

# Ngā pārongo hou

Latest council news

Paenga-whāwhā April 2023 | Putanga Issue 18

## Lessons from a cyclone

Kahika Moko Tepania reflects on the district's response to Cyclone Gabrielle and acknowledges the many marae, community groups and individuals who helped the Far North get through.

Recently, I attended the opening and closing of the Snapper Bonanza competition. It was awesome to see 1200 surf casters flock to Te Oneroa-a-Tōhē to compete in our premier fishing competition and bring a much-needed boost to our Te Hiku economy. The weather was mint, the surf was challenging and locals and visitors from across Aotearoa and even Australia made it out onto 90 Mile Beach. After so much disruption in past months and years, it was awesome to welcome so many manuhiri back to the Far North eager to enjoy our wonderful coastline.



Kahika Tepania and NZ Defence Force personnel during the Cyclone Gabrielle response.

It was easy to forget that just over a month ago Northland was in a State of Emergency as our communities were pounded by Cyclone Gabrielle. Many were cut off by flooding, slips and fallen trees; power lines were down and for many, communications were out for days. The council stood up its Emergency Operations Centre in Kaikohe on Sunday 12 February. We worked hand in hand with Northland Civil Defence and multiple agencies to co-ordinate our response to one of the worst storms to hit New Zealand in a generation.

**"Across Northland, 450 district roads were impacted by the cyclone, so repairs will take months if not years to complete"**

The next days and weeks were busy. We deployed staff and equipment, such as four-wheel drives, military trucks and even helicopters to where they were needed most. But I was glad these weren't the only images we saw in news reports. Cyclone Gabrielle demonstrated that in an emergency, the most important frontline workers are our community organisations. When the storm struck, marae and community centres across our rohe quickly opened their doors to anyone needing assistance. Countless



The Cyclone Gabrielle Mayoral Relief Fund set up by Kahika Mayor Moko Tepania has received around 100 applications for assistance.

individuals checked on their neighbours, ensuring they were safe. Churches, Red Cross, and volunteer groups provided kai and other essentials. That's what civil defence is about. People working together to protect themselves and others.

**"I want to thank our communities; our marae, our churches, the many community groups and all the individuals who helped get us through the cyclone."**

I acknowledge our Kōwhai (Deputy Mayor) and CDEM Group chair, Kelly Stratford, who brings a wealth of knowledge, both personal and professional to benefit our district. She says that an effective civil defence response is about communities and marae and the plans they have. The council and emergency services play a key role, but without community members on the ground following plans they have developed, there is no response. I want to thank our communities; our marae, our churches, the many community groups and all the individuals who helped get us through the cyclone.



Christchurch members of the New Zealand Response Team helped to deliver welfare packs during the cyclone response.

We're still recovering. The Cyclone Gabrielle Mayoral Relief Fund has received around 100 applications for assistance. The initial payments have helped cover the cost of removing fallen trees, rubbish removal, and minor house repairs not covered by insurance. We're now working through more complex requests

for financial assistance. I also want to thank the generosity of individuals, organisations, businesses and, of course, the councils that adopted us for much-needed top ups to our fund.

It will cost between \$5 million and \$10 million to repair damage to our district roads according to early estimates from the Northland Transportation Alliance. The government is helping, but it is yet to be confirmed how much we will receive for more complex repairs such as slips.



Competitors and supporters flocked to this year's Snapper Bonanza after the 2022 event was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the close of the Snapper Bonanza on 25 March, Wairarapa builder Damien Sinclair took the top prize of \$30,000 after landing a 7.4kg snapper. He says he owes his success to his teammates and will share the prize with them. Ka pai Damien! His teammates hail from the East Coast towns of Māhia, Gisborne and Napier where Cyclone Gabrielle hit hardest. Lives were lost there, and large areas of the whenua devastated.

**"I'm stoked Damien's team could spend time with us in the Far North and will take away positive memories."**

My congratulations to them on the win! Nau mai hoki mai, see you again next year!

Community resilience is about bouncing back! A huge mihi to the organisers of our Snapper Bonanza for an excellent event and I look forward to many more as we bounce back from the effects of Cyclone Gabrielle.