



Bay of Plenty Regional Spotlight

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Introduction



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The Bay of Plenty is no longer simply one of New Zealand's fastest-growing regions in terms of population. It is increasingly one of the country's most economically important as well.

What makes this region so compelling is the way its strengths build on one another: strong population growth, a thriving export economy, a world-class horticulture sector, and a nationally significant freight and logistics network that together are creating real momentum and opportunity.

The numbers bring that story to life. The region's population reached 351,500 in 2025 and, if strong growth continues, is projected to rise to more than half a million by 2053. Tauranga has been at the heart of that growth, with its population doubling over the past 30 years.

Business growth has been just as striking, with the number of registered businesses in the region rising 62.5 percent since 2000 to reach 43,146 in 2025.

48%

of New Zealand's containerised exports pass through the Port of Tauranga

\$6.2 billion

expected value of kiwifruit exports by 2030

541,200

the region's projected population by 2053

What is especially encouraging is that this growth is being driven by genuine economic strengths.

The Bay of Plenty grows around 80 percent of New Zealand's kiwifruit, while horticulture exports from the region reached \$2.65 billion in 2025. The Port of Tauranga also plays a central role in national trade, handling 48 percent of New Zealand's containerised exports. Regional exports rose to \$7.56 billion in 2025, up 16.9 percent on the previous year.

That kind of growth brings enormous opportunity for businesses, communities and the wider economy. But it also increases the pressure on transport links, housing, industrial land, utilities and community infrastructure. That is why long-term planning matters so much. Continued investment in freight connections, commercial zones, roading and future-ready infrastructure will be essential if the Bay of Plenty is to realise its full potential.

With the right decisions over the long term, this region is well placed to keep building on its strengths and remain a major engine of growth, resilience and prosperity for New Zealand.



New Zealand's export gateway

In 2025, the value of exports from Bay of Plenty surged to \$7.56 billion, up 16.9% on the previous year. This is more than double the national export growth rate of 7.9%.

Horticulture remained the region's dominant export industry, generating \$2.65 billion, with fresh kiwifruit and berries (\$2.56 billion) by far the largest export product. This was followed by dairy manufacturing (\$858 million) and forestry and logging (\$668 million).¹

The region's strong export performance underscores the role it is set to play in achieving the Government's goal of doubling export values by 2034, with export infrastructure identified as a key part of this strategy.²

A major driver of the region's economy is centred on the Port of Tauranga. In recent years, along with connected freight, logistics and export infrastructure, it has evolved beyond a regional asset. It is now New Zealand's primary trade gateway, underpinning both the regional economy and national supply chains.

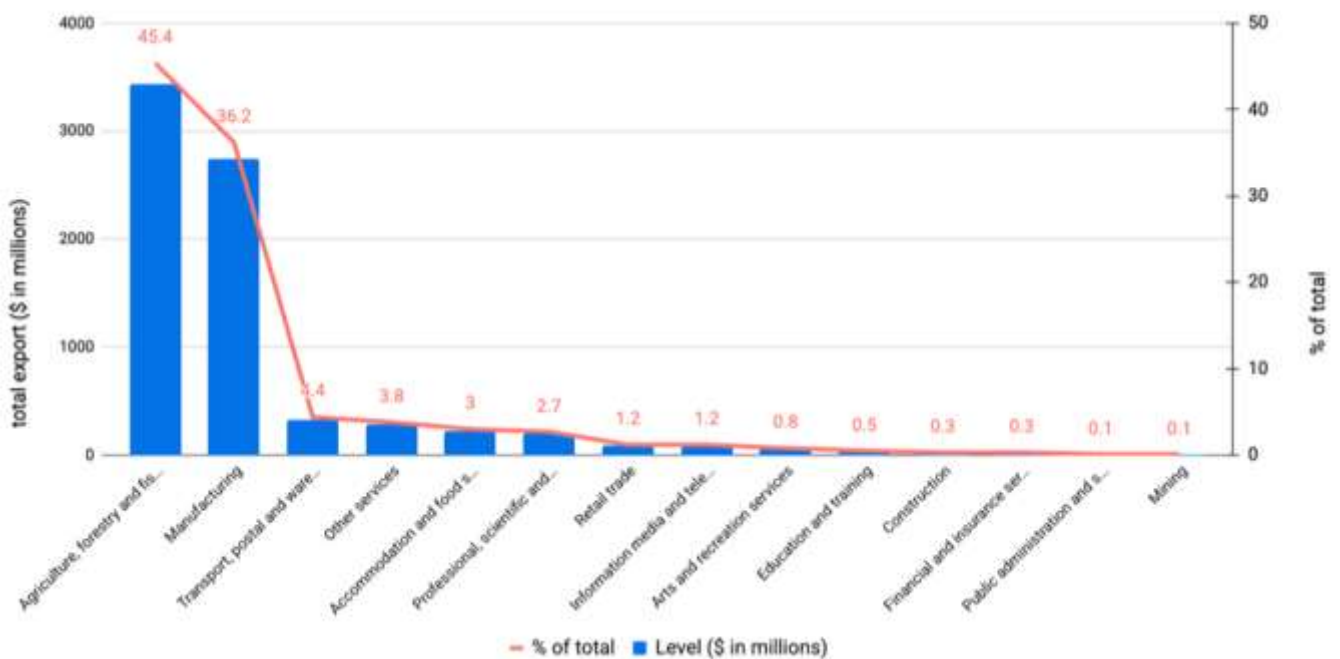
Port of Tauranga's 2025 annual results highlight the scale of this role, with total trade volumes reaching 25.3 million tonnes, up 7% on the previous year. Container volumes reached 1.2 million TEUs, an increase of 5.3% on 2024.³

The port now handles approximately 33 percent of all New Zealand cargo by tonnes and 48 percent of the country's containerised exports. This firmly positions it as the country's largest port by both cargo volume and container capacity and gives the Bay of Plenty an outsized role in the national economy.

This concentration of freight activity has supported the growth of a broad surrounding ecosystem of logistics, warehousing, transport, distribution, manufacturing and export-oriented businesses across Tauranga and the wider Western Bay of Plenty.⁴

Importantly, this provides Bay of Plenty exporters with genuine network centrality, rather than simply access to a local port facility. Its scale, shipping connectivity, inland freight hubs and integration with

Exports from Bay of Plenty, 2025 (Source: Statistics NZ)



national rail and road networks create strong agglomeration advantages for firms operating in the region.⁵

Since 2000, the largest growth in New Zealand’s warehouse and storage capacity has been concentrated in the upper North Island, across South Auckland, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty. In the past six years, more than a third (34%) of new warehouse consents nationally have been in this ‘golden triangle’, up from 16 percent in the 2000s.⁶

With industrial vacancies in Tauranga and Mount Maunganui remaining low (3.6 percent and 3 percent respectively), ongoing demand is set to drive further growth in industrial developments.

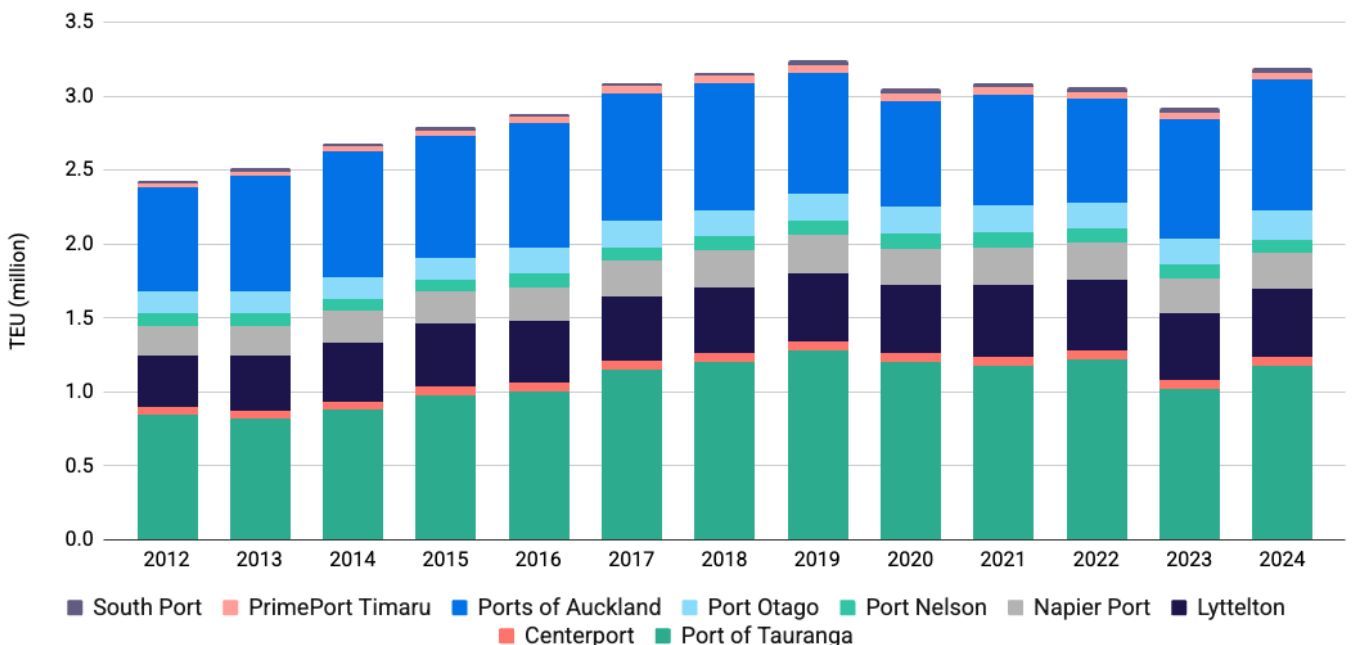
Over the next 30 years, demand for industrial land in the region is estimated at around 320 hectares. To address this, councils have enabled the development of the Tauriko (108 hectares) and Rangiuuru (148 hectares) business estates. Rangiuuru’s location close to Te Puke gives it strong transport

links to Hamilton, Tauranga and Rotorua, supported by a new SH2 interchange opened in early 2025.⁷

Along with new roading, warehousing and future-ready port facilities, investment in Bay of Plenty’s export infrastructure is essential to supporting New Zealand’s trade-dependent economy.

These investments have the potential to lift efficiency, boost returns and strengthen the resilience of export supply chains, supporting continued growth and diversification in New Zealand’s export markets.

Container volume handled by New Zealand ports (Source: Port of Tauranga⁶)





Port of Tauranga: gateway to global markets

At a time when global shipping patterns and supply chains are shifting, the Port of Tauranga is well placed to strengthen its role as a critical gateway for New Zealand exporters.

Already the country's largest port by volume, its next phase of development reflects a broader move towards hub-based logistics networks, where a smaller number of major ports handle larger international vessels and distribute freight across the country.

"As a major infrastructure provider, we're actually looking 50 years out," says Leonard Sampson, Chief Executive at Port of Tauranga.

That long view is driving work to prepare the port for larger, more efficient ships, with planning focused on vessels "up to 14,000 TEUs", which are expected to become more common on shipping routes to this part of the world.

The benefits are both economic and environmental. Larger vessels, Sampson says, "produce fewer emissions per cargo container" and "they're just more efficient."

At the same time, technology is becoming an increasingly important enabler of growth. "We're already using AI in a couple of ways for efficiency, [and seeing] benefits for health and safety," he says, while automated stacking cranes are expected to lift container capacity.

"They increase the number of containers we can house within the existing footprint ... you can stack them up to six high," Sampson says, effectively doubling capacity.

The port is also well positioned to support changing export demand, particularly the growth of higher-value, temperature-controlled goods such as kiwifruit, dairy and meat.

Beyond the port itself, Tauranga's location within the 'golden triangle', supported by rail links and inland freight hubs, strengthens its role in the Upper

North Island supply chain. The main constraint is not a lack of demand or capital, but the pace of infrastructure approvals. "We've got the money ready to go," Sampson says, but the port still needs resource consents for major capital works.

Even so, the long-term outlook remains positive, with the Port of Tauranga looking to play an even bigger role in enabling export growth and strengthening New Zealand's connection to global markets.

25.3 million
tonnes of trade handled by
Port of Tauranga in 2025

7%
Increase in volume YoY

48%
of New Zealand's
containerised exports



Where kiwifruit is king

The Bay of Plenty dominates kiwifruit production, growing around 80% of the national crop. The industry is deeply embedded in the region’s economic identity, labour market, land use and investment profile, and is central to its communities.

The scale of the kiwifruit sector is significant. Horticulture and fruit-growing exports from the region reached \$2.65b in 2025, with kiwifruit and berries accounting for \$2.56b of that, making it the region’s largest export category by a wide margin.⁸ The industry extends well beyond orchards, supporting logistics, packaging, cool storage, transport, engineering, construction and seasonal labour across the wider region.

Zespri generated global fruit sales revenue of \$5.9 billion in the 2025/26 season, with total sales of 248.1 million trays. Around \$3.56 billion also flowed back to

New Zealand growers as part of the sector’s domestic income.⁹

The growth trajectory remains strong, with projections suggesting demand for Zespri kiwifruit could reach 335 million trays¹⁰, or \$6.2 billion in sales by 2030¹¹ driven by continued growth in production and global demand, reinforcing kiwifruit as the region’s leading long-term export story.¹²

Economic impacts are concentrated within the region. Te Puke remains a powerhouse, generating an estimated \$698 million in kiwifruit income in the 2024/25 season, followed by Tauranga (\$320 million) and Katikati (\$285 million). This concentration has shaped housing demand, infrastructure pressures, workforce growth and investment.

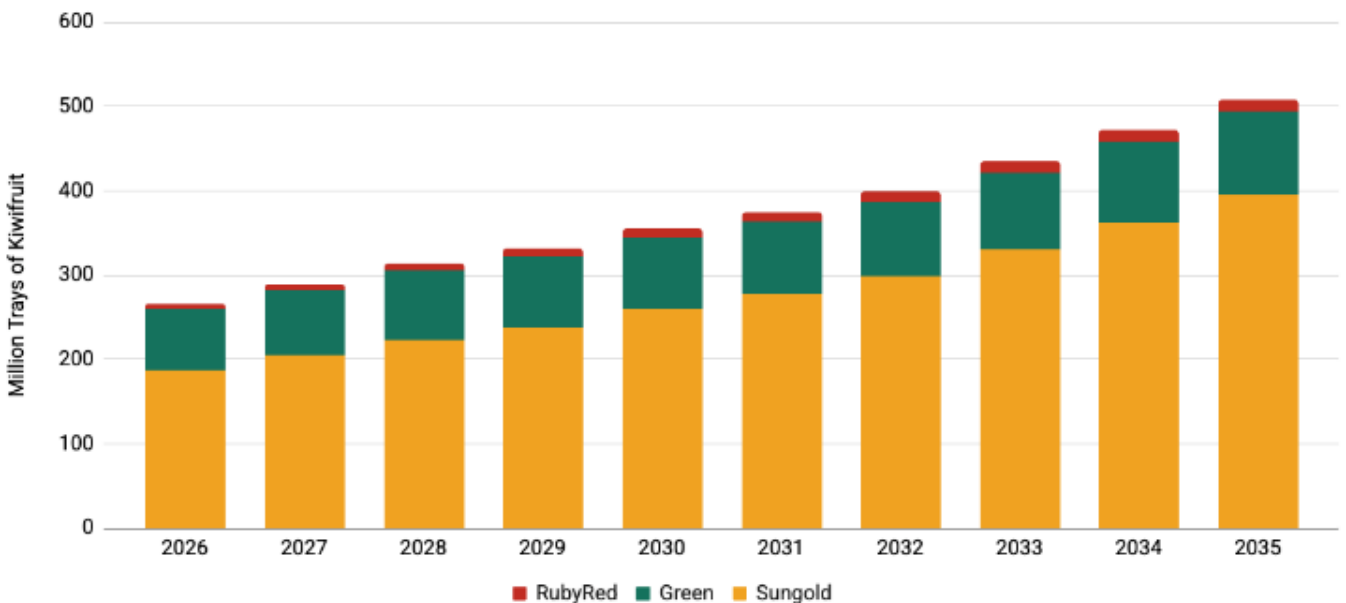
The kiwifruit sector is more than a key part of the region’s horticultural base. It’s a core economic platform few other industries in New Zealand can match, driving export earnings, population growth, freight demand and regional prosperity.

80%
of New Zealand’s kiwifruit are grown in Bay of Plenty

\$6.2 billion
Zespri’s projected global revenue by 2030

248.1 million
trays of kiwifruit sold in 2025-26

Kiwifruit Demand Outlook (Zespri Five Year Outlook 2025⁹)





The secret to kiwifruit success

For kiwifruit orchardists KWKiwi, success comes down to a set of open secrets: work hard, challenge conventional thinking, take calculated risks, and build resilience.

Phillipa Wright and Stephen Kenna founded the orchard on a steep home block near Katikati in the Bay of Plenty in 1980. Over the following years, additional properties have been added to the family-run venture.

As early adopters of gold kiwifruit, the orchard has championed low-input, sustainable practices. For Wright, innovation often comes down to questioning how things have always been done.

“We’ve challenged a lot of conventional growing practices over time,” she says. “We’re not organic, but by industry standards we’re low-input and still high-performing. Just because you’ve been doing it for a long time... what is the risk of trialling something a little bit different?” she says.

The approach is deliberate and grounded in evidence, but it requires growers to rethink established practices and test new ideas in small, manageable ways.

Decisions are informed by science and experience, but Wright says a business must be willing to accept the occasional setback in pursuit of better long-term outcomes.

That mindset helped drive early adoption of gold kiwifruit and continues to underpin KWKiwi’s investment in new tools and technologies.

Among these is a non-destructive fruit size and quality tool that uses phone cameras to measure fruit size in real time, giving growers a clearer view of what is happening across their orchards.

“We have used it extensively this year, enabling us to monitor fruit size and make decisions on thinning and harvesting. Creating our own fruit growth curves will be extremely useful in the coming years, as we are able to compare how fruit size is tracking seasonally,” Wright says.

Because a significant proportion of grower payments is based on fruit size, improving quality helps lift the share of fruit that meets premium export grades, supporting stronger returns. Using tools like this aligns with Zespri’s focus on positioning New Zealand kiwifruit as a high-value, premium product, backed by a strong and trusted global brand.

While hard work provides the foundation, it is KWKiwi’s willingness to question, adapt, and take informed risks that has enabled the business to evolve. In a fast-changing sector, these are the open secrets that have helped KWKiwi continue to grow while staying true to its roots.



People and Business

The strength of the Bay of Plenty business community is reflected in the 43,146 businesses registered in the region in 2025, up from 26,553 in 2000, a 62.5% increase. The region's business mix highlights its productive strengths and how its economy differs from the rest of New Zealand.¹³

The most notable difference is the outsized role of the primary sector. Agriculture, forestry and fishing account for 13.6% of businesses, well above the national average of 9.8%. This reflects strong exposure to kiwifruit, horticulture, forestry and export production, reinforcing the central role of land-based industries and the region's more export-oriented, production-focused economy.

Construction accounts for 12.5% of businesses, broadly in line with the national average, reflecting sustained population growth, housing expansion and infrastructure demand across Tauranga and the wider sub-region.

By contrast, the region has fewer businesses in knowledge-intensive sectors. Professional, scientific and technical services make up 9.3% of firms compared with 11.2% nationally, while information media and telecommunications account for 0.7% compared with 1.3%. This suggests the region is driven less by head office, technology and corporate services than Auckland or Wellington.

This is also reflected in the region's qualifications profile, which is more weighted toward vocational and trade-based skills. Higher-level attainment is

lower than the national average, with 9.3% holding bachelor's or postgraduate qualifications compared with 11.2% nationally.¹⁴

The Bay of Plenty has been one of New Zealand's fastest-growing regions in recent decades, supported by strong job growth, lifestyle appeal and migration inflows.

The population reached 351,500 in 2025.¹⁵ While future growth rates are inherently uncertain, Stats NZ expects the region to remain among the fastest growing in the country. At a sustained annual growth rate of 1.5%, the population is projected to reach 541,200 by 2053.¹⁶

Tauranga has been central to the region's growth. Its population has increased from 80,100 in 1996 to 161,000 in 2025, a 101% rise in less than 30 years.¹⁷ The city is projected to add a further 90,000 residents over the next 30 years, positioning it as New Zealand's fourth-largest city.

While Tauranga, Mount Maunganui and Pāpāmoa are expected to remain the Bay of Plenty's primary population hubs and continue attracting new residents, growth is likely to become more dispersed across the wider region, with fast-growing communities such as Tauriko, Katikati and Ōmokoroa, and further afield in Rotorua and Whakatāne.

Housing affordability and local congestion pressures are likely to drive this intra-regional growth, with population increases spreading more broadly across the Bay of Plenty rather than remaining concentrated in Tauranga.

43,146
registered businesses

62.5%
Increase in number of
businesses since 2000

101%
growth in Tauranga city's
population since 1990s

541,200
the region's projected
population by 2053



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Thank you

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