute (New Zealand's largest independent science organisation) and Plant and Food Research.

³ In May 2021, the New Zealand government announced the Regional Strategic Partnership Fund (RSPF), allocating \$193.75 million to Kānoa – Regional Economic Development & Investment Unit to support regions to be more resilient and achieve their economic outcomes through investing in projects identified as regional economic development priorities.

⁴ [Food & Beverage Sector Profile](#)

17. Technology investment has been identified as key to addressing productivity challenges and labour constraints, specifically across Nelson and Tasman. This sector is an enabler for other big industries and helps achieve other economic priorities.

Economic challenges

18. Nelson Tasman has some particular economic challenges, which are explored in more detail below:
- a. Low productivity – Productivity is the second lowest in NZ, 22 per cent lower than the national average.
 - b. Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss – Vulnerable to sea level rise and extreme weather events.
 - c. Inequality and wages – Low average/mean incomes.
 - d. Workforce Supply – Many sectors are struggling to secure workers.
 - e. Housing affordability and access – Nelson Tasman has poor housing affordability.
 - f. Low Incomes - Average household income is below the national average⁵.

About the attendee

19. The biography of meeting attendee is below.

	<p>Fiona Wilson, Chief Executive, Nelson Regional Development Agency</p> <p>Fiona has extensive experience in regional, economic and tourism development, and has a particular interest in strategic economic development and innovation.</p> <p>Originally from Wales, she moved to Whakatū Nelson with her family in 2021.</p>
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Risks and mitigations

20. No risks identified.

Annexes

21. Annex One: Recent announcements relating to Nelson Tasman.
22. Annex Two: Information about wider Te Taihū region.

⁵ [Nelson Tasman Regeneration Plan 2021 - 2031](#)

Annex One: Recent announcements relating to Nelson Tasman

1. **On 13 March 2025**, at the Infrastructure Investment Summit, Hon Simeon Brown, as Minister of Health, said that a top priority is ensuring all New Zealanders have access to timely, quality healthcare. The government has developed a new approach that we call “Building Hospitals Better”. This takes a staged approach to building and redeveloping hospitals, applying standardised designs rather than each building being unique, considering alternative financing and funding arrangements, and aligning design of hospitals with the wider digital, clinical, and service planning for health.

“Rather than building one large structure, new or redeveloped hospital campuses can be more effectively delivered by building smaller, more manageable sized facilities in stages.”

“This is what we’re now proposing for the Nelson Hospital”.

Source: [Speech to NZ Infrastructure Investment Summit | Beehive.govt.nz](#)

2. **On 13 March 2025**, at the Infrastructure Investment Summit, Hon Chris Bishop, as Minister for Infrastructure, and Hon Shane Jones as Minister for Regional Development, announced the first completed applications accepted by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Fast-track Approvals Act to have projects considered by expert consenting panels.

“The Fast-track Approvals scheme opened for applications just over a month ago. Today, the EPA has announced that three major projects have been assessed as complete to go to expert panels,” Mr Bishop says.

One of the three approved projects announced is the Maitahi Village with the applicant saying it could have a total economic impact on local business activity of \$308 million. The project is a planned development in Nelson of around 180 residential dwellings (50 being Iwi-led housing), and includes a commercial centre, and a retirement village with approximately 194 townhouses and 36 in-care facility units.

Source: [Investment Summit: First Fast-Track projects into process | Beehive.govt.nz](#)

3. **On 26 February 2025**, Hon Minister Potaka, as Associate Minister of Housing, announced additional funding of \$36 million to the national iwi collective Ka Uruora, to continue momentum and enable the delivery of 100 affordable rental homes across Auckland, Marlborough / Nelson, Taranaki, Waikato, Thames and Hawke’s Bay.

Source: [Māori housing partnership to deliver 100 affordable rental homes | Beehive.govt.nz](#)

Annex Two: Information about wider Te Taihū region

1. Te Taihū encompasses three separate territories: Nelson, Tasman, and Marlborough. These three territories are represented by separate unitary authorities which have the powers of both a city/district and regional council. Regional economic information collected from all three territories is summarised below for Te Taihū:
 - In 2023 there was an estimated 167,200 people living in Te Taihū, up 1.2 per cent from 2022. The average household income in the region was \$105,219.00 which was a 6.1 per cent increase from 2022. This compares to the national household income of \$125,424.00.
 - Te Taihū's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was \$10.41 billion in the year to March 2023. This represents 2.8 per cent of New Zealand's GDP. GDP in the region has grown by 2.6 per cent since 2002 (matching New Zealand's GDP growth).
2. Te Taihū's key industries, with the highest share of GDP, are:
 - Manufacturing (including beverage manufacturing and seafood processing) – 15.1 per cent (\$1.57 billion).
 - Agriculture, forestry, and fishing (including horticulture and fruit growing, and fishing and aquaculture) – 8.2 per cent (\$851.40 million).
 - Construction – 6.8 per cent (\$722.20 million).
3. In 2023 there were 89,200 people employed in the region, up 2.1 per cent from 2022. This was lower employment growth than the national of 2.4 per cent.
4. The industries with the highest employment are agriculture, forestry, and fishing with 13.5 per cent of the workforce, with the majority of this employment in horticulture and fruit growing.
5. Other industries in the region with large levels of employment include manufacturing (11.8 per cent), and health care and social assistance (10.1 per cent). Of the total labour market, 35 per cent are employed in 'highly skilled' jobs (compared to 38 per cent nationally).