

# The Māori economy in Waikato: What is it, and why does it matter?

Guest column by **KIM HILL**

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When we talk about “the Māori economy”, we’re generally referring to a collection of aspects that make up the broader contribution of Māori to economic development - both regionally in Waikato and in the rest of New Zealand.

**A**t its core, the Māori economy is made up of a range of authorities, businesses and employers who identify as Māori. Economic development from a Māori perspective is diverse and collaborative, encompassing contributions from iwi, Māori businesses, whānau enterprises, entrepreneurs and individuals.

In New Zealand, Māori own a range of significant assets across the primary sectors (fishing, forestry, meat production, and dairy), and there is growing investment in geothermal, digital, services, education, tourism and housing.

Here in Waikato, the Māori economy is very much alive and well. The most recent figures indicate that Māori businesses contribute \$1.4 billion to the GDP of the Waikato region (8 percent of total GDP), and with steady growth we can expect that figure to be higher when the next round of figures is released.

The key areas where the

Waikato region’s Māori economy is strongest are in health and community services, property and business services, manufacturing and agriculture. Additionally, based on our research into emerging industries we know opportunity for Māori business lies in key sectors, such as cultural tourism and education.

However, it’s important to not view Māori contribution to these larger industries as the sole maker of economic success, as Māori SMEs and entrepreneurs also play a big role in developing and growing the Māori economy.

In measuring economic development, it’s important to look at other indicators of success than simply relying on GDP and other financial markers, simply because they don’t paint a whole picture of well-being. This rings particularly true for the Māori economy.

Benefits from the Māori economy should be viewed holistically. Alongside financial indicators, we also take

into account the four dimensions of Hauora (health and wellbeing): Taha Tinana (physical wellbeing), Taha Hinengaro (mental and emotional wellbeing), Taha Whānau (social wellbeing), and Taha Wairua (spiritual wellbeing).

In the work I do with Te Hūmeka (Waikato Māori Business Network) and Stratihi within the Māori sector, I constantly see opportunity for our Māori economy to grow into a strong ecosystem. With support, resources and funding, Māori business will thrive and grow, with Hauora at the forefront of decision making to ensure we see not only economic but social impacts as well.

The desire for more support was most evident at a recent MBIE event I facilitated at Te Wānanga o Aotearoa where more than 100 people with economic development interests came along to learn about the resources and opportunities available to them from the Government. Government support aims to grow Māori SMEs, support Māori youth, maximise the value of iwi and collectives, and develop our regions.

As a regional economic development agency, Te Waka is tasked with working alongside other relevant agencies to ensure this support is readily available to help grow our regional Māori economy, and create the rich

for collaboration to occur – collaboration that is crucial for the Māori economy to prosper.

Now, more than ever, is the time for Māori business to be supported properly so they can thrive. That’s why Te Waka’s priorities are aligned to economic actions in the Māori Economic Development Action Plan, for example, supporting:

- Major Māori economic development projects across the Waikato region to gain funding and support
- Development of a Waikato regional Māori business hub to support Māori busi-

ness capability, capacity and success

- Iwi to implement a social procurement programme to enable opportunities to be part of the growing Waikato economy
- Māori tourism initiatives

*Kim Hill is an independent business strategist specialising in working with Māori enterprises with a focus on encouraging and promoting Māori economic participation and growth. Kim is a director on the board of Te Waka, Waikato’s regional economic development agency.*



**Kim Hill**

## From the editor

**K**ia ora  
We have an invitation and a new feature this month.

The invitation is to join our coverage of the upcoming local body elections. We want to provide a forum for debate around the most important democratic decision you will make this year.

You can do this either as a candidate or as a voter. If you are a voter we want to hear what you want from your next council and if you are a candidate you have an opportunity to reach out to the greater Waikato business community.



on page 3.

And the new feature is all about bringing you more. Think of it as your business briefing - it’s a new way of packaging

region and giving it to you in easy-to-read bite-sized pieces. The snippets run as columns on the side of the page, and have been designed to be easily distinguishable from our usual stories. We’re pretty pleased with this first up offering - it means we are able to give you a whole bunch more relevant news and information about things that are happening around Waikato. If you have a business item to add in future, feel free to email it to me for possible inclusion. It really is a case of the more the merrier.

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Ngā mihi  
Richard Walker  
Tāwhāri