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Tourism vision from Wine Country

ROGER MORONEY | 8th September 2010

A bold new plan to create a Regional Tourism Organisation to drag Hawke's Bay out of a visitor slump was unveiled at yesterday's Wine Country Regional Tourism Conference in Napier.

Hawke's Bay Wine Country chairman Sam Orton made it clear to the more than 100 attendees that the region needed a major spark to address a slide which had seen the Bay slip down the list of regions with appeal to visitors. And that spark would cost.

"If we don't get in there and put money into this region then we will go down the gurgler," he said.

Wine Country is calling for \$200,000 from the region's tourism sector to join with \$800,000 of regional funding to build a dedicated RTO out of the uncertainty around Venture Hawke's Bay.

The RTO would be sector-led and would champion the Wine Country brand. It would not be concerned with economic development as Venture was.

"We strongly believe that things have to change," said Mr Orton. "We have to return to the top of the pile as I'm sick of hearing we are way down the (tourist visitors) list."

Over the past five years, while other regions had grown, visitor numbers to the Bay had fallen.

It was estimated the region lost \$10.8 million in tourism revenue in 2009.

He said the Bay's tourism foundation had been viewed as "dysfunctional and flawed".

Mr Orton underlined "re-invigoration of industry engagement and collaboration; encouragement of product development and re-energising of the existing brand".

The objective, should the plan receive a mandate from the regional council and the industry in November, was to create a partnership jointly funded by the HBRC and industry members to oversee one agency which would have support from all sectors of the industry and all local councils.

He had committed Hawke's Bay Wine Country to

finding \$200,000 as part of its input.

"To date we have \$60,000 to \$70,000 on board."

At this point one delegate called out "well done Sam ... you've got my support boy" and many others applauded in agreement. Editorial, p6. Business, p8

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