

Industry explores economic development through education

Boosting West Coast tourism through education, training and the natural environment is the focus of this week's West Coast Economic Development Think Tank.

Representatives of international institutions, national and West Coast industries and local authorities are gathering in Greymouth today and tomorrow to share ideas about how education and training, in conjunction with the natural environment and tourism, can help grow the West Coast economy.

Tai Poutini Polytechnic Council Chairman Graeme McNally says the first day of the Think Tank has generated good discussion, which will culminate in a strategy session on Wednesday afternoon.

“The Polytechnic called this forum to get local people talking about how we can use education to grow the West Coast economy. International research tells us that regions with a well-educated, trained workforce also have stronger economic performance. We know that education is the key to flourishing industry and can generate significant economic benefits in its own right.

“Over the two-day session, we are asking industry groups to think about how the West Coast tourism sector can be strengthened, and the visitor experience enhanced, through education and training. We also want to consider how we can use our exceptional natural environment to create tourism and economic development opportunities.”

Mr McNally says opportunities could include inviting more commercial investment from outside organisations, creating partnerships between local businesses and organisations, developing a region-wide promotional campaign, extending the tourism season by offering more attractions, or creating a pool of skills by identifying key industry requirements.

“The objectives are to increase the number of people coming to the region and ensure a more rewarding experience for visitors when they are here. The groups represented at this week's forum have knowledge and experience across a broad range of industries and topics. I am confident that the sessions will generate good ideas which we can turn into real opportunities for the local economy,” Mr McNally says.

Key speakers at the two-day Think Tank include David Kennedy of Ngai Tahu Tourism, Professor Wolfgang Georg Arlt of Germany's China Outbound Tourism Research Institute, Dr Peter Varley of Scotland's West Highland College UHI, Li Xin from the Chinese Embassy Christchurch, Liang Yan of the Guilan Walking Association and Tourism West Coast Chief Executive Jim Little.

The forum is attended by Grey District Mayor Tony Kokshoorn, Buller District Mayor Garry Howard, West Coast business leaders, and representatives from local authorities including: Westland District Council, West Coast Regional Council, Buller District Council, Department of Conservation, Enterprise Hokitika, Greymouth High School, Development West Coast, Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, and the West Coast Economic Development Agency.

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