

# DWC ANNUAL REPORT RELEASED: STRATEGIC SHIFT DRIVES RECORD INVESTMENT

Development West Coast (DWC) has released its annual report for the year ended 31 March 2024, highlighting significant achievements and record investment in West Coast enterprises amid economic volatility and political change.

Since its inception 23 years ago, the DWC Trust Fund, initially valued at \$92m, has invested \$197.4m directly into the West Coast economy, with its equity now at \$146.9m. In real terms, however, after adjusting for inflation, the Fund's current purchasing power is equivalent to \$79.8m in 2001 dollars, underscoring the importance of balancing current needs with the long-term sustainability of the fund.



**"WE RECOGNISE OUR THINKING NEEDS TO BE BOTH CURRENT AND VISIONARY, SO REGULAR REVIEW OF DWC'S STRATEGIC PLAN IS VITAL."**

Renee Rooney, Chair

The change in government late last year was preceded by a full review of DWC's Strategic Plan, leading to a renewed focus on increasing investments in West Coast-based enterprises that deliver commercial returns for DWC. This strategic shift resulted in a record \$15.02m in commercial funding approvals.

As part of this approach, DWC provided a range of financing options to existing West Coast businesses such as Bright Print and Reefton Distilling Co. Finance was also directed toward projects aimed at addressing the region's housing shortage to support the local workforce. Additionally, DWC made equity investments in innovative start-ups bringing new industries to the region, including Westland Mineral Sands Group and The New Zealand Refinery Limited, a boutique ethical gold refinery.

During the financial year, DWC allocated \$2.4m to regional development and community distributions, including \$200,000 to the West Coast Community Trust, which supported 20 diverse projects across heritage, sports, arts,

youth, and more.

"The true value of DWC to the region goes far beyond direct economic investment," said Chief Executive Heath Milne. "Our team is working tirelessly with local businesses to enhance capabilities and drive sustainable growth."

During the year, DWC supported 395 actively managed clients—up from 345 the previous year—by helping them gain knowledge, build connections, and achieve growth. Attendance at DWC's business workshops and events increased to 1,076 from 852 the previous year. Additionally, the recently concluded Upskill employment and training scheme partnered with 67 West Coast employers, helping 277 candidates gain employment. Over its life, Upskill helped nearly 1,000 people into work. The programme's significant impact was nationally recognised with a gold award for 'Best Practice for Collaboration' at the 2023 Economic Development New Zealand Awards.

As well as addressing the immediate needs of the region, DWC is committed to long-term projects and initiatives outlined in the regional development strategy, Te Whanaketanga Te Tai Poutini West Coast 2050 Strategy.

A concerted effort to boost the region's national profile led DWC to proactively secure 265 media placements both nationally and internationally, showcasing positive West Coast stories and generating around \$2m in advertising equivalency value. This work earned DWC a gold award and four silver awards at the 2024 Public Relations Institute of New Zealand Awards.

Despite limited resources, the DWC Tourism team delivered remarkable results by executing effective marketing campaigns, engaging with trade partners to promote the region, and hosting a record 108 travel agents on familiarisation trips. Their efforts contributed to the West Coast recording the highest visitor expenditure growth in the country, with spending reaching \$518m for the financial year—a 16.9% increase, outpacing the national growth rate of 7.4%.

To further strengthen and diversify the West Coast economy, DWC is actively collaborating with businesses and industries, including advancing key initiatives under the Nature Economy Project. Additionally, to help strengthen



our communities and recognise the importance of retaining local talent, DWC has continued its Tertiary Scholarship programme, awarding four annual scholarships valued at up to \$32,500 per student.

Despite rising interest rates and inflationary pressures, DWC's investment portfolio achieved a total return of 10.24%, recovering the value lost in the previous financial year. The portfolio's growth was primarily driven by strong performances in International and Australian equities, which saw gains of 23.71% and 18.33% respectively.

Milne cautioned that much of the growth during the reporting period consisted of unrealised gains - "similar to the market fluctuations you see in your KiwiSaver account." These unrealised gains contributed to DWC closing the fiscal year with a \$6.8m profit, a turnaround from the previous year's \$5m net deficit.

"The DWC investment portfolio is highly diversified, ensuring we remain in a strong position to fund future initiatives and continue to support the West Coast's economic growth."

Towards the end of the financial year, DWC conducted its annual client survey to assess its perception among the West Coast community and stakeholders. The results showed DWC's net promoter score rising to +29—marking the fourth consecutive year of improvement since the survey's inception in 2020.

"We always value feedback from our stakeholders and look forward to another year of close collaboration to unlock the business potential of the West Coast," Milne stated.

The 2024 annual report is available to download on-line.

[dwc.org.nz](https://dwc.org.nz)

## \$15M INVESTED IN WEST COAST BUSINESSES

DWC provides a range of commercial financing options for West Coast businesses, including commercial lending, equity investments, and guarantees.

During the 2023-24 financial year, DWC reviewed 13 commercial finance applications and approved 12 totalling \$15m.

### New Ethical Gold Refinery Established

DWC, in partnership with Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Waewae and the New Zealand Institute for Minerals to Materials Research (NZIMMR), has established The New Zealand Refinery Limited (NZRL), a boutique gold refinery dedicated to producing ethical gold sourced from West Coast alluvial miners.

New Zealand's stringent environmental laws mandate comprehensive land rehabilitation and water quality monitoring, ensuring minimal environmental impact from mining activities. Under its new Awa Gold brand, NZRL produces gold bullion and jewellery grain while ensuring its gold is traceable back to source, guaranteeing its authenticity as both local and ethical.



### Investment in Mineral Sands Industry

DWC has invested \$3m in Westland Mineral Sands (WMS) Group, a minerals, ports, and logistics company, to support the development of a resilient, lowcarbon supply chain and high-value mineral sands export industry.

WMS Group Managing Director Ray Mudgway says: "DWC's investment into WMS Group gives West Coasters a stake in the critical minerals and logistics future of the Coast as we develop a 50-100-year industry."

"By working together across central government, local government, DWC and private business, WMS is proving that the wider West Coast communities and New Zealand, can benefit from long term business development."

### Support for Reefton Distilling Co.

Reefton Distilling Co. has grown quickly to become an iconic West Coast brand. It is a significant part of the Reefton renaissance that has seen the town grow in both size and stature in recent years. DWC is proud to be working with Reefton Distilling Co. to support their growth ambitions as they transition from white spirits to whisky.

"We've had finance support from DWC to purchase land and buildings for expansion which has been a game changer for us," said Patsy Bass.



### New Factory Build with DWC Support

"DWC came to our aid at very short notice to help fund the building of a brand-new purpose-built 2600 square metre factory for our printed packaging division of Bright Print. They were great to work with and provided the funding we needed to make this project happen," said Dave Gordon, Director, Bright Print.

"The factory is now in full production with turnover increasing rapidly which we would not have been able to do without this new facility. It already employs eight new additional staff with more coming, and we are now sending printed packaging all over the country including supplying some of the biggest fast-food chains in NZ."

### DWC Year Comparisons 2023/24

<b>Actively Managed Clients</b>	<b>395</b>
2022-23: 345   2021-22: 305   2020-21: 390	
<b>Commercial Loans Approved</b>	<b>\$15.02m</b>
2022-23: \$4.2m   2021-22: \$14.3m   2020-21: \$6.7m	
<b>Community Distributions and Regional Development</b>	<b>\$4.0</b>
2022-23: \$7.8m   2021-22: \$6.0m   2020-21: \$3.16m	
<b>Attendees at DWC Business Events, Trainings and Workshops</b>	<b>1,076</b>
2022-23: 852   2021-22: 808   2020-21: 700	
<b>DWC's Net Promoter Score</b>	<b>+29 NPS</b>
2022-23: +21   2021-22: +13   2020-21: -1	

**"DWC HAS BEEN INVALUABLE, NOT ONLY IN HELPING ME SET UP MY WHOLE BUSINESS AND GIVING ME INITIAL SUPPORT, BUT ALL THE ONGOING SUPPORT THAT I'VE HAD AS WELL. IT'S BEEN A REALLY AMAZING EXPERIENCE."**

Jasmin Farac,  
Skin and Body by Jasmin

