

12 September 2025

New Zealand Geothermal Strategy (DRAFT)  
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment  
*By email*

Kei ngā rangatira, tēnā koutou

### From the Ground Up: DRAFT New Zealand Geothermal Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity, I submit on behalf of Whakarewarewa Thermal Village Tours Ltd (t/a Whakarewarewa – The Living Māori Village, WTVT), one of our country's premier geothermal tourism businesses, and widely recognised for its legacy as the foundation of tourism in Aotearoa. WTVT is 100% owned by Whakarewarewa Village Charitable Trust, a tier-two charitable trust bringing together stakeholders, haukainga and nga uri o Te Whakarewarewa.

Our people are Tūhourangi Ngāti Wāhiao, who have been living alongside, and sharing the stories of, our geothermal environments at Tarawera and Te Whakarewarewa. Our haukainga have resided in the village and environs for many generations since first settlement of this area, establishing the tourism offering over more than 140 years ago.

We submit in support of the geothermal strategy and raise the following points for your consideration:

- Page 10: note that the Whakarewarewa valley is regarded as one part of the wider geothermal system, and while arbitrarily surveyed in the past so that Pōhutu geyser sits on the Te Puia landholdings, it is also the taonga of the people within Te Whakarewarewa, visible from the village, revered by the people, and equally an important tourism attraction, viewed by and included in tours narrative by WTVT.
- We make a distinction between volcanic and geothermal tourism, noting that geothermal environments have been utilised for passive and paying recreation for many decades, and in our village are also lived in and utilised daily by our residents and hapu.
- Combined visitation of the largest geothermal tourism businesses, at Te Whakarewarewa, Te Puia, Tikitere (Hell's Gate), Waimangu, Wai-o-Tapu and Orakei Korako totals well over 500,000 visitors per annum to these experiences. This excludes passive geothermal recreation experiences in local government parks, reserves and crown land areas, bathing (fee paying or passive) and so forth.



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- The majority of visitors to each of these businesses are international travellers.
- At Te Whakarewarewa, WTVT welcomes over 120,000 visitors per annum, contributing directly to the local and regional economy through employment, local purchasing, local services, goods, and through relationships with other national and regionally based tourism facing businesses
- WTVT and WVCT also return value to our region through a commitment to our local people, environment, and built taonga – direct support for these outcomes are generated through WTVT and through WVCT under its charitable objects.
- As a large tourism export earner WTVT is therefore also a significant contributor to New Zealand’s overseas earnings, bringing in new revenue (both direct purchase and GST) to the country through ticket sales, experiences, food and retail offerings paid for by international travellers. On this matter, we note that the Draft Strategy gives insufficient regard to the export earnings of the geothermal tourism sector, and the value-add to regional and national tourism, as a key reason for people travelling to Aotearoa. We recommend acknowledgement and a cost evaluation be made in the final strategy.
- WTVT is a Māori-owned tourism business. In 2025 BERL was commissioned by New Zealand Māori Tourism to produce the report, *The Value of Māori Tourism*. This report shows that Māori tourism businesses uniquely contribute to our economy at levels higher than non-Māori businesses, are highly productive, generous employers, and work to grow their people, collectively contributing \$1.2 billion in value-add GDP. Māori geothermal tourism was not split out as a percentage. It is recommended that this final strategy include an objective to evaluate and report on the contribution of the Māori geothermal tourism sector, attractions and areas where geothermal tourism is providing value-add through destination tourism, such as for the whole region of Rotorua.
- WVCT and WTVT are involved in numerous research programmes with Earth Sciences NZ (previously GNS), MacDiarmid Institute, Canterbury University, with diversity such as: exploring preservation options for timber structures utilising geothermal brines; utilisation of extremophile microbes for health, waste management, and other purposes; non-extractive geothermal electricity generation (novel heat exchange systems). All of these projects require ongoing support and funding, as well as funding and support to reach commercialisation. We encourage the strategy to dedicate investment and resource into these areas and ongoing projects.
- Due to high maintenance costs in a challenging geothermal environment, maintenance of infrastructure is an ongoing challenge and business cost, with new technologies providing improved longevity at a cost. We recommend the final strategy give regard to funding identification of best practice materials for long-term infrastructure, maintenance and capital. We recommend that this includes the integration of matauranga Māori, to draw on the existing knowledges of mana whenua.



- Tourism infrastructure is a critical area requiring investment enabling our business to grow, through response to predicted growth in incoming tourists, and have the ability to capitalise on this growth by offering new packages, experiences and training people in our region and country longer. We strongly encourage the final strategy to include investment in infrastructure located within or adjacent to geothermal tourism offerings. For example, toilet infrastructure is a critical need at Te Whakarewarewa, and due to other local priorities cannot be funded by our Rotorua Lakes Council. Additional, signage, roading infrastructure, and our tourism assets require investment (more frequent than non-geothermal environs). And further investment in promotion, regional tourism collateral, and regional strategies for growth, as well as health and safety investment.
- We commend the approach to establishing a Geothermal Centre of Excellence, and request that strong representation be given to mana whenua and the geothermal tourism sector in any future planning and whole-sector collaboration, research or development programmes.
- New geothermal tourism opportunities will only strengthen our people, Pakihi and sector as a whole. We state our interest in supporting the development of iwi and other collaborative programmes with these outcomes, both strategically, and with a willingness to provide consultation and share our knowledges, including as leaders in a sector strategy implementation group.
- Note that WVCT and WTVT have also submitted to WAI2358.

Nāku noa nā

Privacy of natural persons

Privacy of natural persons

Manahautū General Manager  
Whakarewarewa – The Living Māori Village  
Whakarewarewa Village Charitable Trust



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Please note there is a typo,  
training people in our region and country longer.

It is meant to say:

retaining people in our region and country longer.

It would be appreciated if this is noted.

nga mihi

Privacy of na

P: Privacy of natural persons

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**From:** resourcesfeedback <[resourcesfeedback@mbie.govt.nz](mailto:resourcesfeedback@mbie.govt.nz)>

**Sent:** Friday, September 12, 2025 3:42:23 PM

**To:** Privacy of natural persons

**Subject:** RE: Engagement on From the Ground Up - a draft strategy to unlock New Zealand's geothermal potential [UNCLASSIFIED]

Kia ora Privacy of natur

This email is to acknowledge receipt of Whakarewarewa – The Living Māori Village’s submission on the draft geothermal strategy – we really appreciate the insight offered. Your submission will help us as we refine the geothermal strategy.

Ngā mihi,

**The Geothermal Strategy team**

Resource Policy team | Resource Markets | Building, Resources & Markets Group

Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, Hikina Whakatutuki