


DEVELOPMENT
WEST COAST

Te Ohu Whakawhanake o Te Tai Poutini

WEST NEW ZEALAND
COAST
UNTAMED NATURAL WILDERNESS

Te Tai Poutini
**SUSTAINABILITY
FRAMEWORK**

JUNE 2023



Prepared for Development West Coast
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Wilson Creek Canyon, Haast | Photo Rody NZ



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INTRODUCTION

He whakatafakīnga

Development West Coast (DWC) is coordinating the development and implementation of a Destination Management Plan (DMP) for the West Coast region according to the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment (MBIE) DMP guidelines¹. This report outlines work undertaken in 2021 for DWC to develop a sustainability framework as part of the inputs for the DMP and as a basis for the regional goals.

There are a number of frameworks available that can support destinations to become more sustainable, reducing negative impacts and increasing local community benefits. The question is where to start on this journey as a region and as an EDA. In the first section, the report summarises international and national frameworks that were reviewed as part of this work and proposes a simple structure for the West Coast framework that aligns with best practice and the MBIE guidelines.

A vital component of the DMP process is stakeholder engagement and the second part of the report presents the results of stakeholder consultations undertaken in four locations on the West Coast – Westport, Greymouth, Hokitika, and Glacier Country. This provides an overview of the key risks and opportunities in each framework area – Economic, Social, Culture, and Environment – and the goals the destination stakeholders can set in order to address these.

The third part of the report makes recommendations as to how this framework can form the basis for regional tourism objectives and plans.



1. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/immigration-and-tourism/tourism/tourism-projects/destination-management-guidelines/>



FRAMEWORK *design*

This section introduces the four key sources that have fed into the design of the West Coast framework and are relevant references for tourism stakeholders.



1

The Sustainable Development Goals

At the highest level, the UN’s SDGs provide a global platform for sustainable development that is good for our planet and people². The SDGs are made up of 17 goals that cover a variety to issues, including poverty reduction, health and wellbeing, water quality, decent work, and more. They are applicable to all industries and all nations – developing and developed.

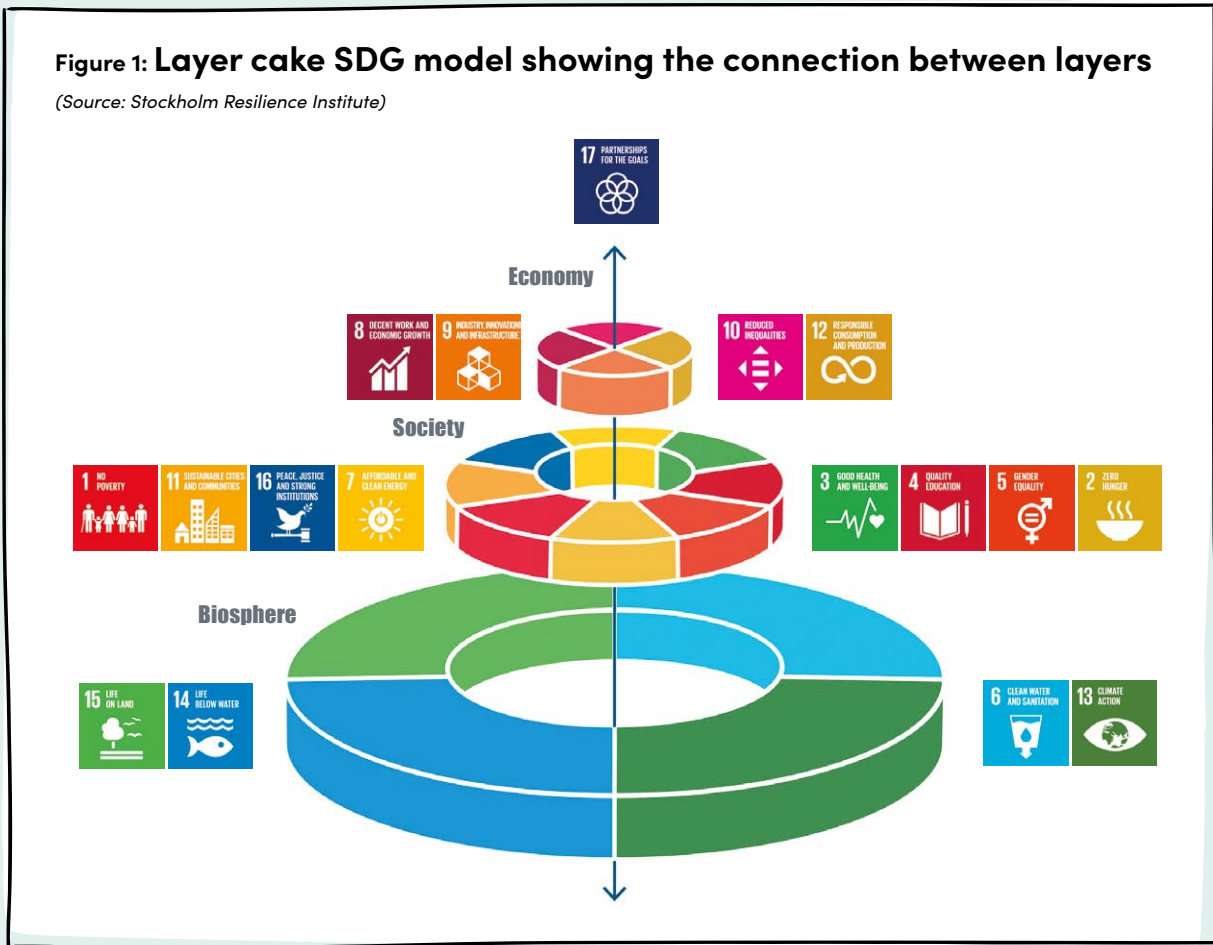
Although the goals are not legally binding, New Zealand has committed to delivering “productive, sustainable and inclusive economic development” in line with the SDGs. The first voluntary national review was published in 2019 and provides a baseline for future development³.

Figure 1 shows the SDGs as they relate to our biosphere, society, and economy⁴. This means that we must maintain a healthy biosphere to have a healthy society. A healthy and long-term sustainable economy is only possible if the base layers of the cake are in place and finally SDG 17 “Partnership for the Goals” connects all levels through stakeholder collaboration.

Regional development in New Zealand is driven by national SDG commitments and tourism as an industry has a big opportunity to make a positive contribution. In 2017, UNWTO published their “Journey to 2030” report which presented ways in which tourism can be a force for good⁵. The SDGs provide a great base to set strategies, but their indicators are not immediately graspable for tourism operators – although the UNWTO report showed how many large tourism companies were making positive contributions to the goals already.

Figure 1: Layer cake SDG model showing the connection between layers

(Source: Stockholm Resilience Institute)



2. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

3. <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/peace-rights-and-security/our-work-with-the-un/sustainable-development-goals/new-zealands-first-voluntary-national-review-vnr/#bookmark2>

4. <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/research-news/2016-06-14-the-sdgs-wedding-cake.html>

5. <https://www.unwto.org/global/publication/tourism-and-sustainable-development-goals-journey-2030>

2 The Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria

The Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC) is an independent and neutral organisation that has developed a global set of minimum standards for sustainable tourism⁶.

There are two sets of criteria – one for industry operators and one for destinations. Both sets of criteria are built on the same four pillars:



Cultural impacts



Socioeconomic impacts



Sustainable management



Environmental impacts

This means that both destination managers and private sector operators can work on the same pillars yet apply standards that fit with their role in the tourism system. The destination standards are mapped to the SDGs, which means that working with the GSTC criteria can help destinations understand where they contribute to overarching development goals⁷. The industry standards then provide a practical link for the private sector operators in the destination to improve their business sustainability.

3 The Treasury's living standards framework

One level of the government's 2021 living standards framework outlines what makes New Zealand wealthy⁸. They break this wealth down into four capitals (see Figure 2).

The four capitals together determine New Zealand's wealth, and we must work towards protecting all of them to ensure that New Zealand thrives. The whole framework is wrapped in the New Zealand culture because all of our actions happen within that culture. Government decisions are driven by this framework, so the pillars are important to consider for the West Coast.

Figure 2: Part of the Living Standards Framework showing the four capitals

(Source: Treasury)



4 The MBIE Destination Management Guidelines

Since the purpose of the West Coast framework is to set goals for destination management, the MBIE guidelines are also a frame that we must take into account. According to their definition, destination management...

"... brings together different stakeholders to achieve the common goal of developing a well-managed, sustainable visitor destination. It is an ongoing process that requires destinations to plan for the future and considers the social, economic, cultural and environmental risks and opportunities"⁹.

Social, economic, cultural, and environmental aspects are all important when looking at the overall health and success of a destination and they align closely with all the previous frameworks.

In addition to the approaches discussed above, there are also tourism industry specific operator sustainability frameworks, like the TIA Tourism Sustainability Commitment¹⁰ and Qualmark's Sustainable Tourism Business Award¹¹. These are both useful for supporting operators to raise their sustainability and both have pillars closely aligned to the above frameworks.

6. <https://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/>

7. <https://www.gstcouncil.org/gstc-criteria/gstc-and-sdgs/>

8. <https://www.treasury.govt.nz/information-and-services/nz-economy/higher-living-standards/our-living-standards-framework>

9. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/immigration-and-tourism/tourism/destination-management-guidelines/>

10. <https://sustainabletourism.nz/about-us/>

11. <https://www.qualmark.co.nz/en/learn-about-us/how-qualmark-works/>

THE WEST COAST

Framework

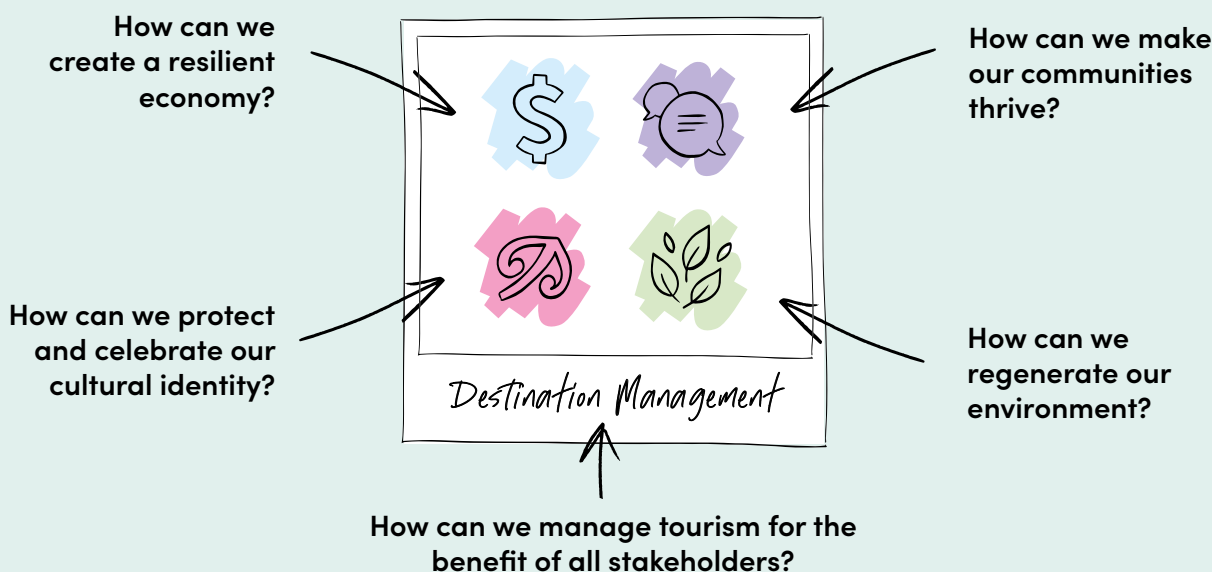
The goal of this framework is to align with international frameworks and ensure that we can set holistic goals that will ensure the West Coast takes a holistic view of sustainability.

The suggested framework is based on goals in four pillars – Economic, Social, Culture, and Environment. We will refer to these as the goal pillars. Destination Management will form the fifth pillar because it is only through sustainable management that the destination can achieve results in the other pillars. This is based on the GSTC's pillar A on sustainable management. Figure 3 shows questions to ask for each pillar.

Over time the ambitions of the stakeholders may change and they will look beyond sustainability towards more regenerative approaches. Partnerships and collaboration will be key success factors in achieving these goals over time, because single stakeholders cannot create this kind of systemic change. Culture will need to change to achieve lasting results.

The next section presents the results of initial stakeholder consultations on the West Coast regarding the four goal pillars of the model. Destination management was not covered directly but did come up in many of the conversations as essential.

Figure 3: West Coast Sustainability Framework with ambitions



STAKEHOLDER input

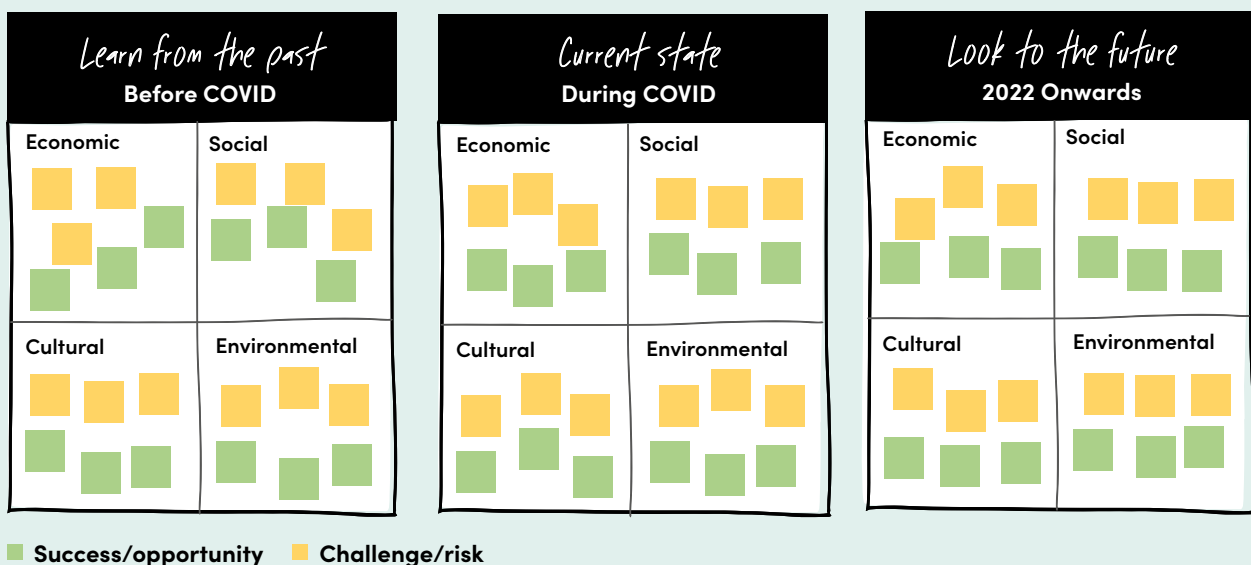
A series of workshops in November 2021 was the basis for these results. In each workshop, a group of stakeholders from the private and public sectors were asked about the challenges or risks and opportunities and successes they could identify in each of the four pillars – Economic, Social, Culture, and Environment.

The whole process was repeated three times in each workshop – once for the pre-COVID times, once for

the time during COVID, and then looking forward beyond COVID. The goal of this approach was for participants to reflect on what was good and bad in the past before looking at the present and future. The question was: What do you really want to recover from the pre-COVID times and what is actually going quite well right now?

This led to interesting discussions amongst participants and sometimes realisations that there were aspects of the past that they did not want to repeat. At the end of each topic the participants were asked to vote for the most important challenges and opportunities.

Figure 4: Workshop process for sustainability framework discussions



Key risks and opportunities for each region

Each of the following four sections describes the key results regarding the future from each workshop. Opportunities are shown in green and risks in yellow. The last sections present the overall most critical challenges and opportunities as well as an attempt to verbalise goals in each of the pillars that would move the Coast towards a more resilient and sustainable future.

> Greymouth

Economic

<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More open access and transport into the region • Bring tourism back but in a sustainable way 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism industry, local government won't align at the same time to speed up resolution • DWC cannot solve all the problems itself as it doesn't have the resources needed.
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Social

<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High values. Visitors more than just \$ (align to our values). • Work altogether as one. Unity for the region (common goal) 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of leadership with tackling issues • Lack of housing for staffing and general public
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Cultural

<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wider celebration of the people and place 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of engagement with Iwi
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Environmental

<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • West coast to become the reference for sustainability in NZ • Sustainability is essential in all aspects • Put emphasis environment, regenerative rather than sustainable 	<p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism returning to pre-COVID impact again if poorly regulated • Councils not embracing need to address climate and biodiversity crisis
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> Hokitika

Economic

Opportunities

- Business telling their story of resilience
- Support business to continue to invest in sustainability
- Maintain domestic market

Challenges

- What can we learn from post COVID European market open up?
- How to maintain new assets?
- Less tourism dollars

Social

Opportunities

- Cultural opportunities in partnership with iwi

Challenges

- Local leadership need to be more visionary

Cultural

Opportunities

- Pounamu pathway greater cultural story telling

Challenges

Environmental

Opportunities

- More active tourism with less climate impact
- Nature tourism everywhere not just icons

Challenges

- Return to high visitor numbers too quickly
- Carbon positive travel

> Fox

Economic

Opportunities

- Less seasonal
- Money to implement changes
- Predator free best natural values in the world?
- Visitors numbers returning

Challenges

- That tourism will go back to overtourism
- Transport infrastructure

Social

Opportunities

- Measure of values
- Vibrant, lively based community

Challenges

- Staff housing
- Connecting the dots from community to operators to big business in positive way

Cultural

Opportunities

- Capitalizing on cultural history
- Education + awareness

Challenges

Environmental

Opportunities

- Reversion to same behaviors / reimagining a 'myth'
- Return of freedom camping

Challenges

- New decarbonizing opportunities
- West coast 1st carbon free tourism region – electric buses, no noise, more birds
- Predator Free South Westland

> Westport

Economic

Opportunities

- Locals have opportunities to benefit economically from tourism
- Underwrite successful/profitable businesses

Challenges

- Lack of housing & staff accommodation
- Business as usual
- Accommodation for visitors for the next 1-2 years, due to current accommodation being taken up due to flood?

Social

Opportunities

- Increase the population base and provide jobs

Challenges

- Not learning from COVID
- How to change preconceptions of the West Coast

Cultural

Opportunities

- Realise the importance + value of culture (Maori, European + other culture) to West Coast offering

Challenges

- West coast needs impetus to change
- Cultural tension - last 150 vs. last 600 years

Environmental

Opportunities

- Low carbon tourism
- Opportunity to restore and take care of our environmental footprint with regards to visitors/tourist
- Connectivity for cycle / walking trails

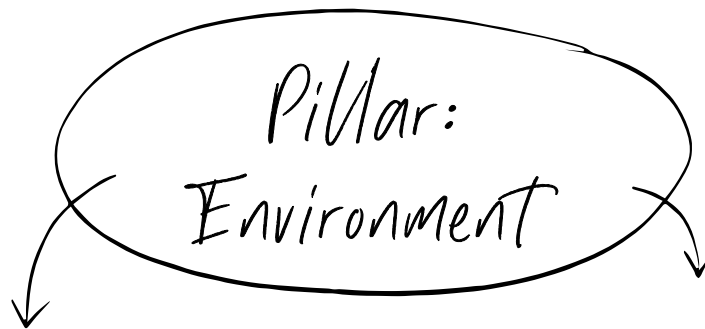
Challenges

- Carbon consciousness and impact on travelling to the West Coast
- More roads + track closure due to climate change
- Natural disaster (AF8)

OVERALL WORKSHOP

Summary

The following tables provide the overall assessment of the key challenges and opportunities that the participants across all workshops saw. These are valuable inputs for the destination management planning process.



Challenges + Risks

- **Overtourism**
Too many people degrading the natural estate was the over-arching past challenge identified by all sub-regions. They did not want a return to that.
- **Apathy**
Councils and industry not addressing infrastructure, climate and biodiversity concerns to prevent a return to the above was a major risk.

Successes + Opportunities

- **Promoting active/nature tourism**
Attracting the kind of visitor who appreciates and respects the environment had been successful and should be targeted further – cycle and walking trails a big part of this.
- **Tourism/Conservation going hand in hand**
Tourism's ability to educate visitors about the importance of protecting natural assets. Part of this was widespread praise for the Jobs For Nature programme, which was intended to help support tourism workers during COVID.
- **Think big**
Reinventing the Coast as the first carbon-free tourism destination was a proposal put forward at a couple of workshops.



Pillar: Economic

Challenges + Risks

- **Access**
Perception of Coast being hard to get to/affected by weather events/distance from international markets..
- **Infrastructure**
Not enough investment by local government/ national government/ industry/ DOC in facilities to support the visitor volumes they have experienced – roading, carparks, bathrooms, rubbish and recycling.
- **Housing crisis**
Not enough housing for residents, let alone seasonal workers.
- **Seasonality**
Affects each sub-region somewhat differently but overall, the huge surge in numbers over summer and quiet winters meant it was hard to sustain a year-round business, continue employment, house workers, and avoid mental health issues and burnout (Social but included here).
- **Same old same old**
All of the sub-regions expressed a desire not to return to the past style of tourism (big bus tours speeding through and only stopping at the iconic spots/freedom campers with their attendant waste management problems – both groups not able or inclined to spend money). The risk was that entrenched councils and operators would simply revert to the numbers game.

Successes + Opportunities

- **Tourism as employer**
The growth of tourism employment opportunities was noted as a positive balance to the traditional industries of farming, forestry and mining.
- **Reinvention**
All of the sub-regions were enthused about the chance to reinvent tourism in a post-COVID world.
- **Embracing domestic**
The opportunity to continue to serve the domestic market that had emerged during COVID was seen as important, with workshop attendees pleasantly surprised at seeing Kiwis engage with their own country.

Pillar: Social

Challenges + Risks

- **Community fatigue/pushback**
Several sub-regions felt their communities were either sick of over-tourism, or had been decimated by the lack of tourists caused by COVID (including loss of workers and of creative business owners). simply revert to the numbers game.

Successes + Opportunities

- **Celebration of the unique West Coast lifestyle/character**
Several sub-regions noted this USP as being just as memorable for visitors as the natural landscape.
- **Community unity**
Both the "in-it-together" feeling of each community brought about by COVID and by natural disaster events, but also the hope that each community on the Coast would start to work together more when it came to tourism.

Pillar: Culture

Challenges + Risks

- **Lack of awareness**
The main challenge identified across the sub-regions was that not enough awareness or support was given to the cultural aspects and Māori heritage of the Coast.

Successes + Opportunities

- **Pounamu Pathway**
This planned development was mentioned by most of the sub-regions as a good initiative to link iwi storytelling and sites to existing visitor flows.

GOALS FOR Te Tai Poutini

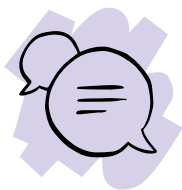
The following is a first attempt to verbalise the types of objectives that would drive a long-term vision for the tourism industry on the Coast. These are all interconnected

Together, these goals provide a framework that will guide specific objectives and targets for our industry. Destination management is the process that we will establish to help us achieve these goals.



ECONOMIC

We want to create a tourism industry that is resilient and future-proof, creating sustainable jobs and economic benefits. This means that it can respond to challenges and take advantage of opportunities. We cannot do this in isolation, and the sector must be connected locally, regionally, nationally and internationally to industry, community, government and customers. We will work with partners to drive value in our offering and impacts. Lastly, West Coast tourism operators must have the skills and knowledge required to deliver on visitor expectations and create local benefits.



SOCIAL

All stakeholders will have the resources they need to support operators and communities, and in turn, communities will benefit from and support tourism on the Coast.



CULTURE

Culture is an underused asset at this point. We aim to have mana whenua actively engaged in tourism and to have all of the Coast's unique cultural stories told clearly and powerfully. We want visitors and communities to recognise and value our unique culture as a key tourism asset on the Coast.



ENVIRONMENT

Our outstanding natural environment is our main asset and will continue to attract visitors. To benefit from this long-term, tourism operators and stakeholders must work to educate visitors about and protect those natural assets for future generations.

We can think big and become leaders in carbon neutral travel.

IMPLICATIONS

for the DMP

The summary of the challenges and opportunities in the previous section and the individual workshop summaries are useful to continue stakeholder discussions in the locations. This will be vital in a region as large and diverse as the coast. The West Coast DMP will build on this report and the following recommendations are intended to make the most of this framework for the future development of the tourism industry on the Coast.



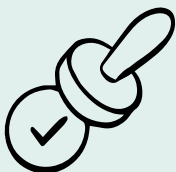
MEASUREMENT

Before stakeholders can set specific targets and goals in each area, they need to conduct a baseline assessment and put measurement systems in place. A key part of the DMP will be setting up a new toolbox of measurement that can track indicators in each of the pillars. For environmental goal, this may relate to carbon measurement and reduction for tourism operators. For social elements, a regular community sentiment analysis could help to track tourism's social license to operate and make adjustments if communities are – again, in some cases – getting upset by the number or types of visitors to their community.



CONNECTION AND LEADERSHIP

Connections between stakeholders in different areas of the tourism eco-system and in different districts or regions will be vital to creating real change in the four areas. Leadership was a challenge mentioned in several workshops, so putting together a leadership group to connect the stakeholders and align them towards a common vision could support future development. Over time, this group could grow to include representatives from related industries, like agriculture or transport to ensure that there is broad alignment on the vision and goals to ensure the whole West Coast region prospers. The key will be to identify roles and responsibilities for different stakeholders to work towards the goals.



VALIDATION

The challenges, opportunities, and goals presented here are based on a series of workshops and have only been validated with a few stakeholders in follow-up discussions. Due to COVID restrictions, larger launch events were not possible. Therefore, it will be essential to validate the goals with key stakeholders to ensure that they are aligned and supportive of this agenda. As one of the workshop participants mentioned, DWC cannot solve all the problems and as with the DMP process, they are only the facilitators and require everyone's input to develop the industry.



CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT CYCLES

The inputs from these workshops and the DMP are tools in the process of managing tourism on the West Coast. The key to success is establishing systems that can learn and adapt to changes in external conditions to continue working towards the goals. One way to do this is through improvement or impact cycles¹². The cycle goes from planning to doing to assessing to reviewing the plans and back to the start. This recommendation is closely related to the measurement and leadership points above, because we need data to measure progress and leadership to create the changes in the plans and systems. For the DMP this is vital because establishing a good destination management system can ensure stability and resilience in the future. People and conditions will change, but the system can continue once established.



RISK MANAGEMENT

The stakeholder consultation brought up a variety of perceived risks in all pillars. As part of the destination management system it would be sensible to implement a risk tracking and mitigation planning process. This could be as simple as creating a list of all possible risks – from flight cancellations through to natural disasters – and working out the likelihood of these occurring and the impact that an event would have. This would give the leadership group an overview of where the risks lie and the ability to develop plans and strategies to mitigate any negative impacts.



SUSTAINABILITY SUPPORT FOR OPERATORS

The tourism operators on the West Coast are all on their individual sustainability journey – some are far along and some at the beginning. In order to create change in all four pillars across the region, it would be valuable to create a programme or support mechanism to help operators improve their sustainability. The key is to give operators the knowledge and confidence to take steps to improve their own business and create value for their communities. For that there are a variety of operator focused programmes, like TIA's Tourism Sustainability Commitment, Qualmark's Sustainable Tourism Business Award, or carbon measurement solutions, like Toitu or Ekos that can all be part of the solution. DWC could help to coordinate these programmes and create communities of practice on the Coast.

12. <https://www.thinknpc.org/starting-to-measure-your-impact/the-cycle-of-good-impact-practice/>



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