

Tourism Business

Strong local government partnership vital

Tim Cossar, Chief Executive, Tourism Industry Association New Zealand

Strengthening the tourism industry's relationship with local government is a key priority for TIA this year.

It's a critical relationship for both partners but one that needs attention. There is significant potential for local government, communities and the tourism industry to work together much more closely and constructively to maximise the economic return from the visitor industry.

The local government elections are set for October, including for the new Auckland super city, which will be a real force on the New Zealand political landscape. One of our goals is to ensure that councils throughout the country recognise the important contribution tourism businesses make to their communities, the opportunity to grow this, and priorities for action.

Tourism generates wealth and jobs, both directly and in down-stream industries such as cafes, supermarkets and petrol stations. Visitors also bring vibrancy to communities and encourage the development of new events and businesses. That in turns makes a community a more desirable place to visit and to live.

Earlier this year TIA made a submission to the Local Government Act 2002 Amendment Bill. Championed by Local Government Minister Rodney Hide, the Bill calls for councils to stick to 'core' activities like rates, rubbish and sewerage. As the Bill stands, those core activities don't include tourism or related activities, and if passed could see the end of council investment in tourism development.

Our submission stressed that tourism is a core activity for most communities around the country and that councils are vital in helping tourism businesses provide the best possible experiences for visitors.

Councils invest in public amenities that are used by both residents and visitors alike, including water, toilets and roads. Many invest in visitor attractions such as museums, art galleries, gardens, events and sports stadiums. Councils also provide financial support for regional tourism organisations and economic development agencies for destination marketing, and i-SITE Visitor Centres.

Councils are clearly a major investor in tourism, helping attract domestic and international visitors, encouraging them to stay longer and spend more.

TIA is working to ensure that every candidate standing in the October local government elections understands the economic importance of tourism to their region. With the support of the Regional Tourism Organisations New Zealand, we have developed a document that highlights the ways that councils can work together with the private sector to maximise the returns from the visitor industry.

This is a major document, similar in impact to the highly successful Manifesto we produced in the run-up to the 2008 General Election, which has resulted in some big wins for our industry, including John Key deciding to become Minister of Tourism and the investment of an additional \$30 million in Tourism New Zealand this year to market New Zealand internationally.

Tourism operators have also told us that they want to engage more with local government, they just don't know how to go about it.

One of the first things they can do is take an interest in the October local government elections. Other industries, farming in particular, have long been actively engaged with their local councils and it's paid them dividends over the decades.

Strengthening tourism's relationship with local government will only benefit business and communities alike.

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