



For  
Tairāwhiti  
with *Aroha*♥

CYCLONE GABRIELLE

13-14 FEBRUARY 2023



## Foreword

### Thank you Tairāwhiti

THE message in so many of these stories shows how the people of Tairāwhiti look after each other. We're a close community and through adversity we've shown time and again how we come together. The result is an even more connected community and we wanted to celebrate that and acknowledge all of us.

We are stronger together. Let's continue to support and care for one another as we continue the physical recovery of our infrastructure over the next five years, as well as heal our land, waterways, sea and people.

We'd also like to thank everyone for their contribution to our Disaster Relief Fund, which meant that via the Mayor Relief Fund we could distribute more than \$3 million directly to the worst affected in our community.

We thank Central Government for listening to our needs, walking alongside us and funding us to repair the damage so our taiao (environment) and people can heal.

At the same time, we prepare ourselves for more severe weather to come as we see the impacts of climate change.

Thank you for looking after each other. We have faced more than our fair share of adversity, but together we know we can do this.

– Mayor Rehette Stoltz

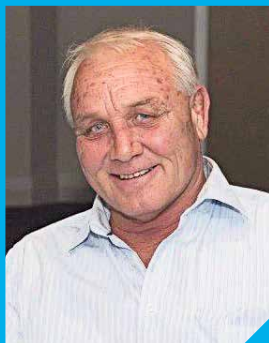


### Dedication

FOR Tairāwhiti with Aroha is dedicated to John Coates, 64, and Joseph Ahuriri, 40.

These two Tairāwhiti men lost their lives in the early morning of February 14, 2023, during Cyclone Gabrielle.

We remember them, and their whānau and friends who love them.



## Normality took a nose dive



**Cyclone Gabrielle was a devastating time for many in our region who were displaced from their homes after they were lost to flooding and/or landslides. Thousands lost everything they owned.**

IT WAS also an unprecedented time when normality took a nosedive for our whole region of around 50,000 people. In the immediate aftermath supermarkets, petrol stations and schools closed. There was no power, no internet, which meant no Eftpos or ATMS, making it cash only which caught many out. When things re-opened it was with rations on fuel and basic food supplies. Our roads were closed, and that's what trucks use to restock our shelves and petrol pumps. Supermarkets had enough on their shelves to last three to four days – tops. Fuel was a hot commodity as it was needed to run generators providing essential power.

The Eastland Network (now Firstlight Network) team and their contractors carried out the most extensive power reconnection across this region they'd ever done. (Plus, it was right on the back of having just finished the power reconnection after Cyclone Hale the month before.) Road crews and contractors worked to clear roads – the main priority was to create access for people who were isolated. Those who owned

machinery walked to get to them if they could. One man in Tokomaru Bay slept in his digger for two nights and dug himself out, as well as created access for the community. It was a huge team effort. Gisborne Airport became our region's lifeline during this isolation. Helicopters, radios and Starlink were vital lifelines.

Our region slowly became reconnected again but we also had to deal with the water crisis. An emergency alert was sent to all cellphones using special national powers that told everyone in Gisborne on city supply to "STOP" using water after multiple breaks in the water pipeline, coupled with the backup treatment plant being unable to meet demand. Everyone did their bit and demand lowered as businesses went above and beyond to help fix the broken water pipe to our city.

Water restrictions continued, and large industries and small businesses did it tough, many unable to operate at all without water. The unrelenting rain also meant the land was so sodden it was slipping away in large chunks taking more roads and access with it. Even though it's a year on, there's still so much to do, still whānau without homes. But schools are back, and they bring the biggest boost of normality and routine to our children, our next generation – and this is who we're doing this all for. So Tairāwhiti can come back better for the future of our land, water, sea and our people.

#### CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:

Sophie Rishworth, Marianne Gillingham, Kristine Walsh, Jack Marshall, Diana Dobson, Amy Shanks, Janelle Lamont.

**DISCLAIMER:** We haven't been able to include everyone who was impacted across our region, or even begin to mention all who stepped up to help in an enormous community response. Thank you to every single one of you for making our region connected by being a community-minded person.

This publication was delivered to you by a volunteer. To keep costs down, Council asked for help distributing this publication around our region, and we ended up with a team of around 100 people – thank you to everyone who took part in that effort too.



From 9-11 February 2023 advanced warning of the approaching cyclone was put out across the region by TEMO.

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SUN 12 FEB

- Region prepares for cyclone as red heavy rain warning issued for Tairāwhiti
- Summer camping sites closed, vessels leave port, schools north of Tolaga Bay shut
- Chief Executives group pre-discussion on State of Emergency declaration
- Heaviest rain predicted for Monday afternoon and evening

MON 13 FEB

- Emergency Coordination Centre activated
- Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) staff deployed
- Heavy vehicle restrictions on unsealed roads commence
- Local State of Emergency declared
- All non-essential Council services and community facilities closed until further notice.
- River levels in Hikuwai and Te Arai rivers rise
- First reports of flooding
- Evacuation centres open
- Scours open at Wainui
- SH35 between Lottin Point and Okitu closes
- SH2 to Opotiki closed and between Wairoa and Napier closed
- Residents in Tolaga Bay, Manutuke and Hicks Bay areas told to evacuate
- First power outages
- Mangatuna Bridge washes away and river levels across region rise
- Water pipeline breaks and messages to restrict water use

TUE 14 FEB

- Ormond township and Te Karaka residents asked to evacuate
- Communications cable severed - no phone or internet
- Supermarkets told not to open next day due to no eftpos and risk of civil disobedience
- Tokomaru Bay to Te Puia Road closed
- Service stations closed
- Critical water supply issues
- National State of Emergency declared and applied to six regions

SAT 18 FEB

- 100,000 litres of fuel arrives in region
- Supermarkets have eftpos and supplies in
- Power back on for most people but fibre cable still out
- 85 homes yellow stickered, 10 red stickered
- SH35 between Tolaga Bay and Te Puia Springs remains closed
- Second edition of Gisborne Herald delivered to 22,000 homes

FRI 17 FEB

- Power restored to 2,000 customers
- Free wi-fi available at Lawson Field Theatre for public.
- Major water crisis messages issued, Waipaoa water treatment plant not functioning.
- Helicopters deployed to region.
- 1,100 customers without power
- Spark restored 72 of the 152 cellphone sites

THU 16 FEB

- SH2 open but controlled access
- Convoy of trucks carrying food commences
- Search and Rescue begin grid search to check on people

WED 15 FEB

- All weather warnings lifted
- Power restored to most of Gisborne City, 4,500 other customers without power, internet access limited and no cellphone coverage
- Burials at Gisborne cemeteries suspended for 10 days
- \$40 fuel limit imposed at petrol stations
- Eftpos terminals working in some supermarkets
- 22,000 copies of Gisborne Herald printed and delivered to every Gisborne letterbox. Copies sent up coast with NZ Defence Force

**SUN 19 FEB**

- Internet and phone services come back up slowly across region
- Public urged to conserve water

TUE 21 FEB

- 42/49 schools open
- Forestry companies clear debris between Waikanae Surf Club and Waikanae Cut
- SH2 Napier to Wairoa remains closed and bypass in place for Tiniroto Road
- Unsealed road network closed to all heavy vehicles

WED 22 FEB

- SH2 Gisborne to Opotiki opens

THU 23 FEB

- Tiniroto bypass closed due to heavy rain overnight
- Precautionary evacuation of 64 homes in the Mangahauini River catchment and Tokomaru Bay township due to risk of debris dam failure.
- 64 local roads still closed
- Govt announces Ministerial Inquiry Into Land Use in Tairāwhiti and Wairoa

**MON 6 MAR**

- 54 local roads remain closed or restricted. This includes 24 bridges either closed or compromised

SAT 4 MAR

- Detour between Tokomaru Bay and Te Puia Springs opens to 4WD
- Warnings about woody debris on beaches and in sea

WED 1 MAR

- SH2 Wairoa to Napier remains closed
- SH35 Tolaga Bay to Te Puia Springs remains closed

MON 27 FEB

- Heavy rain caused flooding in Mangapapa with residents evacuated
- 140 customers without power

WED 8 MAR
















- Anniversary of Cyclone Bola

TUE 14 MAR

- National State of Emergency lifted

FRI 17 MAR

- Bridge assessments completed. 9 bridges destroyed, 14 bridges have major structural issues, 34 bridges have structural issues
- Recovery Office set up

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## Collective effort for landlocked Tokomaru Bay



LILLIAN Te Hau Ward and Gene Takurua ran the Civil Defence (CD) response in Tokomaru Bay. The township of around 500 residents was landlocked for six weeks with the bridge to Gisborne gone and the road to Te Puia Springs blocked. Before the cyclone hit Lillian and her husband Haz knew their home would be cut off, so left food for their dogs with their neighbours and headed to the township. They lived in a caravan beside the Destounis whānau who are critical to every response because “Bush Destounis has everything”. That meant a generator and a Starlink which his wife Carol had ordered after Cyclone Hale the month before.

There were around 40 volunteers on the ground checking on people and river levels, and a diverse set of skills in the community they could call on. Lillian is the CD community link in Tokomaru Bay and works at Council along with Gene. Her first request – find all the machinery and operators available, call the bosses, and ask if they have staff in Tokomaru Bay, “because we need to start clearing roads to do welfare checks”.

Ironically the next thing was to organise

was roadblocks. Even though Tokomaru Bay was landlocked, people were still trying to get out over wrecked roads and remote tracks putting themselves in danger. Community members stepped up and 24/7 security was established to stop people and with funding from MSD, Trust Tairāwhiti and the Dept of Internal Affairs the staff were able to be paid. Rural police commander Scotty Leighton and staff were on the ground helping and could be there within five minutes if there was any trouble.

The biggest concern for the community after Gabrielle was the Mangahauini slip. The Mangahauini River had been dammed by a landslide with a large amount of debris and water trapped behind it. Council scientists told them there was a 70 percent chance the dam could break so around 60 homes were evacuated at least four times.

Lillian worked long days and there were tears of frustration at the end of them.

“The first three weeks we had at least seven helicopters landing a day. We didn’t know where they were coming from, what they were coming with. There were lessons learned that we shared with Emergency Management in Gisborne.”

Lillian says farmers were the unsung heroes also as they got straight to work cutting trees and using tractors to clear slips before the big machinery even got there. Contractors also worked long hours. One local – Matty Maclean – was helicoptered to his machine, which he slept in for two nights. He cleared 17kms of road to get out, went home had a shower then continued to work for four weeks clearing enormous amounts of sediment, silt and drop outs along Mata Road.

With no power, and one “piddly generator” for the community’s Four-Square freezer, a huge generator was commandeered off the side of a building

and reinstalled at the Four Square by Bush Destounis and Nate Wigglesworth. Foodstuffs flew in a Starlink (so Eftpos could work), and some more supplies too. Three weeks in, piloted convoys took residents twice a week to Gisborne on a back road that’d been cleared. Normally an hour’s drive these convoys were a six-hour return trip on a “treacherous” road.

During the response, pallets of food were delivered. If food wasn’t delivered it was set up in the Tokomaru Bay Sports Club like a Pak n Save – except you didn’t have to spend any money. There were daily updates in the club rooms and on notice boards around the town. “Our Manaaki Team cooked and prepared meals daily in the club rooms. Every day volunteers would drive around between 11am and 2pm to take contractors a hot lunch and check in. Eastland Network staff based up there to restore power, would call into Bush and Carol’s every night to pick up their hot meals and hot meals were delivered to our traffic management after hours team.”

When the HMNZS Manawanui arrived at Tokomaru Bay, Lillian sent Bush and his crew, who had the biggest crayfish boat in town, out to meet the ship.

There were two trips to bring in all the supplies, while a small vessel brought in navy staff to gather intelligence. Lillian said Tokomaru Bay was stocked, so the supplies were pushed out to Te Puia Springs for residents there and in Waipiro Bay. Te Puia was also cut off. Ngati Porou Hauora staff and contractors were transported daily via side by sides by CD member Colin Skudder over his farm land to relieve the hospital staff who’d been working 24/7 and to reinstate hospital infrastructure

Dave Scannell had a digger in Tokomaru Bay so he loaned that to us and we put in retired machinery driver Uncle KK

Delamere. He cleared all the drains along Beach Road and down Waima.

“We offered to pay him, but he said no donate it to Starship Hospital so we did.”

When Hatea-A-Rangi School opened it brought routine back for the children. The police gave them rides in their truck, played sports with them and promoted the positive side of policing. Another volunteer, Hoana Forrester was a teacher in Uawa but she and students couldn’t get to school so she created a pop-up school at her home for students who attended schools outside the community. She used the weather events to let the children know they could be the bridge designers and possible infrastructure engineers of the future. MPs Kiri Allan and Meka Whaitiri flew in to see the devastation and popped into the school.

“Kiri asked if there was anything they needed. They asked for some lego for the children and \$700 worth of it showed up a couple of weeks later so the kids really could start learning how to build bridges.”

Turned out Kiri’s mates had paid for it themselves. There were two whānau on dialysis, one of whom was five days overdue. Lillian told Tairāwhiti Emergency Management’s Ben Green they had to get to the hospital now and they were flown out that morning.

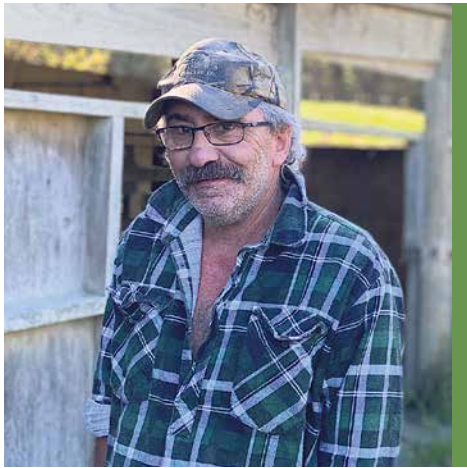
One month in a bypass road created by Kuru Contracting was opened for the community to use. Two weeks later, Waka Kotahi opened a Bailey Bridge to reconnect the community too. It was an emotional time for the entire township. And a year on it’s still raw, said Lillian.

“We all looked out for each other. If someone was showing signs of stress, they were given breaks and words of awhi from each other, our pakeke and Manaaki team.”



In the early hours of February 14, hundreds of Te Karaka locals fled their homes and watched from Cranswick Hill as their township went underwater – they were stuck for more than 24 hours until floodwaters receded. Others evacuated up Cookson Hill. Te Karaka is a 20-minute drive north of Gisborne off SH2. It sits beside the Waipaoa River, which overtopped its stopbanks that night. The impacts on the Te Karaka community were devastating, people lost their homes and everything in them, hundreds of stock were lost and crops and orchards were wiped out.

# Floodwaters two metres deep



IN THE early hours of February 14, 2023, Murray Burgess was flooded at his citrus orchard and that was just as well. If he'd managed to wade to nearby Te Karaka the two-metre deep floodwaters would have been over his head and he would have been on his own. Everybody – nearly 600 people – had been swept up in the fastest evacuation locals had ever seen.

As deputy chief fire officer of the Te Karaka Volunteer Fire Brigade, Murray was frustrated not to be able to get to

the township to help, but soon found out what was going on. By 4am he and wife Wendy had made it off their orchard to the top of nearby Cranswick Hill, where they were soon joined by hundreds of panicked locals.

"They had just been woken by the siren and bolted, the fire crews stuffing them in the back of engines to race them to higher ground while the water was running like a river down the main street," Murray says. "So by 6.30am, when the sun came up, there were hundreds of people all peering over the fence at the giant mass of water below. It was so quiet, so eerie. Then in the silence someone said 'Te Karaka is drowning'."

The day before Murray had been working on the orchard when he got a phone alert from Tairāwhiti Civil Defence warning that the Waipaoa River, which snakes past his place, could peak at 8.4 metres high (0.2 metres above warning level). The persistent rain was a worry so at 2am, he was still awake when called to help with an evacuation just outside the township. But by that time the couple were already flooded in. An hour later the river was at 10 metres high and rising and by 4am son

**"It was going through all your treasures and dumping a lifetime of memories that made us tear up a bit."**

**When he finally got the courage to go look at his orchard, one of the first things Murray Burgess found was the neighbour's ram stuck on top of a shed, indicating the height of the water as it rushed through the property.**

Steve Burgess and Te Karaka Volunteer Fire Brigade chief fire officer Jamie Simpson, had busted through a shelter belt to tell them 'The stopbanks won't hold, get out now!'

"The chief has lived here all his life and he knew it was all going wrong. He had never seen the river rise like that," Murray says. "It was his call to evacuate the town and it turned out to be a good one."

When the couple could finally return home at 7.30am they found that over half a metre of water had barrelled through the house, leaving a viscous layer of silt as it drained away. Around the property up to three metres of floodwaters had

ripped through the orchard "like a washing machine", destroying everything from machinery and fruit bins to Murray's prized collection of five early-2000s Holden V8s and Monaros. But there was good news... under the layer of the silt, and behind shelter belts packed with dead sheep and debris, most of the orchard appeared salvageable.

As the anniversary of Cyclone Gabrielle approaches Murray and Wendy Burgess are living in a shed while work continues on their flood-damaged home.

"But at least we still have a house...some poor buggers have nothing," Murray says.

## Water was gushing over stopbanks



AS TE KARAKA couple Paul and Sharree Rice evacuated themselves and their dogs – all they could hear was water gushing over the stopbanks across the road. It was 4.40am, Valentines Day, pitch black and raining.

"It was eerie," said Paul.

"You knew shit was going bad," said Sharree.

A few minutes earlier the fire department had driven down Cliff Road where they'd lived for seven years and told them to leave, "now".

"You see these events on TV, like a flood or a fire, and you think 'poor buggers'. But you don't know what it's like unless you're that poor bugger. It's sickening – you don't know where to start," said Paul.

Paul and Sharree have been together for 17 years. They're positive proactive people. But this got them.

"We were in disbelief. We're still a bit up and down emotionally," said Sharree.

The couple lost everything under knee height – that's how high the Waipaoa

River went across their property. Their pinex walls soaked up the water, "like blotting paper", and the rimu floors are still leaching silt. The whole house had to be gutted.

"There are always people worse off and some people in Te Karaka had water up to their windowsills," says Paul. "There's a lot of homes still not lived in."

Theirs is one of them. They lived for eight weeks in their van after Cyclone Gabrielle.

"The iwi was quick to give us a cabin, Willie's been awesome."

Willie Te Aho is the CE of Te Aitanga a Mahaaki iwi, who quickly filled a need for displaced families as winter approached in the township. Their home has been classified as a Category 2 home. They have met the criteria to have their home lifted as part of the \$15 million scheme funded by the Government to help flood-affected properties. More than half of the 200 homes that will get a lift under this funding are in Te Karaka. They're grateful they were insured but it's taken a mental toll.

"You know you've got friends, but you don't know who your tribe is until you go through something as traumatic as this."

Paul and Sharree didn't sleep much on the Monday. The forecast Category 3 Cyclone Gabrielle had arrived as predicted.

"We knew once the Waipaoa River gets to 7.5m they shut Nisbett's Dip."

They were checking updates until 2.15am when all updates stopped as communication was cut to the entire region. Heavy rain persisted. The Waipaoa River measured higher than 12.5m before it ran out of gauge. About 4.30am a voice yelled from the road, "You need to get out now the stopbanks are about to go."

In the time it took to gather what they needed and get in the van the water had risen halfway up Paul's Red Bands and was moving fast. They could see water "pumping" down Station Road.

"It was unreal" says Paul.

The couple say they were in shock. They drove along Cliff Road through rising water to Te Karaka Area School where they registered then drove up Cookson Hill. Twelve hours later around 4pm, the floodwaters receded enough, and they returned home. When they got to their property, water was everywhere and fences were flat.

"We went to the front door and the top step was clean. I thought 'oh, it's going to be alright' but then I looked inside," said Paul.

The Waipaoa River had raged through their home, which they'd just finished working on to how they liked it, complete with brand new wool carpet.

"That's when I lost it," said Paul.

Friends arrived and started scraping mud off their carpet with a shovel.

"They got us started and we all shovelled," said Sharree. "The next day more people turned up and got on their hands and knees to help as well. We live in an amazing community."

Family and friends helped in the garden, Paul shoveled silt beside his son Mike, and his daughter who lives in the South Island set up a Givealittle page. Paul's employer Pacific Haulage, where he works as a logging truck driver, was "incredibly supportive". He was able to take time off plus the company delivered five truckloads of wood chips to help soak up the water.

"You have no idea how much sanity

that gave us, being able to walk without walking in mud."

A colleague of Paul's took a week's annual leave and turned up every morning to do the horrible jobs "you don't want to do". People from Gisborne came through, Sharree's best friend turned up early one morning from Tauranga. Friends lent them a 20ft shipping container to store what could be saved.

Paul's returned to work and Sharree demolished what she could of their home to get it ready for builders. Life carries on, but that can be tricky too.

"There were lots of 'how're you going?' at the beginning. Then everyone gets on with their lives. We're still struggling, and need the check-ins. When it rains, I just want to pack up and go," said Paul. "There's unbelievable anxiety when it rains."

The couple are looking forward to 2024.

"It's a big relief to have the house lifted and paid for. We can let go of the rain fears and head into retirement years with peace of mind."

**The support was unreal – we live in an amazing community.**



# House lifting – how it all started



ROBYN and her husband Greg Osborne live on Branson Road. Their property went underwater on 14 February with floodwaters up to 300mm inside their home. The silt is still inches thick in the framework and they have cardboard for walls.

When Greg and Robyn looked outside, Robyn couldn't believe all the water she was seeing. "The water was at the bottom step and then twenty minutes later the water was coming through the floor." Greg yelled to get their passports and they evacuated.

They had to evacuate with nothing but the clothes on their back. Robyn made sure to grab her work laptop and timesheets in the rush to leave. It showed her dedication to her job and her responsibility towards it.

Robyn, Greg, and their granddaughter climbed through a window and onto the back of their ute.

"We were lucky enough to be able

to stay with Gaye and Tony Smith at 1 Branson Road, for the day. Then I realised, I'd forgotten my handbag on the table. So I walked back through waist-deep water to get it. We then stayed at a motel for a few days."

The lack of communication due to the cyclone meant their children who lived out of the region were worried. However several days later, Robyn's boss delivered a Starlink and a Spark phone to where they were staying and Robyn was able to call their children as well as processing the late pay for their employees.

Robyn had been speaking to her sister and brother-in-law on the phone after Cyclone Gabrielle when the conversation turned to lifting houses – and that maybe the Government could help. They encouraged Robyn to ask Willie Te Aho – Te Aitanga a Mahaki Trust CE at the next community hui.

So last year at a Te Karaka community meeting in March, Robyn asked if the Government might fund house-lifting. Willie, who had secured funding from Housing & Urban Development & Te Puni Kokiri for temporary housing and critical repairs, couldn't promise anything but he would start advocating. Robyn continued to champion the issue at subsequent community meetings and a breakthrough came when the Minister for Cyclone Recovery at the time, the Hon. Grant Robertson, agreed in principle to funding at a meeting on 12 July 2023 in Turanga/Gisborne. It was a pivotal moment that led to the \$15 million fund to lift 200 houses in Tairāwhiti that was announced by the then, Prime Minister Chris Hipkins in September 2023.

Te Aitanga a Mahaki iwi, working in partnership with the Gisborne District Council, has overseen two successful house lifts in Te Karaka. They have started their 3rd house lift. Another 29 families including the Osbornes have agreed for Te Aitanga a Mahaki, through their housing company Toitu Tairāwhiti Housing Limited, to manage the lifting of their house. Their house will be lifted 500mm above where the flood water entered their house. With the government funding the house was expected to be 1.5m above ground but the Osbournes will have theirs lifted to 2.1m with the extra height being at their cost. This is so that they can legally utilise the space underneath.

Every time it rains, Robyn is on edge, "What if it happens again, I mentally work out where to put everything – like the new appliances so they don't have to be replaced again. The few months I couldn't sleep, I was up at 1am working at the computer because my mind just didn't stop."

"House lifting is so important to me; I want that peace of mind – not just for me but for others because we're all in the same boat. Pimia Wehi, one of the Community leaders for the Te Karaka Community said there's still a lot of work to do, "but we're so grateful to Chris Hipkins and the previous Labour government for the funding".

Robyn said she's beyond grateful for Te Aitanga a Mahaki Trust. "I don't know what I would have done, we didn't know who to turn to at the start."

After more than seven months of housesitting, Robyn was so homesick that they moved back. Now they're working

with builders, architects, and house lifters to get theirs off the ground.

"I was very excited when I heard the Government was going to fund it."

It's heartening to see the iwi and the community coming together as one to support each other during such difficult times. Along with her resilience and determination to get her house lifted and to ensure peace of mind for herself and her whānau, she has made a significant impact for other families within the wider Tairāwhiti community. Her story is a testament to the strength and unity that can be found in times of crisis.

“The water was at the bottom step and then twenty minutes later the water was coming through the floor.”

## Te Karaka hill choked with evacuated residents

BY MIDNIGHT on Monday the road along SH2 into Te Karaka (TK) had flooded, so the trapped township had hunkered down for the night. TK local Antony Ruru (Antz) was helping father-in-law Frank Ngatoro down at the Civil Defence (CD) HQ to keep communication going into the community as Cyclone Gabrielle inched closer.

Antz, who works for FENZ in Gisborne, is also a volunteer firefighter in Te Karaka. He was supporting Frank and, at that time, the Waikohu CD team who were relatively new to their positions. Checks of the Waipaoa River height were done throughout the night and at 2.12am, on 14 February, a message was sent to volunteer firefighters' pagers to respond to an emergency and they reported to the TK fire brigade. It was lucky timing, minutes later all communication went out across the region.

At 3.30am a plan between police, CD and the Fire Brigade was to evacuate

those in TK who lived near the riverbank. TK Area School was set up for residents to register. Twenty minutes later the plan changed when the Waipaoa River started to come over the stopbanks. The entire township was evacuated as volunteers drove down streets yelling out for people to leave now.

"The message was to go straight up Cranswick Hill and drive as far as you can. The hill was choked, there were about 200 vehicles and 450 people up there," said Antz.

Antz and Frank were the last to leave. They closed the school, got some water and headed up the hill. After ensuring everyone on the hill was safe, Antz returned with local police officer Geoff Pardoe to do another sweep of TK on a front-end loader driven by local contractor Glenn Church. They roused one local who was still asleep and met another local whānau who needed rescuing from their home – one of whom was on dialysis.

They set them up at the fire brigade, where a generator gave them power for the dialysis machine. The local brigade with the officer in charge (OIC), Jamie Simpson, then turned their attention to collecting kai for those up on the hills. As well as the hundreds on Cranswick, there were approximately 80 -100 residents who went up Cookson Hill – both evacuation points for the community. They got gas bottles, gas hobs, pots, 1000 litre water containers and sanitary items that Te Runanga O Turanganui A Kiwa (TROTAK) had acquired from them through funding for emergency resources just two months before.

"We popped them all in the front loader along with some meat from the butcher."

Tables, canned food, water and lollies from the shop went in too. With the bucket above floodwater, over the next couple of hours, the front loader delivered supplies to each of the two evacuation points. Antz said multiple community members

on each side cooked up the food for everyone, "it was run like a Marae". The first meal served up to the 450 people up Cranswick was baked beans and wild pork.

"Not something that usually goes together but it was nice that day."

Those who were up Cookson Hill were able to return to TK around 12 hours later, however those up Cranswick Hill were trapped for more than 24 hours by floodwaters. Antz said the local iwi Te Aitanga a Mahaki were very supportive and have led the community through the aftermath. "Mahaki Tiaki Tangata has emerged as a crucial entity following this event, assuming the responsibility of caring for Te Karaka and surrounding communities in place of CD. This marks a significant shift towards an iwi-led readiness and response strategy," said Antz.

"The support we've got from Matua Willie Te Aho, Uncle Davey and Auntie Pimia has been unreal."

## Te Karaka hit by Bola too

TE KARAKA was hard hit by Cyclone Bola as well. Former Gisborne Mayor John Clarke was chairman of the Waikohu Council at the time and in the lead-up to Cyclone Bola was the Civil Defence controller for Waikohu. He worked closely with residents of Te Karaka and suffered personally too.

"We lost our home in Bola and we didn't rebuild, we moved to a hill.

"But the flood levels were higher in Gabrielle."

Back in March 1988 John remembers the stopbanks at Te Karaka being built but hadn't quite been finished – they were three-quarters complete.

"We evacuated residents well before the peak of Bola arrived as a precaution.

"Water came around the bottom of the unfinished banks but not to the extent residents suffered this time."

John said they'd just harvested their grapes before Bola came, but this time with Gabrielle they weren't so lucky and joined many others in the region who lost entire crops, and income for the year.

"It's devastating for people, and I really feel for those in Te Karaka and others who have had homes inundated".

Stopbanks at Te Karaka were raised 300mm above the peak levels of Bola after the 1988 cyclone.

But even that wasn't enough to protect Te Karaka from Cyclone Gabrielle.

Funding has been secured urgently for the Te Karaka community to increase the level of flood protection from the Waipaoa River to cater to a 100-year heavy rain event, accounting for climate change until 2090.





# Felt like a war zone

MATAWAI had battled through Cyclone Hale on January 9 and 10, then a month later came warnings Cyclone Gabrielle was on the way.

Matawai Lunch Bar owner Tui Sue Seymour assumed the role of Community Lead for Matawai through Te Runanga O Turanga nui A Kiwa (TROTAK) during COVID, so she already had the list of potentially isolated families.

"I began ringing to check they were okay. Only one family was unable to reply as they'd been completely cut off already and thankfully supplies had been dropped off via Civil Defence (CD)."

The power went out Monday night and on Tuesday they set up generators to keep the fridge and freezers working.

By Thursday there was still no power, no phones and petrol had run out for the generator.

"It had been three days, but it felt like forever. I decided to go to Opotiki. What a contrast it was," said Tui Sue.

"I felt like I was coming out of a war zone and into civilisation on a beautiful day. The kids were so excited they were enjoying cell phone coverage for the first time since Monday."

The trouble with the power going off is so do the petrol pumps. So, they had fuel in the tanks but couldn't access it.

After Gabrielle, TROTAK kindly supplied the community with a generator and they're waiting for the local electrician to connect it.

On the Friday after Gabrielle, Tui Sue's daughter, brother, son-in-law and grandson went to Opotiki with a trailer seeking donations for Te Karaka community.

"They were overwhelmed. Then my daughter got a call to go to Whakatane to pick up more supplies. "She just cried at the generosity of our whānau there. Thankfully, the trailer they'd taken had high sides so it could carry everything."

"When the whānau arrived home, they wanted to take the trailer straight to Te Karaka Area School before the next round of rain, so off they went."

By the Sunday, after Gabrielle, word had reached Tui Sue that Te Karaka whānau needed freezers, so she cleaned two out and took them over the next day.

"We have an amazing farmer from Motu and his crew

who were hard out hunting and taking processed meat through to Te Karaka daily before the roads closed, his mum and dad (Ron and Gaye Crawshaw) were back and forth to Te Karaka for CD."

A delivery from TROTAK arrived at Tui Sue's shop but was taken to the Fire Brigade.

"Later my niece in Te Karaka sent excess supplies to our shop so I set up the shop for the community to come and grab whatever they needed; it was great work all around."

Tui Sue's Matawai Lunch Bar was able to open intermittently as power was restored.

"Our road workers had no cash, and there was still no eftpos."

Being so grateful for the hard mahi the road workers were doing Tui Sue would give them what she could. "It's no big deal."

"One of our nephews was working on our road and couldn't get home to his children in Gisborne. So, he drove to Tauranga to catch a flight home from there."

There was a helicopter pilot bringing petrol in from Opotiki to be picked up by a mate of his. The pilot had a hairy flight back after his own chopper fuel was stolen.

There was a dance troupe who could not get through to Gisborne to perform. They stayed in Matawai and received manaakitanga from the marae, who were rewarded with a performance they thoroughly enjoyed.

There was a dog from Puha who was taken to an Opotiki veterinarian to have her pups. Tui Sue picked her up, and her daughter returned her to her breeder.

"Oh, the things we did, and we loved it."

The Matawai community did find the reoccurring heavy rain warnings, road closures, slips and huge cracks on their road to Gisborne, "very unsettling and unprecedented".

"The biggest event this year has been to close our shop, but I am finally able to wake up and feel okay instead of having that constant feeling of uncertainty and disruption that can happen at any time, so as one door closes another door opens."

"Thanks everyone for putting up with our uncertainty we apologise for any inconvenience, there are better things to look forward to, 2024 bring it on."



Surplus stock from Te Karaka was sent to the Matawai, where it was set up in the shop for locals to help themselves. "Many came even as far as Hangaroa, the Coast, it was awesome," said Tui Sue.

EVACUATION Centres were set up and help surged into our rohe from around the country as the weather experts called Cyclone Gabrielle an unprecedented storm with phenomenal seas, gale-force winds and heavy rains.

A team from NZ Red Cross in Wellington drove a trailer with 50 stretchers, 50 bed rolls, lighting and blankets for those who had to leave their homes. They left Wellington at 4am on Monday 13 February knowing access could get cut off.

In Gisborne City there were three welfare centres Te Poho-o-Rawiri Pa, Ilminster Intermediate and House of Breakthrough Church. House of Breakthrough Pastor Lance Rickard said they had around 90 people come in that first Monday night. What they realised quickly was that people needed to process what had just happened first.

"They needed to sit down and think, have a cup of tea and someone to talk to, get their head around what's going on. Sometimes relations came to get them, we had around 22 stay the first night."

"We were reasonably set up for Gabrielle, except the need went above what we had."

The 30 ready-made food parcels went in the first two hours on Tuesday because supermarkets had closed – unable to operate without eftpos. For a few hours they had people coming in and not much to give them.

"I remember a joker came in and needed food, we only had oranges at that point. Then a lady walked in with a loaf of bread to donate. We were able to pass that straight to him, he was stoked, it was for his kids."

By that afternoon word had got out and orchardists brought fruit by the truckload, Gizzy Kai Rescue found food and trucks of things started coming in. Their church networks sent a helicopter full of food and blankets.

"The stuff didn't last long – the need was out there."

A member of their congregation had cash under their mattress which meant they were able to stock up after being granted access to Countdown. The Rapid Relief Team turned up and fed everyone for two and a half days before they were called to Wairoa. Government agencies visited the evacuation centre to answer questions people had. HOB brought in counsellors and held a community barbecue on Fergusson Drive to see how everyone was doing after the clean-up. If we're needed, we close the church down and away we go, it's a lot better now with the ECC beside us. We've got good teams who come in from Elgin and Kaiti and we're quite well set up now. Gabrielle showed us our weaknesses, we'll fix up those."

ABOVE: Picture by Phil Yeo.

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“We're still active a year on helping people.”

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Tiniroto's 250 residents were trapped for eight days after Cyclone Gabrielle. The rural township, situated southwest of Gisborne, is a beautiful spot surrounded by the Ruakituri and Hangaroa rivers and includes Hackfalls Arboretum and Doneraile Park (which remains closed after Cyclone Gabrielle). The challenges continued for this tight-knit community during 2023. An engineer's report in June identified extreme risks of failure in boulders from the Hangaroa Bluffs, which overhang Tiniroto Road – the main road to Gisborne. Then in October, a massive landslide shunted a portion of Tiniroto Road into the river below. A new road needs to be built to safely connect the community to Gisborne, this is about three to five years away and \$45 million, which will be funded by central Government. Until the new road is built, residents continue to battle treacherous detours and long commutes. What used to be a 45-minute drive has more than doubled, and can involve various modes of transport.

## Kayak part of the daily commute

IT'S BEEN nearly a year since Cyclone Gabrielle hit the region and Tiniroto resident Sally Officer is still dealing daily with the brunt of it, to a point most city residents could only imagine.

Sally and Simon, along with five other families, lost their connection to Gisborne when the Hangaroa River turned into a torrent so large that a bus-turned-into-a-bach was lost in its depths and has never been seen again, along with at least one shipping container. The force of the debris-laden water tore out their Ruakaka Road access bridge, making their 50-minute journey to town into one of two or three hours. The couple's farm used to be first on Ruakaka Road, but now it's the last.

A dedicated duty nurse manager and flight nurse, Sally was not ready to quit. Instead, she resorted to using a kayak to cross the river and get to the road to work. As a shift worker this sometimes

involved crossing the river in the dark, wading up and down the muddy banks, often carrying supplies. Simon made steps down the bank but was away every time the river flooded. A flood also washed her jetty away. If she was carrying a big lot of groceries, she had to organise for someone to help her on the other side.

In the worst conditions, Sally had to drive the long way, via the Mossman Bridge, to Tiniroto. But her problems were further compounded when this road repeatedly became troublesome with slips, dropouts and the Mossman Bridge abutments collapsing several times, forcing her to leave a car on the other side and walk or use the quad bike to get across the slips and stream. She then had to drive to work either via Wairoa and the Wharerata Road or the tortuous Parikanapa Road while the Hangaroa Bluffs were closed. This made it easier to

stay the occasional night in town, leaving Simon to run the farm and their popular farmstays. The weather also caused the latter to slow down, although they still got hardy travelers who were willing to come the long and often marginal way.

"Luckily I had plenty of annual leave owing" she says.

When the Mossman Bridge was out, the couple were unable to get mail, fuel or machinery in and they had to walk their stock 12 kilometres to get them out. It's been a challenging year and Sally has found herself having long walks, "having a barney" or the occasional stiff gin to get by. But she is philosophical and grateful she no longer has young children to manage as well.

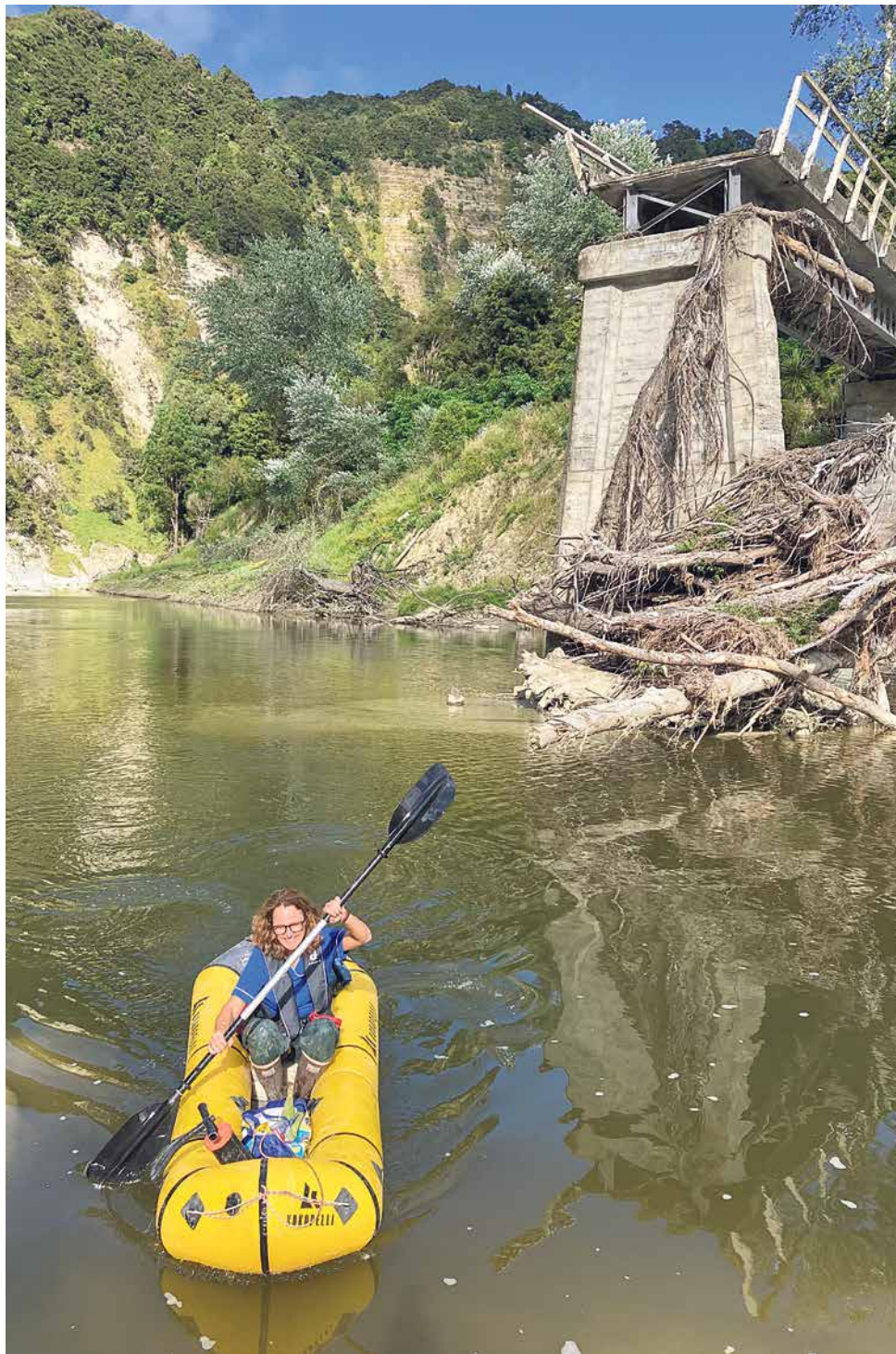
"There are women in the community having to take their children to school or town the long way." And her life got a lot easier when a friend lent them a pack raft.

This meant she could get all the groceries across in one load, instead of several trips by kayak.

"It's been a Godsend – I can bring everything over in a big drybag."

And although a long-promised flying fox over the river has yet to materialise, residents have been given good news about a replacement bridge. Mayor Rehette Stoltz and the Council's roading manager Dave Hadfield have told them the funding for a new long-span bridge has been approved and committed. The geotech work and planning have been done and work is due to start in April.

Depending on how long the work takes, they may be back on the road by the end of the year, all going well. The road serves seven farms and a forestry block. All they need now is some temperate weather to get everything on the farm back into shape and the river crossings easy.



## Tiniroto still in limbo

THE hardest thing for the Tiniroto community is being in limbo, says resident Kirsty Playle.

Tiniroto Road dropped out in multiple places during Gabrielle and the Hangaroa Bluffs was washed out, despite local forestry contractors reconnecting Tiniroto to Gisborne. There then was an engineers report after Gabrielle which deemed the Hangaroa Bluffs, that overhang Tiniroto Road as having an extreme risk of failure – that means boulders and or landslides onto the road.

Then in October 2023, a massive landslide took out more of the road. A track was cut through within 2 weeks. The 25km detour for the community is via Parikanapa Road, it's described by locals as a goat track, which was never built for heavy, or high numbers of vehicles. Normally a 45-minute drive, Tiniroto to Gisborne is now 1.5 hours on a good day and even longer if you want to skip Parikanapa Road and go via Wairoa.

It's a challenging situation as residents commute to Gisborne for work, need to get stock out of their farms and stocking up on essentials.

While the community was trapped the Tiniroto Hall became the hub. There were no phones, no power, no road, and bridges were gone. Luckily, they still had landlines to call those inside their community, but weren't able to call out.

The message was met at the hall every day at 4pm. Everyone would bring food from their fridges and freezers and cook it up. As the hall had a generator, Tiniroto Civil Defence lead Jenny Law oversaw supplies choppered in and they were pushed out to the outer reaches of the community – sometimes by walking it to them. Baby formula, medical supplies and generators were the high-level items.

On the 9th day, Tiniroto residents who needed to get to Gisborne met at

9am and carpoled in a convoy over the Parikanapa Road.

"It was a slow and scary trip," says Kirsty. "It gave us a chance to see what Gisborne was like, catch up with people and get supplies"

Kirsty says the challenges they faced together brought them closer as a community.

"We did a lot of events in the community to keep morale up after farms had been badly damaged and access was a major issue. The school was opened on generators and that brought normality to the children. The kids loved it. Kirsty said it goes to show how rural communities come together and help each other out. It has really brought us all together, and we're really prepared for when it happens again."

"Everyone knows the hall is the central Civil Defence base, it's been fitted with a Starlink, medical supplies, bedding food and runs completely off the grid with new renovations.

"We are still waiting for our roads and bridges to be built but we are working hard with the Gisborne District Council and central government to get these issues fixed. Let's hope it's not 5 years!"

Part of the Government's \$204 million payout to Tairāwhiti after Cyclone Gabrielle included \$45 million to reconnect the Tiniroto community. This is three to five years away.



# RADIO HOST KEPT LOCALS CONNECTED



## FEBRUARY 13, 2023

ON DAY one, the rain came – it fell hard and heavy from gunmetal grey skies over Gisborne – city river levels rose, water droplets pummelled glass and pooled on road surfaces.

For More FM breakfast host Bevan Chapman, it was yet another episode in a series of severe weather events.

Bevan decided to sleep in his studio on Monday night to make the morning airwaves.

He'd sent his wife and kids to stay with friends for the night, but nothing could have prepared him for what followed.

"I had spoken to a couple of weather experts on the Monday who said the Cyclone was still coming, I knew from experience it was not looking great – so I

took a mattress, pillow, sleeping bag and went to sleep in the office.

"I did my breakfast show came off air, it had gotten worse, so I jumped back on in the afternoon because I felt like we needed to be local again – we were on and off no power and starting to get some leaks in the building that I was tending to in between.

"Council and Civil Defence got in touch, the rivers were getting high and it coincided with high tide, so they were looking to close bridges in the city."

## FEBRUARY 14, 2023

The breakfast host woke on Valentine's Day to moody scenes, viewed from his camping mattress on the studio floor.

By day two – traffic had come, it was backed up down the block and as far as the eye could see from his second story vantage point on Peel St, through reinforced glass windows.

As the district dozed, Gabrielle hammered the sleeping city, lashing at roads and rivers, whipping up winds and stirring seas.

That day brought a strange stillness – in a world where nothing stops – no cell phone service, and a loss of internet cut comms with head office in Auckland.

He was on his own, yet ironically, the only connection thousands of Tairāwhiti residents had with the outside world.

"It didn't seem much different for me in the studio, but people were waking up to

this bizarre apocalyptic thing – there was no phone connection, an hour or so later there was no internet.

He continued with his show – with no option but to do everything from music to loading ads manually. By 7.30am a buzz from the doorbell downstairs indicated the arrival of new updates.

"The Valentine's Day broadcast was strange, I was starting to stress as the generator was running out of diesel, and I had to try and get some delivered mid-morning. Traffic was bumper to bumper – bridges closed on and off. I made it through, and the power came on that afternoon."

From the 14th and in the week that followed, people began to put pen to paper, scrawling notes and slipping them under the studio door – snippets of news turned into radio sound bites.

"From day one, people started coming to the station to pass on and deliver messages – the bell was constantly going...I would put on a song and run downstairs to collect the notes.

"There were insurance companies, Council, basically every Gisborne school principal physically came in. Businesses were saying what was and wasn't operating, and stories of people adapting to the situation."

## FEBRUARY 15, 2023

Another wet morning waking in his sound box studio.

He was the missing link – even missing to his bosses in the big smoke. Determined to show up, unaware he was the sole link for many who felt so alone.

Day and night, he delivered detail to keep locals connected, informed and updated – until a support team arrived from Auckland on Thursday, February 16.

"I slept in studio for two nights – and didn't hear from or see my own family for a couple of days. Head office in Auckland assumed we had been off air the whole time. When they sent a team down, I must admit I did breathe a sigh of relief to have some help.

"I was literally just doing what I do, telling people what I knew. I'm normally on air 5.30am to 10am with news in the afternoon but on Valentine's I went across the day from 5am to 6-7pm, the next day people started to come up to the studio.

It was a constant community noticeboard – everything from school updates to news on water restrictions – he did it all.

"I remember feeling fairly calm, everyone seemed and still seems remarkably positive in a way that makes me quite proud."

To Bevan, it was nothing special, a bit of 'Gizzy ingenuity' and 'just doing my job'. Whatever you want to call it, he'll go down in Cyclone Gabrielle history as a local legend.

# Only the radio to listen to



RUATOREA-BASED Radio Ngati Porou (RNP) broadcast live for 24 hours to keep the coast company while Cyclone Gabrielle raged outside. Manager Erana Reedy says they've sharpened the bow with how they respond to these severe weather events because there have been so many to practice on over the last few years. Cyclone Gabrielle though was "unprecedented". Erana said the feedback they got from the community after the 24-hour broadcast reminded them why they do what they do.

"People told us they had no power, they were sitting in the dark, and they only had the radio to listen to. They said it was good to hear a friendly voice, that it was like a beacon in the dark as they heard the river outside and the logs banging into each other."

On Tuesday morning when everyone woke up with no phone, no power, no internet connections, RNP's generator on their local transmitter had automatically switched on and they continued on air. With communication down, it not only highlighted the importance of radio but also the AM frequency, since those who live around Whareponga and Tuparoa don't get FM because of the hills. As a result

of Cyclone Gabrielle, RNP has received funding to build further resilience:

An upgrade to their AM transmitter so that it complements the one Radio NZ has in Gisborne. This would mean AM coverage for the entire Coast.

Connecting their six other transmitters to generators

Portable broadcast kits for staff that include a generator and a Starlink so they can announce their shows from home if a road is shut.

"When we know there is a storm coming and rain will last for more than two days – that means surface flooding, roads closed, flooding, erosion, no power, and maybe no internet. "We have a bit of a process."

RNP is a trusted source on the coast that imparts important information in the lead-up to any severe weather event. The standard message is to have three day's supply of kai, medicine, water, batteries, and candles and to check in on whānau and neighbours before the weather arrives. After it passes, her team start talking to the people to see how they fared. Erana was based at the Ruatorea Fire Station during the State of Emergency because Tairāwhiti Emergency Management had the foresight to create a Civil Defence hub up there with a Starlink.

"It was a real honour to be based there and see how everyone coordinated themselves. It was amazing. We spoke to Mayor Rehette daily on the radio. We were hearing about everybody else worse off than us and really wanting to know how they all were."

Erana said they were able to relay messages online from volunteers who had been out checking on people and reassure them about their whānau.

"It's hard to name one hero, because everyone who worked voluntarily through that is a hero. Whānau were checked on before and after the event. Teams carried

kai and medication across flooded roads so people could have a meal. Damaged roads, homes, sections, farmland were logged daily. You know, in times of adversity, you see the best of people – and it warms my heart. I take my hat off to all our volunteers, the roading crews, FENZ and St Johns peeps, our Police, Civil Defence and our iwi. Ngati Porou "really responded". They brought in generators, Starlinks, food, supplies, clothes – trucks and trucks of help. They managed queues at the local shop when eftpos wasn't working and no one had cash. They supported whānau needing kai and other essentials."

Then Ngati Porou around the motu and the world mobilised to help by donating kai, supplies, clothing, linen and money.

"It was unreal. Trucks came from Auckland, Wellington, wherever the Ngatis were, to a central drop-off point in Whakatane. Then the trucks brought

those supplies around the coast and then distributed to our isolated whānau and communities. SH35 was munted but they found ways over farmland through rivers, to get supplies to places like Tokomaru Bay which was totally cut off.

"At one point a navy ship brought supplies in and the locals sent their boats out to meet them. Then some of those supply trucks were re-directed to Hawke's Bay.

"It was humbling. I am proud of my iwi. And very proud to be Ngati Porou, especially after that event."

*PROFILE: Image courtesy Liam Clayton, The Gisborne Herald.*

*BELOW: Makarika Bridge across the Mata River by Ruatorea. Picture by Dr Murry Cave*





Vogel Street sits in the central city beside the Waimata River. The quiet cul-de-sac has around eight houses. But today the once cared-for gardens are unkempt, and most of the residents are gone after six of the eight homes were classified Category 3. This means they are eligible for a buyout offer which is based on the valuation of their property on 12 February 2023.

## City street wiped out

SENTHIL Manickam, his wife Selvi, and their two children, aged 7 and 5, were living in a basement flat on Vogel Street beside the Waimata River. The couple are qualified engineers who today work for Gisborne District Council. They'd lived in Singapore for eight years before calling Gisborne home and are originally from Tamil Nadu, India. They'd never lived beside a river or ever seen so much rain.

"All my life, I have known only two weather conditions - hot and extremely hot," says Senthil. "Cyclone Gabrielle was a huge shock for my entire whānau."

On February 13, it started to rain, and the cyclone was forecast. Senthil and Selvi checked with their landlord who lived upstairs and were told not to worry. Selvi, "always a planner", got a suitcase and put her and Senthil's educational certificates in and a couple of dresses.

"We are Indians, education documents are very important," says Senthil.

Their engineering qualifications underpin the three most important things for them as a family - jobs, residency and being able to buy a home in New Zealand.

At 10.45pm, with their children asleep, they got the first flood alert text on their phone from Council. Senthil went outside to have a look and stepped straight into water. The next thing the fire brigade turned up to evacuate them.

"We put everything on top of the sofa, we still didn't think it was going to go so crazy," he said.

They took their suitcase and went to a friend's home. Around 2am the landlord called and asked Senthil to move his car. Senthil knew how far up the hill the car was parked, and started wondering, 'If I have to move my car...?'

"What about our home?" he asked the landlord. "Forget the home," he was told.

Senthil arrived back to Vogel Street in the pitch black with gale force winds and heavy rain. Realising the car keys were inside the flat, he shone his torch towards it from the landlord's upper balcony and saw his family's home completely underwater.

"The water was up to ceiling level - and at that moment, I knew everything was

gone. We'd just bought the car the week before and it wasn't insured yet."

Without keys, they tried to move the car with a rope, but they lost that too. At daybreak, the family gathered in Vogel Street beside their devastated neighbours.

"Everyone was just standing there. In shock."

Senthil says when he opened the door to their home; the silt was knee-high.

"Everything had floated and moved around; the fridge and bed were in completely different places."

The silt ruined everything. Their whole lives were in that home and now they had only what Selvi had put in the suitcase.

It can feel isolating enough to be from another culture, let alone during a natural disaster when the internet and all connections are lost for a week. During the aftermath of the cyclone, it was the people of Gisborne who helped this whānau through. Senthil remained his upbeat self - they had each other. Whereas Selvi mourned all that'd been lost. There were diaries she'd kept from 2006, and possessions that'd travelled the world with them. Before Gisborne, Selvi had worked in India, London and Singapore - seven of those years for Quest Global as an aeronautical engineer which services Rolls Royce engines. It was a tough time, yet it also brought out the best in people. Selvi says she "loves Kiwis".

"I've lived in a lot of other countries and traveled around but I'm calling it home. People are really understanding of immigrants, we're very lucky and Gisborne is so good."

Selvi's job came to an end as the factory she worked in went to minimal work lines due to Gabrielle and it became an additional stress.

"This last year has made me stronger and more resilient. There is a very supportive community here in town, and through our church. When I went to the psychologist, I realised the most stressful event in my life had been my daughter's birth. That was a 10/10. This cyclone I could handle."



## 'They needed to know people cared'

When builder Brendan Fry saw the plight of flooded Vogel Street residents he stopped building houses, and started to try saving them.



THE day after Cyclone Gabrielle had bullied its way across Te Tairāwhiti, Bill Moore gave a weary thumbs up from the balcony of the riverside house he and wife June had for decades called home.

"He was saying they were all good but they obviously weren't," says Gisborne builder Brendan Fry. "The whole of Vogel Street was just munted, and nobody had even been to check in on them."

Brendan's first thought had been to secure the building site he was working on at Wainui Beach...a task he completed just before the bridges closed and he was marooned on the city side of the Waimata River. His second was to suspend work on that project altogether.

"That's what we do, we build homes, but how can you do that when some people have no home at all?" he says. "So we decided that, for the next few days, helping those people was going to be our focus."

And there was some big manpower on tap: as well as running the team at Brendan Fry Builder Ltd, Brendan is president of the Gisborne branch of the NZ Certified Builders Association while his partner Tracy Pedersen is secretary.

"Obviously we had no comms at that point so we drafted a memo and Tracy drove around delivering them by hand to any of our members we could find."

"We managed to get hold of eight or 10 of them, and despite what was going on in their own lives, each and every one said they would help."

That was the Wednesday and by

Thursday the big machinery started rolling in.

"With the support of local businesses we had diggers, bobcats, trucks, trailers... everything you think we'd need to get the silt from the site to our approved dump location," Brendan says.

"But a lot of it was just grunt work on the end of a shovel."

The really difficult part, he says, was clearing out residents' silt-sodden belongings.

"There was a lot of carpet, furniture, all that sort of stuff, but it was the little things that were the hardest. We'd ask what residents wanted to do with special items like photo albums but they were all ruined. Trailer-load after trailer-load just had to be dumped."

It got tougher as time went on, Tracy says, the sludge turning into a liquid slurry that was difficult to handle.

"But they just kept at it. It was obvious those homeowners were going to have some difficult decisions to make in the future but, at that time, they needed to know people cared and were there for them."

The news has not been great for the residents of Vogel Street...six of the eight homes have been deemed Category 3 (unsafe) and will be bought out. But for those still there, including Bill and June Moore, Brendan Fry and his cohort of builders have not forgotten them.

"When we heard big rain was approaching again in June, Brendan pulled his entire crew off a build and took them to fill 100 sandbags to help protect the properties," Tracy says.

"That's just who he is. He's constantly thinking about what others need then doing what he can to help."

**PROFILE:** Bill Moore (right) with Brendan Fry (left) says he thought he and wife June would be at their Vogel Street home for years to come, but Cyclone Gabrielle has dashed those hopes.

**TOP:** Taking a well-deserved break from their work at Vogel Street are (left to right) Dan Fogarty, Phill Claffey, Grub Irving, Max Gavin, Sam Gavin, Bruce Knight, Brendan Fry, Bill Moore (homeowner), Barry Hudson, Shayne Tuapawa, Levi Alexander, Peli Taliauli and Luka Fogarty.



Vogel Street. Picture by Ben Cowper, The Gisborne Herald.



# Te Poho-o-Rawiri Marae – a place of refuge

TE POHO-O-RAWIRI Marae sits at the base of Titirangi Maunga / Kaiti Hill. The Pa, as it's affectionately known, is a well-known refuge in any crisis. Cyclone Gabrielle was no different and from 7am on Tuesday 14 February, people started to gather there. When you arrive at The Pa, manaaki is given without hesitation, in the form of kai, shelter, a shower, a hug or just an ear or shoulder to cry on. The Pa is home to Ngati Oneone iwi who encompass an area from the Pouawa Stream in the North to Te Toka a Taiau (a rock formation in the Turanganui river) in the South – a catchment today of around 12,000 people.

On the morning of February 14, tumau (the workers) of The Pa headed straight there – they needed cash to buy kai – starting with sausages and bread. Although the Marae had fully stocked freezers ahead of the predicted cyclone, the whole city had woken up to no power and no comms and the marae tumau knew people within their community would be needing kai. They bought sausages, bread and borrowed a couple of barbecues. Then they dropped the supplies for a hot breakfast at a few whānau driveways in Waikirikiri, Kaiti. The Pa Chairperson Char Gibson said they knew with no power at least people could be catered for.

"And if they needed a shower, we told them to come to Poho. While doing those deliveries, we got a good sense of how our people were feeling."

For the first three days, The Pa was the main source of kai to the Te Karaka community centre based at the Area School. It was full-on workstations as The Pa began receiving all kinds of donations. Systems were quickly organised, and

donations were divided into packs; pantry, hygiene products, and meat and vegetables. Any household furniture, linen and clothes went to another area where it was sorted. Families from Te Karaka were given wristbands and for eight weeks after the cyclone, they were able to come and choose what they needed after many lost everything they owned.

MP Kiri Allan visited and was impressed with what she saw, heard and felt. Kiri made sure the Marae got a Starlink within half an hour of her visit. That connectivity boost sent Marae systems into top gear. A hub was created and by the end of that first week, they had representatives from WINZ, MSD, MBiE, Kainga Ora, IRD, Immigration and the Department of Corrections – because if you were wearing an ankle bracelet during Cyclone Gabrielle you still needed to check in with your parole officer. They even had a doctor for the first five days before Pinnacle took over the health side in Kaiti. The hub they had at The Pa was created by necessity. With all the government agency offices now closed in Kaiti, The Pa committee is working towards building a permanent hub to help whānau.

Char said when both bridges were shut during Cyclone Gabrielle for a few hours, it left the Kaiti community vulnerable with no doctor on their side. Other takeaways from the Cyclone Gabrielle experience included the need for more gear – like bobcats to get in closer and clear slips and silt.

"After the road to Whangara was shut we started to think we needed a boat too, because what if we needed to get people to a doctor."

Char's been looking into hovercraft

for their practical ability to reach cut-off coastal communities in an emergency. Then, when Char and other whānau saw pictures her niece Shaan had of the devastation caused in Wairoa and Frasertown, "We had to help, we couldn't just sit there and watch it."

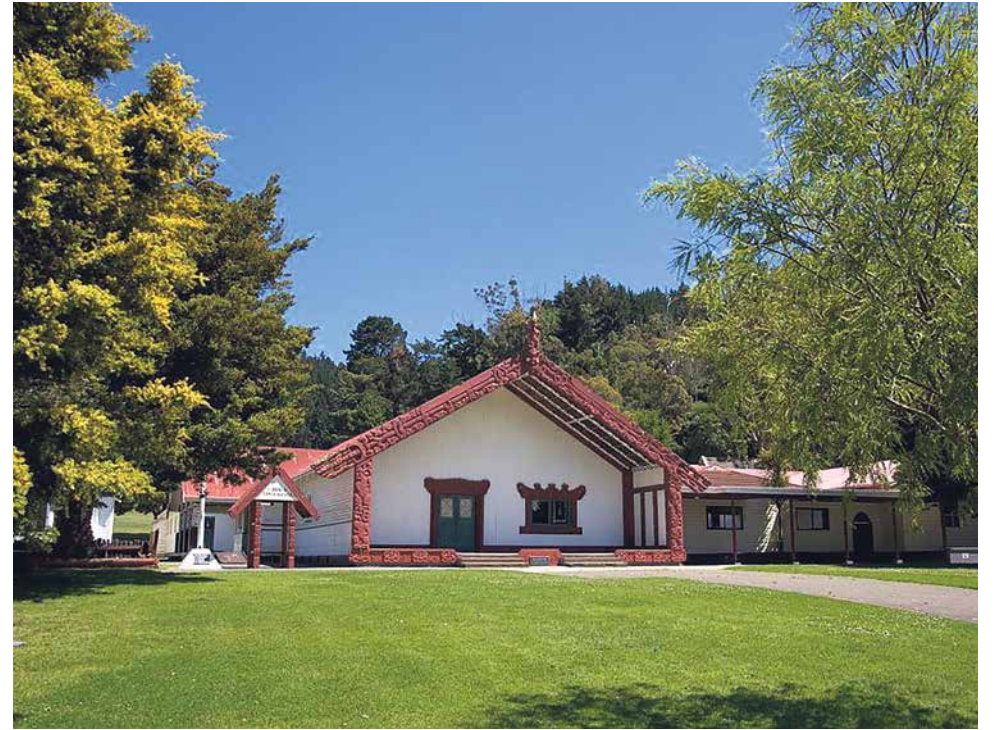
The Pa has a taiao crew of 16 (Whaia Titirangi), who are employed to be kaitiaki of the whenua. As a result of the cyclone they, along with around 10 Fijians, went down to Wairoa, Frasertown and Rangiahua to offer 12 pallets of supplies and help to clear silt. Another takeaway from the Cyclone Gabrielle experience, and the one that's the biggest deal for

Char, is they've become close with the Fijian and Tongan communities.

"They're our tuakana (elders) of the Pacific, it's so sad then as a teina (younger ones – us) watching the tuakana struggle on our lands."

Char remembers one night at 11pm, a group of Fijians knocked on the door of The Pa. They'd been living and working in Hawke's Bay – they were the ones stuck on the roof in Bayview – and were sent to Gisborne without food, water, clothing or bedding.

"All they came to ask for was water... they got more than just water".



## Widespread flooding around Gisborne city

MANY homes around the central city were badly affected by flooding and landslides. These pictures show Grant Road, Marion Drive and Fitzherbert Street. Riverside homes along Fergusson Drive also had between 1-2 metres of water through them. Properties on Ballance Street Hill, Riverside Road, out at Makorori and on Titirangi/Kaiti Hill were affected by landslides or the threat of unstable land above.

The Future of Severely Affected Land (FOSAL) is a Government process whereby properties are categorised as 2 or 3 – this is a separate process from the red and yellow stickers applied by Council.

All Category 2 homes can be lived in again if mitigation measures are put in place. But Category 3 homes can't be.

**Final figures are still being worked out but, to date, the number of properties in these categories are:**

- Category 3: 62 (with nine potentially eligible for the Whenua Māori Pathway)
- Category 2 (2P, 2C, 2A): 219

The buyback process for the Category 3 homes is underway, a huge milestone that allows property owners to move on with their lives. The best future use of this land, once bought back and cleared, is being looked into now.



Flooding and silt from the Waimata River went straight through many homes on Grant Road.



Marion Drive was also hit by flooding and metres of silt.



This home in Fitzherbert Street has been classified as a Category 3 and unsafe.



A driveway was exposed after a landslide on Ballance Street Hill.



Wharekahika (Hick's Bay) is a coastal township on SH35 along the East Coast. It sits between Potaka and Te Araroa. Around 200 people call Wharekahika home. All residents were asked to evacuate before Cyclone Gabrielle because of how close it is to the ocean. The Hicks Bay Motel Lodge, which sits 250m above sea level, opened its doors to the community.

## “When the taiao is not well – we’re not well”

THE only impact Cyclone Gabrielle had on Shyla-Drew Taiapa and her whānau was the impact it had on their whenua (land).

“We live adjacent to the river mouth at Wharekahika. The weather events over the past two years have literally taken our land away. We don’t know what to do. We’ve talked to Council. We feel helpless. When our land erodes, it’s like a part of us is going too. This impacts us emotionally and spiritually.

“When the taiao (environment) is not well – we’re not well. It’s been a wake-up call for our people, our way of life is being jeopardised. All rivers are getting paru. Water is gold. To paint a picture for you of how much it’s changed, my pakeke have told me it would have to rain for four days before the rivers run brown. It only has to rain for one to two hours before it turns muddy now.”

The Wharekahika-Waikura catchment includes the Wharekahika River. The river mouth, beside where they live, feels the impact of whatever’s happening in the headlands.

“The farms and forestry are a contributing factor. We needed to start acting 20 years ago. It’s got to be a hapu approach, our awa is something our whole hapu utilises for their wellbeing. We swim there during the day over summer, we collect water and source kai from there. This is why co-governance is important around decisions that affect our taiao and hauora – this is partnership stuff. Mātauranga Māori – indigenous knowledge – it’s powerful. If we merge Mātauranga with western science, we’ll be able to come up with solutions. Stop looking at the taiao as a commercial commodity. The whenua and the moana will look after you if you look after them. Live

a simpler life like our tipuna and be happy with what you have.”

With their whānau safe after Cyclone Gabrielle, Shyla and her husband Frank Taiapa focused their energies on helping others. News of how badly hit Wairoa had been filtered through.

“Shaan Te Kani my cousin from Rangiahua had tono (asked) Koka Charlotte Gibson from Te Poho-o-Rawiri Marae to mobilise supplies to get to our whānau in Frasertown.”

Within 24 hours a truck filled with food, clothing and fuel had been organised. Whānau shared that there was too much red tape to get support, or they were whakamā (ashamed).

“So as whānau we mobilised ourselves and set up an account to put putea (money) in to help until the much-needed resources arrived. We were just trying to do what we could do. I felt helpless and guilty my whānau were struggling, and my whānau and I were warm and safe.”

Shyla also supported her colleagues at Sport Gisborne, Anna Tolich and Katie Keough, to make sure Civil Defence (CD) play packs were delivered to highly isolated communities such as Waikura, Potaka, Horoera, Kopupounamau, Whakaangiangi, Whareponga, Waiomatatini, Tikapa, Makarika and Waipiro Bay. These areas are at risk of being cut off from their CD hubs. The play packs include cards, table tennis, crafts and games to keep children occupied.

She and Frank helped pack and deliver packages at Hinerupe Marae on behalf of CD for Wharekahika.

“My husband works alongside Uncle Jo Bauckham for the Wharekahika CD. They’ve recruited me as their

communications person. Uncle Jo can finally retire from this role, the next generation is starting to step up. Thank you, Uncle Jo, for all your mahi over the many years serving our hapu.”

The COVID years had taught their whānau to look after one another ahakoa he ko wai (no matter who or where you are).

“We know to be ready and prepared for the unpredictable – whether it be a pandemic or reoccurring weather events such as flooding. We must look after each other. We also need to understand the calvary isn’t going to show up and save us each time a disaster happens. We must prepare and empower one another to do that ourselves.”

Shyla said one way going forward is to empower whānau to have their own maara kai gardens, become more self-sufficient.

“This way of living would not only benefit us holistically but would also benefit our Taiao. Mana Motuhake – Self-determination is the dream.”

Planning for this catchment starts in 2024, for more information see Council’s website [gdc.govt.nz](https://www.gdc.govt.nz)

## Pacific Island communities feel seen and heard

Tairāwhiti residents who are our South Pacific neighbours came together and helped after Cyclone Gabrielle. They brought their strengths, and the community support and acknowledgement they received back spoke volumes.

THE Pacific Islands are used to cyclones – the difference with Gabrielle was being so far away from home.

Mere Batisaresare says in Fiji after cyclones, “you have to build back from scratch on your own”.

“But here the support was just amazing in Gisborne. Farmers supplied fresh vegetables, everyone gave what they could, and it turned into so much, we’d share with our neighbours.”

Mere remembered three vans full of groceries turning up, given by the Pacific Island community. “It was WOW”.

It took them from 2pm to midnight to distribute it, sending lots to Te Karaka.

“It was out of our imagination that it was that big. During difficult times, you find people smiling and it’s very encouraging to see during times of hardship.”

Tairāwhiti has a 1,000-strong Fijian community, with around 300 who are part of the Tairāwhiti Fijian community Inc.

President Iliesa Kelevi Batisaresare said volunteers from their community divided themselves into three teams after Cyclone Gabrielle.

One group did assessments within their community to find out each family’s primary needs. A second team went to Te Poho-o-Rawiri Marae (The Pa) to help distribute care packages. A third team of 40 people were deployed through Council to remote areas to help where they could shovel silt and move ruined household appliances and furniture.

“We didn’t have any building as a community base, so my sister-in-

law’s garage was set up as a space for everyone to gather at the end of the day for a cup of tea, a chat and some baking. We’d share stories, some of the things we heard really touched us. It was good to see our men express how they felt after helping families out when what they valued most was covered underwater and in silt.

“Being from another country during a natural disaster, it’s hard to know who and how to connect with people.

“We want to thank Te Poho-o-Rawiri for their kindness and support – to us it was a big thing.

“Aunty Char was very supportive. I remember one time during a meeting I said clearly to the committee that we had the physical support and man power to offer but right now we didn’t have any money to pay fuel to get the boys out there. But if we had to walk, we’d walk.

“Aunty Char helped, and we were able to put fuel in cars. People would make food for us at the Marae, and we could take it home as well.

“The situation was tough – it was devastating. But the outcome was helpful because our community feels seen and heard now in Gisborne.

“After everything we’ve been through, we want to thank everyone. Now we call Gisborne home.”

Gisborne resident Pauli Ma’afu said he was incredibly grateful his Tongan community, and everyone from the Pacific Islands, were helped after Cyclone Gabrielle.

There are around 1200 people in the

Tongan community in Gisborne, and they’re all helpers too. “Any people with problem, we’re going to help,” said Pauli.

But they needed help too. “It was a very stressful time.” Most of the community relied on orchard work and that stopped for about a month after Cyclone Gabrielle.

“Thank you to everybody for helping our Pacific Island people.

“Te Poho-o-Rawiri Marae were very big

help for more than two months. Food, clothing and shoes, blankets, everything. They even had people to help with counselling and finances.”

“After we came back from the marae, we have new family.”

The Siaola Vahefonua Tonga Methodist Mission also arranged for two huge trucks packed with everything to be delivered to the Wesley Methodist Church, which was the base for the Tongan community.

When Government agencies brought their staff to Gisborne to make connections face to face – it was the biggest help to the Pacific Island community during a time of need. No one had to be shy as they recovered after Cyclone Gabrielle because the help came to them at a grassroots level. MBIE, MSD, Immigration, IRD and Kainga Ora all sent staff this way.

Locally, the down-to-earth approaches of help were greatly appreciated from Te Poho-o-Rawiri Marae, Tairāwhiti Police Area Commander Sam Aberahama, Tairāwhiti Multicultural Council, Tautau Village, SuperGrans, Council, Ngati Porou and more. The communities from the Cook Islands, Samoa, Fiji and Tonga all helped each other as well.

“We want to say thank you to God for giving us the strength, for the comfort when being far away from home,” said Iliesa.

“And we thank God for the blessings we had here for helping our Pacific Island peoples, we felt the aroha from the heart,” said Pauli.



# How to connect with no internet

STARLINK dishes and satellite phones provided the only way to get any connection out of the region for almost six days. Landlines were rare and most needed power to work anyway. Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) communications staff posted on Facebook to let those outside of Tairāwhiti know how the region had fared. Mayor Rehette Stoltz conducted countless media interviews by satellite phone from the early hours of each day. However, the main issue was getting information out to the around 50,000 residents across Tairāwhiti.

At 6.30pm that first night on 14 February a communications advisor from Council visited Gisborne Herald editor with a knock on the door of his home. Jeremy Muir was asked if the Herald had the capacity to print 22,000 papers the next day so every letterbox in the city would get one for free. They could. So a selection of articles from Herald journalists and ECC comms staff created material for the issue.

Councillors, Council staff, their families, and people who just wanted to help, delivered the papers city-wide on Wednesday afternoon. Helicopters delivered to cut off communities.

Daily bullet points of key information were also posted at 50 community points like dairies and shopping centres in the city around 10am each day. Starlink satellite dishes were sent to Te Puia Springs Hospital and Uawa. On the Friday 17 February, Council provided a Starlink by Lawson Field Theatre to create a public internet hub for everyone to contact their whānau and friends to let them know they were ok.

That same day there was another mass region-wide delivery of the Herald. As well as our local channels, national media had also ensured our region would be covered with reporters from across channels embedded in the region. Radio NZ staff also provided a channel for updates to our rural community through their AM frequency so daily updates were provided from the second week in.

Jeremy Muir said the media had a vital role to play in sharing essential messages and keeping people informed.

"Emergency communications via "HF" radio were also stood up as the cyclone arrived on Monday afternoon by a network of radio amateurs," he said.

Civil Defence loaned Gisborne Herald a Starlink satellite dish so their printer could work. Jeremy said the paper had only local coverage of the disaster situation as they had no access to national or world stories.

"Every single item was moved onto USB memory sticks to pages, then PDFs, then a server to create plates for the press. It was one of our latest papers out ever and unfortunately, the new team of volunteer paper boys and girls had to wait an hour longer than arranged, but they didn't seem to mind.

"Later that morning we got the first indication of the flooding and mass evacuation at Te Karaka, in an RNZ report, and a reporting team headed straight there.

"It seemed incredible that a day and a half on, we were not able to report on the terrible situation just up the road – we are so used to being connected and communicating

easily these days."

The skipper of a boat (Sabourter) tied up in the Inner Harbour at Eastland Port offered Wifi/Starlink access to people who need to contact loved ones overseas.

The Gisborne Herald will in future be able to quickly start up online coverage and newspaper production in such situations thanks to a generator and high-performance Starlink kit funded after the cyclone by the Public Interest Journalism Fund.

## Our community links during Cyclone Gabrielle

DURING disasters, it's our neighbours and community members first on the scene to check on each other after the danger has passed. There are also those in the community who put up their hand and volunteer in their areas to deliver important community messages. They are the trusted voices of communities, and it is through them TEMO gets information in, and messages out.

### For the Cyclone Gabrielle response those Community Links people were:

- Hicks Bay/Matakaoa: Joe Bauchan
- Te Araroa: Hal Hovell, Michelle Wanoa
- East Cape: Rei Kohere
- Tikitiki: Leroy Kururangi, Bo Ngata
- Rangitukia: George Koia, Paul Langley
- Ruatoria: James Palmer, Leeanne Morice, Monty Manuel
- Tuparoa/Mahora/Reporua: Linda Taro, Spencer Reedy, Joe McClutchie
- Waipiro Bay: Karen McClutchie, Justin Tibble
- Te Puia Springs: Christine Collins, Lois Hauiti
- Tokomaru Bay: Lillian Ward, Carol Destounis, Gene Takurua
- Tolaga Bay: Greg Shelton, Nori Parata
- Whangara: Tatai Kutia
- Ormond: Gary Howse, Peter Sainsbury, Adrian Avery, Ben Mathews
- Manutuke: Karl Scragg
- Muriwai: Candice Gate
- Patutahi: Alex Hill
- Ngatapa: John Sheratt
- Tiniroto: Jennie Law
- Pehiri: Philip Steel
- Waingake: Jonty Pyke
- Waimata: Mike Savage, Laura Watson
- Te Karaka: Frank Ngatoro, Dave Pikia, Jamie Simpson
- Motu: Ron Crawshaw
- Whatatutu: Sally Cal
- Matawai: Hamish Carmichael



Hundreds gathered outside the Lawson Field Theatre to make use of the community Starlink set up by Tairāwhiti Emergency Management.



TV3 reporter Alexa Cook films a piece to camera beside the flooded Waipaoa River. Council staff monitor the situation in the background, the dark triangle is a concrete tank floating down that smashed into the bridge shortly after this photo was taken.



TVNZ's John Campbell outside Gisborne District Council.





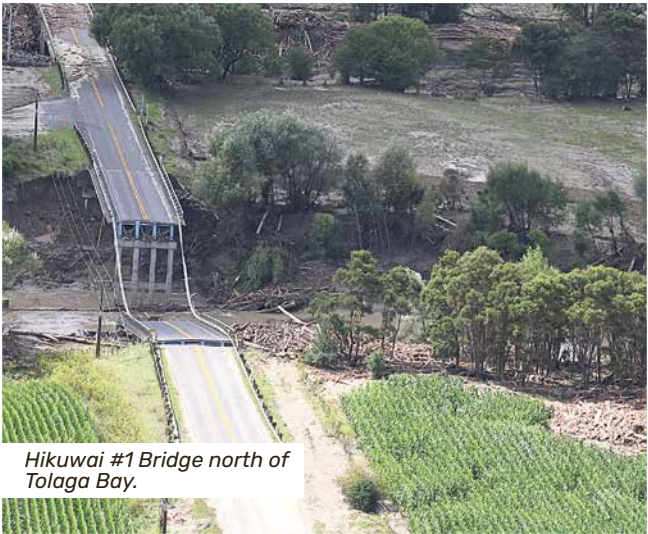
East Cape Road. Picture by Dr Murry Cave



Volunteer clearing debris, Marian Drive.



Doneraile Park remains closed after the damage Cyclone Gabrielle caused



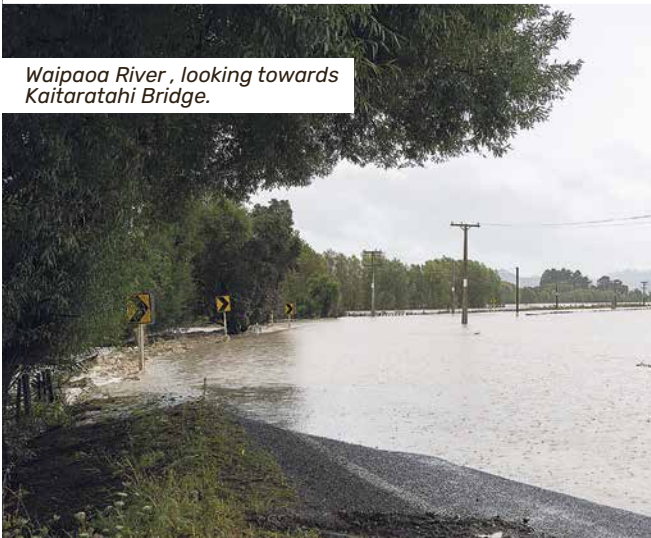
Hikuwai #1 Bridge north of Tolaga Bay.



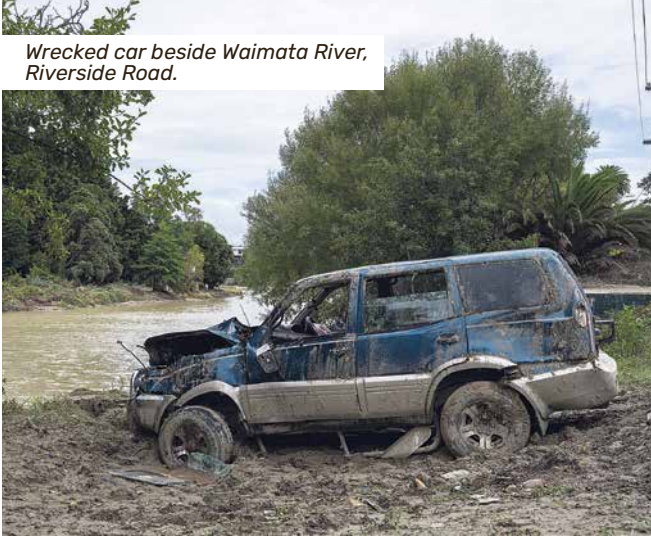
Flooded crops. Picture by Phil Yeo.



Landslide, Waiorongomai. Picture by Dr Murry Cave



Waipaoa River, looking towards Kaitaratahi Bridge.



Wrecked car beside Waimata River, Riverside Road.



Slash at Waikanae Beach. Picture by Phil Yeo



# The magic of Gabrielle



WAIPIRO Bay is a coastal community of around 150 residents – depending on the time of year. For nine days after Cyclone Gabrielle, they had no power or communication except word of mouth. Resident Karen McClutchie refers to the time after the rain and gale force winds left, as “the magic of Gabrielle”.

“Waipiro Bay is quite a humble community. And I won’t use the ‘r’ word, it was perhaps overused, but the people of this community know how to respond to circumstances when they’re not ideal and carry on with the mahi.”

Karen McClutchie was born in Te Puia Springs and grew up a few bays over in Reporua, spending many holidays along the Waipiro shoreline. She married her Waipiro Bay sweetheart Matuakore Tibble in February 1998 and raised their two children there.

“Without a doubt, Gabrielle was a

challenging time. A precious feature of the post Gabrielle experience was the privilege of serving the community alongside family, especially my children connecting with whānau and understanding who resides in Waipiro.

“I’d never have known there were around 150 residents. I would have said, ‘where are these people? It was lovely to see our people come into the fold. The relational reach has been strengthened, we found out more about our strengths, interests and whānau make up.

“This came about because of a time of challenge and the need to think community wide. During adversity, you see the good that comes out in people. It was a privilege to be part of how we can do things and elevate ourselves to better respond to further challenges beyond Gabrielle.”

To prepare, the community extended their ability to cater for everyone with a base at Te Puia Springs, and two Civil Defence welfare bases in Waipiro Bay – at the kura (school) and Taharora Marae. Six local Waipiro residents took up warden roles.

Taharora marae and the schoolhouse homed kaumatua and families who’d evacuated from the Akuaku end of Waipiro.

“For nine days everyone banded together resources and know-how to respond to our changing needs, this included fuel and generators. Some generators didn’t hold up. Our whānau generator became mobile and went to a few homes and the school to support appliances and chill medicine.

“Henry Rasmussen provided a radio so we could reach Te Puia whānau, who had access to external communications. As Starlinks became available his electrical strengths helped too.

“Gas cookers were fired up at the kura with manaakitanga top priority. With the billy on full time whistle, this meant there was always something ready at the click of the gas for people who turned up for a chat. There was kai for our delivery people and sustenance for our team who delivered to those who lived in the township, north to Akuaku, South to Waikawa and westward above the school. We soon realised togetherness was really important and having an effective team in place ensured no one got burnt out.

“A gas operated solar shower was set up and my husband made the epic six-hour journey to bring supplies of fresh fruit, vegetables and pet food for our local pets. Kaumatua and whānau in the Ihungia Valley were prioritised in this drop.”

Deliveries were made daily to every Waipiro home. Karen’s children, 17 and 20 at the time, helped and got to know who all the Aunties and Uncles were. Some deliveries were 1-2km on foot. Welfare checks were done at the same time. “Everyone was so grateful. And we were grateful too.”

They had two extra residents over that time too, “blown in by the wind”.

With the road between Te Puia Springs and Ruatorea closed, a pilot and a nurse from Tauranga on a van holiday found themselves part of Waipiro Bay – along with their French bulldog and cat. The couple blended in and helped out where they could. And the pets... “well, they were all of our pets by the end of the two weeks,” said Karen.

“A couple connected to the Williams’ family turned up one day. They spoke of their connection to Waipiro Bay and had a ute-load of groceries with them. They



Karen McClutchie and her two children, Matuakore Tibble and Fushia Tibble, making deliveries around Waipiro Bay.



Fushia Tibble playing Articulate by torchlight. Boardgames were the evening entertainment.

asked what else was needed and then came back with a barbecue.

“The donation of a barbecue for the school, and any resource to support readiness going forward, is much appreciated. We’re focused on how to prepare for future weather episodes, sustainably and independently. That means we need to generate our own power and have a good and healthy water supply.”

Karen said it’s also about creating an environment where Waipiro Bay can look at alternative cleaner power sources and systems.

“If we’re more independent, it frees people up for the huge amount of work required in times like these. I reflect on the incredible work of people at all levels of response, particularly the volunteers but also those who toiled to reconnect us all with whatever we needed.

“The generosity of our people who donated to the Waipiro Bay whānau was more than substantial. We were humbled. Whānaunga, who connected to Waipiro, reached out from the far north to Bay of Plenty. Leaving no stone unturned, some came directly to our door and others, through the grapevine, found ways to reach us and the rawa (goods) got through.

“While it seems like such a long time ago one year on, the benefits of relational exchanges in times of need continue to make us stronger – ano te pai o te piri tata, te noho tahi a nga tuakana me nga teina I runga I te whakaaro tahi (the importance of collaboration, mutual respect and collective thinking. The dwelling together of whānaunga sharing a common purpose. A powerful reminder of the strength that is drawn from this union.)

## Benefited from the kindness of strangers

ELLIE Mason, 28, and Hobby Hafiz, 31, initially went to Waipiro Bay for a shower but ended up being stuck there for nine days after their van broke on the weather-damaged road.

The couple from Tauranga had been on a holiday around the East Coast when Cyclone Gabrielle struck. Parked in Te Puia Springs, Ellie said they heard about the setup in Waipiro, which had a shower, and made their way there.

They made it to Waipiro Bay School with their dog and cat, but it was nine days before they could get out.

“We loved it – they were such lovely people and so kind and so welcoming. We all got along very well, we all became friends – it was good fun in the end despite the problems.

“Ngati Porou are the kindest people that we’ve dealt with, ever.”

A new part was sourced for their van in Ruatorea.

“We borrowed a push bike to get there along SH35 and someone in a Ute offered us a ride and coming back we got another ride from a road contractor.

“We really benefited from the kindness of strangers. Everyone was amazing.”



# Worst Valentine's ever

OPENING the door to Country Garden Flowers on February 14 – the usual bright blooms and familiar waft of fresh flowers hit owner Chantelle Ribbon...only it was eerily quiet and dark.

Inside, there was no power, outside the pavement was devoid of people. Rather than skipping a beat on one of the busiest days in a florist's calendar – her heart sank with the realisation no one would be calling, ordering online or walking in off the street.

A colourful array of roses sat uniform in their buckets, sunflowers and lilies showed their sunny faces, bunches were wrapped and ready – with nowhere to go.

"We spent everything out of the business account, we filled the shop to the brim...and never sold a thing," Chantelle recalls.

"At first, we were in our own little bubble, until we started getting news on Monday 13 that the bridges were closing due to high water levels.

"People don't tend to order in advance on Valentine's Day – so we need to be fully stocked to about three times our normal level. It was chocka, we had \$30,000 worth just in roses."

Chantelle knew things were bad when waking to no power that Valentine's Day morning, looking at flood water right to the front doorstep of her home in Farmer Road, Makaraka

"I realised a four-wheel drive may be my only way into work that day."

With other staff trapped across closed bridges – she and head florist sister Cherry Ribbon met over the shop counter.

It soon became clear things would not go to plan, as huge lines of traffic held up the handful of deliveries they had on pre-order.

"We were trying to get rid of the half dozen early orders we did have before roads shut off completely, but traffic was crawling, it was taking so long to get anywhere.

"I have seen devastation before, the earthquake in 2008 was bad for us, but sometimes you just feel like screaming. There are so many emotions, so many sleepless nights, a lot of quiet worry."

Even in the hard times, as her livelihood literally wilted before her eyes, Chantelle saw an opportunity to show some heart.

"By Thursday morning, we had to make a decision; flowers were rotting in the shop, we had no running water, no power, we packed up what was still good and took them to the hospital to give away to staff and patients.

"We dropped some into some businesses that were open along our journey to hospital. There would have been a few trolley-loads sent up to the wards to brighten their week."



Country Garden Flowers owner Chantelle Ribbon (right) with head florist Cherry Ribbon (left) weathered the storm of Cyclone Gabrielle and hope for a successful Valentine's Day this year.

As Tairāwhiti remained isolated with road blocks, no internet, no understanding of when things may return to normal – the reality set in. It became clear – buying bouquets would not be the first thing on people's minds for some time.

"It was dread, a feeling of dread, knowing the income for all our staff was gone for the whole week."

"Valentine's Day gets us through the tough months. I knew I had lost everything – I didn't even have \$2 in the account, as I banked it all on Monday and paid for flowers that same day.

"I split the float from our till with my worker who needed nappies and then I left some money at the shop in case she needed it. I went home with \$50 cash not knowing what lay ahead for the next few days; Fortunately, our cupboards were full, our freezer was full, the real sadness was losing our workers' income."

Many more challenges lay ahead, with freight and flower supply issues meaning things would take a long time to get back on track.

With sister Cherry and four other staff to support, Chantelle cut her hours at the shop in order to keep paying wages.

Applying for insurance was a mammoth task. The provider was slow to respond and when payment came in six months later (August), it barely covered loss of stock.

"The silent stress that lingered in the following weeks was the hardest. Do we close the shop or do we soldier on? You are doing everything you can to get through what others do not understand.

"It always does come back to normal, you just have to learn to sustain shell business. I think it's so important to understand sustainability – if you're going through a tough time – buckle down and potter along, eventually it will pick up."

Through it all, Chantelle has kept the doors to Country Garden Flowers open; sourcing stems where possible, digging in to keep delivering through the difficult times.

As the anniversary of Cyclone Gabrielle nears – anxiety looms, along with an ever-pressing deadline to fill the shop with flowers.

Times are still hard, but she hopes people will take the chance to brighten someone's day with blooms this Valentine's, just as she did in a time of darkness.

Perhaps this year, love will be just the medicine to help Tairāwhiti heal.

# Tough few years for hospitality

WHEN Cyclone Gabrielle hit, Marcel Campbell was determined to keep people fed – he's a pizza man after all. As the owner-operator of Neighbourhood Pizzeria, Marcel knows how to make a good slice and wasn't going to let a cyclone stop him. That's not to say he was prepared for the approaching cyclone. Despite warnings in the news beforehand, he didn't brace adequately for the impact.

"It didn't feel like it was a bonafide big storm, said Marcel. "There was a bit of media coverage around it, but it wasn't like it was 'a batten down the hatches' moment."

But when the cyclone hit, there was that limitless rain. Marcel still wasn't concerned as he thought Tairāwhiti was "match fit" after the amount of rain we'd experienced over the last couple of years. Reality hit when Marcel woke up.

"It was like shit, this is the real deal. Then it was emergency mode."

Being a pizza man, Marcel decided to do what he does best. But first, he needed ingredients.

The cyclone hit at the beginning of the week so his suppliers hadn't delivered his orders. Marcel decided to get behind the wheel and made his way to the Waioeka Gorge. He had some contacts on the other side of the gorge and was able to pick up supplies and quickly head back to Gisborne to open the doors of the pizzeria. Not long afterwards, the gorge closed to traffic so the trip was a once-off. On that drive,

Marcel saw the devastation around Te Karaka for the first time and realised this was no small weather event.

"That was when it hit home: seeing what had obviously been a wall of water just rolling through those flats. That's when I really realised it was quite localised. Some places were really unlucky, and some places were absolutely fine."

When he got back to Gisborne, Marcel and his crew fired up the pizza ovens.

"We just felt like we needed to open and make pizza."

Only a handful of tables showed up so they decided to "feed the heroes who were helping out."

"We made as many pizzas as we could and chucked them out to the emergency services and we just went around and showed a bit of love to everybody."

The cyclone hit at a particularly challenging time for the hospitality industry after years of COVID restrictions during the pandemic.

"It was like being in a boxing ring and this was like the final uppercut, you know? Just been a real tough couple of years."

Now he's looking forward to a hot summer so the Coast can recharge its batteries and dry out.

"There's a lot of chatter about El Nino, so I'm just hoping El Nino knows it's been invited to the party and shows up."





# PULLED OUT ALL THE STOPS TO MAKE BREAD

THERE was never any question the team at Walter Findlay Ltd wouldn't rise to the occasion and find a way for bread to make its way to tables across the region during Cyclone Gabrielle.

The 110-year-old local family business has ridden its fair share of disasters since it first opened its doors. At its heart has always been its people, with a strong connection to the wider community.

The company has operations in Australia, Idaho, Auckland, Dunedin, and Gisborne, as well as a distribution warehouse in Masterton. In Gisborne they bake and distribute 37 bread varieties which are trucked six days a week throughout the top of the East Cape, to Wairoa and the Wairarapa. Milk, eggs, pies, pizzas and other products are included in their distribution arm supplying supermarkets and stores.

Company leaders through the cyclone and aftermath were plant manager Clint Mengel, employer relations manager Chanelle Aspden, production manager Matt Spencer, chief financial officer Marianne Gillies and three fifth-generation members of the Findlay leadership team – operations Connor Findlay, health and safety Caleb Brown, and communication manager Alyx Findlay.

Everyone on the team has their own stories from the cyclone and what happened when the power and comms went dark. Many employees still showed up on Tuesday morning to see what they could do – even those who had been badly impacted by the weather.

"Everyone wanted to help," said Alyx.

The generator was kicked into gear and the bakery team set to work, producing enough bread for Gisborne.

It was not until Wednesday morning that the whole team gathered and while shell-shocked, were keen to get busy.

"It was a comfort to have everyone there, with the chance to debrief and coordinate a strategy."

Clint and Connor were in regular contact with Council, Waka Kotahi, Weatherell Transport and Pak'nSave, with multiple daily meetings to work through the mounting challenges. Ensuring the community had access to food

was a top priority. One major challenge was the road closures.

"It was a massive disruption to the supply chain with extreme concern as to how to get food to the more remote and isolated areas, including Wairoa and Tokomaru Bay."

The lack of internet and mobile coverage was very "disconcerting and challenging". Early on retail customers started turning up at the office door requesting extra pies and bread. Without phone connection it was like a step back in time to before phones existed. There were messages going out with drivers to shops, while Clint with the sales and distribution crew visited clients. Admin kept track of stock movement using pen and paper. "It felt like we were running blind, and not able to access our wider team who also rely on the Gisborne-based administration function."

They managed to get the bread truck to Tolaga Bay on the Wednesday, sending up around 1,000 loaves to a very grateful community. This was as far as the truck could go.

By now there were grave concerns about running out of flour so only a half production was done. Clint and Alyx used a satellite phone to call the flour supplier and get them on standby to join the first convoy through the Gorge. The truck arrived on Thursday and had to quickly turn around to meet the return convoy.

Findlays had been baking and freezing bread for the islands and by a stroke of luck had a full container ready to go. That was reddiverted to Wairoa who were desperate for bread and milk.

"It was a huge ask for our drivers to be out in these conditions, so had two drivers per truck for safety reasons. We tried to get to Wairoa on Thursday but got turned around. We tried again on Friday and got through with a full truck of bread, milk, water and eggs."

By Sunday, they got a truckload to Ruatorea the long way round with the drivers overnighing in Opotiki. From Ruatorea they managed to get bread and supplies to Tokomaru Bay and Te Puia via farm bike and trailer.

"There were lots of tasks that needed to be done but without internet or phones we couldn't do them.

I reassured people that our team outside of Gisborne would know we were offline and would have it covered.

"More importantly, we knew we had a driver somewhere in the south. He was doing the return run from Masterton and was due to overnight in Napier but no-one knew if he had made it safely."

They eventually tracked him down and flew him home to his very relieved family and colleagues, while his truck was seconded to Hawke's Bay Civil Defence. Company chief executives Nickkie and David were working in the United States at the time and Alyx said one of the toughest things was knowing they wouldn't know they were ok.

"We had to trust they would be able to find a way to pay our people and everything else that needed to be done. We later found out it took two days working with the banks to sort it."

Alyx says trusting in your people in such a moment is all you can do.

"People do rise up in the face of adversity to do what needs to be done."

Operating during COVID had put them in a good position to be flexible and make decisions quickly. "Our team stayed calm and just got on with things. I am very proud of them."

The road closures continued long after the Cyclone with drivers having to take longer routes for months after. "The interruption to our business has been astounding, and we were one of the lucky ones. The impact on people has been huge. I have never seen this level of stress and fatigue in our people."

Alyx said as tough as it was, she saw the very best in so many people.

"You hear other people's stories and realise how lucky we were. The responsibility as a business leader is weighty – you need to get your product out there, but you have to make sure your people are safe. That's what it is all about... people and your relationships with them."

## Truck convoy arrives with supplies

TRUCKIES are practical people. Show them a blocked road, and they'll get a chainsaw. At least that's what happened when a couple of Weatherell Transport's drivers were trapped on the night of Cyclone Gabrielle. The two drivers got stuck in Matawai after slips came down in front of them on Monday night, said Steve Weatherell, owner of Weatherell Transport with his partner Jane.

"They were basically stranded up there without any food or anything. The locals were feeding them but probably got sick of that so the best they could do was help them get out of there."

The truckies and the locals pulled out the chainsaws and got to work opening the roads, and drove into Gisborne on Wednesday. A surprise to many in town who thought the roads were impassable.

For 30 years Weatherell Transport has had trucks coming in and out of Gisborne, stocking supermarkets with the food that fills bellies, then hauling product and produce out of Tairāwhiti to market. Trucks, it's fair to say, keep this town rolling.

"We've got a business with 170 odd staff and depots throughout the country and Gisborne's our head office. So, when we lost internet we lost contact with the outside world, and they lost contact with each other as well. Our server for the whole country is here in Gisborne," said Steve.

When the drivers came down from Matawai, Steve knew they could get supplies into town. At the Emergency Coordination Centre he got into gear, liaising with Waka Kotahi, Council staff and police to get his trucks moving. By

Thursday, 13 Weatherell Transport trucks were rolling out from Auckland, Tauranga and Opotiki, filled with food, supplies and Starlink satellites destined for Gisborne. Saturday was the first time they took a truck with supplies to Wairoa which usually gets its groceries from Hawke's Bay. Steve said the business has probably lost millions because there's been almost nothing to haul out of town.

"There's a lack of crops down here. The crops have struggled because of the continual rainfall over 2023, many haven't been able to plant crops."

After the cyclone, there was some work for four or five months. Livestock farmers lost so many fences that they couldn't contain their stock so they sent them off to the freezing works.

"As far as we're concerned it is just the perfect storm. I mean we're hemorrhaging money left, right and centre. It's just unbelievable."

The business model works on a round-trip basis. They bring supplies into town and transport local goods to the main centres. About nine trucks arrive in Gisborne every day with supplies for the supermarkets, but the return journey struggles to find loads. Now Steve is looking forward to summer with plenty of produce to haul like sweet corn, squash and other produce. Steve is "hoping and praying" that things go smoothly this year but even then he said it will likely be a weak year because farmers are still in recovery mode. Many growers are struggling with increased costs and lower returns, and as a result, transport is struggling as well. Steve said Waka Kotahi is throwing everything they have at getting the roads

up to standard, but it will take time.

"They've done a bloody awesome job of trying to get the roads back. There are still a lot of roads around that need a lot of work and there's a lot of money still to be spent. You just need to drive down Bushmere Road, and there are holes there that you can bury half a car in, it's just unbelievable. It's gonna take some years to get back into some sort of shape."

Reflecting on the cyclone and the

recovery, Steve said the response from the community and the Council was impressive.

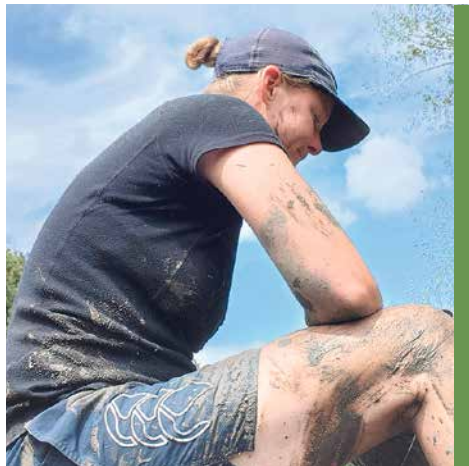
"I'm impressed with the Mayor, Helen Harris from Waka Kotahi, and with the way the councillors have run things. They get a lot of bad press, but they don't deserve it. Everybody's got their heart on their sleeve and done the best they can, and that's all you can ask."



A convoy of trucks into Gisborne on Thursday 16 February to bring much-needed supplies to the region.



# Off grid and can live off the land



JINA Jackson is used to being self-sufficient, but with the Horehore Station nestled in between the Waingakia Stream and the Mata River, the adverse weather of 2023 was always going to have a big impact. The 1600ha station northwest of Tokomaru Bay borders the Raukumara Ranges beneath Mount Hikurangi. In recent years it transitioned from sheep and beef farming to forestry. Jina manages the station and had only just got all the sheep off the station when Cyclone Gabrielle hit.

"It started drizzling the night I got back and when I woke up the next morning, the Waingakia was uncrossable. I thought it was just a rain event coming through but it hung around and was so wet I couldn't even go outside," she said.

That's not unusual in the autumn and winter months. Sometimes Jina can be stuck for a few weeks but once the water goes down she can get out easy enough.

"During Gabrielle it was torrential – the Waingakia was bank to bank and the noise unbelievable. I didn't get a lot of sleep that night because of it."

Her house is elevated so flooding wasn't her concern, but she was worried about a big hill covered in bush just behind the house.

"With all the heavy rain and the weight of the bush on the hillside I worried it would just let go."

Jina's house runs off solar and a generator, so when her contact with the outside world slipped away, she wasn't

particularly worried. But after 10 days and seeing a run of helicopters flying overhead, she knew something was amiss.

"I didn't hear from a soul," she says, "and it wasn't until my sister in Wellington called Civil Defence that anyone realised I was here."

By then, she was starting to run low on fuel and was living on rice and mutton from her freezer. She ended up hunting for deer for her five working dogs.

"I am on spring water here but the feed into my tank was all silted up so I had to drop all that."

It took her six hours and many bucketloads to get rid of the silt. The first loads from the helicopters were fuel, food and water, with regular drops continuing.

"I knew just from the amount of rain there would have been damage but I had no idea of what that would be as I had no TV or internet. Just looking at the damage here I knew it would be bad."

She had about 700mls of rain over the week of the cyclone and the river remained impassable for several weeks. Even now it doesn't take much to bring it back up. Almost continual rain through the year meant Jina hasn't been able to venture far often, and being cut off has become a regular occurrence. A year on, Jina is still rebuilding tracks across the farm. It took two-and-a-half hours to walk to the back of the station where the digger was (once it dried out enough to move it). It's no short jaunt to town even on a good day. Jina drives a side by side for 45 minutes to a nearby station where her ute is parked and it's then another two-hour drive to town. She used to cross the Mata River and go out through the Ihungia Forest to the road but with all the damage from the cyclone the rivers have changed. She now has to go another way that is dependent on the Waingakia being low. The continual high-water table has meant that's not guaranteed these days. She figures there are worse places to be holed up than the land she has lived on for a decade. Jina now has a Starlink so can remain connected with the outside world and has her constant companion Olive, a vizsla dog breed, by her side.



The Mata River roared with the volume of water.



## Hapu leaders instrumental in supporting whānau

CYCLONE Gabrielle Te Runanganui o Ngāti Porou (TRONPnui) General Manager, Lisa Whakataka, and Facilities and Projects Manager, Richard Whangapirita, represented TRONPnui at the Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) during the event.

As Lisa reflected back to almost twelve months ago, she has so much appreciation for everyone involved at the time of the event and post-Gabrielle. Over the State of Emergency, hapu leaders were instrumental in supporting the community with everyone putting in long hours.

Lisa's personal experience at the time observing in the ECC highlighted their robust internal processes; however, these did not always align with whānau in the community who just wanted to help where they could, which was totally understandable.

Sitting inside the ECC both Richard and Lisa were the lines of communication for their organisation. At the time it was crucial to have a central point of communication to ensure the correct information was being distributed.

"I want to express my sincere gratitude to everyone active in our communities, our organisation, and the ECC as a whole. Huge appreciation for the professionalism of Ben Green and his staff, our mayor Rehette Stoltz, and the cool-headedness of Nedine Thatcher Swann, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Gisborne District Council (Council).

"During the event, in light of the limited road access, I would want to draw attention to Ben Green's empathetic approval of two separate helicopter callouts to support tangihanga to both Whareponga and Tokomaru Bay. These plights for assistance came from those living within those communities. Huge thanks also to our CEO George Reedy, who didn't let a lack of resources stop his team from helping those in need and instead encouraged them to pivot and work in our communities. Thank you also to the members of our TRONPnui board who provided further behind-the-scenes support.

"I sincerely appreciate the contributions made to our Ngāti Porou fundraising page. I especially want to acknowledge all iwi and whānau from near and far who made koha. We were truly grateful.

"Although we are almost twelve months on, this event has highlighted the many priorities for Ngāti Porou and how the support of Government, Council and businesses builds greater resilience for all Tairāwhiti whānau in the future."



# Tokomaru Bay was landlocked

DAN Russell at Puketiti Station wasn't surprised when it started to rain as the cyclone approached. A pilot in the past, he'd been tracking both cyclones Hale and Gabrielle as they made their way toward Tokomaru Bay. He knew they were in for trouble. Thankfully, due to a series of unfortunate floods in the past, Tokomaru Bay had one of the most experienced Civil Defence (CD) teams in New Zealand.

"We've had five states of emergency in the last two years," said Dan, a sheep and beef farmer at Puketiti Station near Te Puia Springs. The 3500-hectare station has seven full-time employees, including Dan and his wife Anna. When the cyclone hit, Dan was in Tokomaru Bay recovering from back surgery. Instead of lying down, Dan went to the region's CD HQ to help out. He surveyed the region's slips and roads using his remote-controlled drone, teaming up with Errol Clarke from Council. A lot of the focus was on checking a major slip in the Mangahauini Valley, which posed a risk to the Tokomaru township. Dan said he was extremely impressed with everyone from Tokomaru Bay CD, saying the people there really knew what they were doing and that Lillian Ward and Gene Takurua ran "a very slick operation".

Helicopters and a Navy ship delivered supplies to the land-locked township.

"We had nearly 34 helicopters land one day. The sports ground was pegged out with four helipads. There could be three or four helicopters on the ground there at any given time. Possibly the weakest point of the whole emergency scene was the lack of coordination on the aerial support side. It's one of these lessons learned after the fact."

Dan said it was impressive how the community came together. We had a lot of schoolchildren here who couldn't get to school and couldn't access the internet. So local cray fisherman, Nick Destounis

and his crew member got all these kids in a group at Gerry Smith's and taught them how to splice ropes."

People from all over the community took time to share their life skills with the students, everybody was prepared to chip in. Another example was Remis Maaka, who ran checkpoints in the torrential rain.

"He was out there to stop people trying to drive off in the middle of the night and cross a bridge that just wasn't even there. It was a thankless task in the rain. There were guys there all night, every night. I think if those guys hadn't been on those roadblocks, people would have died."

Time has already begun to heal the coast, even if full health is some years off.

"It's amazing how quickly it repairs itself. We've just had all the logs and slash removed from the Tokomaru beach. You can walk down there, and you wouldn't even know a single thing that happened a year ago."

"But if I put my farming hat on now, you get off the beaten track, and you look at the damage to infrastructure. The recovery could take two or three years, even longer."

In Dan's case, nearly all of his farm's dams are full of silt, which stock get their drinking water from.

"When the water levels drop, the stock get stuck in mud trying to get a drink of water and often die there. This is not something you can fix in five minutes."

It takes time for the environment to heal, and the same goes for the people on the Coast.

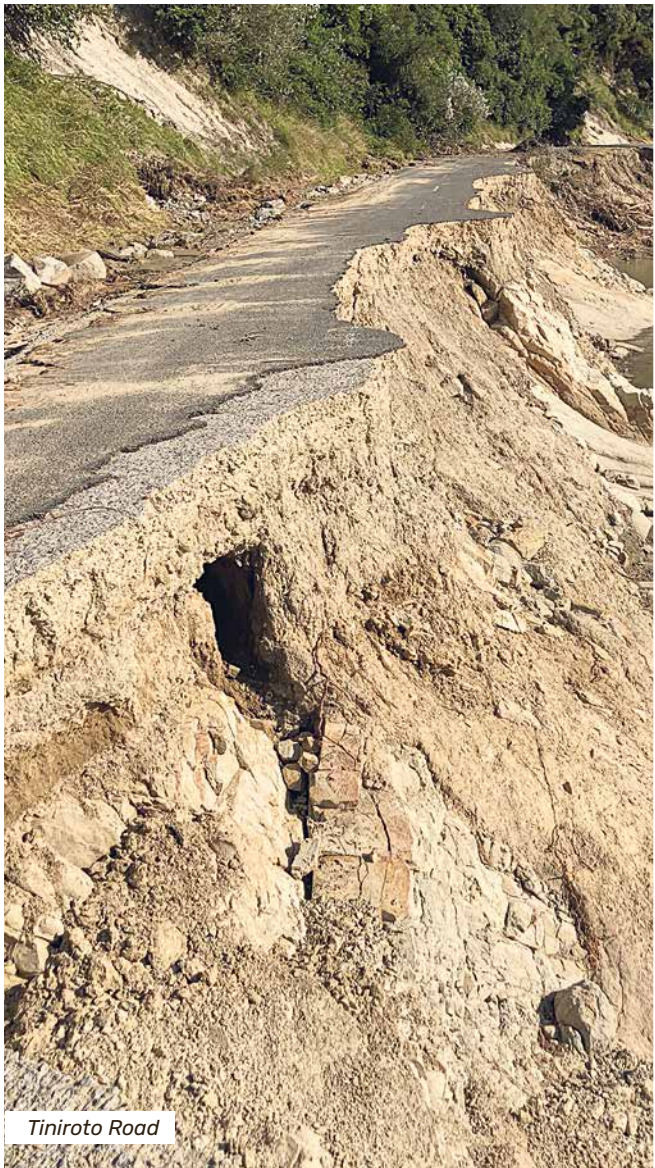
"Anytime there's a severe weather outlook here, everybody here gets a bit tetchy and a little bit of PTSD kicks in. If suddenly people start getting short with you or nervous, you've really just got to take your time. Mother Nature, she's a fickle mistress."



The Mangahauini River carved a new path across SH35 near Tokomaru Bay.



The Hikuwai #1 Bridge on SH35 took the fibre cable with it when it broke, this severed all connection to Gisborne.



Tiniroto Road



Slash at Tokomaru Bay



Neighbours and volunteers, Fergusson Drive. Picture by Phil Yeo.



Lavenham Road





# Well practiced and prepared community

ŪAWA (Tolaga Bay) is an hour's drive from Gisborne travelling north on SH35. Around 1,000 people call the township home. The community in Ūawa have sandbags, radios and gumboots always at the ready. Since 2018 the community has had more than its fair share of severe weather events, but it means they're better prepared as a result.

Between 24-48 hours before Cyclone Gabrielle made landfall, most of the community in low-lying areas by rivers had self-evacuated.

"You can always rebuild but you can't get back the loved ones we've lost," said Greg Shelton, Civil Defence Area Manager for Ūawa.

Greg was still trying to get access to his property on Waihou Beach Road from March 2022, when the region was pummeled again by Cyclone Hale, then Gabrielle. The road reopened quickly after Cyclone Gabrielle but four months later a heavy rain event in June caused a landslide at Waihou Beach Road that took five metres of the road with it. Ten

residents were trapped as a result until the road was rebuilt and reopened in December 2023.

Greg's been involved with Civil Defence for 35 years and has been area manager in Ūawa for the past six years. He knows this region has to move on from Cyclone Bola, but he reckons all that was learned has been forgotten or ignored.

"The two examples are that waterways and roads have been neglected to keep the volume of water where it should be. Also, permanent crops are still being planted in flood plains, and they shouldn't be because they cause a lot of heartbreak and financial stress. We went through it in

Cyclone Bola and people have continued to do it. That might be a bit controversial, but I'll be the first one to stand up and say it. We have to be about future-proofing. Look carefully where to put a house or a permanent crop. Because we've got the recipe here for more severe events."

Ūawa Wharf is the second longest wharf in New Zealand at 600m long. It's been closed since January 2023, when large swells during Cyclone Hale caused extensive damage. It's hoped to get the historic wharf, a popular spot for fishing, open to the halfway point by the end of February 2024.



TOP RIGHT: Wigan Bridge. ABOVE: Mangatokerau Bridge. Pictures by Dr Murry Cave.

## Beauty of rural communities

WHANGARA is a community of around 50 people that sits between Tūranga/Gisborne and Ūawa (Tolaga Bay). They have their own tank supply so never lost water but were without power and communication for more than a week.

There's a little transistor radio in Jasmine Leach's Whangara home that's taken pride of place. The solar-powered radio was all she and her Mum had after Cyclone Gabrielle, and they used it to tune into Radio Ngāti Porou. They didn't touch that dial once it was on or turn it off once – not even when they slept. Because even though rural communities are prepared and resourceful, what they weren't prepared for was not knowing.

"We had the neighbours of course and making sure everyone was ok but we were minimising movement. It felt very isolating. The hardest part was not knowing what was happening outside of us."

Knowing your community beforehand makes such a huge difference in a time of crisis, said Jasmine.

"Especially in a community like Whangara, we know each other and go over and above. Even if you're fighting with your cousin, you'll still share kai and resources. That's the beauty of rural communities."

Jasmine works at the Hauora in Ūawa. They prepared a space there in the days that followed Gabrielle where the community could come for a cup of tea,

a shower and have access to a Starlink for internet. The Ūawa Community Response team (UCR) led by Rina Kerekere and Jamie Kernohan worked in partnership with Ūawa Civil Defence (CD) and the community.

They had a database of who lived where, and what their needs were.

"That's invaluable in times of crisis. Ūawa is a well-oiled machine."

Hauiti Marae was activated, and there were regular check-ins from Tatai Kutia, CD community link for Whangara. It was tough on families locked down at home with lots of children and Dad not working though. Tolaga Bay Area School had its own water supply and was able to open earlier than most. This brought back routine, relieved pressure on families and lunches for school was able to provide meals again.

However, the impact of Gabrielle hasn't gone away just because it's a year on, said Jasmine. Some families have had to split up because the husband's job is now out of town. Lessons were learned too and rebuilding trust is huge.

"There needs to be trust that locals know how to support locals. While the sun is shining build some good relationships – that was a key learning. We're strengthening relationships with ourselves. Everytime it rains, we're worried about our community's mental health and wellbeing. It's about supporting them."



# Most devastating event in history of Te Karaka township



FROM February 14 2023, Te Karaka Area School was closed for six weeks as it sheltered, supported and provided sustenance for the community. The two local Marae in Te Karaka, Takipu and Rangatira, were heavily impacted with flooding.

Principal Renae Savage said they were blessed the school was not damaged. "It was an extreme situation but a huge privilege to be able to provide care and aroha at a huge time of need."

Donations poured into their technology and art rooms, the home economics kitchen made meals for hundreds of people every day, and displaced whānau were housed in classrooms.

"Whanaungatanga and manaakitanga are two of the school's values which will always prevail as we continue to work through the impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle."

Support also came through motivational speakers who shared "pearls of wisdom" and uplifting support.

Koka Renae said one student was particularly impacted by something John Kirwan said when he came. "She remembered he said it was ok to do one thing (shortened to DOT) at a time, step by step, and we promoted that as a school."

"Our students are very grateful they received support from around the country and the world. There was koha from Australia, shoes, sports gear, clothing and cards from all corners of Aotearoa. The akonga (students) were overwhelmed people who were not anywhere near us geographically had sent their aroha to us."

"Although our staff were impacted, they were at work. Together with whānau they've maintained an aspiration for educational success for our tamariki and rangatahi, despite everything that'd happened."

A huge achievement for the school came in January 2024, when NCEA results showed 100 percent of the akonga passed NCEA Level 1 and 2 despite the disrupted start to the year.

## The flood water came from nowhere

Kia Ora koutou

Ko Stellar Auldin ahau.

"I'm a Year 9 student at Te Karaka Area School. This is the korero that I shared at the Porou Ariki Teachers Conference."

"On the morning of the flooding we were evacuated from our home at around 4am. It was very scary because it was dark, we didn't know what was happening and the flood water started coming out of nowhere."

"We were taken up to Cranswick Hill. Fortunately, our house was not damaged but we did lose stuff in our sheds. I was really worried about my horse; I wasn't sure if she was still alive."

"Our town was like a war zone. It was great we could go to kura to have kai while we were cleaning up. It feels like we have only had a term and a half of constant learning."



"What an achievement, we're so pleased for all of our akonga and their families. We are conscious that there is a long road to a full recovery from this event, but staff feel excited and rejuvenated about the year ahead."

"We are very grateful to our first responders Civil Defence team who were pivotal in saving the lives of our community - despite being only six weeks in their voluntary roles at the time of the cyclone."

"We're very fortunate to our iwi Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki for their ongoing support to re-house, repair and lift the houses in our community - it's just incredible!"

"We've built community capacity and the single focus is inclusivity. We've become a school of the community as opposed to a school in a community."

For weeks after regular classes resumed, kaumatua would pop in for a cuppa.

"They wanted to be with other adults, they felt the silence of the town as the presence of people had reduced and the school was the natural place to go."

"We're planning to create a mural in front of the school - a korowai to signify one year on. To depict the whole community who wrapped around us to get us through the most devastating natural disaster in the history of our township."

Koka Renae said the biggest learning had been not to be complacent anymore.

"We've got plans both at school and for the community that are in place for when river levels get to certain heights, we activate our evacuation process. This is to ensure our tamariki, rangatahi and kaiako return home before the roads are unpassable."

ABOVE: Students and whānau at the 2023 prizegiving for Te Karaka Area School. NCEA results showed 100 percent of the akonga (students) passed NCEA Level 1 and 2 despite the disrupted start to the year, they'd had.

TOP RIGHT: Picture by Rebecca Grunwell, The Gisborne Herald.

## Water like waves crashing onto road

Ko Owen Roberts ahau

"I am a Year 5 student at Te Karaka Area School."

"This is my story about the morning of the flood I shared with the Kaiako at the Kahui Ako conference."

"On the morning of the flood my Dad woke us up and went to check on the river. Her told us it was overflowing. He said we needed to go to the school to register. We went up to the Cranswick Hill to evacuate."

"The water was like waves crashing onto the road. We waited watching our whole town go under water."

"We went back down to town. One of our cows and four of our sheep had drowned. Our house was flooded and we had to go to the school to live for three weeks."

"We were lucky enough to go live at the Police house in TK. Until our batches came to our house."

"My Dad now runs a silt crew to help other whānau to clear their homes."



# Cyclones, chainsaws, and a road not worth travelling

**At the end of her first four-day shift she had to be dropped to her Wairoa home by helicopter, and in the following months her mother shouldered the lion's share of caring for her daughter.**



TRAVELLING to Gisborne for work in the weeks after Cyclone Gabrielle, Kelley Waite would pack what she needed for overnight stays...and a chainsaw.

"There were always trees down," she says of the Tiniroto Road route from her home at Marumaru, inland from Wairoa, "you had to be prepared".

As the state of the road worsened Kelley opted to travel via Wairoa, making it an 80-minute trip to the Gisborne hangar where she worked as crewman with the Trust Tairāwhiti Eastland Rescue Helicopter.

"But even that route was often compromised," she says. "That's quite ironic given our work often involves getting to people who are cut off from the help they need."

At the time the cyclone struck, Kelley had given up her role as base manager with plans for her, her mother Della and her pre-school daughter Kenzyie to leave the family home of more than 40 years and move to Hastings, closer to the care centre where her father, Glyn, has lived since suffering a stroke in 2022. But in the post-cyclone environment, she opted to stay put and in those early weeks there was plenty of work to be done.

"Though we'd got the warning alert on Monday night, it just sounded like rain, so we settled in for the night," Kelley says. "It wasn't until the morning we discovered we had no phones, no paging system, no internet or any other means of contact with the outside world."

Even if they did have communications, Civil Aviation Authority rules meant the crew would not have been able to fly in the worst of conditions. Their first response was to check in on St John Ambulance staff, who had been flooded out of the ground floor of their building but had access to comms via a Fire and Emergency NZ command vehicle. They then managed to contact their own Search and Rescue Ltd (SRSL) operations manager, in Palmerston North, to let them know they were alright but would have to communicate via satellite phone.

"Those first couple of days were really frustrating," says Kelley. "Our region did not have the rescue demands like in Hawke's Bay but we still had to be available to respond to medical and trauma events, especially with the roads having been smashed in the storm."

Responding to Rescue Coordination

Centre (Lower Hutt) alerts from Personal Locator Beacons, the crew were in the air on Tuesday morning the 14th. And by the evening of day three, Wednesday, the Tairāwhiti crew weren't on their own: the Rescue Coordination Centre had swung into action to send support from Otago Southland Rescue Helicopter (two helicopters, seven crew) while SRSL sent relief crew from Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter's Taupo base.

"Critically, the Otago crew brought with them a Starlink kit and, while on a job to Rotorua on the Friday, managed to pick up one for us to keep," Kelley says. "That meant we could restore some of our own comms without drawing resources from our community, where connectivity was a struggle for everyone."

Between them the crews and aircraft worked non-stop, checking on rural residents, delivering critical medical supplies, flying people in need of medical attention to hospitals in Gisborne and the Bay of Plenty and, of course, responding to emergency medical and trauma events.

"The whole reason for our existence is to help people, especially those who are far from or cut off from the assistance they need," Kelley says. "We were just lucky that, in the hours after the storm, most people in our region were able to self-evacuate or had support from neighbours and whānau to help them."

As time went by Kelley was among the thousands of people affected by the ongoing impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle. At the end of her first four-day shift she had to be dropped to her Wairoa home by helicopter, and in the following months her mother shouldered the lion's share of caring for her daughter.

"It was horrible being cut off from Kenzyie and, because of the condition of the roads, we weren't able to see my father," she says. "We always need the support of our families but it's at times like that it really hits home how, without them, we just couldn't do the jobs we are here to do."

Ten months after Cyclone Gabrielle struck Kelley Waite, her daughter and mother had secured a new home near Hastings, and Kelley was snapped up to crew for the region's Lowe Corporation Rescue Helicopter.

"To me, the whole experience just solidified the need to have a rescue helicopter based in Tairāwhiti," she says. "So many people in the community rely on having that asset available right where and when they need it."

**You had to be prepared.**

## TROTAK – still working with Te Karaka

WHEN the cyclone struck, Te Rūnanga o Tūrangānui a Kiwa sprang into action.

"Our first priority was to support the Welfare Response teams in the community," said TROTAK's Tee Montgomery.

"We want to thank our eight communities who have been involved with E Tū Whānau for the past eight years and entrusted us to respond, leading in how they wanted their community to be supported. The TROTAK warehouse was established in 2022 and was prepared to receive resources for all of Tairāwhiti. We packed up food hampers for families and set up welfare centres in Kaiti, Te Karaka, Waihirere, Tiniroto, Matawai, Whatatutu and Ngāti Porou.

"After three days, it was reported that many whānau had been displaced, and a week later, their where were marked with red or yellow stickers. The TROTAK Housing team was able to work alongside teams from MBIE and MSD to support families who lost their homes. They joined forces to offer a high level of support for all the vital services these families needed, including addressing their social and emotional needs.

"During this large event, many organisations came together to ensure that essential services and resources

were available to meet the immediate and long-term welfare needs of the families. It required a comprehensive approach that only a team effort could achieve.

"The Te Karaka community has suffered significant damage to infrastructure roads, bridges, and two marae are currently out of action which the marae committees are working through a process for their next steps.

"The community has received a significant uplift, thanks to many initiatives and the ongoing collaborative support of various agencies. It is heartening to see such a high level of dedication towards the rebuilding of Te Karaka."

TROTAK continues to be involved following Cyclone Gabrielle, offering ongoing support to Te Karaka Area School and providing resources for students and their whānau.

**BELOW: Cars jam-packed on top of Cranswick Hill in Te Karaka. Around 450 people were trapped up there for more than 24 hours. Food was delivered by a front loader and distributed to everyone as they waited for flood waters to recede.**





# The ‘Mangapapa Event’ – Tuesday 28 February 2023

TWO weeks after Cyclone Gabrielle a localised severe downfall of rain hit the already saturated suburbs of Mangapapa with such ferocity that sheds and cars were washed away. Around 4am on Tuesday 28 February many Mangapapa residents either self-evacuated or were woken up by the Police going door-to-door checking on people. It is estimated the Mangapapa Stream rose up to two metres in places. The House of Breakthrough re-opened as an evacuation centre.

Most people were able to return home later that day, however, the downpour resulted in a further 18 homes being yellow-stickered as a result of this one-off rain event.

Council Principal Scientist, Dr Murry Cave, says the key issue was the intensity. “Stormwater runoff was immediate and the culvert and water table capacity was overwhelmed, and still had lots of debris in it from Gabrielle.”

The graph below displays the combined rainfall from rain gauges across the city during the flooding on 28 February. This explains why the flooding was localised to one side of town, specifically at Mangapapa.

The top three lines are Cameron Road, Stout Street and Waimata at Goodwins Road rain gauges.

These three sites recorded roughly three times the amount of rain compared to Waipaoa at Matawhero, Wheatstone Road, Paraone Road and Waikanae Creek at Customhouse Street sites.

“What’s important about this event of 28 February was that it created an impact in the city due to groundwater levels rising, not river levels”, says Peter Hancock, Council’s Environmental Monitoring team Leader.

“Yes, it was intense but normally something like this wouldn’t cause flooding.

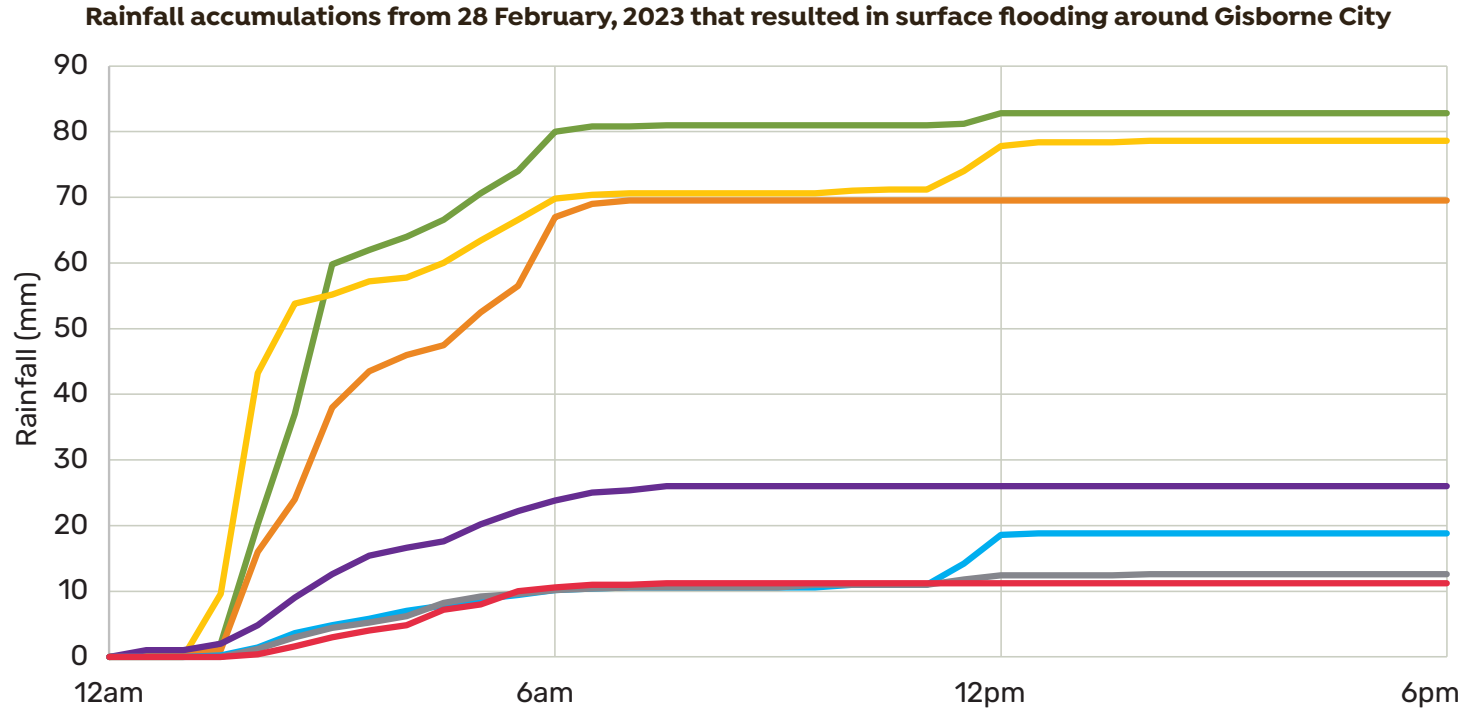
“It was the inability of the ground to absorb rain which caused the surface flooding damage.

“Cyclone Hale filled up the shallow Te Hapara sands aquifer, then Gabrielle filled groundwater levels up even higher, and rainfall on 25 February filled them up even higher.

“Then this intense but relatively small rainfall event on 28 February was the straw ‘that broke the camel’s back’. It filled up the aquifer to above ground level and caused widespread flooding in Gisborne city itself.”

Legend

- Stout St RG
- Cameron Road No1 Bore GPB099
- Wheatstone Rd
- Waikanae Creek at Customhouse St Bridge
- Waimata River at Goodwins Rd Bridge
- Waipaoa River at Matawhero Bridge
- Paraone Rd RG



## “No way I would have survived”



A GISBORNE woman survived her worst nightmare in the after-effects of Cyclone Gabrielle, when her car was swept into a swollen torrent created by a blocked culvert in Mangapapa. Dianne Holland – a real estate agent at Bayleys – and her husband Russell were asleep at home in Clifford Street in the early hours of 28 February – two weeks after the cyclone – when the effect of the thunderstorm affecting Gisborne came to a head in the hills behind Valley Road. Russell woke her at about 3.30 am after hearing noises of debris crashing into their neighbour’s house. They were shocked to see their neighbour’s neatly stacked firewood floating, with water quickly filling their home office in the basement. Russell immediately began moving whatever he could from their office while Dianne went to shift her car, which was parked at the bottom of their driveway, in front of their office. She started driving out to manoeuvre it to a higher spot. However, as she started driving, water had already entered the car’s footwell, causing it to stall before she could get it to safety.

“I could not open the doors or get the windows to go down.”



With flood water rising, she knew she had to get out before her car was swept into the stream alongside their property. The car was already starting to drift downstream.

“I tried to get the headrest off to break the window and began to panic when I could not get it off.”

Ordering herself not to panic and saying a quick prayer, she thought about what else was in the car. When she thought of the real estate signs in the boot she suddenly remembered she had the mallet for driving their stakes into the ground. Sliding through to the back seat, she reached into the boot of the car to grab it from her tool kit. It bounced off with the first blow on the window but smashed it on her second attempt.

“I was able to climb out and have never felt so relieved in my whole life,” she said. So much so that she initially did not

feel the bits of glass in her legs and hand. Being underwater in an enclosed place had always been her worst nightmare. She waded waist-deep back to her home as the car, a late model Touareg, disappeared into the stream which by then had become a river.

“It was destroyed and there is no way I would have survived.”

The vehicle was eventually found several hundred metres down the stream, having gone through the Mangapapa culvert and ended up completely submerged. Additionally, their treasured Mini, which was parked in the garage, was also destroyed.

Dianne and neighbours believe the sudden flood was likely caused by a blocked culvert in Ormond Road. Water rose two-thirds of the way up the walls in their basement but Russell had managed to get out their main computers and

most of their work data before the flood waters became too dangerous. Dianne’s desk was destroyed along with many other things. They estimate they disposed of approximately 5 tonnes of damaged property. Miraculously their freezer, which was floating, was still running and the contents were dry.

The basement had to be virtually rebuilt and the Holland’s were grateful to neighbours and Dianne’s colleagues from Bayleys who all turned up the next day to help them clean up.

“People from down the road found our kayaks and paddleboards but I lost my brand-new wetsuit from the back of my car.”

One thing she learned from the experience – apart from keeping something heavy in the car – is the need to keep culverts and drains clear.



## RRT goes where the need is

CYCLONE Gabrielle was the largest operation NZ's Rapid Relief Team (RRT) had ever been involved in with a lot achieved in a short time.

RRT is operated across the country by volunteers who turn up and feed people during a crisis. They bring their own BBQ trailer, all the ingredients to make burgers and water. In Gisborne, 21 volunteers served 1,100 burgers, gave away 360 water bottles and 96 food boxes between Monday 13 to Wednesday 15 February.

Then they were called to Wairoa. The logistics of getting their large 1,700kg BBQ trailer to Wairoa via helicopter was complicated and hard but they did it, thanks to support from NEMA (National Emergency Management Agency). RRT team leaders from Gisborne Clarke Judd and Jerry Blampied got a ride to Wairoa in an NZDF NH90 helicopter landing late on Wednesday afternoon, much to locals' surprise – "who are you, where have you come from, we haven't heard from anyone."

Over four days in Wairoa, 34 RRT volunteers served 5,000 meals, and gave away 1,488 water bottles, 1,626 food boxes and 800 care kits. Across the North Island during February, RRT made 7,457 meals with volunteer teams in Northland, Auckland, Napier, Hastings, Manawatu and Palmerston North.

## Business hub created by Trust Tairāwhiti

IN THE aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle, Trust Tairāwhiti (the Trust) had a vital role to play in supporting the immediate business response and broader regional economic recovery. The initial priority was establishing a business hub with Starlink, internet, enabling businesses to pay staff and access support from Government agencies while connectivity was down.

More than 300 businesses came through the hub in the first couple of weeks after the cyclone. Trust staff surveyed local sectors and small business owners about the impacts and losses to provide information to the Government.

The Trust was one of seven agencies tasked with delivering the Government's business recovery package to flood-affected regions around the North Island. Eligible businesses could apply for up to \$40k to help address immediate cash flow issues related to customer access, supply chain issues or inability to operate as usual due to cyclone damage.

Over eight weeks, the Trust distributed \$16.32m to 730 local businesses to support their recovery and get back up and running.

Outside of the business and economic response, the Trust board made \$372.5k available towards an immediate community relief fund, recognising the massive volunteer efforts from various community organisations. Other funders contributed to the initiative, including the Department of Internal Affairs, The Gift Trust, the Clare Foundation, and the Mātai Relief Fund. In total, 49 community groups received quick turnaround grants to help their recovery.



Silt through a home in the Waimata Catchment.

## Dedicated group of volunteers ensured farming families accounted for

AFTER Cyclone Gabrielle wreaked havoc and destroyed roads and infrastructure in the early hours of the Tuesday morning, hundreds of people found themselves isolated from the rest of the region.

A pop-up Farming Community Hub was set up immediately afterward to gather information on who was where, who needed help and what they needed.

Around 200 rural families in Tairāwhiti were airlifted essential supplies like food, baby food, pet food, and diapers since they had no means of getting out.

"The Hub was an incredibly dedicated group of four people who worked from a Council meeting room in the main foyer. Their single aim was to ensure every family beyond the broken bridges and washed-out roads was accounted for," said Sandra Faulkner who helped coordinate the Hub together with Pania King.

The Hub volunteers, Sue Quilter, Dana Kirkpatrick, John Bowen and Tim Walker, produced a "phenomenal"

interactive spreadsheet of who was where, their rapid find numbers (letterbox numbers) and GPS coordinates for flights. They achieved it with no internet or phone coverage using only maps and local knowledge.

"They delved into their own personal and professional networks, they connected with every farmer, pilot, roading contractor, stock and real estate agent, rural banker and trucking operator that walked through the Council doors," said Mrs Faulkner.

"Every time news came in, the spreadsheet was patiently updated and passed to the Intelligence, Operations and Welfare teams in the ECC.

"Through all that first week they, graciously and with deep empathy, welcomed shattered and broken farming folk into their office making endless cups of tea, providing tissues and shoulders to carry the tears, before helping to sort out connections and work out solutions."



## Boots on the ground

IN THE days and months after Cyclone Gabrielle, Rural Support Trust workers went under the radar, cold-calling farmers in person to see how they were going. They could often end up staying for a cuppa, or a chat against a fence post if that's what it took. Tairāwhiti coordinator, Vicki Crosswell, said some didn't want to talk about the cyclone at first or talk at all. She relayed a story about a gentleman she referred to as Bob to protect his identity.

"He's a dear old gentleman, had been through Bola so he'd seen it all, lost his wife many years before and was still working the land like everyone else. When I pulled up to his house, Bob yelled out, 'Whadda ya want?'"

Vicki explained who she was, and what the Rural Support Trust was out doing.

"No, I'm all right," said Bob, "nothing wrong with my mental health."

Vicki said 45 minutes later Bob was still talking to her, and half an hour after that she asked him, "So, Bob, how are YOU?"

"He lifted his head, looked me in the eye, scratched his head, and said, 'What type of question is that?'"

Vicki acknowledged it was a question that can hit hard, that he didn't have to answer but she wanted to ask anyway.

Bob replied, "That's a curve ball that question. I can't answer that at the moment."

About seven days later, Vicki bumped into Bob in Farmlands.

"He tapped me on the shoulder and said, 'I can answer that question now. When you spoke to me, you were generally interested in how I was doing. You made eye contact and spoke to me, not at me. It made me realise people do care.'"

Vicki said she had to hold back tears in the middle of the store.

"But it's a good example of how little things show people that we do genuinely care and want to know how they're doing. Mentally people can put a front up but it's hard going. We're a year on now from Cyclone Gabrielle

and people's walls are falling down. We've seen people go to some dark places. A big thing in our job is finding normality. But what is normal for people now, some just don't know anymore. Plus, everyone deals with a traumatic event differently, it's daunting. One big thing out there is people are unable to recognise the systematic signs of mental wellness – your self-care.

"We're out here to make sure the holistic part of farming is remembered. If you don't look after your own well-being, then you can't look after everything else like the right decisions, finances etc. It's so important to take time out. Take a walk, read a book, even just 10 minutes for a cuppa, or better still take a short break away"

RST sponsored "Hort Day" run by the Evergreen Foundation and Rapid Relief Team, "Farmers Community Connect Day" – where farmers and growers came together.

"Both days were amazing and to see smiles and laughter on everyone's faces was incredible."

Restore Native donated 17,000 native trees which have been planted in and around the rohe. Sunrise Foundation has contributed towards the RST Outward Bound Experience happening in Anakiwa in March, tailor-made for cyclone-affected people in this region.

"If people are in need or see a need, we're there," said Vicki. "Even just to say hi."

ABOVE: Farm and home in Crosswell Road, Kaiteratahi by the 'banana bridge' between Ormond and Te Karaka.



Call Rural Support Trust on **0800 787 254** or visit them online **www.rural-support.org.nz** or direct on **021 433 524**.



# Keeping each other going



AT A time when most people are settling into retirement, Nuhaka couple Andrew and Debbie Greaves are facing the biggest slog of their lives. They'd sold their contracting business so Andy could help Debbie run the farm. They were both adapting to an easier pace of life. Then in January it started raining and didn't really stop all year. Cyclone Hale caused damage to their fertile river flats, where floodwaters swept away concrete water troughs and left silt, debris and boulders. But nothing prepared them for the catastrophe of Gabrielle.

The worst flooding was overnight, and

they were not fully aware of the immense havoc going on in the dark. There wasn't much sleep as they kept a watch on their dog team as the Tunanui Stream rose closer to their dog motel. The dogs stayed safe but morning light revealed utter devastation. Their main farm access track was buried in silt, logs and other forestry debris covered their holding paddock, their access bridge wasn't even visible. All their sheep and cattle were on the other side, with no way to get across to check their safety. Their neighbour picked Debbie up on his quad bike to view their precious river flats from River Road on the other side of the stream, now a raging river.

She just about fell off the bike when she saw the scene. The most fertile part of their farm was covered in boulders, timber and silt as far as she could see. The stream had cut a new course right through their flats, sweeping away fences and water troughs.

Worse was to come when they finally regained access about 10 days later to discover the bodies of lambs – about a third of their annual lamb crop -- strewn on the hillsides. They're still finding bodies of cattle. It took Andy 60 hours on his digger just to get down to the bridge. Since

then, he's shifted thousands of tonnes of silt and debris and helped Debbie oversee construction of new fencelines across the farm. Luckily, they've had help with the cost through Council and had worker support through Taskforce Green.

Apart from this they've had many visits from officials and experts but have yet to receive any practical help or advice resulting from their observations. Their best support has come from MPI and the Rural Support Trust.

"They have been great – some have become lifetime friends," said Debbie.

Their spirits were also hugely lifted with the arrival of their daughter and son-in-law Kylie and Guy Gaddum and their children. Guy spent a solid day on the digger and with their older grandchildren shifted some huge piles of slash. They're still getting their heads around some weird changes in their water tables. Many springs have disappeared, drains are now running the wrong way or have simply disappeared. They're struggling to deal with all the slash, having nowhere to legally dispose of it. With JNL forests further upstream, bonfires are not an option. The silt is also a major problem. It covers about 25 hectares and is metres thick in some areas. It was to wet all

winter to navigate and has now dried up to a fine dusty powder. Although fertilised and oversewn with rye grass it supports mainly weeds. They fear it'll be some time before paddocks can be used to finish stock.

Feeling angry doesn't help. Being a former forestry roading contractor Andy knows well what has caused the worst of the problem and attributes it to decades of poor regulation in this region. No other region has had a slash disaster on this scale because elsewhere there have always been tight slash management and enforcement regimes. They feel they have been left with an unsaleable asset, so they just must soldier on and try to keep their sense of humour. This has not been easy in the face of repeated flooding in their district. For example, Andy has had to do major clearing work on the farm's main culvert not once but three times. Debbie says she's stayed at home the whole time and given up badminton and a lot of the things she normally does with her grandchildren.

"There is so much work to be done, we have to keep each other going. The hardest part is when we are both feeling down but usually one of us can bolster the other. We're a team."



Anzac Park. Picture by Ben Cowper, The Gisborne Herald



Tim and Sarah Blair on Branson Road who were hit hard. Picture by Paul Rickard, The Gisborne Herald



Mangatokerau, Uawa. Picture by Dr Murry Cave



Te Arai. Picture by Dr Murry Cave



The Waimata Catchment rises to the northwest of Gisborne city, having its headwaters in the Wakaroa hills. After passing several bridges it joins the Taraheru to become the 1.2km short Tūranga-nui river. The catchment was severely affected by cyclones Hale and Gabrielle with nearly 14,000 landslides resulting in the migration of significant volumes of sediment, wood and debris downstream where it partially dammed the William Pettie bridge. This resulted in back flooding, exacerbating flood impacts on upstream dwellings rendering many temporarily uninhabitable. Other dwellings were impacted by lateral erosion and riverbank slumping.

## The beauty of having a catchment group

ON DAY six after Cyclone Gabrielle, Laura Watson and Sam Gibson went door-to-door armed with a ute load of dog food (donated by the SPCA) to visit rural residents in the Waimata Catchment. Laura is the Waimata Catchment Group (WCG) Coordinator and Sam is the New Zealand Landcare Trust (NZLT) Catchment Coordinator.

Having an established catchment group, supported by a Landcare Trust Coordinator, speeds up recovery from extreme weather events, they said.

The door-to-door approach was key to this response being successful, as one learning was “emails don’t work in a crisis”. However, social media does. It was a powerful funding tool with the NZLT Recovery Fund raising more than \$100,000.

NZLT/Ngā Matapopore Whenua is a grassroots organisation that partners with rural communities, catchment and landcare groups to make a tangible difference in the future of New Zealand’s waterways. The WCG is a community-led initiative that aims to improve the health of the Waimata River, its tributaries and the wider catchment area. The Upper Waimata area is about a 30-minute drive from Gisborne.

Farmers needed digger and bulldozer support urgently to clean farm tracks and get stock out as animal welfare became a serious concern. A one-off \$5,000 worth of digger work was given to each farm impacted within the catchment area.

Local demand meant most of the machinery and digger operators came from outside the region. They had a window of three months to get as much done as possible. Affected houses were dug out and cleaned out, woolsheds and yards de-silted, fences patched, fences dug out, culverts unblocked, flood gates built and drains re-established.

“Farmers were overwhelmed. The devastation and loss they had suffered seemed too big to climb out of,” said Sam.

“Farmers were exhausted working dawn to dusk



Utting Road.

keeping access roads open and trying to repair their infrastructure. When they returned home, checking emails was simply a low priority.”

But that meant they weren’t getting information about Government funding or important surveys for other funding. So, the team gathered all the information, popped it in a flyer and hand-delivered it. Volunteers were available to help fill out application forms.

“This freed up our farmers so they could deal with animal welfare needs and start destocking. This was crucial as erosion and slipping caused significant pasture losses meaning the remaining feed for winter was dwindling.”

Tairāwhiti Environment Centre acted as a town base for the WCG relief efforts. Gear was stored, meetings held, and naps taken there. It was also where a large volunteer movement was coordinated. Steph Temple became the Tairāwhiti Environment Centre Volunteer Coordinator with a list of more than 400 people who wanted to help.

Steph supported Sam and Laura by sending volunteers whose skills matched the property-by-property job list.

“If you have a strong catchment group already in existence you can achieve great things when disaster hits and you don’t have to reinvent the wheel. It allowed us to hit the ground while there was still an appetite in the community to offer voluntary help. About 50 percent of the volunteer work was done on lifestyle blocks.”

Steph said there were some volunteers who never got to do anything, but their offers of support were a form of support.

“Even the act of putting your name down to help is a beautiful thing and makes our community what it is.

“The collaborative approach and networking prior to the cyclone meant we all had strong relationships with agencies. For example, Gizzy Kai Rescue helped with animal food, there were offers of resources from out of town and a group drove from Tauranga with wheelbarrows and spades, others donated chainsaws, PPE and food to keep our volunteers going.

“We just want to say thank you to all those who supported these efforts with financial donations, physical help and messages of encouragement.”

## Tonnes of food moved to welfare centres

MORE than two tonnes of food and hygiene products were distributed by Gizzy Kai Rescue (GKR) in the week after Cyclone Gabrielle.

Manager Lauren Beattie said the diverted, rescued and donated kai went to Civil Defence welfare centres and matched with their vision of ‘no waste, no hunger’.

“We were one of so many community groups who did so much over this time.”

GKR networks reached whānau from Wairoa to Wharekahika/Hicks Bay, in a seven-day operation that was supported by more than 30 volunteers.

“Our strength is our amazing volunteers, networks, logistics, coordination and collaboration,” said Lauren. “We have systems, processes and policies that guide our operation when anomalous events occur.”

GKR quickly adapted and expanded its operations to reach a broad range of groups during this period. Offers of donations, support and goods rolled in, allowing GKR to carefully decide which items to prioritise for distribution into the region.

“Our local donors were amazing, as were the NZ Food Network team. There was a considered donation from a Tauranga business of wheelbarrows, shovels, generators and gumboots, and socks and petrol canisters from another one. Although outside the norm for GKR it was an easy ‘yes, please!’”

Lauren said an avid group of bakers in Auckland sent home baking to GKR which was pushed out to affected rural families and volunteer clean-up crews. There were also donations of pet and working dog food that were distributed in the weeks and months afterward through GKR networks.



SuperGrans distributed a year’s worth of supplies in just three weeks after Cyclone Gabrielle.

Manager at the time Linda Coulston said it was “unprecedented”.

“We were amazed by the incredible response from our community, organisations and businesses as so many came forward to assist us.

“I was incredibly proud of our staff, board members and community for their unwavering support during this time.”



# Tairāwhiti Emergency Management Office

Tairāwhiti Emergency Management Office (TEMO) is an executive-level team of four people who lead every regional Civil Defence response. TEMO is the professional arm that oversees the Civil Defence Community Links members – the volunteers in our community who take up roles of leadership when disaster strikes. TEMO is situated at the Tairāwhiti Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) on Potae Ave, Lytton West.

## Ben Green MNZM

TEMO MANAGER

BEN said the difference with the Cyclone Gabrielle response was that there were multiple regions across Aotearoa New Zealand in strife and on a scale that saw a national emergency declared. This is significant as it is only the third time New Zealand has declared a national-level emergency.

"Within our own region, every community was either directly or indirectly affected too. In that sense, Cyclone Gabrielle was like having a five-car accident and one ambulance turn up. At that point, it becomes about the priority of need, and deploying the limited assets and resources to be able to respond," he said.

"We were dealing with finite resources over a large-scale scenario across the region and where multiple regions were also affected. It doesn't get more challenging or complex than what we went through. What these events always present, are ordinary people who take on extraordinary tasks."

Ben says TEMO's integrated model to prepare for any emergency includes science as well as Mātauranga Māori – the handed-down knowledge. The regional model for a disaster response developed by TEMO was nationally recognised after Cyclone Gabrielle.

"We take for granted how well formed our relationships are here that we have a model others would aspire to."

Ben sits on a national working group with NEMA (National Emergency Management Agency) and iwi leads. "If you're not working with iwi for emergency planning, you're not working."

Tairāwhiti has one of the busiest Civil Defence groups in the country as the quantifiable impacts of climate change become clear in this region. Because of this, the readiness phase of emergency management is crucial. Ben likens it to building and maintaining a circuit board. During non-emergency times relationships are built, nurtured and strengthened. So when disaster strikes, the circuit board can be plugged in "and lights up".

"Doing the basics well during readiness is a continual focus for us. That's why the region's community groups can come together quickly. Eat the elephant in small bites."

"Tairāwhiti is very well-connected and well-integrated in terms of a response. We configure quickly. After each event, we improve by drilling into lessons learned."

Ben's consistent approach over the two years in the job means the ECC has built trust at all levels. Under his tenure, the new ECC was built in a tsunami-safe zone and the Tairāwhiti Marae Resilience Project is trucking 19 shipping containers full of supplies to remote communities across the region so they can be self-sufficient in case they're cut off.

Ben was raised in Te Puia Springs, the eldest of three boys and the conscientious one his mum Shirley said.

His father Ben Green Senior managed Puketiti Station back then, and a young Ben and his brothers would open the front door to a farm as their playground. At 18 Ben "signed the dotted line and worked for the Queen". He worked his way up to a Major with the NZ Defence Force and in 2004 was awarded the NZ Order of Merit in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for service in Afghanistan.

Ben was deployed around the world and served three operational tours in Bosnia, Bougainville and Afghanistan. In 2005 he left the Army and worked for around 15 years at a corporate veterinary company overseeing 400 people as a Human Resources and Health and Safety manager. He gets back to Te Puia often, loves to fish off Tokomaru Bay and tries to play "one bad round of golf every year" at the Te Puia Golf Club.

## Kumeroa Papuni-Tuhaka

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ADVISOR - INTELLIGENCE AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Intelligence maintains situational awareness across space and time, to provide key decision-makers with the information and analysis required to make good decisions, particularly during high-pressure moments.

Kumeroa was deployed to Ruatorea on Sunday 12 February, 2023 to set up a Civil Defence (CD) Hub along with staff from FENZ and Police. He brought with him a Starlink and a generator which meant they had internet



From left to right: Ben Green, Dallas Haynes, Kumeroa Papuni-Tuhaka and Marcus Tibble. Photo courtesy The Gisborne Herald.

the whole time.

But from 2am Tuesday – they were drawing a blank in communication from Gisborne. Kumeroa understood what had likely happened to Gisborne causing a breakdown in communications. He had confidence the training and experience he and the team had, would support them during this moment of uncertainty.

Kumeroa was with the Ruatorea CD team during the initial period of the event. "I found it difficult not knowing how my own whānau were doing. However, I had to trust what we'd planned for moments like these and that they'd be fine."

## Dallas Haynes

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ADVISOR – WELFARE

The welfare function ensures a holistic and coordinated approach to meet the needs of affected whānau and animals.

Dallas' tagline during every event is "leave no one behind".

"The best part of my role is building and maintaining relationships with agencies, organisations and

communities that support the provision of welfare services. Identifying needs was challenging when we had no means of communication, but everyone stepped up and did what our community does best. It's very rewarding to see our whānau being supported to support themselves."

## Marcus Tibble

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT ADVISOR – OPERATIONS AND READINESS

Readiness means raising awareness and providing guidance through engagement and training with community groups and other organisations/agencies.

Marcus is the Manager for the Operations Function during declared and undeclared events, and a go-to man for many.

"I coordinate with our partner agencies/organisations to effectively and efficiently distribute resources to those in need around the region. The best part of my role is engagement with the community and staff, building on the capability of our rohe and everyone's strengths, creating resilience for the future."







## Everyone pitched in

GISBORNE Airport was a critical lifeline after Cyclone Gabrielle because it was the only way into the region after roads were closed north, east, south and west. Airport owner, Eastland Group, said the sheer scale of the post-cyclone recovery effort was shown in the numbers of aircraft landings at Gisborne Airport in February.

### Out of 1,137 total landings, there were:

- 206 out-of-town helicopters
- Four Royal Australian Airforce C27J Spartans
- Six C130 Hercules
- Four NH90 helicopters from the Royal New Zealand Air Force.

The air space above Tairāwhiti became restricted on Thursday 16 February to ensure a controlled space for the increased activity. All flights above were coordinated through a flight desk set up at the Emergency Coordination Centre and run by Fire and Emergency NZ (FENZ) managers. Approval for helicopter use had to go through them for any purpose. This surge in air traffic brought urgently needed supplies as well as specialist personnel to Tairāwhiti. It also transported essential supplies to remote and cut-off communities, with Tokomaru Bay recording 34 helicopter landings in a single day.

Eastland Group's 2023 Annual Report, which had the February airport figures in it, thanked Air New Zealand for ensuring travellers were able to continue flying in and out of the region at such a crucial time – and for adding a special Gisborne to Napier route after SH2 south closed for months.

"And, our thanks to air traffic control who managed an unusually crowded airspace and kept people, aircraft and essential supplies safe."

On the ground keeping people safe, were Tairāwhiti Police led by Area Commander Sam Aberahama. Police upped their presence in the community and were highly visible in the days and weeks that followed Cyclone Gabrielle. In the first two days, there was no 111 service and people had to flag down an emergency vehicle if

they needed help.

St Johns staff found themselves needing help too after their ambulance bay and headquarters were flooded by the Taruheru River. Ambulances were moved up the road, and their neighbours FENZ got their command vehicle setup so St Johns could have communication. More staff were flown in from around the country to boost the number of emergency services on the ground.

The NZ Defence Force also set up a base on Palmerston Road with army personnel and a Unimog on standby. The navy ship HMNZS Manawanui offloaded supplies on

the Thursday in Tokomaru Bay with drop offs to Te Puia Springs and Waipiro Bay as well.

In Ruatorea the HMNZS Canterbury arrived with more supplies.

With multiple breaks in the communication link to the north of Gisborne, Chorus staff were helicoptered in to Tokomaru Bay looking to reconnect the fibre network.

Cyclone Gabrielle initially caused power to go out for the whole region, due to the damage at Transpower's Redclyffe substation in Napier. Eastland Network (now Firstlight Network) and

their contractors worked tirelessly to get customers reconnected, in extremely challenging conditions. Once the region was reconnected to the national grid, there were still around 4,500 customers without power. A week after the cyclone, there were just under 1,000 customers still off, with generators helping to provide power to isolated communities. Everyone pitched in to help at all levels in our community.

ABOVE: Flooding by Gisborne Airport. Picture by Dr Murry Cave.

## Council Principal Scientist Dr Murry Cave



"KNOWING what's coming from the 4 February 2023 didn't mean I could be fully prepared for the onslaught that was Gabrielle," said Council's Principal Scientist Dr Murry Cave.

On the morning of the 13th, Murry checked Gisborne houses he knew to be vulnerable after Hale, then went to Tolaga Bay/Uawa as he knew the community was going to be badly hit.

"At 2:15pm I arrived at Mangatuna and was shocked to see floodwaters already spreading across the road. I called it in and travelled on to the Hikuwai Bridge at Willowflat and stopped to assess the flood and woody debris in the river. One large log struck the bridge pier and the whole

bridge shook, so I cleared the bridge and then went to check out the Mangatokerau and found the river rising rapidly and one property already badly flooded. I could only hope that they'd already evacuated and were safe."

Paroa Road was impassable, so Murry returned via SH35. "By the time I got back to Mangatuna at 2:45pm the road was well underwater. Driving through the water was well over the wheels, and I could feel the back of the Ute shifting. I suspect the weight of the winch in the front was all that kept me on the road."

Early on the morning of the 14th, Murry visited some city sites to assess flooding in the Waimata, including the badly affected houses on Fitzherbert Ave. "As soon as I got to the office, I was asked to assess the pipeline as we'd lost water supply. At the airport, I briefed Ray (the pilot) on the flight plan, and we headed up the Te Arai, photographing the impacts along the way. The first break at the Schoolhouse bridge was obvious but then started finding more and more breaks where logs had crashed against the pipeline bridges. We tried to get to the Mangapoike Reservoirs but had to abort the flight when the cloud lowered, and visibility became marginal."

Every major storm has a long tail, and Gabrielle's was longer and harder than any Murry had previously experienced, "particularly when we then had the

Mangapapa rain event and the June storm".

"My attention became almost 100 percent focused on the many people whose homes were impacted, particularly those impacted by landslides and where the flood inundation was severe. In some ways it became a bit of a blur just because there were so many badly impacted families. But it is impossible to forget the looks of devastation on people's faces when you told them that they could no longer stay in their home or that soon they'd have to move."

There were many tears and many hugs, and many times when Murry could only just hold it together.

"Driving back to the office, I often had to stop and just sit quietly and sometimes not so quietly, and there were many nights when I couldn't sleep thinking about the conversations I'd had that day and dreading those I'd have on the day following. Even now one year later, knowing it's still not over, those emotions still come back and bite me when I least expect it. On the other hand, most of the people I dealt with were gracious and understanding but both anxious about the future and stoic at the same time. I am grateful that I had the opportunity to see people at their best when their personal circumstances were so dire."



# ‘We need to be prepared’



AS CYCLONE Gabrielle approached, Renee Raroa's thoughts went first to whānau and whenua back home at Te Kautuku, Rangitukia.

As Cyclone Gabrielle bore down on the East Coast, Renee Raroa's whānau in Rangitukia watched with the sense of calm that comes with having been there before.

Back in Gisborne City Renee, too, kept a close eye on the unfolding situation. If she were that kind of person it could have been a big “I told you so” moment . . . she had for years worked to promote awareness about climate change.

And for the previous five years much of that work had been with regenerative action agency Toha Network, taking her deep into the predicted impacts and the systems “that keep us heading there at an accelerated pace”.

So while Gabrielle served as an

accelerant, the Coast's familiarity with climate-related trauma meant Renee's work had started long before that. Recognising the need for more local awareness and response, she had been looking for more community-based research opportunities to support.

First was the Higher Carbon Prices: Impacts on Farming and Forestry Whānau project (timeline February 2022-March 2023) – launched in partnership with NIWA's Deep South National Science Challenge – to help farming and forestry communities prepare for the risks (like job losses) and opportunities (like bioscience) posed by permanent forests.

Then, together with Makarika-based Manu Caddie, she set up Te Weu Tairāwhiti, an umbrella organisation that encompasses six more projects looking into issues from climate resilience and housing to how communities can respond both in and after a major emergency.

Overall there are seven funding bodies involved; five universities; and more than 40 project leads, supervisors and researchers doing the work on the ground.

Te Weu projects kicked into play from February 2023, starting with the University of Otago-partnered Resilient Kaenga Project (February 2023-December 2023), looking at tools and processes land blocks and marae can use to assess and manage risks.

## And the roll-out continued with:

- Deliberate Democracy for Climate Adaptation (February 2023-June 2023, partner Koi Tu: Centre for Informed

Futures), to identify opportunities for Gisborne District Council to support climate adaptation in the region

- Resilient and Sustainable Tai Rawhiti (RASTR) project (March 2023-ongoing, partners Auckland, Waikato and Massey universities, NIWA), to support flood risk and environmental planning in communities across Tairāwhiti
- Assessing the Impacts of Public Lifelines Loss on Māori Communities in Te Tairāwhiti (May 2023-December 2023, partner University of Auckland), to assess the impact on communities of losing “lifelines” like bridges, roads, power and communications
- Extreme Weather Events Impact on Health and Wellbeing (June 2023-February 2024, partners University of Auckland and Sustainable Hawke's Bay Trust), looking at the impacts of cyclones Hale and Gabrielle on the health and wellbeing of communities in Tairāwhiti and Hawke's Bay
- Taonga and Climate Resilience (July 2023-June 2024), developing resources help Māori communities create taonga-informed climate mitigation plans.

It's a massive collaboration but as far as Renee is concerned, it was a case of needs must.

“Major weather events are becoming more frequent and severe,” she says. “So as a region we need to be well prepared, understand the actions we can take to

protect our whānau and whenua, and be willing to make changes to how, and perhaps where, we live.”

“Communities are a mash-up of people and approaches, and that is reflected in the breadth and the approach of the Te Weu projects,” Renee adds.

To that end she has the full backing of her whānau . . . it was to her whānau land, at Te Kautuku Station north of Rangitukia, that she went to carry out research for the Te Weu initiatives.

“Change starts at home so we are working to support native forest regeneration at Te Kautuku as the first Māori land block to trial Toha's climate action payments system,” she says.

“The confidence to be early movers is supported by research projects enabling whānau to document landblock history, and engage in adaptation planning through Te Weu.”

Renee hopes the projects at Te Kautuku will help pave the way for other landblocks, proving examples of economically-viable land use options that are in alignment with whānau aspirations, while standing up to the climate challenges they face. For Renee, it is all about land, people, and their futures.

“It's about taking different approaches to different – but related – issues,” she says.

“For research to be a powerful tool it needs to be something that is done by us, not to us, so we can come up with solutions that work for our whānau and our whenua.”

## Gisborne's critical water crisis

CYCLONE Gabrielle had a major impact on our raw water pipeline with multiple breaks stopping water getting to the Waingake Treatment Plant 10km downhill and along Te Arai River. There were 10 breaks in the line including two pipe bridges along Waingake Road. Some complete sections of pipe and supporting bridges were washed away. The Mangapoike water supply dams were full to overflowing after all the rain but getting water to the Waingake plant for treatment was not possible until the pipes were fixed.

Straight after the cyclone the only drinking water left was in the hilltop city reservoirs. Because the alternative supply from the Waipaoa Treatment Plant had

failed, due to the flooded river blocking the treatment plant intakes, the city water supply levels got very low – and there was a real risk of taps running dry.

City residents, who'd been without cellphone coverage for three days, suddenly got an emergency text at 11am on Friday 17 February. It said STOP using water! Water was for drinking and hygiene purposes only. You could use it to prepare meals and take a short shower. No laundry or dishwasher use was advised and no outdoor water was to be used at homes or at work. The situation was critical.

With support from local iwi, industry, and contractors the team (note Te Whānau a Kai and LeaderBrand allowed access to their river intakes, Gisborne

Hiabs worked tirelessly to establish and manage the site pumps etc) got the Waipaoa treatment plant back into action but restrictions carried on for weeks as it could not meet full demand. As a result industries who needed a lot of water had to stop production until they could source their own. This meant for some operators employees were on stand-by while they worked to establish alternative water sources, assessed crop and property damage from flooding, access to sites, transportation issues around and to Tairāwhiti, stock and supply constraints. These had to be resolved before employees could return to work.

Businesses were affected too, with many food outlets and restaurants changing to using disposables rather than washing dishes. Some hairdressers and retailers were unable to open until they had their own water supply. An untreated water collection station was set up at a car wash location in Gisborne where anyone could get some water to use outdoors and for non-essential purposes like washing away silt around houses. As schools and business re-opened they needed to control water use – no outdoor use like filling pools and running irrigation. Industries were allocated water as soon as there was enough.

Water discolouration from the high iron level in the flooded and silted Waipaoa River put some people off, and it affected some laundry items with staining. But the water was rigorously tested and met the NZ drinking water standards.

Six weeks later, in record time, the Waingake pipeline had been fixed. Initial reports indicated it would take months to repair. Contractors worked in difficult terrain and helicopters were used as well for heavy lifting. So much was achieved

in a short period of time due to the skills, determination, and perseverance, and teamwork of all involved.

And two weeks shy of the first anniversary of Cyclone Gabrielle – the Waingake Water Treatment Plant is back to full production.

Council's Chief Executive Nedine Thatcher Swann said there was significant individual effort that got water supply back on to Gisborne city.

“These companies and their people went above and beyond to reinstate the Waingake water supply and to help keep the Waipaoa plant running.”

Also, supporting Gisborne was Te Whānau a Kai Trust who generously allowed use of their community water pipeline to get some water to the Waipaoa treatment plant.

## Thank you to these key people for making it happen:

- Universal Engineering: Phil Matthews
- Gisborne Engineering: Dmitry Carruthers
- McCannic's: Robbie McCann
- Ritchie Civil: Derek Watson
- Fulton Hogan: Joel Robinson
- Earthwork Solutions: Matt Mead
- CR Taylor: David Taylor
- Chris Hurring Logging: Chris Hurring
- Juken Nisho: Shaun Truelock
- AgFirst Engineering: Taylor Howatson

## At Waipaoa:

- Te Whānau a Kia Trust: David Hawea
- Gisborne Hiabs: Justin Martin
- Leaderbrand: Gordon and Richard McPhail
- Thompsons Horticulture: Craig Thompson
- AgFirst Engineering: Nick Briant



Water pipe break to Waingake Water Treatment. Picture by Dr Murry Cave.



# The tale of two cyclones

FOR 35 years Cyclone Bola has been the benchmark of disaster for our region. Then on 13 February 2023, Cyclone Gabrielle barreled into town toppling records. The next morning, Tairāwhiti woke up on Valentine’s Day with no way to communicate with anyone unless it was face-to-face.

Cyclone Gabrielle was a Category 3 tropical cyclone originating from the Coral Sea that tracked towards the north-east of the North Island of New Zealand. The most severe weather impacted Tairāwhiti on Monday 13 and Tuesday 14 February, then reduced intensity.

A local State of Emergency was declared by Mayor Rehette Stoltz at 9.45am Monday 13 February 2023. This was superseded by a National State of Emergency the next day at 8.45am on Tuesday 14 February. The national state of emergency over Tairāwhiti ended a month later on Tuesday 14 March.

Cyclone Gabrielle was more extreme in rainfall intensity and higher flood levels than Bola but didn’t stay as long. At its heart, Gabrielle was a 24-hour severe rain event.

Whereas for Cyclone Bola, the rain started on 6 March 1988, and didn’t let up for three days which heavily saturated the ground resulting in widespread land movements and thousands of slips, with Mayor of the time Hink Healey declaring a State of Emergency on 7 March 1988. What followed in Bola was a prolonged period of rain that kept the rivers near peak levels for almost a week.

The city’s water supply pipeline from Waingake and the Mangapoike dams were also damaged in both events, but in slightly different ways. In Bola land movement failures and major slips carried the buried pipeline away. However, in Gabrielle buried pipes were largely okay, but six ‘pipe bridges’ where the pipe crossed the Te Arai River, that survived Bola, were destroyed by the much higher Gabrielle flood waters.

Riverbeds have also changed over the past 35 years. The shingly bottoms have been slowly aggrading with sediment (riverbed increasing in height). This trend has reduced the carrying capacity of our rivers during flood events.

Once river channels fill up with flood waters, they start to flood out sideways into the valley and adjacent floodplain, and there’s generally not much vertical change after this point relative to an increase in flow.

It was this sideways impact that put Gabrielle in the record books for being the most expensive storm we’ve ever experienced as it impacted wider inland areas. The large amount of woody debris in the floodwaters this time was an aggravating factor that contributed to the severity of damage inflicted on the region.

Before Cyclone Gabrielle, the recent raising of the stopbanks completed on the Waipaoa River on the eastern side saved our city from further damage.

## Land use changed after Bola

Perhaps the biggest by-product of Bola was how land use changed. Hill Country farms were destroyed by slips – many farmers walked away. The Government at the time, led by David Lange, offered exit packages to farmers. Up Tauwhareparae Road, it was estimated 90 percent of hill country had eroded and could never be farmed again. Interested buyers in these hill country farms were the forestry industry.

So began the planting of our steep hill country slopes in pine trees. Over the next 35 years, the proliferation of pine trees planted and how they were harvested has created the biggest point of difference between these two storms.

The flood of waste wood (branches and unsuitable logs for harvest) that came down those steep erosion-prone hills during Cyclone Gabrielle knocked out bridges, crops, roads and above-ground infrastructure like internet and cell phone coverage. It’s estimated 1.4 million cubic metres of woody debris littered our region.

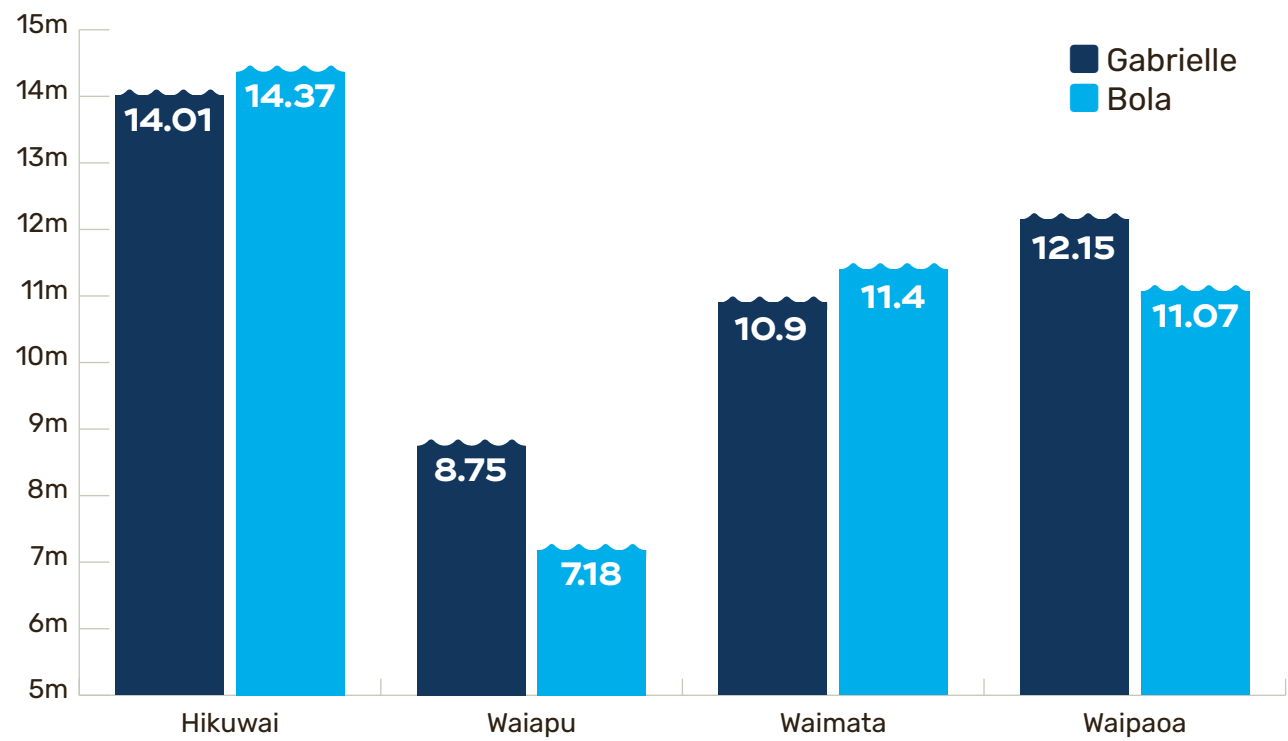
The weight of the wood, sometimes called ‘slash’, caught on the city’s bridges on its way out to sea. When it gets to the sea it poses a danger to boaties as some logs float just below the surface. Then, when it arrives on our shores it poses a risk to beach-goers.

## A 100 years + event

A report on 18 March 1988, a week after Bola left, suggested a Cyclone Bola event had an average return period of greater than 100 years. It was only 35 years later Gabrielle arrived – with an earthquake too.

At 7.45pm on 13 February 2023 a 4.4 magnitude earthquake rattled residents but caused no damage.

RIVER LEVELS – GABRIELLE VS BOLA



## Bola by numbers

- Heavy rainfall lasted three days between 6-9 March, 1988
- 25 days in State of Emergency
- 1300 farms were affected
- 198 houses damaged
- 33 million tonnes of soil and rock was carried down the Waipaoa River
- A major slip north of Tolaga closed access to the East Coast for days
- Another slip at Waerenga-o-kuri wiped out part of the road, blocked the stream and created a broad lake – half a dozen men and 4WD vehicles were assessing the site when the massive slip fell and they literally ran for their lives
- Tokomaru Bay’s historic Te Puka Hotel was hit by landslide
- \$90 million lost to horticulture and farming
- \$45 million to homes and farms
- \$111 million from the Government – which earned Bola the title of NZ’s costliest storm in history until 2023
- Three-day rainfall in Urewera National Park said to be the highest ever recorded in NZ

## Bola rain levels

- Not as many rainfall sites were monitored in 1988 compared to 2023, and a lot of these were manually recorded measurements. These rainfall totals are across the whole 3-4 day event.
- 917.5mm at Glenross Station in the Waimata
- 900m at Matanui Station
- 843mm at Waiau Station in Tokomaru Bay
- 820.9mm at Poroporo Valley

## Gabrielle by numbers

- 29 days in local State of Emergency (February 13 to March 14)
- 28 days in National State of Emergency (February 14 to March 14)
- Schools closed for six days
- 250,000m³ of silt to be removed from residential areas
- 200,000m³ from Te Karaka properties
- 50,000m³ from riverside properties in Gisborne city
- Recovery costs estimated to be in the billions
- No cash for five days

## Gabrielle rain levels

- Over Sunday and Monday Cyclone Gabrielle brought 547mm Raparapaririki (Waipapu) – this was the highest rainfall in the district
- 500mm was recorded at Mangapoike, which is by the water supply dam and recorded the second-highest rainfall totals in the district for the event.

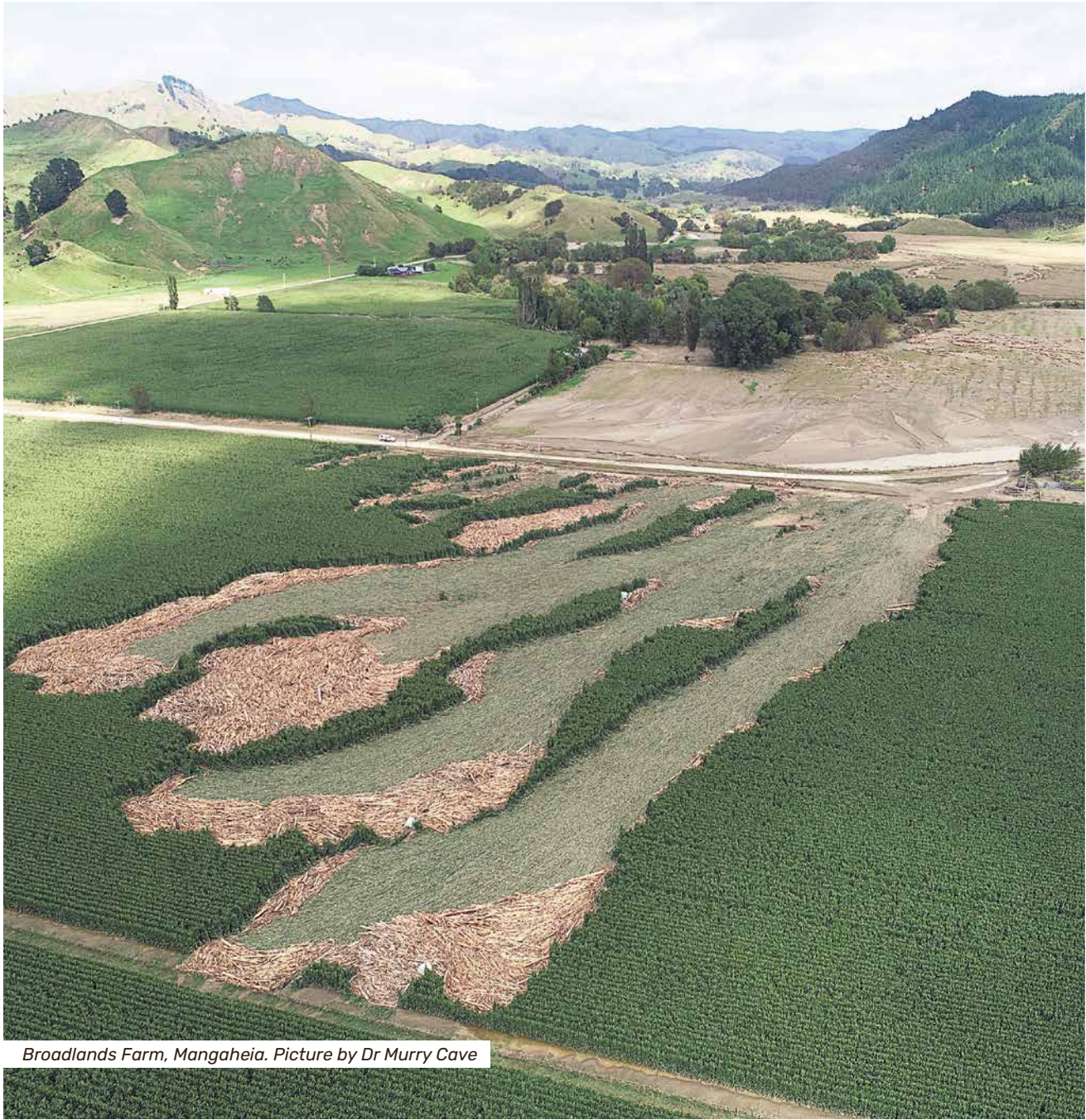




A truckload of flour for Walter Findlays arrived in the first convoy into Gisborne on Thursday 15 February.



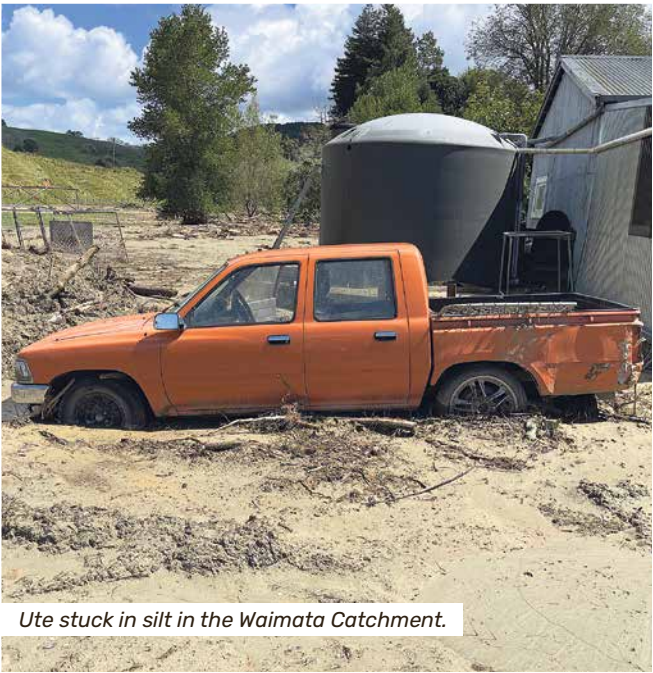
Nuhiti Bridge



Broadlands Farm, Mangaheia. Picture by Dr Murry Cave



ABC Design owner/builder Sam Gavin works to create access to Bill Moore's Vogel Street home.



Ute stuck in silt in the Waimata Catchment.





## Disasters happen any time – are you prepared?

**It's important you're ready to cope on your own for up to three days or more. Here's a guide for what you need as a minimum:**

- ✓ An emergency plan - where to meet family and how to contact one another if separated
- ✓ Prepare a grab bag of essential items
- ✓ Enough food in your home to last 3 days
- ✓ Know where to get water, if your usual supply is not available
- ✓ Alternative lighting - a torch with spare batteries or a wind up one, gas lantern or light-sticks
- ✓ Battery operated or wind-up radio and spare batteries - don't forget your car radio as a last resort
- ✓ First aid kit, make sure it includes any essential medications
- ✓ Blankets, survival blankets or warm waterproof clothing
- ✓ Alternative cooking methods, barbecue or gas cooker
- ✓ Store important family documents where you can get them easily.

We ensure our community is prepared and warned when severe weather is coming. However, if you live in low-lying areas near the river; do not wait for evacuation orders.

If you need to report an issue, please make contact by either:

- ☎ 0800 653 800
- ✉ [service@gdc.govt.nz](mailto:service@gdc.govt.nz)
- 📱 GDC Fixit App

To subscribe to flood warning alerts on your cellphone scan the QR code below.

