

**Speech by Under Secretary for Regional Economic Development
Fletcher Tabuteau**

At the Grand Opening of the Sky Waka Gondola

Knoll Ridge Chalet, Whakapapa

July 26, 2019

(check against delivery)

E nga mana, e nga reo, rau-rangatira ma

Prestigious people, speakers of note, chiefs one and all

Nga tangata whenua, o tēnei rohe

Tena koutou katoa

*I acknowledge the indigenous people of this land and greet all of you in
te reo Maori*

Nga mihi ki te rangi e tu nei

Nga mihi ki te whenua e takoto nei

Nga mihi ki nga mea katoa

Nga mihi nui kia katou

Kia ora kotou katoa

Greetings to the sky above,

Greetings to the land below,

Greetings to you all things.

Thank you for inviting me here to speak tonight at the official opening of the Ruapehu's Sky Waka.

I'd like to acknowledge my Parliamentary colleague and Member for Te Tai Hauauru, Adrian Rurawhe.

Can I also acknowledge the RAL Board and its Chair Murray Gribben, thank you for having me here this evening.

It is a genuine pleasure to be here tonight.

What a breath-taking spot and a seriously impressive project the Sky Waka is and one that the Government is proud to support through the Provincial Growth Fund.

The aim of the PGF is to lift the productivity potential of regional New Zealand, putting the regions on a sustainable and meaningful economic footing.

And that is why it's so very rewarding to be standing here before you this evening, particularly as I recall the early beginnings of the Fund and the reasons why it's so important to this Coalition Government.

We know that there have been, over many years, concerted efforts in our regions to turn the tide around.

Equally a number of governments have developed their own share of policies intended to lift the hope and aspirations of small town New Zealand.

Today the difference is that this Coalition Government are the first to allocate significant funds to the policy. In fact, the PGF is the highest per capita economic development fund in the OECD and something we are incredibly proud to be delivering on.

The success of provincial New Zealand isn't something the PGF can or will claim sole responsibility for.

I'd like to pay particular mention to acknowledge the efforts of the Ruapehu region to align yourselves with one another, to build consensus with *all* stakeholders and find solutions that support your

region's economic opportunities and challenges. We know this isn't always easy, yet through your commitment and perseverance we are here on the wonderful evening to celebrate this spectacular facility.

The Sky Waka is one example where central government, through the PGF, has been able to get alongside what *you* the regional stakeholders have determined to be *your* priorities and support the work that was already underway. And can I say what an incredible honour that is.

We want to ensure there is increased economic activity that:

- Increases regional GDP growth
- Extends the shoulder season in the tourism sector so that your sector is not so dependent on the weather gods but has the opportunity to trade all year round
- Creates local jobs both direct and indirect that enable people to remain close to the whenua
- Enhance returns on Maori assets
- Generates opportunities for the tens of thousands of 18-24 year olds not in employment or education

The Sky Waka project hits every mark.

It's about enabling everyone to access sustainable economic development.

It's about empowering communities.

And it has gotten off the ground thanks to the wonderful work of local hapu and the iwi, the local community, Ruapehu District Council, Horizons Regional Council and officials from the Provincial Development Unit.

I thank you all for your hard work and your dedication.

You can be proud of what you have achieved.

You have made significant steps towards securing a sustainable economy for the region and its people.

The gondola means the nearby townships won't be as reliant on a ski season but an extended shoulder season means that business can maximise returns all year round.

The Central Plateau is open for business.

It's anticipated this project will boost tourism across the central North Island by 500,000 people annually by 2025 and help double regional tourism income to \$400 million a year by 2028.

With such high visitor numbers, infrastructure and services will be built to supply customer demands which mean local jobs will be created for local people.

Further Announcements

But further to this tonight, I'm also pleased to officially announce and recognise today the \$525,000 in PGF grants to Ruapehu District Council which support comprehensive tourism infrastructure through spatial planning.

The \$525,000 in PGF grants to the Ruapehu District Council (RDC), support governance and a regional visitor plan project to support long-term infrastructure planning. This includes \$225,000 (plus a \$25,000 contribution from the Department of Conservation) to RDC in the co-ordination and delivery of a spatial plan for tourism pathway infrastructure in the Ruapehu/Tongariro national park and \$300,000 over two years to support governance arrangements to drive the project and support iconic tourism developments.

It's vital that we work with our local authorities and harness the best in planning technology to secure our tourism capabilities well into the future.

And with that ladies and gentleman I would finish up with saying again thank you to all, those who have made this evening possible.

This is not only a success for the Mountain but a success that is possible because good people have come together.

It is a success for the district and its people.

It is a shining beacon to you all.

Thank you for having me here to help you mark this event and share your celebrations.

ENDS