CHAIR'S REPORT
AGM 10 AUGUST 2026

Tēnā koutou katoa,

It is my privilege to present the Chair's Report for the New Zealand Cruise Association's 2026 Annual General Meeting.

The past year has been one of both hard truths and genuine progress. The hard truth is that New Zealand remains in a fight to win back cruise deployment in an intensely competitive global market. The progress is that cruise is now being taken far more seriously across government, more deliberately across the tourism system, and more strategically by our own industry than at any point since the downturn began.

Last year I said our industry was at a critical juncture and that remains true today. But where last year's report focused on sounding the alarm, this year's report can also point to momentum: stronger ministerial engagement, a more coordinated cross-government approach, our Horizon Two strategy launch, and the inclusion of cruise in New Zealand's first national Tourism Policy Statement.

Those developments matter because they begin to shift the conditions that influence deployment decisions, and deployment decisions are ultimately what determine whether cruise returns to New Zealand at scale.

The challenge has not passed. New Zealand cruise visitation remains well below where it needs to be, the 2027/28 outlook remains difficult, and 2028/29 may show only modest improvement. But we are unquestionably in a stronger position than we were a year ago. The foundations for recovery are being rebuilt, and our task now is to convert that progress into deployment decisions for 2028/29 and beyond.

1. A year of progress

The most significant shift over the past year has been the move from government awareness to genuine engagement.

Twelve months ago NZCA was working hard to ensure the scale of the problem was understood. Today, cruise is firmly on the agenda across Ministers, central government agencies, Tourism New Zealand, ports, regions and industry partners.

The Cross-Government Cruise Forum has been one of the most important developments. Following the inaugural cross-government roundtable at the Beehive in July 2025, Ministers issued a Joint Ministerial Statement affirming support for cruise tourism and committing to ongoing industry forums, collaboration on biofouling solutions, regulatory and fee transparency, port productivity, innovation and low-emissions maritime connectivity.

Progress has also been reinforced at a policy level. New Zealand's Tourism Policy Statement now includes a dedicated cruise tourism vignette and recognises the need for predictable settings that lift value.

Together these developments show that cruise is increasingly being treated as part of New Zealand's wider tourism, trade, regional development and international connectivity agenda.

2. The state of cruise in New Zealand

While there has been genuine progress, we must remain honest about where the industry stands.

Horizon Two states clearly that New Zealand cruise visitation is down 40 percent in a globally growing sector, with a further decline forecast for 2026/27. The Tourism Policy Statement is equally direct, noting that in 2025/26 New Zealand cruise visitation was just over half the pre-pandemic level.

Cruise lines make deployment decisions years in advance, and the next critical decisions for 2028/29 and beyond are being made now. The window we are in is immediate, commercial and consequential.

This is not fundamentally a demand problem. New Zealand remains a destination cruise guests want to experience. The challenge is whether cruise lines see New Zealand as predictable, competitive and straightforward to do business with.

Last year's Chair's Report identified four interconnected barriers: biofouling risk, regulatory uncertainty, rising costs and New Zealand's reputation for unpredictability. Although significant progress has been made, each continues to influence deployment confidence.

Even in a down cycle the value of cruise remains substantial. In 2024/25, cruise contributed NZ$1.23 billion in total economic output, supported 8,253 jobs, generated NZ$384.2 million in wages, and delivered 1.3 million passenger visit days across 25 ports and destinations. Direct passenger expenditure reached NZ$393.7 million, with average passenger spend of NZ$313 per day ashore.

Despite the decline, these figures confirm that cruise remains a high-value, regionally distributed part of New Zealand's visitor economy.

3. What NZCA delivered

Over the past 12 months NZCA has delivered a substantial programme of advocacy, engagement and practical industry support.

NZCA advocacy helped build stronger government interest in cruise and contributed to a more coordinated programme of work, supporting ministerial engagement, bringing industry perspectives to the table, and helping inform collaboration between officials and partners on initiatives such as the Auckland biofouling solution.

We also helped secure cruise's place in national tourism policy and tourism growth roadmap discussions.

The launch of our Horizon Two strategy has given NZCA and the wider sector a sharper strategic framework. Horizon One laid the foundations through alignment, engagement and partnership-building. Horizon Two is focused on integration and impact, with deployment enablement at the centre of the next phase of work.

NZCA has also continued to rebuild relationships offshore. In September 2025 at Seatrade Europe Hamburg, cruise line meetings welcomed the Government's engagement, the Joint Ministerial Statement and progress toward an Auckland biofouling solution, while making clear that urgent follow-through remains essential.

At Seatrade Cruise Global in April 2026, NZCA took its largest delegation yet, with strong representation from ports, regions, government and industry. The attendance of the Hon Louise Upston, Minister for Tourism and Hospitality, was a significant perception win for New Zealand. Cruise line leaders saw a Minister who understood the sector, engaged directly with senior executives and reinforced that New Zealand wants cruise, values cruise and is serious about addressing the current barriers.

These conversations reinforced that positive signals must now be matched by cost competitiveness, regulatory certainty, practical biosecurity solutions and consistent delivery.

4. Our membership and association

Alongside our advocacy and strategic work, NZCA has continued to strengthen as an Association.

This year we introduced a new Platinum membership, welcomed new members, expanded the Executive Hosting Fund, and delivered updated economic impact data and regional fact sheets.

We also benefited from strong engagement across the membership, particularly from ports, regional partners, operators and cruise line members. That participation keeps our advocacy practical, credible and aligned with the realities of the sector.

We welcomed Mel Collier into a new role supporting membership and events - an appointment that reflects both the growth of the Association and the expanding work programme now required of NZCA.

I want to acknowledge Mel, CEO Jacqui Lloyd, our Board, our members and our partners for the time, advocacy and practical support you continue to contribute.

5. Rebuilding confidence: the work ahead

The focus now is to convert stronger relationships, policy recognition and practical progress into deployment.

That will require sustained delivery on the issues cruise lines have raised and clear evidence that New Zealand is predictable, competitive and operationally reliable. The test will be whether this work influences deployment decisions for 2028/29 and beyond.

Horizon Two is candid that foundational work remains incomplete. Data and measurement systems need to be integrated more fully, education and engagement tools need to be systematised, national operational guidelines need refinement, regional operating models need to become more consistent, and trans-Tasman collaboration must move from goodwill into practical coordination.

More broadly, ministerial commitment must be embedded across agencies, stakeholders must align around a “first enable deployment” mindset, and fragmented cost and compliance settings must be simplified.

Cruise lines must also be treated as genuine strategic partners, supported by stronger evidence-based advocacy, clearer accountability and better coordination across government and industry.

6. Priorities for 2026/27

The next 12 months are critical.

Our first priority is to influence deployment decisions for 2028/29 and beyond through direct engagement with cruise line decision-makers and clear evidence of progress.

Our second priority is to lock in long-term biosecurity certainty. We must continue working with MPI, ports and cruise lines to protect New Zealand’s environment while providing clearer operational pathways for compliant vessels.

Our third priority is to improve cost competitiveness and regulatory predictability. We need better forward visibility of fees and charges, earlier communication of regulatory changes and stronger coordination across agencies. The Cross-Government Cruise Forum gives us a structure to do this, but the test will be whether it results in practical change.

Our fourth priority is to strengthen New Zealand’s international cruise reputation through coordinated offshore engagement with cruise lines, Tourism New Zealand, ports and regional partners, to demonstrate that New Zealand is open, aligned and solutions-focused.

Our fifth priority is to grow the value of cruise for regions and communities. That means improving regional readiness, evidence and shore experiences, while communicating the benefits cruise brings to local jobs, businesses, visitor dispersal and regional growth.

Alongside these external priorities, NZCA will continue to strengthen the Association by growing membership, increasing member engagement, supporting the Board and team, and ensuring the organisation has the capability to deliver an increasingly important national work programme.

Every decision, every policy discussion, every operational improvement, every offshore conversation, and every part of our work should be tested against one central question: does this give cruise lines greater confidence to deploy to New Zealand?

7. Closing remarks

Twelve months ago New Zealand was at clear risk of losing further cruise deployment. That risk has not disappeared, but we are now in a much stronger position than we were a year ago - and significantly better placed to respond.

We have stronger ministerial engagement, a functioning cross-government forum, a Joint Ministerial Statement, progress on biosecurity solutions, a national Tourism Policy Statement that recognises cruise, and Horizon Two to guide our next phase.

The task now is to turn that stronger position into the practical certainty cruise lines need to secure future deployment.

To our members, our Board, our CEO and team, our ports, regional partners, operators, and colleagues across government and industry - thank you. The progress we can point to this year reflects the commitment and contribution of many people across the sector and beyond it.

New Zealand remains a world-class cruise destination, and the opportunity is still within reach. We now have the strategy, the relationships and the government recognition to rebuild deployment. The task ahead is to keep delivering.

Ngā mihi nui,
Tansy Tompkins
Chair, New Zealand Cruise Association