



BAY OF CONNECTIONS

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Opotiki harbour funding an important step for potential aquaculture sector

Funding to improve Opotiki harbour is an important first step towards realising the region's aquaculture potential, says Bay of Connections governance group chairman John Cronin.

The Opotiki Harbour Transformation project has received a \$92,000 grant from BayTrust which will be used for work being done to improve the Eastern Bay of Plenty town's harbour entrance so it can be used year-round.

The harbour project is part of a wider plan to promote economic growth in the area through the expansion of the country's largest offshore marine farm, Eastern Seafarms.

Future development of aquaculture is a key focus of the Bay of Connections, a regional economic development strategy for the wider Bay of Plenty region that sets out the goals and priorities for sustainable, region-wide, economic growth.

Bay of Connections' vision is to grow an integrated and sustainable aquaculture industry in the Bay of Plenty with export sales of \$250 million by 2025. The regional vision is in line with the New Zealand Aquaculture Strategy, which is aiming for exports totalling \$1 billion by 2025 and it's envisaged the Bay of Plenty will be responsible for about a quarter of the aquaculture industry's sales by then.

Mr Cronin says the Opotiki project is vital for the development of aquaculture in the region, however, any expansion is dependent on improving the harbour entrance so the BayTrust grant will play a major role in ensuring that happens.

"This funding is great news not only for Opotiki, but also for the region's aquaculture aspirations. Our waters are among the best in the country for aquaculture and with low competition for water space in the Eastern Bay, the region is well positioned to take advantage of its natural resources," he says.

Chairman of the Bay of Plenty Regional Aquaculture Organisation action group, Graeme Coates, says the Eastern Bay of Plenty is proving to be a unique and positive area for mussel growing and better onshore facilities are needed for it to expand.

Research has shown Bay of Plenty waters are among the most productive in New Zealand with opportunities for large-scale marine and land-based operations to farm a range of species for local consumption and export.

“At the moment there is just one mussel farm at Opotiki, but there will be more opportunities for other species as we get to understand this area, see how it develops and get better access to the site. Harbour improvements will enable this to happen,” Mr Coates says.

“To ensure the expansion of aquaculture in the region we need local infrastructure to support it, including an all-weather port. It’s very pleasing to know the funding to enable this to happen is being made available so the industry can advance.”

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