

Report due on central growth

By John Maslin

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The first stage in a bid to fire up the Wanganui economy is expected to be released next month.

Wanganui will be included in the report which encompasses local authorities across the central North Island, giving all of them a potential blueprint for growing their economies.

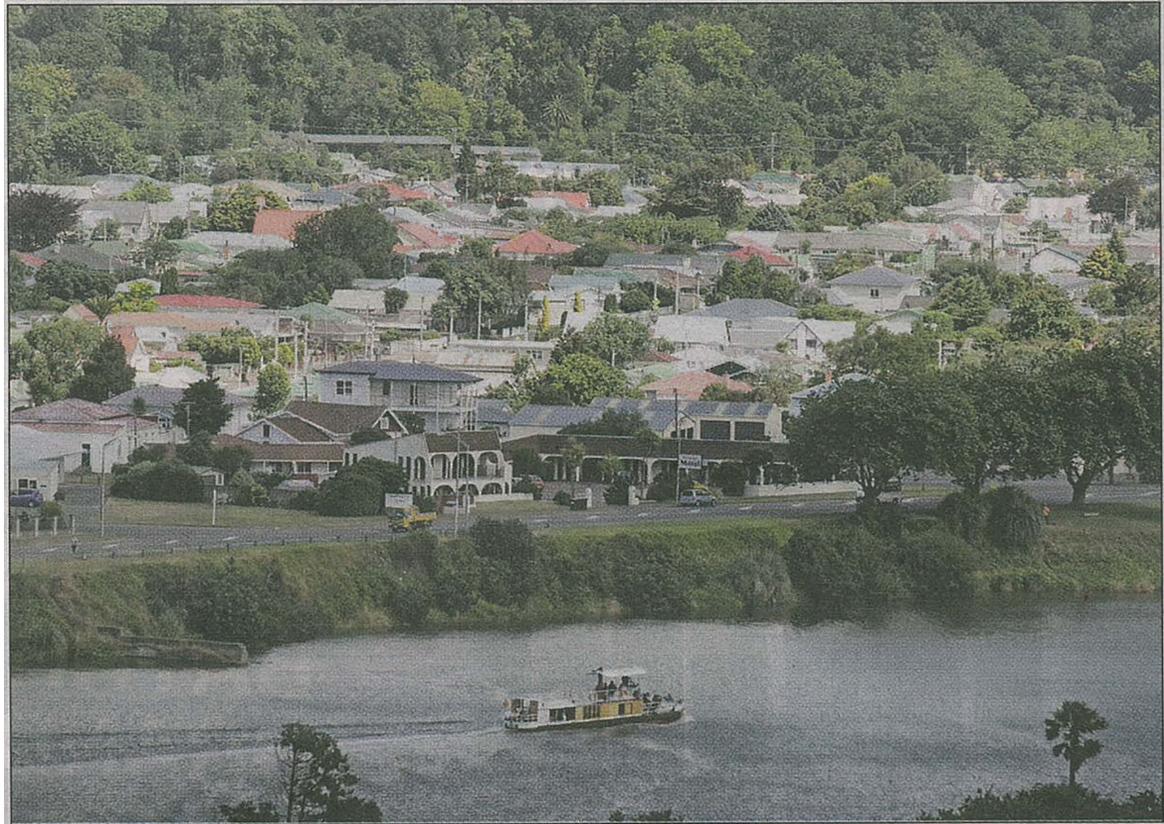
Last July, mayors and Economic Development Minister Steven Joyce launched a regional growth study to pinpoint where the region's most significant economic opportunities lay, identify what actions would encourage economic development and increase incomes and jobs in the region.

The goal is to double the region's agri-business exports from \$1.9 billion to \$3.8 billion within 10 years. Seven district mayors across the central North Island, including Wanganui's Annette Main made a commitment to the study.

The pending release of the report was flagged by Horizons Regional Council chief executive Michael McCartney when he spoke to Wanganui district councillors earlier this week.

"Once the report is released our first challenge is what happens next and that means putting forward a plan that gives life to what the study reveals," Mr McCartney said.

He said areas the report would target would not come as a surprise and were sure to include topics such as agri-business.



ECONOMY: Wanganui is known as a hub of innovation.

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"But the potential in tourism is sure to rank high for the Wanganui, Rangitikei and Ruapehu regions," he said.

But Mr McCartney said Government had made it clear that it would only be interested in investing in any scheme if the region took a collective approach.

The regional growth study aims to help increase investment opportunities, employ-

ment and incomes in the Wanganui-Manawatu region.

It would do that by bringing the collective knowledge held by central and local government, local business people, Maori, and other stakeholders, as well as official economic data and analysis.

The region has already been identified as an innovation hub, with its agricultural strengths driving research and develop-

ment in areas such as biotechnology, agricultural technology, animal health and food technology.

The study will identify further opportunities to promote economic growth and identify what actions would encourage further economic development. As well it is expected to show up any barriers to economic growth and recommendations on how these can be addressed.