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Editorial: Wine Country asks for skin in the game'

ANTONY PHILLIPS - Editor | 8th September 2010

Talk is cheap, they say.

That wasn't the case yesterday, however, as a fair amount of money, effort and inspiration went into the Hawke's Bay Wine Country Regional Tourism Conference at Napier War Memorial Conference Centre.

There was a full day of industry updates and speakers, including a key note address from Ngahihi o te ra Bidois, tourism entrepreneur and motivator, who challenged the local industry to seize the opportunity to improve visitor numbers to the region.

"Are you ready," he asked, to do your utmost not only for your business but for all tourism in the Bay.

It was a theme picked up by former Tourism New Zealand supremo George Hickton and Hawke's Bay Wine Country chairman Sam Orton.

The messages were clear.

From Mr Hickton: Wine Country is one of the strongest brands in New Zealand tourism but it has been unloved. Our best opportunity is to back it with a clear, single-minded determination and push it hard.

From Mr Orton: Hawke's Bay needs a dedicated Regional Tourism Organisation with serious input from the sector. The tourism operators must put not only effort into a new RTO but money.

Ah, money. It's a hard thing to ask for but that is what the talk was about at the end of the day.

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Wine Country is asking tourism operators to collectively stump up \$200,000 to pump into a proposed new RTO structure which is sector-driven rather than Venture Hawke's Bay-driven. With their own dollars on the table, Bay tourism would have some "skin in the game" says Mr Orton.

He is right. Hawke's Bay needs the Wine Country brand to be strong again, delivering on its huge potential. And it badly needs a functioning RTO with a coherent direction and a single call to market.

Bay tourism's smartest move would be to back this initiative.

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