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Opportunities aplenty: Bay of Plenty boom puts region in the economic fast lane

The Bay of Plenty is rapidly strengthening its position as one of New Zealand's most important economic regions. Exports grew at twice the national rate, and a new report from ANZ NZ highlights the region's expanding role as an engine room of the country's export economy.

The report highlights a region experiencing strong growth across multiple fronts:

- Regional exports increased to \$7.56 billion in 2025, up 16.9 percent year-on-year.
- The Port of Tauranga is now New Zealand's largest port by volume, handling 48 percent of the country's containerised exports.
- The number of registered businesses has risen 62.5 percent since 2000, reaching 43,146 in 2025.
- Kiwifruit exports are expected to increase to \$6.2 billion by 2030.
- The population is projected to grow to 541,200 by 2053, with Tauranga on track to become New Zealand's fourth-largest city.

ANZ Managing Director of Business and Agri Lorraine Mapu says the figures underline the Bay of Plenty's growing national significance.

"The Bay of Plenty is one of New Zealand's great economic success stories. Its export industries, population growth and investment in infrastructure are creating opportunities not just for the region, but for the entire country," Ms Mapu says.

Born and bred in the Bay, Ms Mapu grew up on a dairy farm near Whakatāne, built and ran her own business in Kawerau, and now lives in Tauranga.

"I'm a huge cheerleader for the region. It's a total standout, and we don't do enough to recognise its national importance.

"Having run my own business and now being in a position to support other businesses, both big and small, I can see how the Bay brings together the best in one place," Ms Mapu says.

"It's home to some of our smartest businesspeople and the source of some great innovation. Add to that strong investment in our export industries and infrastructure, and it's no surprise we're seeing such stellar growth."

Freight and Logistics

The ANZ report also identifies the Bay of Plenty as a key beneficiary of New Zealand's increasingly important freight and logistics network. Since 2000, the largest growth in warehousing and storage capacity has been concentrated across South Auckland, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty.

Over the past six years, more than a third of all new warehouse consents nationally have been issued within this "golden triangle", up from 16 percent in the 2000s.

"As an export nation, we need to be earning as much as we can for each log and each kiwifruit when we send them offshore. A critical part of that is having efficient export and logistics facilities, like those we see developing in the Bay of Plenty.

"That investment in connected freight, logistics and export infrastructure sets the scene for strong future growth across a range of sectors, from dairy manufacturing to horticulture. As New Zealand's primary trade gateway, the Bay of Plenty underpins both the regional economy and national supply chains."

Innovation

The report notes that work to prepare the Port of Tauranga for larger, more efficient cargo ships, together with the use of AI to improve efficiency and enhance health and safety, is expected to further expand capacity. The port is also well positioned to benefit from growth in higher-value, temperature-controlled exports, including kiwifruit, dairy and meat.

“In the Bay, the kiwifruit sector is a core economic platform that few other industries in New Zealand can match,” Ms Mapu says.

“With 80 percent of the country’s kiwifruit grown in the region, it drives export earnings, population growth, freight demand and regional prosperity. It really is a golden goose.

“Right from the beginning, the kiwifruit sector has been built on innovation, and we continue to see this today.

“From the development of new cultivars like Zespri’s RubyRed to the use of AI and smartphone imagery to measure fruit size in real time, giving growers a clearer view of what is happening across their orchards, there has been a constant effort to improve fruit quality and achieve stronger returns.”

Population

The report also highlights the scale of population growth facing the region. Tauranga’s population has more than doubled, increasing from 80,100 in 1996 to 161,000 in 2025, and is expected to grow by a further 90,000 people over the next three decades.

“This kind of growth brings enormous opportunity for businesses, communities and the wider economy. But it also increases pressure on transport links, housing, industrial land, utilities and community infrastructure.”

Ms Mapu welcomed the recent signing of the Western Bay of Plenty Regional Deal between local councils and central government, describing it as an important step towards ensuring infrastructure keeps pace with growth.

“This kind of long-term planning is critical. Continued investment in freight connections, commercial zones, roading and future-ready connected infrastructure is essential if the Bay of Plenty is to realise its full potential and continue to create opportunities for its growing population.”

About the ANZ Bay of Plenty Regional Spotlight Report

The ANZ Bay of Plenty Regional Spotlight Report is part of a series of in-depth, data-driven economic snapshots from ANZ New Zealand and insights company Dot Loves Data.

The reports seek to identify where the greatest opportunities for economic growth lie and help the business sector and government understand what needs to be done to fully realise the region’s economic potential.

For media enquiries contact:

Tarek Bazley
Senior Manager
External Communications and Content
Tel: +64 27 428 0434

Briar McCormack
Head of External Communications
Tel: +64 21 280 1173