

Editorial from Tim van de Molen, MP for Waikato

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Summer and the festive holiday season is upon us, bringing domestic and international tourists to the Mighty Waikato. We boast incredible attractions within the Waikato electorate including Hobbiton, the Te Aroha mineral spa, Wairere Falls, Morrinsville's Herd of Cows, and the Waitakaruru Arboretum Sculpture Park. Wider across the rest of the Waikato region we are fortunate to have an even more varied range of attractions on our doorstep, including the spectacular Hamilton Gardens, Sanctuary Mountain, SkyCity, Fieldays, Waikato Museum, and many more.

Tourism is a vital sector for both our Waikato and national economy. Visitors spend money on accommodation, foods and beverages, entertainment, transport, services, and retail goods. We have huge potential for tourism earnings with our existing attractions and the innovative entrepreneurs creating new attractions, hospitality services, and retail outlets throughout Waikato. As visitor numbers to Waikato increase, so do enterprises supporting these, such as businesses shuttling visitors to connection points on the Hauraki Rail Trail and tramping in the Kaimai ranges, and food vendors in Hamilton and our provincial towns. It's a highlight of my role as an MP to hear about, visit, and experience the various businesses supporting our Waikato tourism sector as I travel around my electorate and further around the region. We must maximise the opportunity tourism brings to our region and deliver exciting and memorable experiences to our visitors.

Our National-led Government is focused on enhancing the tourism sector to continue to grow the economy for the benefit of all New Zealanders. We know increased tourism creates more businesses, more jobs, and increased wages – putting more money into Kiwi's pockets. Tourism is New Zealand's second largest export earner, worth \$17b per annum and the sector supports nearly 200,000 jobs across the country. Our Government is boosting the sector with our \$40 million Events Attraction Package, commencing in 2026, to attract more large-scale international events to New Zealand and a \$10 million Events Boost Fund to support existing events. Further, we're funding \$10 million with our Regional Tourism Boost Campaign to incentivise international visitors to visit and up to \$10 million for tourism infrastructure upgrades including the ever-popular cycle trails, such as Te Awa River Ride and the Hauraki Rail Trail.

In the year to September 2025, New Zealand saw an increase in Australian visitors up 12 per cent (153,500) compared to September 2024. With direct flights between Australia and the Waikato again, we must capitalise on the ease of access and entice more Australian visitors to come here, to eat, play and stay.

This summer, when not busy in your own business or place of work, I hope you and your family, and any visitors you welcome to Waikato, take the opportunity to experience our local attractions and support the businesses which provide services to this vital sector.



Note to the Editor: Thank you for publishing this editorial.

To comply with Parliamentary guidelines, the editorial heading or the notation at the end must identify Tim van de Molen as the MP for Waikato. It must be accompanied by the House of Representative's crest (black, on white background) or the funding statement "Funded by Parliamentary Service". Our preference is to display the House of Representative's crest.

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I am working to grow tourism in our region with an official Great Walk on the Kaimai Range, from Wairere Falls to Mount Te Aroha. This would be massive for our region as the northern-most Great Walk, accessible 12 months of the year, within close proximity to two international airports and a cruise terminal, and over half of our domestic population within a two-hour drive. It's spectacular walking in all seasons and the Wairere Falls are especially good viewing after a period of rainfall. With the numerous tracks linking to this walk, it can cater for day trips through to the full five-day experience. The opportunity is significant, and I welcome your support for the Kaimai Great Walk project.

Our National-led Government is continuing to invest in New Zealand's future. That includes 17 new Roads of National Significance, including the extension of the Waikato Expressway to Piarere which is now consented, with construction commencing in 2026 (it would have been completed about now if it hadn't been cancelled by the last government). Our longer term aim to extend the expressway to Tauranga is ambitious, but vital to deliver the prosperity, safety and social connection our regions deserve. I'm excited to see this stage progress for the benefit of everyone here in our region. The Southern Links project, linking SH3 to SH1 at Tamahere will be the next major transport connection for our region. Critical infrastructure like these investments are essential to deliver real value for families, commuters, and businesses. This is part of an infrastructure pipeline now worth \$275 billion – delivering schools, hospitals, homes, and better-connected communities nationwide. Infrastructure such as road transport networks are essential to Waikato businesses freighting products and visiting clients, as well as to their employees commuting to workplaces. We must ensure arterial links throughout Waikato and further to Auckland and Tauranga are fit-for-purpose, safe, and foster efficient and productive commerce.

We're pressing ahead with major reforms, including the complete replacement of the Resource Management Act, overhauling council structures to drive efficiency, and changes to building compliance. By changing the earthquake prone building system to focus on strengthening buildings that pose real risk, we're reducing unnecessary costs for Waikato building owners and enabling our local buildings to be utilised for commercial and community benefit. We are prioritising our Going for Growth goals, ensuring the changes made will drive productivity. For many business owners, 2025 has been difficult. Our plan is working. For two years, we've been focused on fixing the basics and it's paying off. The future is looking stronger, brighter, and full of opportunity. Together, we're building a better country.

Do you live in the Waikato electorate? Enter your address here to check – www.vote.nz/maps/find-your-electorate/. Should you wish to share your views on an issue, or reach out for my support, please feel welcome to contact me on 0800 GET TIM (0800 438 846) or email Tim.vandeMolenMP@parliament.govt.nz. Wishing you, your business teams, and your family all the best for a wonderful festive season. I look forward to seeing you in 2026. – Tim van de Molen, MP for Waikato.



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