Our Places

Eastern Bay Spatial Plan

Wāhanga 2: Ngā Whakaaweawe Matua

Part 2: Key Influences

June 2025

BAY OF PLENTY REGIONAL COUNCIL TOI MOANA

WHAKATĀNE District Council *Kia Whakatāne au i ahau*

KAWERAU DISTRICT COUNCIL Te Kaunihera ā rohe o Kawerau

Ōpōtiki District Council STRONG COMMUNITY STRONG FUTURE

Ngā Ihirangi Contents

Figures

Whakatāne Heads

Wāhanga 2: Ngā Whakaaweawe Matua
Part 2: Key Influences

Ngā āhuatanga hoahoa i te anamata o Te Moana o Toi ki te Rāwhiti
Factors shaping the Eastern Bay's future

Part 2 – Key Influences describes the key factors that inform the decision-making process for the spatial plan. It also supports the development of goals and recommendations for key moves.

Goal	Key influence topics	Overview statement
Whai hauora me te whakarauora **Healthy and healing**	Natural and cultural environment	There is an opportunity to prioritise the natural and cultural environment more highly within decision-making processes.
Ngā ohaoha toitū, kanorau hoki, e tuku ana i ngā mahi me ngā kaupapa mō te iwi whānui **Sustainable, diversified economy providing jobs and purpose for our people**	Economic wellbeing Population growth Employment growth	There is an opportunity to leverage investments and infrastructure projects to boost the local economy and create new job opportunities.
Ngā tāngata, ngā hapori me ngā tauwāhi e hono ana, e tōnui ana, e manawaroa ana hei whakaata i te hītori me ngā tūmanako o tātou katoa **Connected, thriving, resilient people, communities and places that reflect our history and aspirations**	Changing housing needs Natural hazards and climate resilience Rural environment	The Eastern Bay's growing population presents an opportunity to plan for diverse housing types and business developments to accommodate this growth. Planning must occur in the context of various natural hazards, providing an opportunity to address these risks and support safe, resilient community growth.

Strong connections create opportunities

The Eastern Bay must ensure it maintains strong connections to the wider region. Reliable freight access to the Port of Tauranga is critical for reaching export markets. Housing needs to be located near employment opportunities, and people must have access to healthcare and other services in larger urban centres.

These are some of the key intra-regional projects that have influenced our planning:

Rangiuru Business Park: a significant industrial development located near Te Puke in the Western Bay of Plenty. It spans 148 ha to accommodate large industrial facilities and is expected to provide up to 4000 jobs in the future. Quayside Holdings owns Stages 1 and 2, comprising 60 ha, which are currently under development. The park provides easy access to major transport routes, including the Tauranga Eastern Link expressway and SH 2, across the Western, Eastern, and Southern Bay of Plenty. These connections make the Eastern Bay highly accessible.

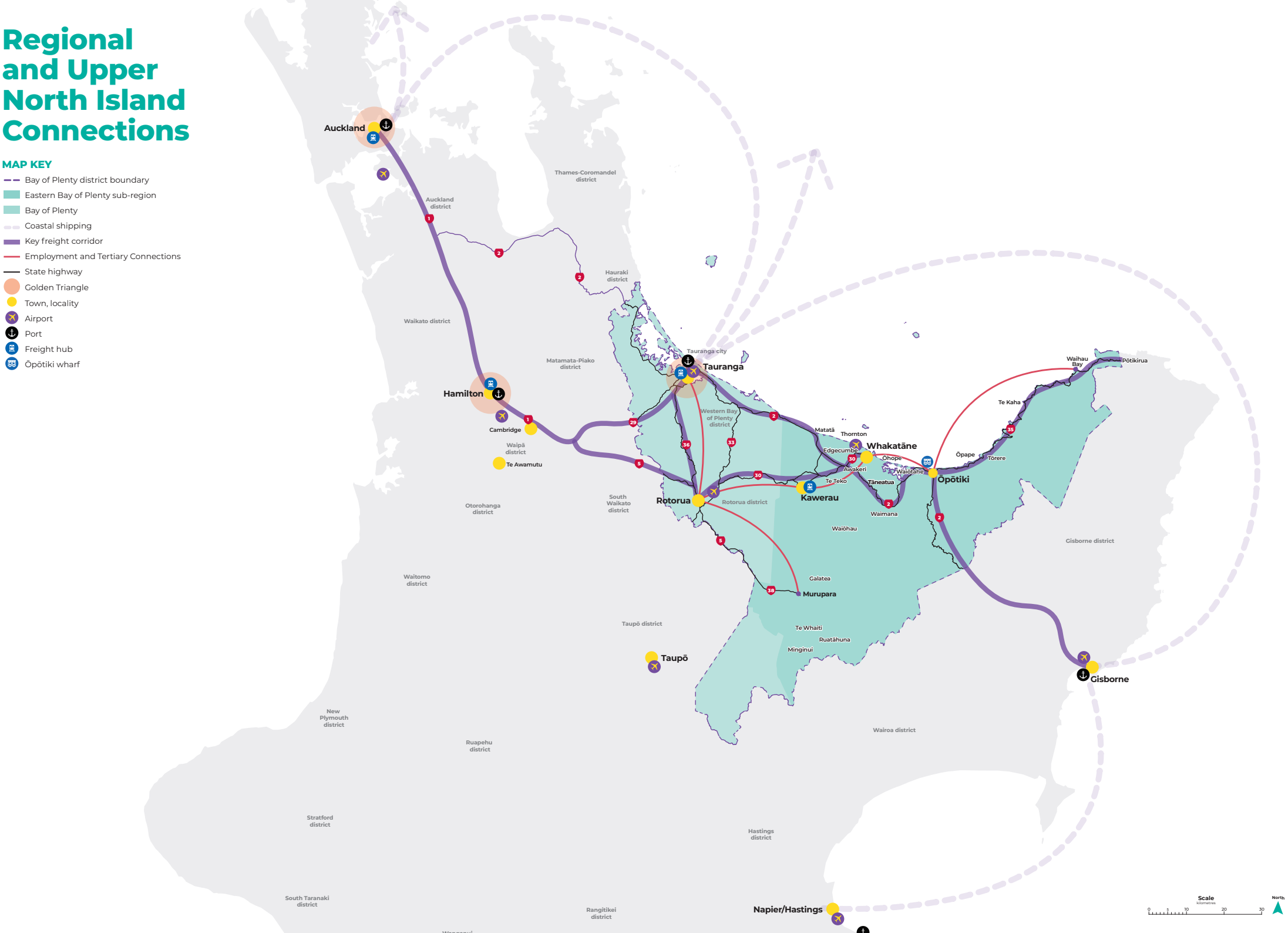
Tauranga Port: is well-connected to all Eastern Bay of Plenty districts. Key transport routes, such as SH 2 and the Tauranga Eastern Link expressway, facilitate efficient movement of goods between the port and these areas.

Rotorua Future Development Strategy: outlines how Rotorua will grow and develop over the next 30 years. The strategy focuses on creating a well-functioning urban environment that supports the social, economic, and cultural wellbeing of its people. It also acknowledges the importance of freight links to Kawerau and Whakatāne.

Western Bay of Plenty SmartGrowth: a collaborative strategy for managing growth in the Western Bay of Plenty sub-region. The latest SmartGrowth Strategy (2024-2074) aims to build strong, resilient communities that are well-connected and sustainable. This includes planned growth in Te Tumu in the Eastern Corridor of the Western Bay sub-region. The SmartGrowth Strategy also identifies SH 2 as an important corridor that services rural production in the Eastern Bay to the Port of Tauranga.

Gisborne Region Tairāwhiti Future Development Strategy: a comprehensive plan outlining a 30-year vision. It identifies areas for future housing development to meet the demand for nearly 5,000 new homes and ensures necessary infrastructure upgrades are in place. The strategy also promotes urban intensification to prevent sprawl and emphasises sustainable practices to benefit the community and environment.

Regional and Upper North Island Connections



Whai hauora me te whakarauora
Healthy and healing

Natural and cultural environment

To be better guardians, we need to prioritise the natural and cultural environment more highly in our decision-making. This includes focusing on:

- Designing sites sensitively by incorporating green infrastructure into urban design and maintaining and developing ecological corridors.
- Implement habitat restoration projects in impacted areas.
- Upgrading water management systems to meet higher standards.
- Continuing to prioritise an integrated catchment management approach, reflecting the Māori concept of "ki uta ki tai" (from the mountains to the sea).
- Continuing to recognise, protect and enhance cultural landscapes, customary activities, wāhi tapu, wāhi taonga, wāhi tupuna, and mahinga kai.

Where are we now?

Cultural heritage

Te Taiao, the natural world, holds deep significance to tangata whenua. The concept of kaitiakitanga (guardianship) embodies the responsibility to care for and protect the environment, ensuring its sustainability. Across the Eastern Bay, there are many sites and areas of cultural significance, including urupā (burial sites), pā (fortified settlement), kāinga (village), and maunga tapu (sacred mountains). Other sites include wāhi tapu (culturally and spiritually significant sites and places), wāhi tūpuna (ancestral sites), and wāhi taonga (places where treasures with high intrinsic value have been found).

Adverse effects on sites and areas of cultural significance, including cultural landscape values, culturally sensitive ecology, and important waterways and marine environments, have occurred and continue to do so. This has led to cultural disconnection, including loss of land, cultural practices, and identity. The relationship of Māori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, water, sites, and other taonga is a matter of national importance. Many sites and areas are protected through regional and district planning to ensure that sacred nature is respected.

Whenua

The Eastern Bay has a diverse natural landscape. The Huiarau and Ikawhenua Ranges, with Maungapōhatu as their high point, extend through to the wilderness treasure of Te Urewera - the North Island's largest native forest. The steep Raukūmara Ranges taper away at the East Cape. Te Urewera and other forested areas, such as Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne and Raukūmara Conservation Parks, provide numerous environmental benefits. These include biodiversity protection, climate regulation, soil stability, and maintaining water quality and supply. Other landscapes, including Ōhiwa Harbour, Waiōtahe and Waioweka Estuaries, and the Matatā wetlands, hold significant natural and cultural value and are sensitive to change.

Residential, industrial and agricultural

development has modified the landscape. These changes have altered landforms and affected indigenous biodiversity and broader ecological systems. Many natural landscapes, features and sites are now protected through regional and district planning to ensure future development is environmentally and culturally appropriate.

Awa

The main rivers in the Eastern Bay are the Rangitāiki, Whirinaki, Ōhinemataroa (Whakatāne), Waimana-Tauranga, Tarawera, Waiōtahe, Waioweka, Ōtara, Mōtū, and Raukōkore. These rivers have shaped the land by depositing sediments, creating fertile soils in areas such as the Rangitāiki Plains and around Ōpōtiki.

For Māori, fresh water is a taonga considered essential to life and identity. Freshwater, including rivers, lakes, streams, wetlands, groundwater and geothermal sources, is a precious resource. It is used for residential, commercial and industrial purposes; for horticultural irrigation and agriculture; stormwater management; generating electricity in hydroelectric power generation schemes; and recreation and tourism. Freshwater habitats also provide opportunities for wildlife, recreation, and amenity, as well as connections between the places we live.

The catchment areas surrounding rivers significantly impact the biodiversity and ecology of the water. Activities on land within these catchments can harm river health. Risks include pollution from factories, farms, and towns, increased water use reducing river flow, extreme weather causing floods, landslides, and droughts, and poor land practices leading to sediment build-up. To address these risks, integrated catchment management practices are in place to protect the natural character, indigenous biodiversity and ecosystems. These systems are supported by community involvement in conservation initiatives.

The Rangitāiki River, Tarawera River and Ōhiwa Harbour have co-governance or co-management arrangements with tangata whenua. These partnerships aim to restore the cultural, environmental and spiritual health and wellbeing of the catchments, rivers and harbour for the benefit of present and future generations.

Moana

The Eastern Bay has the longest coastline in the Bay of Plenty region and includes several rural coastal communities. From Matatā to Ōpape, the coast is shaped by sand dunes, river mouths, harbours, volcanic features, and rocky headlands. East of Ōpape, the landscape becomes steep and rugged with rocky headlands and long gravel beaches. This 125 km long coastline supports active boating and aquaculture industries. In the Ōpōtiki District, iwi lead many aquaculture projects that provide long-term benefits for future generations. The coastal marine area holds significant ecological, cultural, spiritual, recreational, and economic value for communities. However, activities like farming, forestry, transportation, and urban growth have polluted and altered many coastal ecosystems. It's important to understand these impacts to manage and reduce them effectively.

What is being done?

A significant amount of work has already been done or is underway to recognise and manage elements of our natural and cultural environment. A range of legislation, plans, projects, agreements, and initiatives are in place to ensure actions are taken to restore and protect areas and sites. The existing work is a mix of local or site-specific projects (e.g., community care groups), infrastructure and reserve management planning. It also includes regional and district-wide policies and plans, catchment-based programmes, and the implementation of national policy direction.

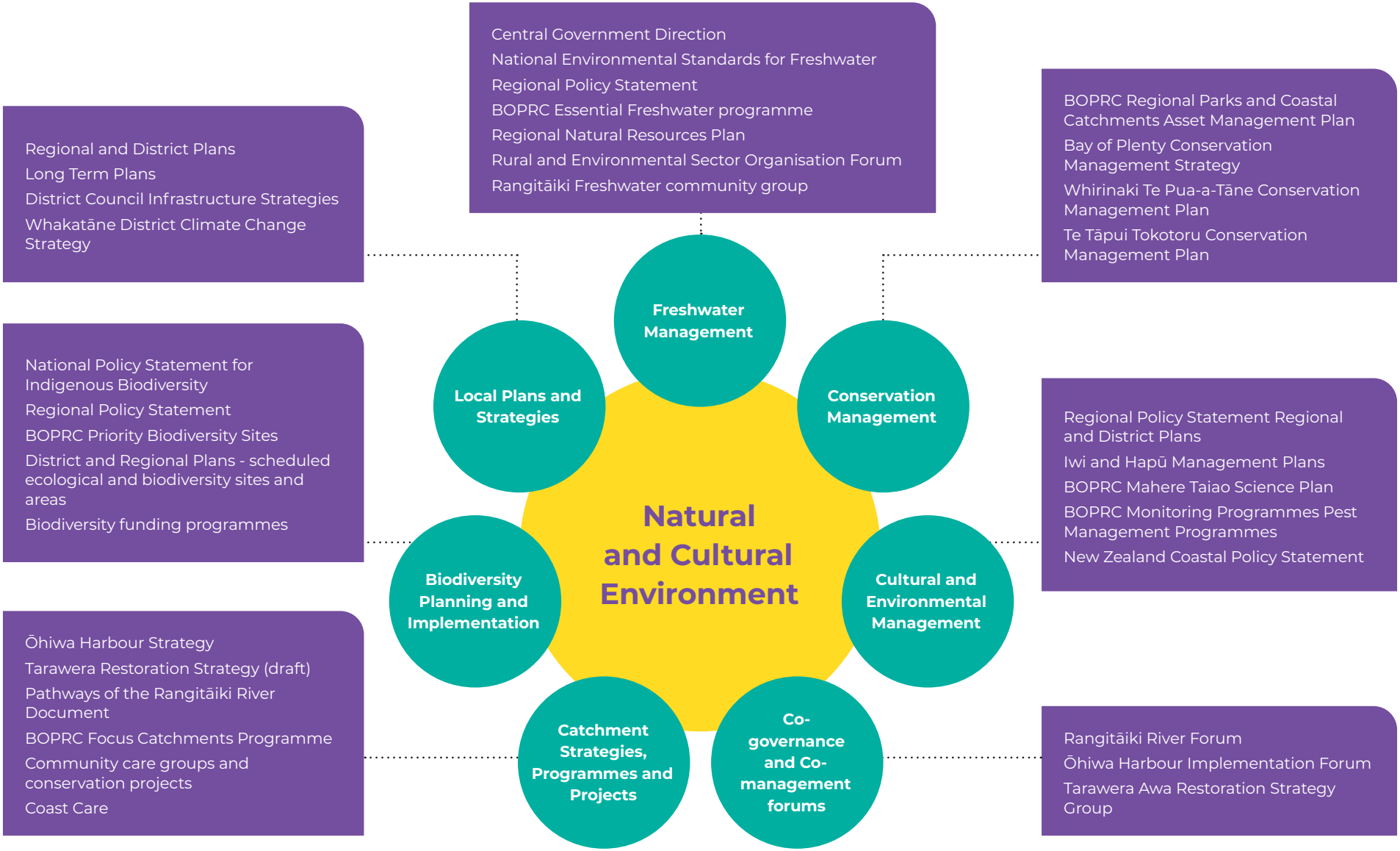


Figure 2: Natural and cultural environment work programmes, policies, strategies and plans

What does the future hold?

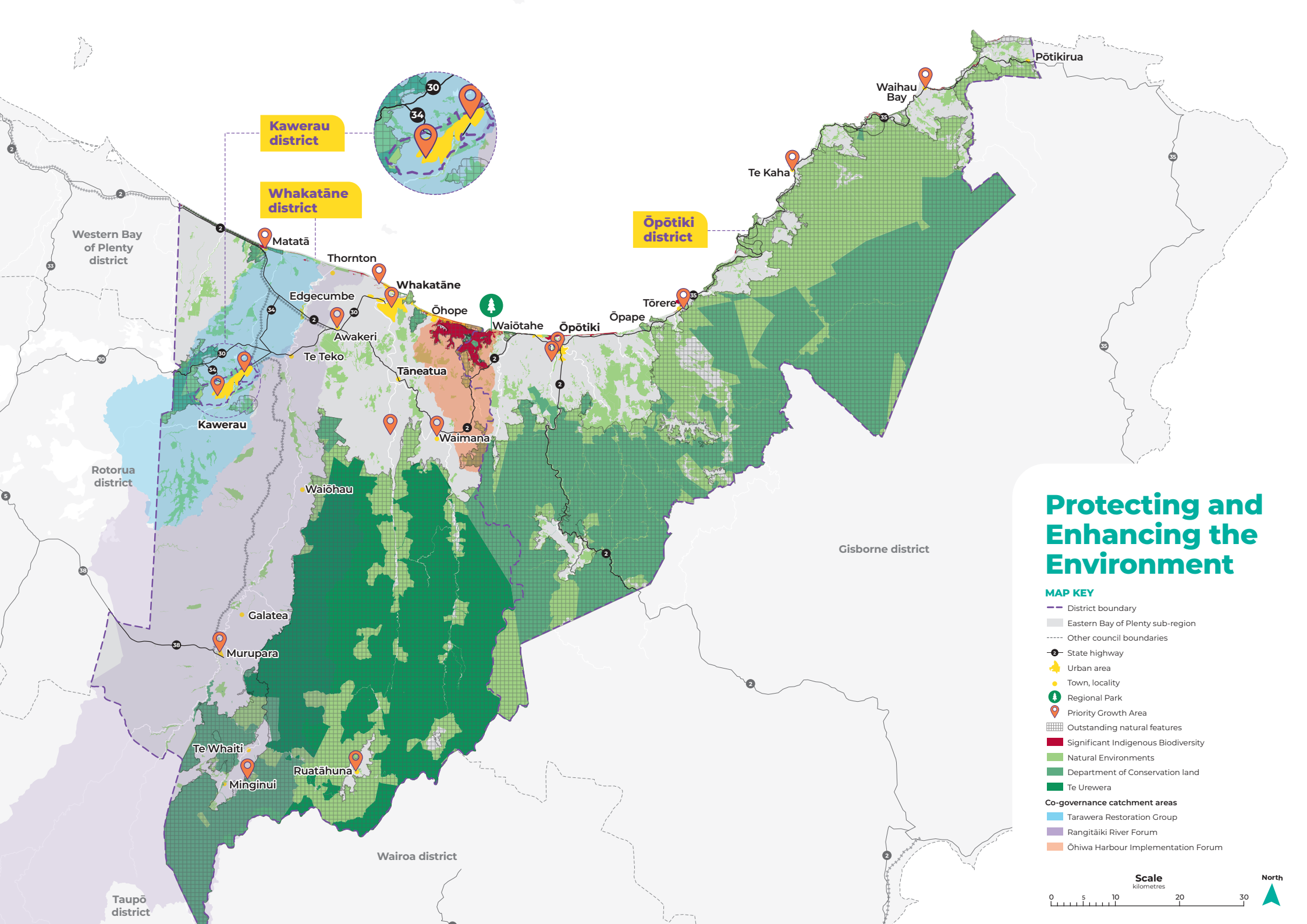
First and foremost, we need to continue looking after our taonga, now and into the future. We must ensure we create space for nature and foster the right conditions for people to live healthy lives, allowing the mauri of te taiao to thrive and support our wellbeing.

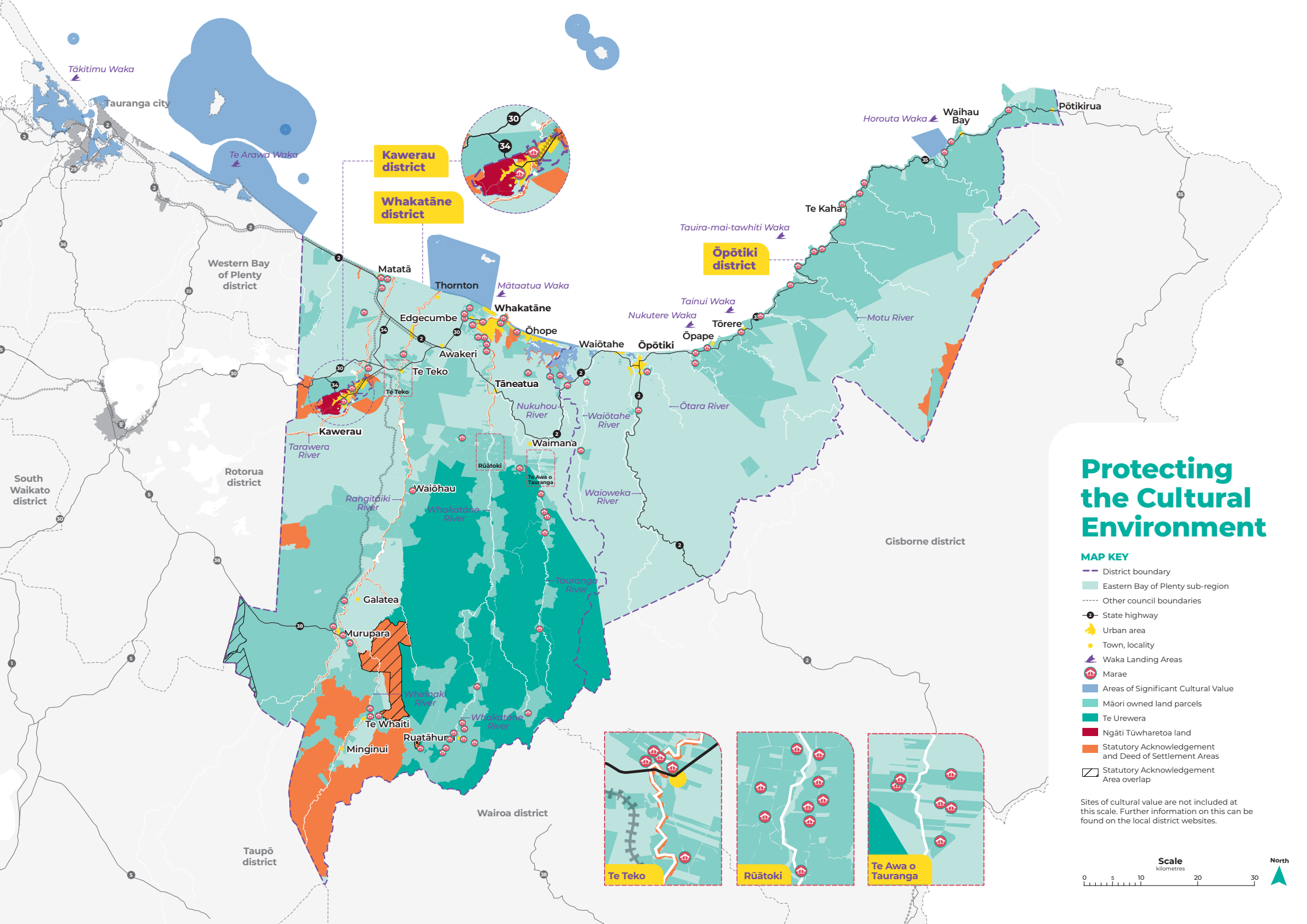
Protecting, restoring and enhancing biodiversity ensures that our taonga remains for future generations to enjoy. Prioritising the health and wellbeing of our water bodies is essential, and we must work to reduce the impact of land use on the ecosystems.

A strong emphasis is needed on site-sensitive design, incorporating green infrastructure into urban design, maintaining and developing ecological corridors and implementing habitat restoration projects in impacted areas. Approaches such as water-sensitive urban design and low-impact water design will play a key role in addressing a changing climate, supporting biodiversity, and making our towns healthier and more liveable. We will need to upgrade water management systems, including stormwater, water supply, and wastewater, to meet higher standards.

Land, freshwater, coastal and marine environments are often dealt with separately. However, it is critical to recognise that they are interconnected, and activities in one area, can impact others. We need to continue prioritising an integrated catchment management approach, which involves managing natural resources on a catchment scale, reflecting the concept of “ki uta ki tai” (from the mountains to the sea).

We highly value the sub-region’s rich and diverse cultural heritage. Cultural landscapes, customary activities, wāhi tapu, wāhi taonga, wāhi tūpuna, and mahinga kai will continue to be recognised, protected, and enhanced. Careful consideration and collaboration are needed to uphold our cultural heritage. Respecting the integrity of mātauranga Māori and recognising the value of mātauranga to inform decision-making processes will enable more meaningful and productive relationships with tangata whenua and Māori communities throughout our region.


Kawerau district
Whakatāne district
Ōpōtiki district
Western Bay of Plenty district
Rotorua district
Gisborne district
Wairoa district
Taupō district
Matatā
Thornton
Whakatāne
Edgecumbe
Awakeri
Ōhope
Waiōtahe
Ōpōtiki
Ōpape
Tōrere
Te Kaha
Waihau Bay
Pōtikirua
Te Teko
Tāneatua
Waimana
Kawerau
Waiōhau
Galatea
Murupara
Te Whaiti
Minginui
Ruatāhuna
Protecting and Enhancing the Environment
MAP KEY
District boundary
Eastern Bay of Plenty sub-region
Other council boundaries
State highway
Urban area
Town, locality
Regional Park
Priority Growth Area
Outstanding natural features
Significant Indigenous Biodiversity
Natural Environments
Department of Conservation land
Te Urewera
Co-governance catchment areas
Tarawera Restoration Group
Rangitāiki River Forum
Ōhiwa Harbour Implementation Forum
Scale
kilometres
0 5 10 20 30
North


Tākitimu Waka
Tauranga city
Te Arawa Waka
Kawerau district
Whakatāne district
Western Bay of Plenty district
Matatā
Thornton
Mātaatua Waka
Whakatāne
Edgecumbe
Ōhope
Awakeri
Te Teko
Tāneatua
Kawerau
Tarawera River
Nukuhou River
Waiōtahe River
Waiōtahe
Ōpōtiki
Waimana
Rūātoki
Te Awa o Tauranga
Waiōhau
Rangitāiki River
Whakatāne River
Waioweka River
Ōtara River
Tauranga River
Galatea
Murupara
Whitikaki River
Te Whaiti
Ruatāhuna
Minginui
Whakatāne River
Rotorua district
South Waikato district
Taupō district
Wairoa district
Gisborne district
Horouta Waka
Waihau Bay
Pōtikirua
Tauira-mai-tawhiti Waka
Ōpōtiki district
Te Kaha
Tainui Waka
Nukutere Waka
Tōrere
Ōpape
Motu River
Te Teko
Rūātoki
Te Awa o Tauranga
Protecting the Cultural Environment
MAP KEY
District boundary
Eastern Bay of Plenty sub-region
Other council boundaries
State highway
Urban area
Town, locality
Waka Landing Areas
Marae
Areas of Significant Cultural Value
Māori owned land parcels
Te Urewera
Ngāti Tūwharetoa land
Statutory Acknowledgement and Deed of Settlement Areas
Statutory Acknowledgement Area overlap
Sites of cultural value are not included at this scale. Further information on this can be found on the local district websites.
Scale
kilometres
0 5 10 20 30
North


ABUS 12,5t
BakerCranes
HYSTER
16-6
250

Ngā ohaoha toitū, kanorau hoki
Sustainable, diversified economy

Economic wellbeing

Economic development plays a vital role in improving the wellbeing of communities throughout the Eastern Bay.

A strong economy depends on access to suitable housing, infrastructure, and services. Without changes, a lack of suitable housing and infrastructure are a handbrake on the economy.

By investing in housing, transport, workforce development, and essential infrastructure, we can create the conditions for sustainable growth that benefits communities across the Eastern Bay.

Where are we now?

Whakatāne, Ōpōtiki and Kawerau Districts are closely connected, creating economic resilience and a strong foundation for future development. The sub-region enjoys a favourable climate, fertile soils and rich natural resources, including fishery and forestry. The Eastern Bay enjoys a diverse and robust industrial base with strengths in horticulture, manufacturing, forestry and wood processing, tourism, energy, aquaculture, and more.

The Eastern Bay faces economic challenges, including lower GDP growth and median incomes and higher unemployment compared to the national average. However, it has significant potential for growth, as evidenced by recent government investments aimed at boosting the local economy. Four key infrastructure projects are in delivery or completed, including the Ōpōtiki harbour / aquaculture cluster, high-value horticulture on Māori-owned land, the Putauaki Trust Industrial Area and regeneration plans for Minginui and Murupara.

The Eastern Bay faces a range of challenges, including industrial decline, outdated infrastructure, and socio-economic hardship. The Eastern Bay continues to face some of the highest levels of socio-economic disadvantage in the country. The average deprivation score is 8.5/10 versus a national average of 5.6. This reflects challenges across education, healthcare, employment, income, housing, crime, and access to services. In 2023, unemployment rates were more than twice the national average (7.4% versus 3.3%), and nearly one quarter (23.1%) of working-age people were receiving a benefit.

A significant Māori-owned land and assets base. Continued development of Māori-owned land and economic activities can help build resilience and job security by further diversifying the economy. While there is no specific estimate for the Māori asset base in the Eastern Bay of Plenty, the wider region's Māori asset base is valued at $17.5 billion[1]. These assets span a range of sectors, including agriculture, forestry, horticulture, aquaculture, geothermal energy, tourism and hospitality. This significant contribution, along with its capacity for

expansion, will have a substantial impact on the direction of economic growth in the Eastern Bay.

Aquaculture is a significant contributor to the economy. Ōpōtiki District has the opportunity to expand its aquaculture industry, with the potential to generate multi-million-dollar annual income. According to the Sub-Regional Economic Development Strategy, the estimated growth in the aquaculture industry nationally is projected to be $3 billion by 2035, serving local and international markets. By leveraging the more than $200 million already invested in harbour and processing facilities, this aquaculture industry is well-positioned to create jobs and boost the local economy.

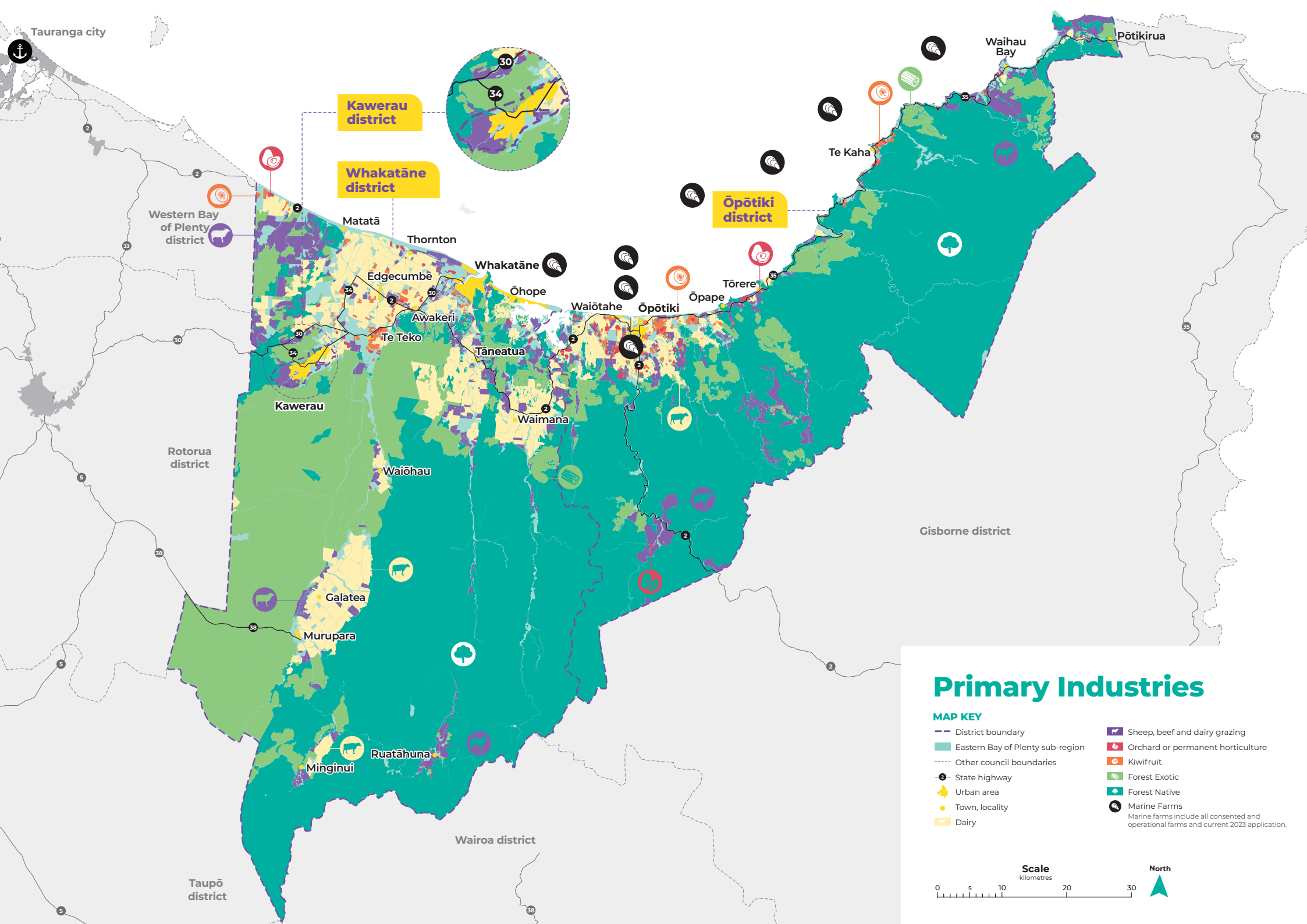
The Eastern Bay has a strong focus on primary industries, commercial services and industrial processing. It is also home to some of the country's most loved domestic tourism destinations. Whakatāne is the main commercial and residential hub, offering a wide range of services and facilities. Kawerau is known for its industrial activities, while Ōpōtiki serves as a secondary centre for eastern areas, with a focus on horticulture, agriculture and an emerging aquaculture industry. There is a high level of commuter movement and economic interconnection between the districts, with goods transported across the region to manufacturing and processing facilities and to the Port of Tauranga.

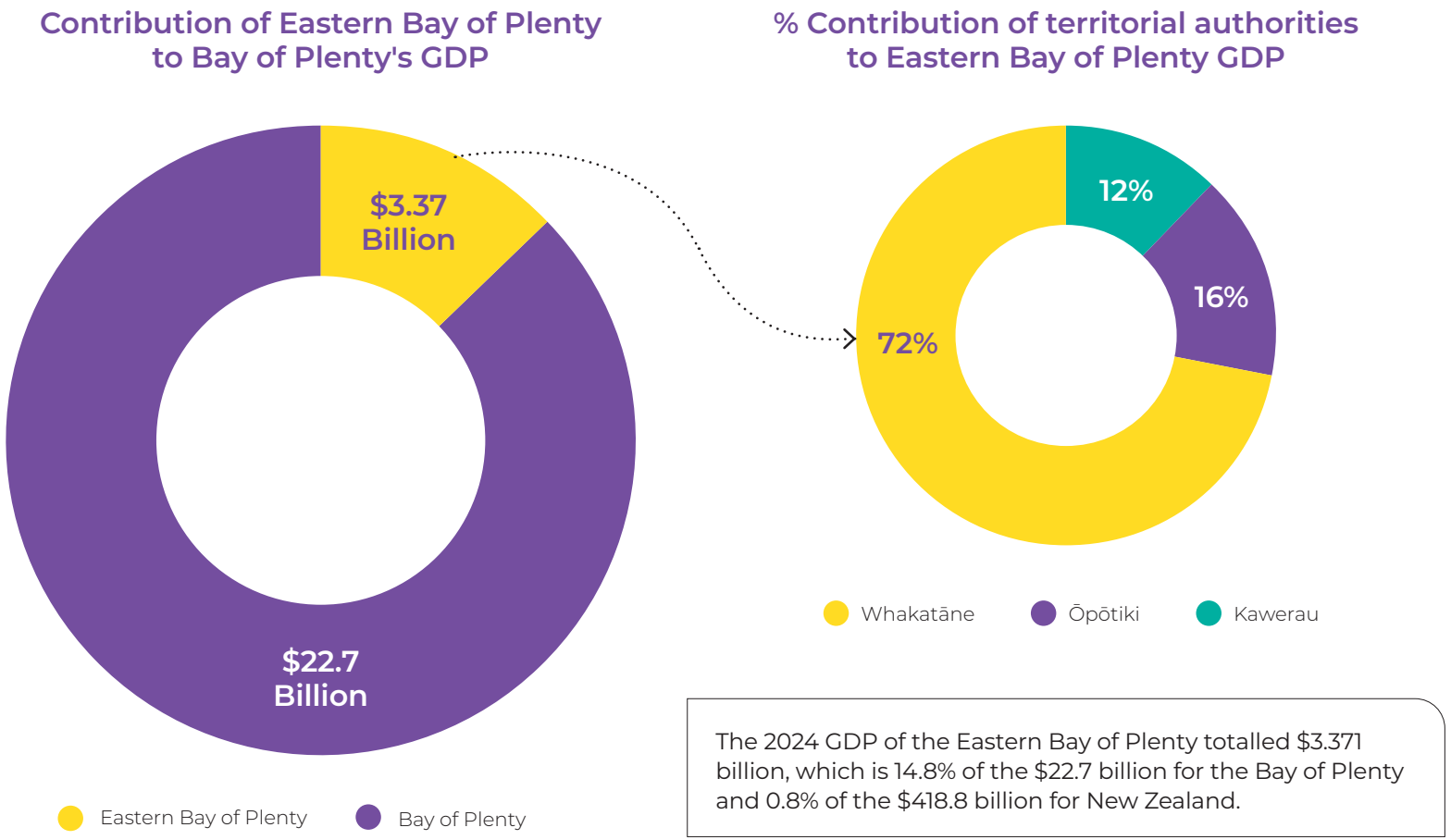
The Eastern Bay's fertile land and favourable climate support a strong and thriving primary industry, enabling growth in agriculture, horticulture, dairy farming, and forestry. The sub-region plays a vital role in supporting food supply for both domestic and export markets, benefiting all of New Zealand. It produces high-quality kiwifruit, avocados, and dairy products. The major dairy processing factory in Edgecumbe has a milk collection catchment across almost the whole region. Distinct industry clusters characterise the sub-region's employment landscape. In Kawerau, 37% of jobs are in manufacturing. In Ōpōtiki, 31% of jobs are in agriculture, forestry and fishing. Whakatāne has a more diverse employment base, with jobs across agriculture, forestry, fishing, healthcare, training and education, and retail.

The Eastern Bay is a major forestry region, home to over 20% of the Central North Island's exotic forests. Approximately one-third of this land is owned by the Central North Island Iwi Collective. Large plantations, sustainable practices, and efficient timber processing and transportation from Kawerau ensure the long-term success of the forestry industry. Many of the sub-region's remote communities are dependent on the forestry sector.

The rivers of the Eastern Bay, particularly the Waioweka and Ōtara Rivers in Ōpōtiki, are vital sources of industrial aggregate, including shingle and sand. These materials hold significant commercial value and provide essential materials for construction and infrastructure projects.

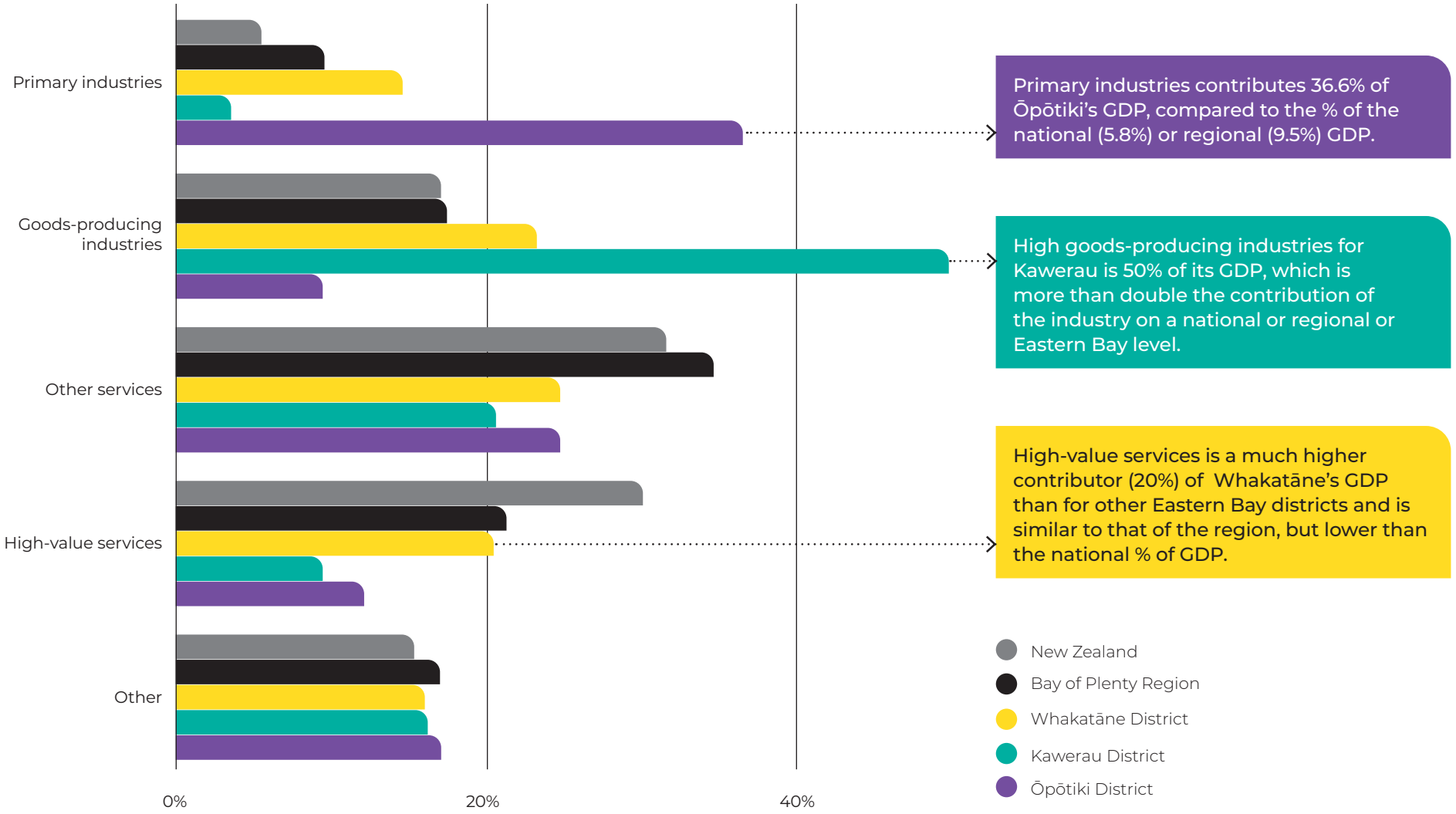
[1] Te Ohanga Māori 2023 report


Tauranga city
Kawerau district
Whakatāne district
Ōpōtiki district
Western Bay of Plenty district
Matatā
Thornton
Whakatāne
Ōhope
Edgecumbe
Awakeri
Te Teko
Tāneatua
Waiōtahe
Ōpōtiki
Ōpape
Tōrere
Te Kaha
Waihau Bay
Pōtikirua
Kawerau
Waimana
Waiōhau
Rotorua district
Gisborne district
Galatea
Murupara
Ruatāhuna
Minginui
Wairoa district
Taupō district
Primary Industries
MAP KEY
District boundary
Eastern Bay of Plenty sub-region
Other council boundaries
State highway
Urban area
Town, locality
Dairy
Sheep, beef and dairy grazing
Orchard or permanent horticulture
Kiwifruit
Forest Exotic
Forest Native
Marine Farms
Marine farms include all consented and operational farms and current 2023 application.
Scale
kilometres
0 5 10 20 30
North



Source: Infometrics Regional Economic Profile

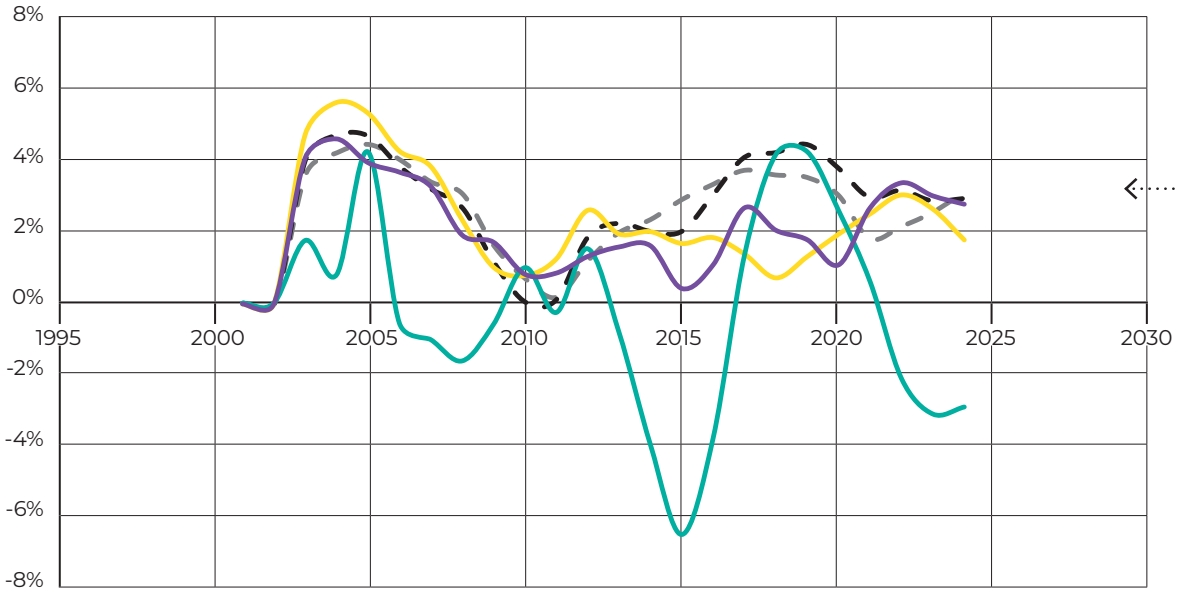
Figure 6: Eastern Bay's contribution to GDP



Source: Infometrics; Regional Economic Structure – Industry Structure; April 2025

Figure 7: Economic structure by broad sector (% of total, year to March 2024)

Annual GDP % growth, 3-year trailing average



Economic growth in New Zealand averaged 3.0% p.a over the 10 years to 2024 compared with an average of 3.4% p.a in Bay of Plenty Region

1.8% p.a in Whakatāne District

0.0% p.a in Kawerau District

2.3% p.a in Ōpōtiki District

- New Zealand
- Bay of Plenty Region
- Whakatāne District
- Kawerau District
- Ōpōtiki District

Source: Infometrics; Regional Economy – Economic Growth; April 2025

Figure 8: Annual change in GDP over the past twenty years

What does the future hold?

The Sub-Regional Economic Development Strategy (SREDS) was refreshed in 2025 and provides direction for economic development opportunities across the Eastern Bay at a sub-regional scale.

Economic growth vision

Our Places supports the vision of SREDS, focusing on three key areas: creating jobs, accelerating economic growth, and leveraging existing industry specialisations and the unique strengths of each district.

- Aquaculture in Ōpōtiki
- Green industry in Kawerau
- Commercial and residential development in Whakatāne

The SREDS guides and shapes priorities and next steps, including:

- Development of local economic development plans, enabling economic development to serve as a powerful lever for delivering social, cultural and environmental wellbeing.
- Addressing key constraints to growth — including housing, transport and connectivity, workforce development, and capital. Our Places addresses two of these by planning for population growth and identifying housing and infrastructure needs for the next 30 years.
- Through collaboration with central and local government, iwi, and key industry sectors, we can build on our successes and create new opportunities.

Purpose

Unlocking resilient economic development for the Eastern Bay of Plenty

Vision

By 2055, the Eastern Bay of Plenty is a prosperous, high-productivity sub-region with flourishing communities and robust infrastructure. The Eastern Bay's diversified economy, underpinned by a strong bi-cultural foundation, supports nationally and internationally competitive industries, ensuring a vibrant and inclusive future that fosters social, environmental, and cultural wellbeing.

Development focus areas

Ōpōtiki: Aquaculture centre of national significance

- The largest and most productive aquaculture region in NZ, providing direct benefits to locals
- A full-service aquaculture centre with services across the value chain

Kawerau: Green industrial and energy hub

- Forefront of green energy and a premier engineering and manufacturing hub
- Sub-regional freight gateway to the Golden Triangle

Whakatāne: The Eastern Bay's commercial and residential heart

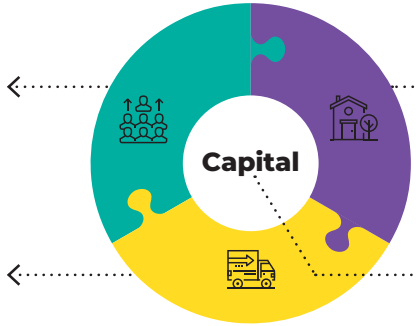
- Dynamic business network and regional service centre
- Coastal living with transport links throughout the Bay and beyond

Existing economic base

Cross-cutting constraints and success statements

Workforce development
Success: Fostering an engaged, skilled local workforce aligned with current and future industry needs.

Transport & connectivity
Success: Comprehensive, resilient transport network that improves connectivity within the region and between the regions.



Housing
Success: Enabling and optimising for the right housing number, mix, and locations, to enable prosperity and liveability.

Success: Private industry can elevate to the next level of size and scale, supported by enabling public initiatives.

Figure 9: Sub-regional economic development strategy summary

Source: Sub-Regional Economic Development Strategy

Population growth

By 2055, the Eastern Bay's population is expected to increase from 56,500 in 2022 to 68,000. Based on current projections, the demand for housing and land needed for businesses is expected to rise. The National Policy Statement on Urban Development requires local authorities to maintain a sufficient supply of land for housing and businesses. Without proactive planning, land may not be available for new development, driving up the cost of housing and infrastructure.

By 2053, we will likely need between 1,150 and 8,200 new homes, with the most likely scenario requiring 5,500. The range reflects variable population outcomes, as well as declining household sizes, driven by an aging population. As a result, more homes will be needed for the same number of people. Population change depends on many factors, and ongoing monitoring will be needed to adjust planning accordingly.

We need to plan for more affordable housing to meet the demand. Over the past decade, housing affordability has decreased significantly, especially in the Eastern Bay. By enabling more housing options and ensuring an adequate supply, we can help make housing more affordable for more people.

Looking back at how the population has changed

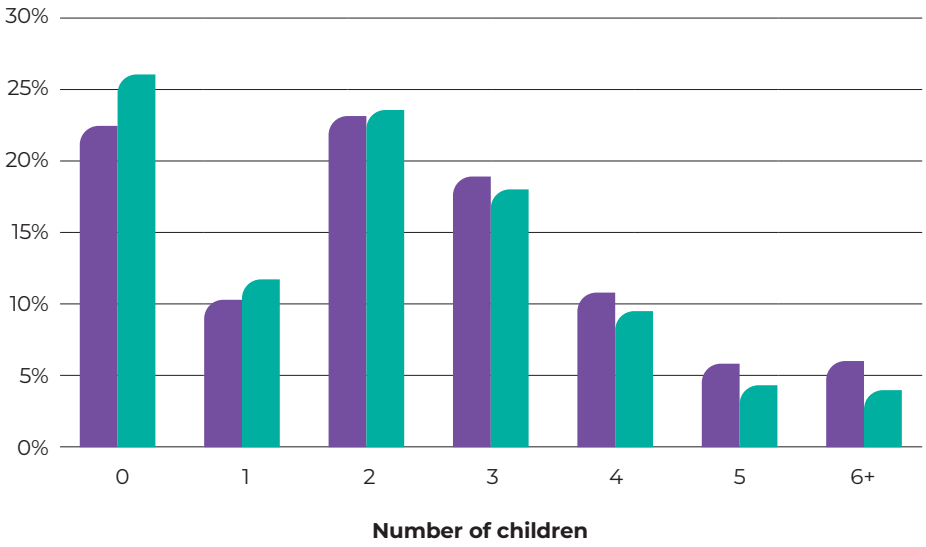
Between 2013 and 2023, our total population grew by more than 9,000 people. Whakatāne District grew by 17%, Kawerau District by 22%, and Ōpōtiki District by 24%.

From 2013 to 2018, net migration was a significant driver of population growth in each district, accounting for around 70% of the total increase. During this period, more people moved into the Eastern Bay than left, reversing the trend of negative net migration from 2001 to 2013.

New Zealand's national immigration policies influence growth in the Eastern Bay. In the year ending August 2023, New Zealand saw a record net migration gain of 110,200 people. Migration will continue to be a primary driver of population growth for New Zealand and a main influence impacting the growth and development of the Eastern Bay. Looking ahead, New Zealand's population, which was 5.13 million in 2022, is projected to be between 5.55 and 6.65 million by 2048 and between 5.62 and 7.86 million by 2073.

Children born to each female 2006 & 2023

Eastern Bay of Plenty sub-region



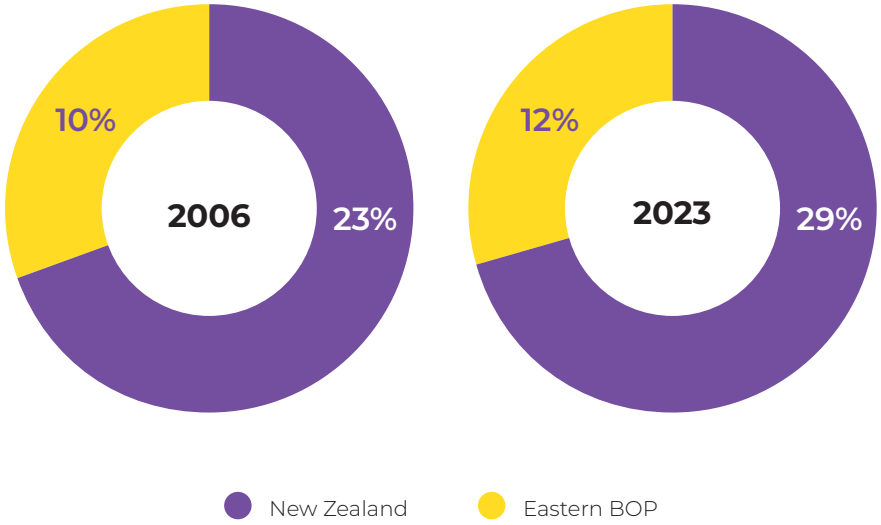
Woman are having fewer children and about one in four women have no children in 2023 compared to one in five in 2006. For all NZ, about one in three women do not have children.

Source: Stats NZ Census 2023, (Usually Resident Population)

Figure 10: Number of children born in the Eastern Bay

Birthplace: Overseas born 2006 & 2023

Since 2006 the proportion of residents born overseas has increased by 2 percentage points, compared to 6 for NZ



Source: Stats NZ Census 2023, (Usually Resident Population)

Figure 11: Birthplace of residents

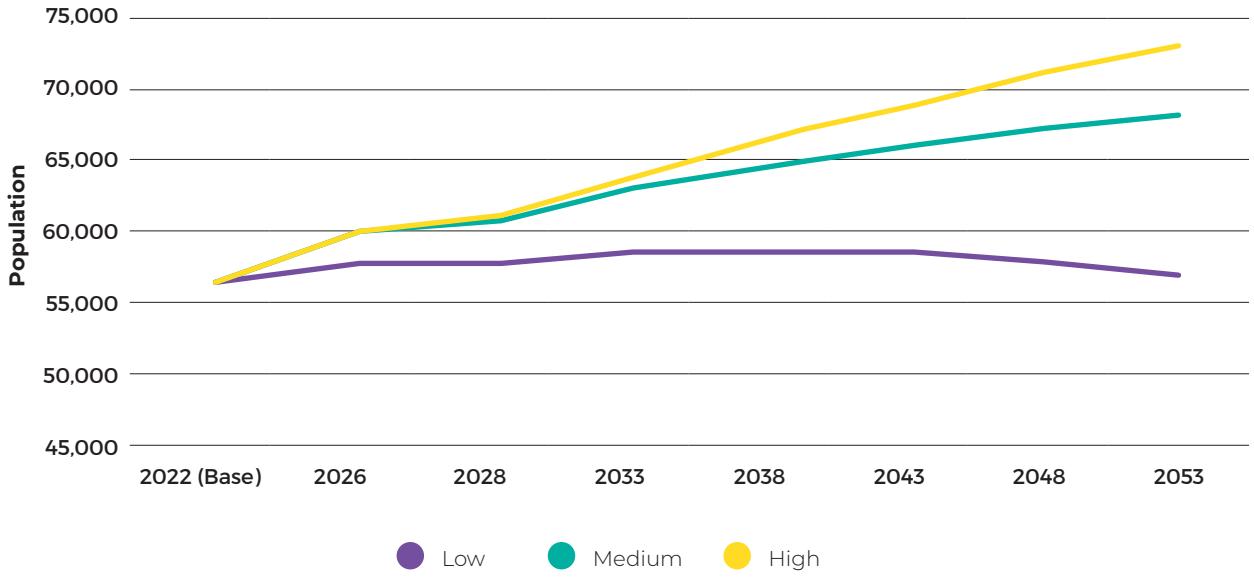
Looking ahead at how the population could change

Population projections are estimates of future population size and composition based on current data and trends. They help us understand how our community might grow and change over time. However, projections are uncertain and will likely change from what we expect now. Regular monitoring and reporting on population change, through Councils' Long-Term Plans and other work programmes, will inform decisions on how we plan for growing communities and changing rates of growth.

A range of population projections were developed for the spatial plan. Looking ahead over the next 30 years, we expect population change in the Eastern Bay to be similar to the medium projection.[2] The medium projection prepared for the spatial plan is the same as Statistics NZ's high projection.

Planning based on higher population growth ensures we are prepared if the growth trend we experienced during the early to late 2010's continues over the long term. If population growth is higher or lower than expected, we need to manage investment in new growth areas proactively. It's important to avoid locking in large upfront investments, especially those funded by growth, without having a way to manage the risk if growth slows over time.

Similarly, some areas could experience higher growth than projected. For example, Ōpōtiki District Council estimates growth could be closer to 2,300 dwellings over the coming decades based on building consent and resource consent trends. This number is much higher than the 1,400 dwellings indicated by Statistics NZ's high projection.



Source: Eastern Bay of Plenty Housing and Business Needs Research Report, MRCagney 2023

Figure 12: Eastern Bay population projection range

[2] The details for this can be found in the Eastern Bay of Plenty Spatial Plan - Scenarios and Development Options Report and the Eastern Bay of Plenty Housing and Business Needs Research report (MRCagney, 2022)

Growth projection	Description
High +16,500	Predicts rapid population increase due to high birth rates, low death rates, and significant migration. Greater demand for housing, infrastructure, and services requiring proactive planning.
Medium +11,500 people by 2055	Reflects moderate population growth, with balanced birth, death, and migration rates. It allows for manageable development and aligns with recent trends while remaining flexible. *(the same as Statistics NZ high projection, and the one we are using for planning purposes)*
Low, nearly no change	Anticipates slow population growth due to low birth rates, high death rates, or reduced migration. Gradual population increase, easing resource and infrastructure pressures and ensuring quality services.

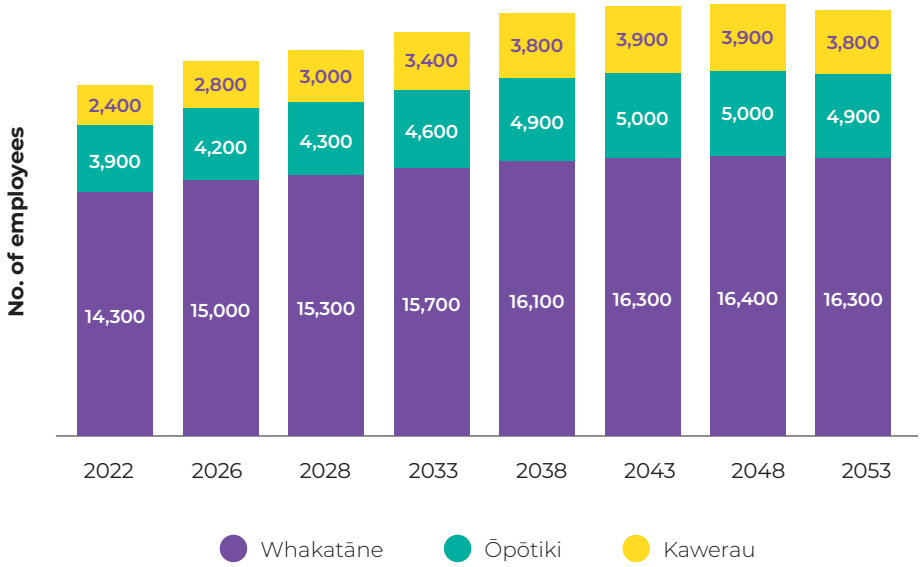
Employment growth

The SREDS identifies housing and infrastructure as two of the main constraints slowing economic development. Continued community growth and change will require both job creation and additional land for business development. The Scenarios and Development Options report, along with the Housing and Business Needs Research report, provides details on the amount of land needed and when it could be required.

The SREDS brings together the districts of the Eastern Bay to focus on shared economic goals. By working together, we can more effectively plan and prioritise projects that strengthen our local economy, create new jobs, and attract investments. This collaborative approach is key to attracting further investments and supporting regional development.

The number of jobs in the Eastern Bay is expected to grow by 8% over the next 30 years, representing an average annual increase of 0.3% per year. Based on population projections, we anticipate an increase in employee projections over the next 30 years.

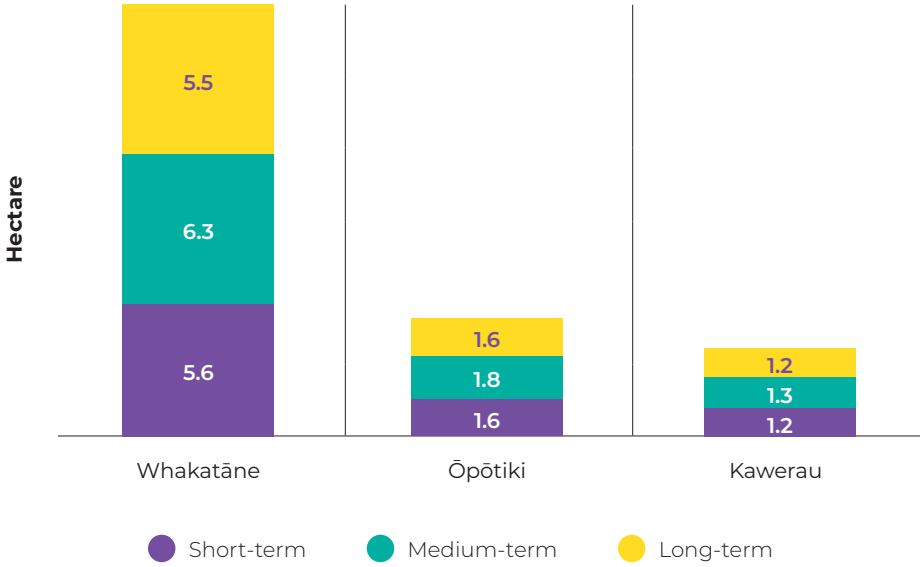
Employee projections 2022 (base) to 2053 (medium growth scenario)



Source: Eastern Bay of Plenty Housing and Business Needs Research Report, MRCagney 2023

Figure 13: Employee projections 2022-2053

Demand for business land 2022 to 2053 (hectares)



Source: Eastern Bay of Plenty Housing and Business Needs Research Report, MRCagney 2023

Figure 14: Demand for business land 2022-2053 (ha)

Porritt Glade Lifestyle Village and inaugural resident Mrs Kathleen Cook, Kawerau

Ngā tāngata, ngā tauwāhi me ngā hapori e hono ana, e manawaroa ana

Connected and resilient people, places, and communities

Changing housing needs

An ageing population will require changes to healthcare and more accessible housing to enable people to remain in their communities as they age.

Growth in the younger Māori population requires planning that supports a diverse range of housing types to meet the needs of both a growing and ageing population. This includes planning for papakāinga and other types of Māori-led housing.

Affordability must be a key consideration in planning future housing developments, along with strong connections to employment.

An aging population needs accessible housing

The Eastern Bay is experiencing an ageing population, with a growing proportion of residents aged 65 and older. The rising median age reflects this demographic shift. The median age for all New Zealanders is 38.1, compared to Whakatāne at 40.2, Ōpōtiki 40.1 and Kawerau 38.6.[3] By 2053, people aged 65 and older will make up 30% of our community.

This trend has several implications for the community, including increased demand for healthcare services, hospitals, clinics, and aged care facilities needed to support the health and wellbeing of older residents. Housing needs will also change, with greater demand for accessible and age-friendly homes. The local workforce may experience change as more people retire, potentially leading to shortages in some sectors and an increased need for workers in healthcare and aged care. Community services and activities that promote social interaction and wellbeing for older residents will become increasingly important. Understanding these trends helps us plan for a future that supports and values our older residents, ensuring the Eastern Bay remains a great place to live for people of all ages.

[3] StatsNZ Census 2023, (Usual Resident Population).

A growing youthful Māori demographic need larger and more affordable homes

The Eastern Bay has a youthful and growing Māori population. Māori make up just over half of the sub-region's population, a proportion that is projected to rise to 60% by 2053. Compared to the Eastern Bay's ageing population, the Māori population is a much younger demographic.

Due to their different age profile and cultural practices, many Māori households need larger houses or multiple houses close to each other. Many rural and remote communities are predominantly Māori and are based around whānau, hapū, and marae. Māori in the Eastern Bay have distinct housing needs and experiences compared to the general population.

- Māori homes reflect traditional whānau structures, characterised by multi-generational living. On average, 2.2 generations live in a Māori household. A recent survey in the Whakatāne District showed that 28% of the Māori population wanted larger homes with five to six bedrooms to accommodate multi-generational living.
- Home ownership rates among Māori are significantly lower, with only 30.3% owning their own home compared to 64.5% of the general population. A further 25.5% of Māori live with whānau, at a whānau homestead, or on whānau land.
- Other research indicates that Māori households spend about 20% of their income on rent, compared to approximately 14% for the average household. This highlights a greater need for affordable housing.

The spatial plan recognises the need for a strategic and culturally responsive approach to Māori housing. The plan highlights opportunities to support diverse living arrangements, enable papakāinga development, and foster partnerships with iwi. It provides high-level direction for councils to work collaboratively with Māori to unlock housing potential, improve infrastructure alignment, and ensure planning frameworks are enabling of Māori-led housing solutions.

Affordability of housing continues to be a challenge for everyone

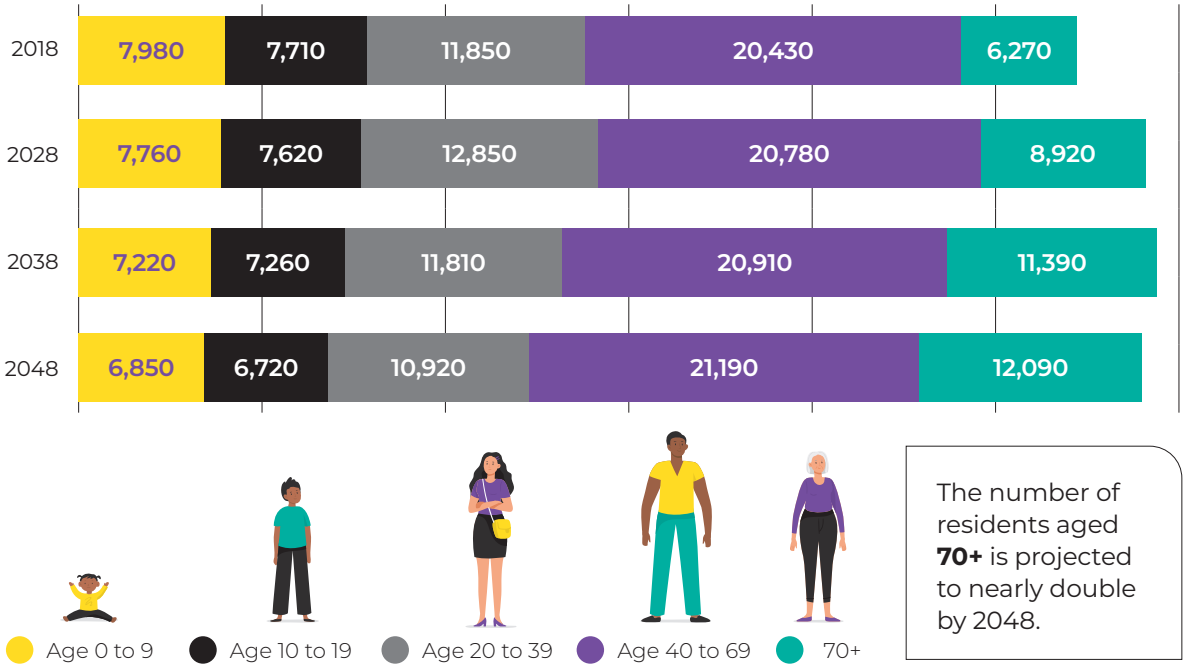
Rising housing prices, high rental costs, increased demand for social housing, and low home ownerships rates indicate affordability challenges in the housing system for the Eastern Bay. In response, household crowding remains a challenge for Eastern Bay communities, and the number of applicants for social housing has increased over time.

Everyone in the Eastern Bay should have access to safe, affordable, and suitable housing. By planning for more housing options and addressing affordability issues, we can help prevent overcrowding and reduce financial stress for residents. New development areas should include planning for diverse housing types to meet the needs of both a growing and ageing population.

Addressing these challenges fosters a more inclusive and supportive community where everyone can thrive and enjoy a high quality of life.

Demographic change

Projected demographic change in our sub-region 2018 - 2048

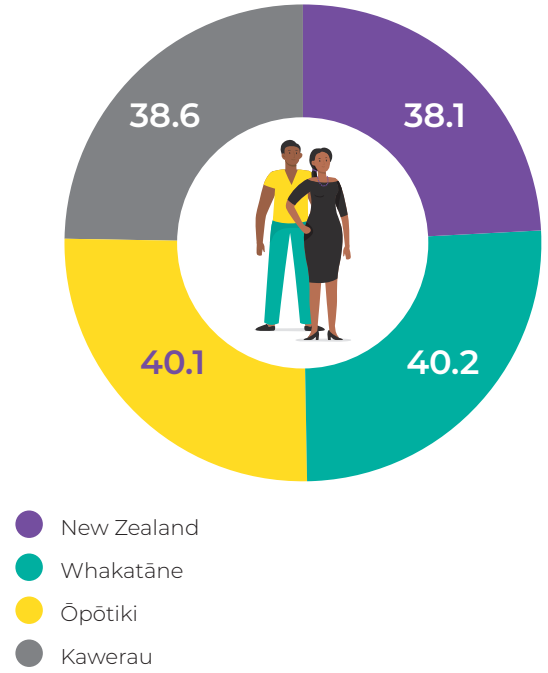


Source: Stats NZ Subnational population projections, by age and sex, 2018(base) - 2048 (update) - Medium projection, December 2022

Figure 15: Demographic change

Median age

2023

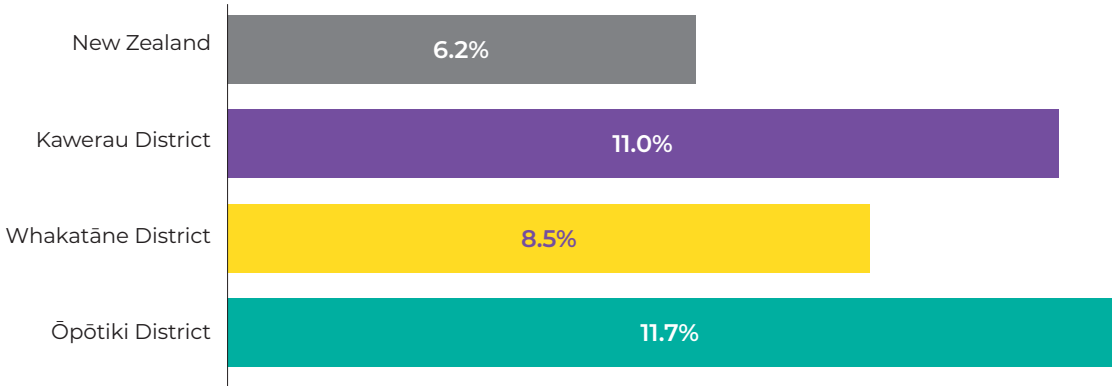


Source: Stats NZ Census 2023, (Usually Resident Population)

Figure 16: Median age

Household crowding 2023

Percentage of households requiring one or more additional bedrooms



Source: Stats NZ Census 2023

Figure 17: Household crowding

Housing register 2024

Number of applicants on the register for social housing

Region	Sep-19	Sep-24	% Increase
Kawerau	36	**60**	**67%**
Ōpōtiki	21	**93**	**343%**
Whakatāne	117	**291**	**149%**

Source: Ministry of Social Development

Figure 18: Housing register

House values 2024

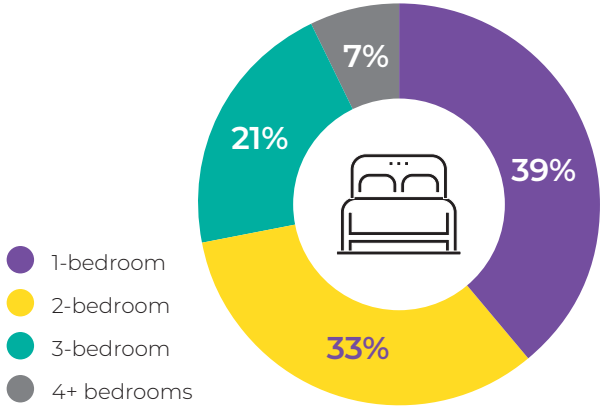
Region	Sep-19	Sep-24
Kawerau	$218,000	**$398,000**
Ōpōtiki	$304,000	**$506,000**
Whakatāne	$434,000	**$716,000**
New Zealand	$664,000	**$908,000**

Between March 2018 and September 2024, average house values have increased by 82% for Kawerau, 67% for Ōpōtiki and 65% for Whakatāne. For all NZ, the increase was 37%

Source: Infometrics (NB: Infometrics source house value data from CoreLogic)

Figure 19: House values

Housing register by bedroom



Source: Ministry of Social Development

Figure 20: Housing register by bedroom

Natural hazards and climate resilience

The Eastern Bay faces various natural hazards, including flooding, landslides, earthquakes, coastal hazards, and rising groundwater levels. This is expected to worsen as our climate changes, further limiting available land for future growth and increasing risk levels for some existing communities.

Flooding, river management and flood protection are key considerations for future development. An integrated and adaptive strategy, including consideration of managed retreat, is needed to support future growth to enable resilience in the long term.

Where are we now?

The Eastern Bay is already experiencing the impacts of a changing climate and natural hazards. This includes significant flooding events, the spread of new pests, coastal erosion, greater calcification of the ocean and increasing drought-like conditions. We have a rapidly closing window of opportunity to enable climate-resilient development.

Our communities, iwi, hapū, councils and key stakeholders must make well-informed decisions about the levels of risk we are prepared to accept, now and for future generations. Lessons from past events, both locally and across New Zealand, highlight the significant economic and social costs of major floods, particularly for communities located in flood schemes. Cyclone Gabrielle alone is estimated to have caused up to $14.5 billion in damage[4].

River flooding presents an ongoing challenge for the Eastern Bay. Rivers are dynamic systems and have the potential to cause damage to people, property, taonga, and infrastructure. New data is being obtained to improve insights into the vulnerability of low-lying settlements to natural hazards and the changing dynamics of large river systems. Affordability, a changing climate, and residual risk are key issues for the flood scheme.[5]

Some existing settlements are subject to residual risk from over-design events. Existing settlements in the Eastern Bay that rely on flood protection schemes, such as stopbanks, are not typically susceptible to smaller events. However, extreme weather events, like Cyclone Gabrielle or Cyclone Debbie, could exceed the system's capacity or cause failures. Therefore, even with mitigation measures such as flood defences, land use restrictions, or other engineering solutions, the risk of damage or unforeseen impacts on community wellbeing remains.

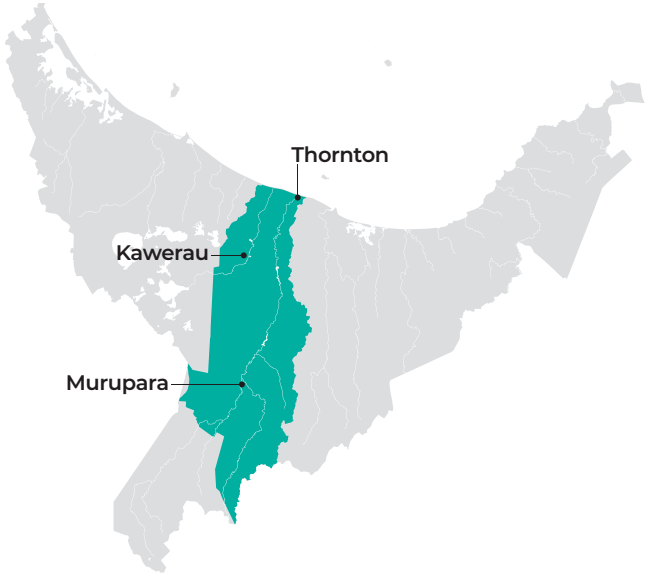
Climate change affects councils' strategic infrastructure needs and costs. We must plan for maintenance, renewals and new projects for water supply, stormwater, wastewater systems, and transportation. Stormwater management involves planning for larger capacity pipes and overflow areas in master planning, while wastewater treatment plants will need to be in climate-safe locations. Transport decisions include determining where to build new roads or bridges and selecting suitable sealing materials. Long-term solutions might involve shifting or reducing access to high-risk roads. Other actions could involve finding alternative freshwater sources, monitoring saltwater intrusion, and preparing for microbial spread in drinking water during warmer weather.

[4] Impacts from the North Island weather events - Information release - 27 April 2023

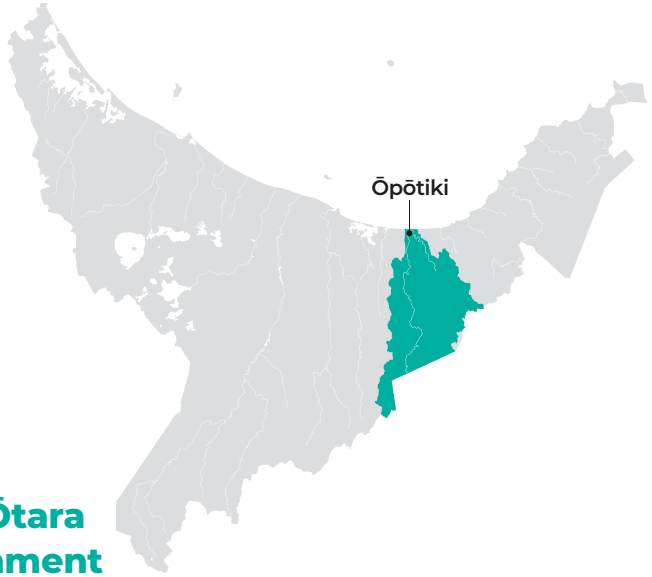
[5] BOPRC Long Term Plan 2024-2034: Infrastructure Strategy

Whakatāne-Tauranga Rivers Catchment

Rangitāiki Drainage Catchment

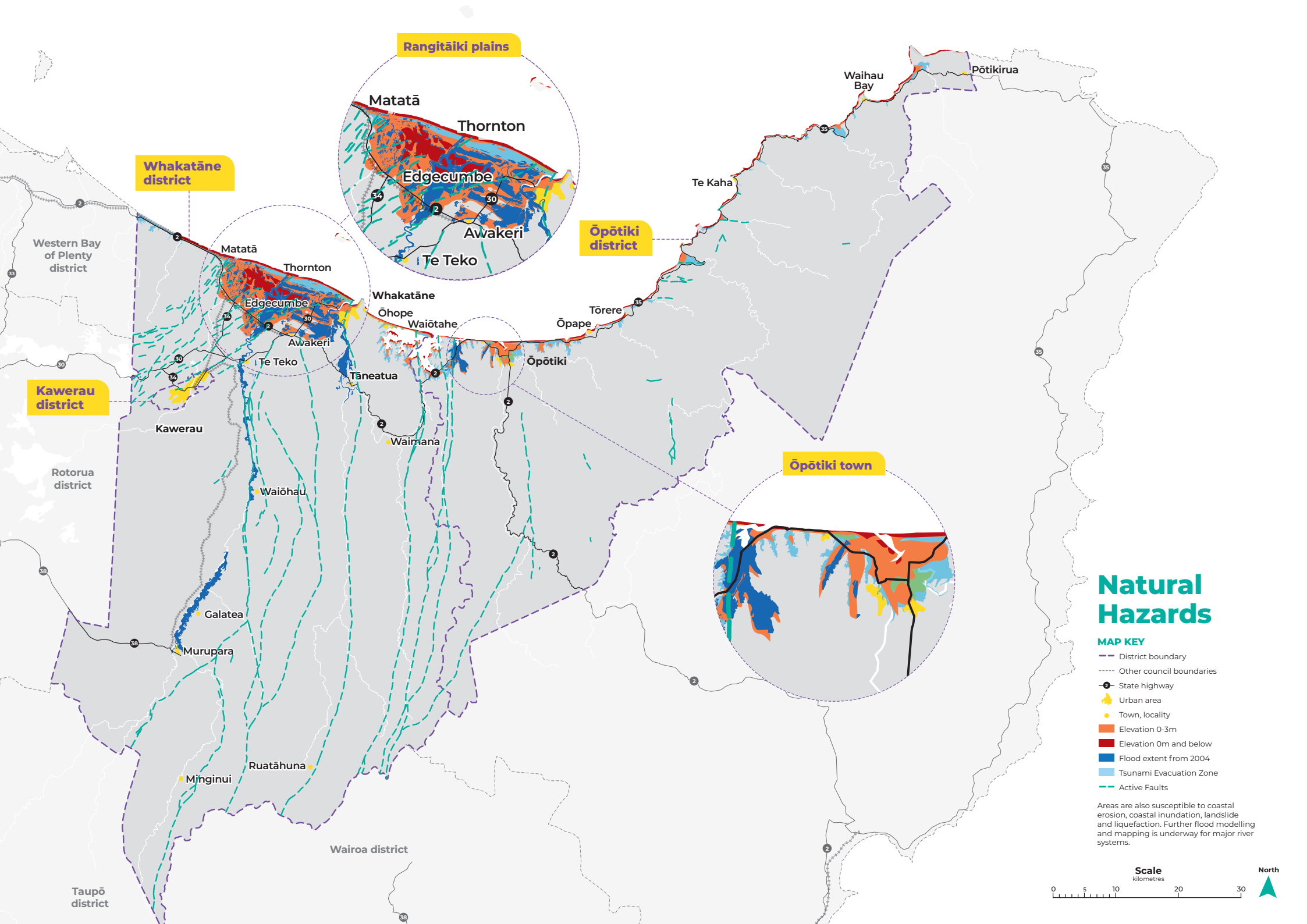


Rangitāiki-Tarawera Catchment



Waioweka-Ōtara Rivers Catchment

Figure 21: Catchment locations


Rangitāiki plains
Matatā
Thornton
Edgecumbe
Awakeri
Te Teko
Whakatāne district
Ōpōtiki district
Kawerau district
Western Bay of Plenty district
Rotorua district
Taupō district
Wairoa district
Waihau Bay
Pōtikirua
Te Kaha
Tōrere
Ōpape
Ōpōtiki
Whakatāne
Ōhope
Waiōtahe
Tāneatua
Waimana
Kawerau
Waiōhau
Galatea
Murupara
Minginui
Ruatāhuna
Ōpōtiki town
Natural Hazards
MAP KEY
District boundary
Other council boundaries
State highway
Urban area
Town, locality
Elevation 0-3m
Elevation 0m and below
Flood extent from 2004
Tsunami Evacuation Zone
Active Faults
Areas are also susceptible to coastal erosion, coastal inundation, landslide and liquefaction. Further flood modelling and mapping is underway for major river systems.
Scale
kilometres
0 5 10 20 30
North

COMMUNITIES AND SETTLEMENTS: Ōpōtiki town, Whakatāne town and settlements along the coast may be exposed to increasing coastal hazards and rainfall relating to flooding.

Kawerau is projected to experience relatively high increases in temperature which may be exposed to increasing rainfall related flooding, extreme weather, drought and fire.

HORTICULTURE: Kiwifruit and avocado orchards on the Rangitāiki Plains may face increased flooding, groundwater rise and salinity stress. Orchards may also suffer from reduced winter chill, drought and increasing damage from severe weather.

AGRICULTURE: Farms on the Rangitāiki Plains may face increased flooding, increasing heat stress and increased pests and diseases.

Farms on hill country in Kawerau may face increased loss of productivity and damage from erosion, extreme events, drought and increasing temperatures.

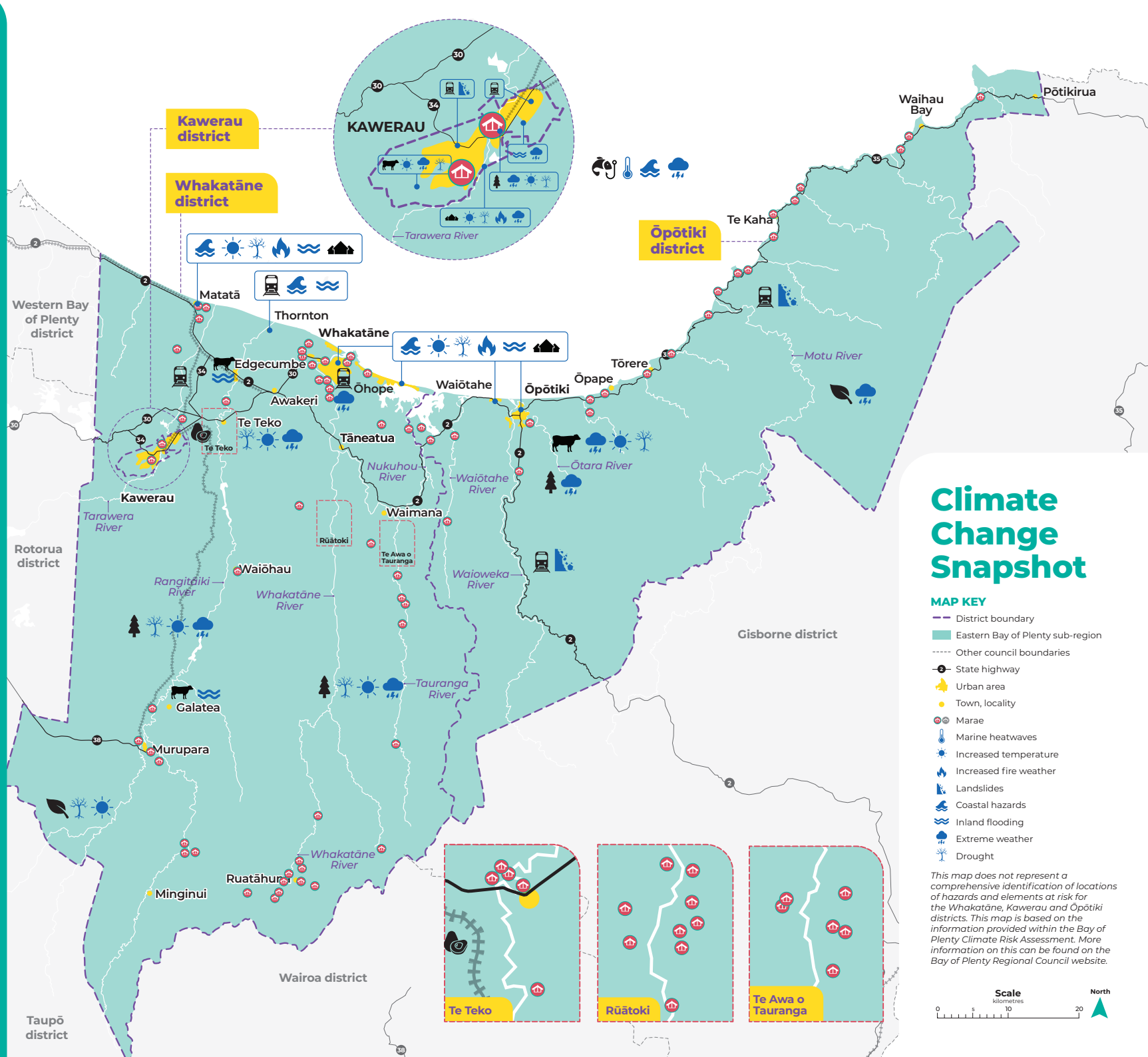
Farms on Ōpōtiki District's river flats may face increased flooding and damage from severe weather.

FORESTRY: The strong forestry processing industry within Kawerau may face increasing disruption from regional climate impacts on forestry. Pockets of forestry in the foothills in the Rakumara Ranges and Kaingaroa Forest are at risk from increasing extreme weather, drought, landslides and fire risk as well as disruptions to logging connections due to flooding of transport routes.

NATIVE ECOSYSTEMS: Native forests within Te Urewera ranges and the frost flats are at risk from increasing temperatures. Native forests within Raukumara Ranges may be damaged from increasing rainfall and erosion. In both environments, increasing rainfall may increase sediment in rivers and cause sediment plumes to discharge, causing damage to coastal ecosystems.

TRANSPORT: Rail including the Murupara and Matatā rail lines may be exposed to increased disruptions from landsides. Whakatāne Airport may also face increased damage and disruption. State Highway 2 and State Highway 35 may face increased damage and disruption from landslides, which may restrict access to large areas of the East Cape.

MARINE ECOSYSTEMS AND FISHERIES: Warming, acidification and sediment deposition may have severe consequences for the oyster and mussel farms, marine ecosystems and species that inhabit the Ōhiwa Harbour and the open coast.



Climate Change Snapshot

MAP KEY

- District boundary
- Eastern Bay of Plenty sub-region
- Other council boundaries
- State highway
- Urban area
- Town, locality
- Marae
- Marine heatwaves
- Increased temperature
- Increased fire weather
- Landslides
- Coastal hazards
- Inland flooding
- Extreme weather
- Drought

This map does not represent a comprehensive identification of locations of hazards and elements at risk for the Whakatāne, Kawerau and Ōpōtiki districts. This map is based on the information provided within the Bay of Plenty Climate Risk Assessment. More information on this can be found on the Bay of Plenty Regional Council website.

Scale kilometres 0 5 10 20

North

What is being done?

Significant work is already underway to address the risks of natural hazards and a changing climate. Several initiatives relevant to Our Places are included here:

Whakatāne District Council has developed a Climate Change Action Plan focusing on transport, energy, water services, waste management, land use, and the built environment. These considerations are now embedded in council's planning processes, integrated into Asset Management Plans, the Long-Term Plan 2024-2034 and the Infrastructure Strategy. Additionally, the council's Climate Change Risk Assessment identifies and prioritises climate risks to develop local adaptation plans with the community. Over time, these plans will be incorporated into major documents, including Our Places.

Ōpōtiki District Council has included a workstream in its Long-Term Plan 2024-34 to better understand the district's key risks and hazards. It also investigates mitigation measures such as additional stopbanks and temporary stormwater storage solutions. This includes gathering place-based research to inform adaptation planning for the township and coastal communities, as well as long-term infrastructure planning. The findings will help determine potential costs for replacing infrastructure assets, explore options for property buy-outs in the event of major flooding, and define the role of other agencies, including Central Government. As a first step, Ōpōtiki District Council, in partnership with the Toi Moana Bay of Plenty Regional Council's (BOPRC), are scoping a risk assessment for the existing township.

Kawerau District Council is preparing stormwater modelling to inform future planning decisions.

Long-term river management planning is underway as part of the BOPRC River Scheme Sustainability Project. This will ensure the long-term viability and effectiveness of flood schemes with a focus on the Whakatāne–Tauranga, Rangitāiki-Tarawera and Waiwoeka- Ōtara catchments. Where possible, options will be considered to make 'room for the river', particularly in rural areas where land can be utilised for flood management. This approach allows for protection without impacting existing townships while risk management responses are developed.

Evacuation mapping is being prepared for flooding and tsunami to inform emergency and evacuation planning for rural and urban areas. This work aims to identify welfare centres, safe evacuation routes and safe locations to support emergency preparedness. Civil Defence and Emergency Management play a crucial role in ensuring that lifelines such as power, internet, and mobile phone services remain resilient in the event of extreme natural hazard events.

The changing climate is likely to have significant impacts on Māori and their role as kaitiaki. These impacts stem from the risks posed to the natural environment, to which Māori have an innate connection. The changing climate is expected to increase existing inequities and vulnerabilities within Eastern Bay communities. It is likely to have a greater impact on Māori due to current income levels, health statistics, and unemployment levels. Local iwi and hapū are beginning adaptation planning with support from BOPRC community-led adaptation funding and other Central Government agencies. Iwi-led approaches in Maraenui, Ōpape and Tōrere in the Ōpōtiki District are leading the way for localised adaptation planning in the Eastern Bay.

The changing climate is anticipated to impact the productivity of rural areas that support local rural economies and sustain nearby townships. Investment in water storage solutions is essential to support a diverse range of energy systems and improve grid resilience. To enable this, councils may need to work alongside industry to advance climate-resilient infrastructure and sustainable agricultural land-use practices. This includes promoting agricultural diversification and other economic strategies to reduce vulnerability to climate impacts and strengthen long-term economic resilience.

What does the future hold?

Flood protection and more adaptive approaches: Flood protection will continue to play a key role in supporting community wellbeing. However, as conditions change, more adaptive and resilient approaches may need to be explored to ensure communities remain safe and resilient to the long-term effects of natural hazards and a changing climate.

Integrated stormwater management: Recognising the increasing costs of maintaining the flood schemes and managing climate-related risks to people, property and infrastructure, the spatial plan promotes integrated stormwater management as a key component of future growth planning. Communities will have the opportunity to help shape new growth areas, including Awakeri, Hukutaia, and Matatā, by contributing to the planning process.

Improved information about risk: Natural hazard mapping is required as part of the Regional Policy Statement and will soon become available for flooding, coastal erosion and inundation and tsunami mapping. Once this information is accessible, technical risk assessments can be undertaken for at-risk locations to increase community awareness and inform future planning decisions.

Integrated adaptive planning responses: As a starting point, assessing natural hazard risk is critical to better inform councils and communities at a local level. For townships defended by stopbanks, a range of risk reduction responses will be required and have implications for:

- River management planning
- Asset management planning
- Adaptation planning
- Emergency management planning
- Land-use planning

Adaptation planning is an iterative process that relies on a whole-community approach to achieve effective solutions. Ultimately, risk management responses will reflect the level of risk the community is willing to accept and can afford.

The community must be at the centre of all solutions: In Priority Growth Areas with existing natural hazard risks, such as Ōpōtiki and Whakatāne townships, risk assessments are to be prepared in accordance with the Regional Policy Statement. These assessments will inform the development of adaptive planning responses to manage natural hazard risk. Additional risk assessments may be progressed for other at-risk locations across the sub-region, including Tāneatua, Te Teko and Edgecumbe.

Where appropriate, some communities may need to consider long-term strategies to ensure existing areas are resilient. If affordable or feasible solutions are not available, relocating from highly vulnerable locations may need to be considered.

Future risk management decisions will have significant implications for community wellbeing and livelihoods. The outcomes of these assessments must be carefully balanced alongside other local priorities, including housing supply, economic growth, and social wellbeing. We need to ensure communities are at the centre of any future adaptation planning.

Climate change adaptation roadmap

As we better understand the impacts of hazards and a changing climate, what does this mean for local communities, iwi, hapū, and stakeholders? Experts and decision makers play a key role at all stages of the process.

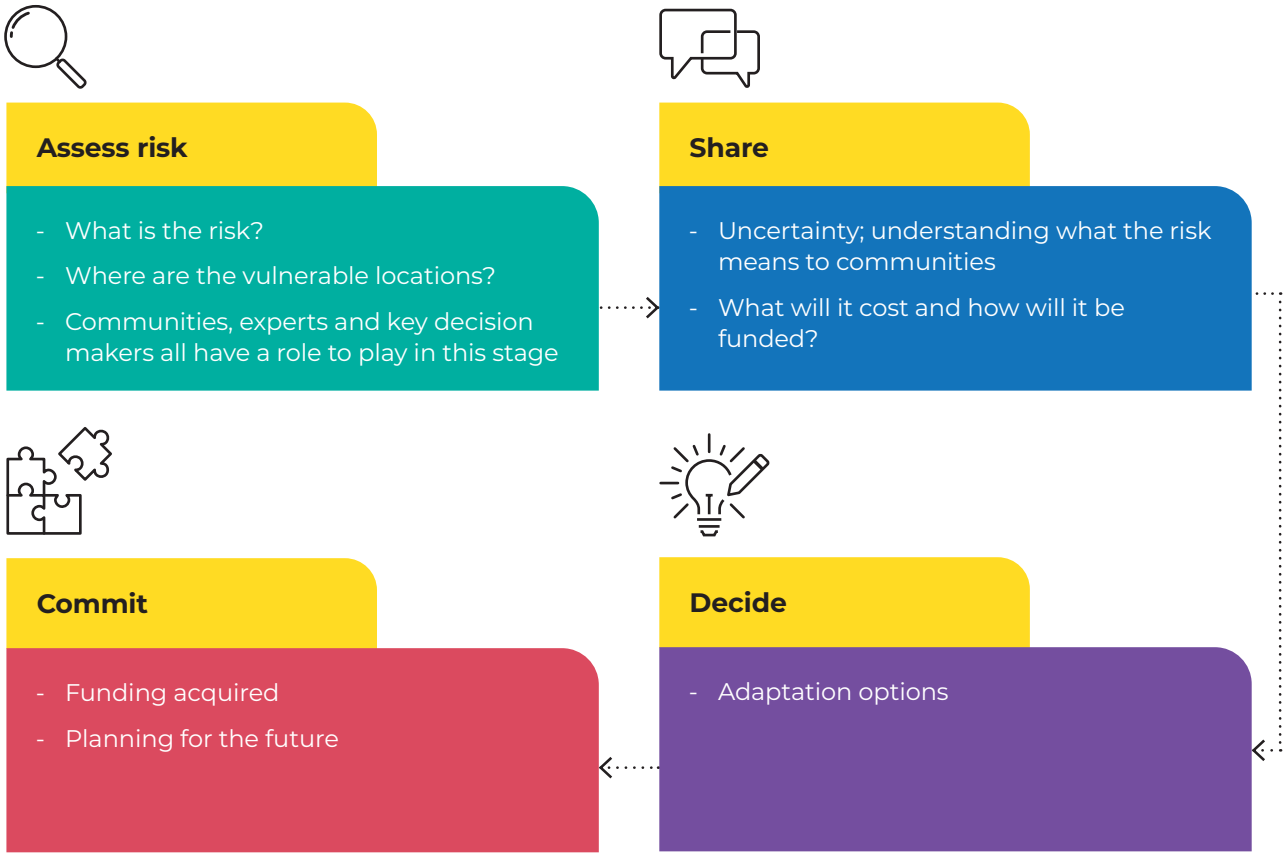


Figure 24: Risk reduction roadmap

Rural environment

The Eastern Bay's rural environment will remain a cornerstone of our region's prosperity, identity and lifestyle. Access to goods, services, and community amenities in vibrant urban centres will support this. We need to continue priority efforts towards:

- Minimising land fragmentation
- Managing incompatible land uses
- Unlocking Māori land for development
- Fostering strong links between rural and urban areas

Where are we now?

The sub-region includes vast rural areas of native forest and bush, plantation forestry, pastoral agriculture, horticulture and other primary industries. Extensive forestry dominates the less fertile areas in the south and south-east of the sub-region, while dairying is predominantly located on fertile, mid-coastal lowlands. Rural land use plays a crucial role in our economy.

Highly productive land protection

Versatile and productive soils are essential to the primary production industry in the Eastern Bay. Highly productive soils are ideal for growing a wide range of crops due to their fertility and favourable physical properties. They require less mitigation to be productive, making them highly valuable for agriculture.

The National Policy Statement for Highly Productive Land (NPS-HPL) protects these valuable soil resources, providing guidelines for local authorities to identify and manage them. It supports a balanced approach that enables urban growth while preserving land essential for food production. The NPS-HPL categorises soils into different classes based on their productivity. It aims to protect these soils for their ongoing use in land-based primary production while avoiding inappropriate subdivision, development and use. Highly productive land has been mapped for Land Use Capability classes 1, 2, and 3 under the current NPS-HPL. Amendments have been signalled to remove class 3 land, but these are not currently in effect.

Māori freehold land is mainly in rural locations

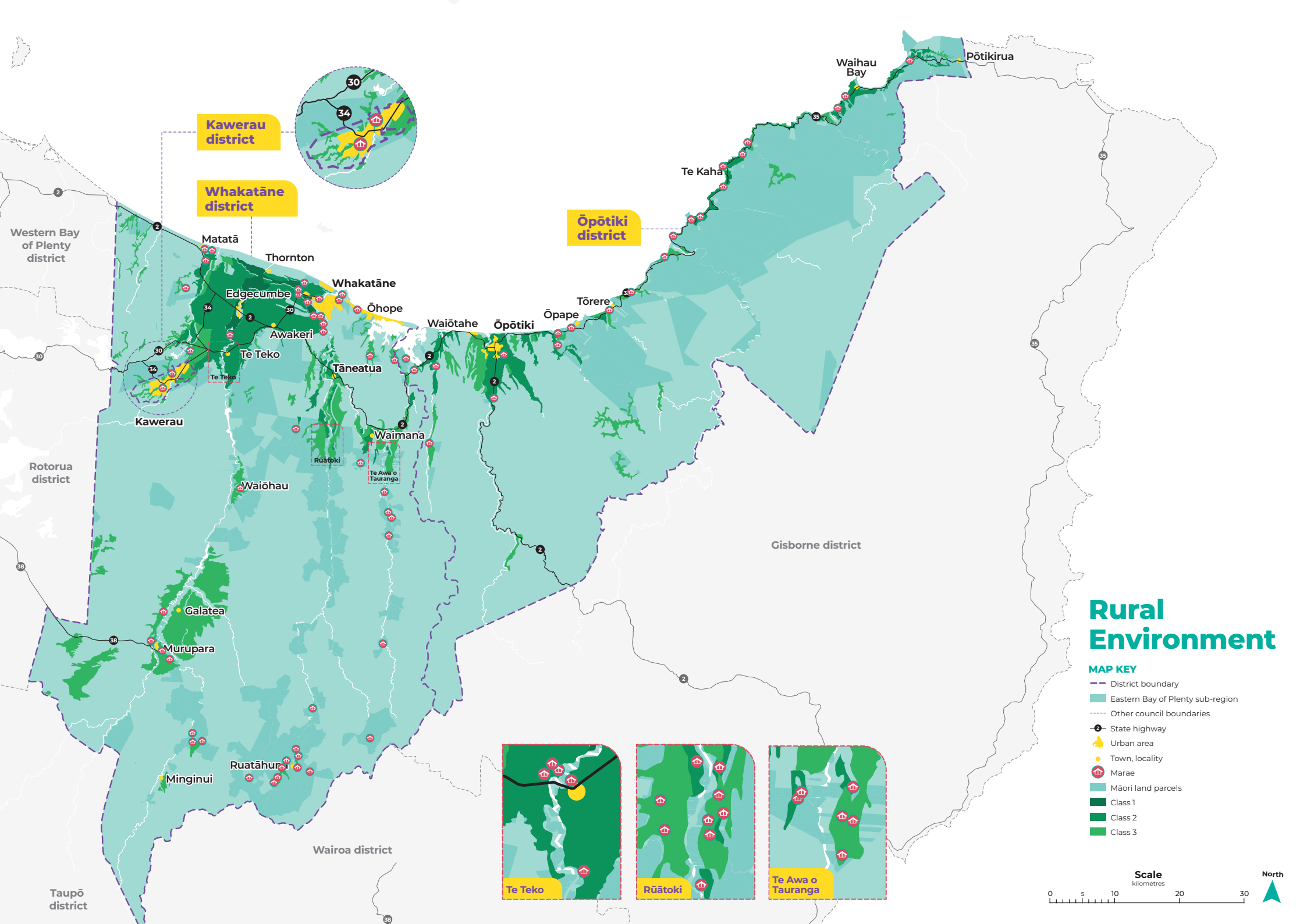
The confiscation of land and associated land use changes have resulted in the widespread loss of Māori owned land. In many cases, land returned to iwi through Treaty Settlements has been located outside traditional rohe. Most iwi in the Eastern Bay have settled their Treaty claims, with their Treaty Settlements now enacted through legislation. Today, Māori freehold land makes up 22% of the Eastern Bay's area, a total of 168,987 ha[6], most of which is located in rural areas. Mana whenua have varying interests across the sub-region, recognising that Māori housing and business development are intertwined with the growth of the Eastern Bay.

Biodiversity and open spaces

There is 758,899 ha of land in the Eastern Bay, with several defining areas setting the broad structure of the rural environment. The largest of these include Te Urewera (127,845 ha), Department of Conservation land (200,891 ha), and plantation forestry land (152,713 ha)[7]. These are significant for cultural, biodiversity or economic reasons and shape the rural character of the Eastern Bay.

[6] This does not account for all land owned by Māori or Māori trust land, as some of this is held under general freehold title including large parcels of land owned by Ngāti Tūwharetoa ki Kawerau.

[7] The Eastern Bay of Plenty sub-region includes Whakatāne District, Kawerau District and Ōpōtiki District. The geographic boundaries are as of 1 January 2023. Data sources: Land Information New Zealand, Department of Conservation and Te Puni Kōkiri.


Kawerau district
Whakatāne district
Ōpōtiki district
Western Bay of Plenty district
Rotorua district
Gisborne district
Wairoa district
Taupō district
Matatā
Thornton
Whakatāne
Edgecumbe
Ōhope
Awakeri
Te Teko
Tāneatua
Waiōtahe
Ōpōtiki
Ōpape
Tōrere
Te Kaha
Waihau Bay
Pōtikirua
Kawerau
Waimana
Rūātoki
Te Awa o Tauranga
Waiōhau
Galatea
Murupara
Ruatāhuna
Minginui
Te Teko
Rūātoki
Te Awa o Tauranga
Rural Environment
MAP KEY
District boundary
Eastern Bay of Plenty sub-region
Other council boundaries
State highway
Urban area
Town, locality
Marae
Māori land parcels
Class 1
Class 2
Class 3
Scale
kilometres
0 5 10 20 30
North

Te Urewera: The Te Urewera Act was a key part of the Treaty of Waitangi settlement negotiated between Tūhoe and the Crown. In brief, Te Urewera Act 2014 recognises:

- Te Urewera is and has always been the homeland of Tūhoe.
- Te Urewera is recognised in law as an identity and legal person in its own right.
- Tūhoe are the tangata whenua (host) and kaitiaki (guardians) of Te Urewera.
- Te Urewera Board is appointed to represent the legal personality of Te Urewera and to provide governance over Te Urewera.
- Te Urewera Board may grant permits to manuhiri (visitors) on behalf of Te Urewera and Tūhoe (Tangata whenua and kaitiaki of Te Urewera) for activities such as hunting.

Source: www.ngaituhoe.iwi.nz

What does the future hold?

Effective management of growth and development is crucial, both to support the primary industries of our region's economy and to protect and enhance the ecological values of these areas.

Some of the key actions we need to take include:

Minimising land fragmentation	Managing land fragmentation has become a critical challenge due to subdivision and residential development. It threatens the productive value of rural land and makes sustainable growth more complex.
Managing incompatible land uses	Unplanned rural lifestyle development can lead to incompatible neighbouring land uses, creating reverse sensitivity concerns and negative effects on residents' wellbeing. Structure planning for new development areas must consider reverse sensitivity early in the planning process to identify spatial solutions, such as buffers or separation distances, to create good outcomes.
Unlocking Māori land for development	Includes complexities different from general title land development, such as multiple ownership, governance, financing challenges, planning restrictions, and infrastructure investment.
Fostering strong links between rural and urban areas	The connections between rural communities, townships and other service centres like Te Kaha and Murupara are important to recognise and support. Strengthening transport accessibility and resilience will help maintain these connections.

Our Places

Eastern Bay Spatial Plan

kiaora@ourplacesebop.org.nz
ourplacesebop.org.nz