

Mayoral Column | 11 January, 2024



HAPPY NEW YEAR

Welcome to 2024. I hope you have had some rest and relaxation over the holiday break.

Most of us will agree that 2023 was a significantly challenging year, and we look forward to moving on. The imprint of Cyclone Gabrielle is still very evident, and our focus will continue to be working towards flood protection so we can get our whānau back in their homes and rebuild our district.

It was great to see an influx of visitors making the most of the beautiful Wairoa district over the holiday break with Lake Waikaremoana and Mahia tourist hotspots.

This week, the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk reopened nearly a year after flood damage caused by Cyclone Gabrielle. The year-long recovery work was led by Te Uru Taumatua, the board and Ngāi Tūhoe, as guardians of Te Urewera. I congratulate everyone involved in the massive undertaking to reopen this fantastic walk.

The repairs to the Waikaremoana Great Walk will continue with prolonged high-water levels, changing much of the low-lying track areas and mahi focussed on not just repairing but improving the track. Te Urewera's Great Walk is a three-night backcountry trail through Ngai Tūhoe's ancestral ipukarea and, at 46km long, follows the western shore of Lake Waikaremoana and includes climbing 600m to the majestic Panekire Ridge.

CYCLONE GABRIELLE ONE ONE-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

We are nearing the one-year anniversary of Cycle Gabrielle on February 14. A regional and local approach to this anniversary is being organised which will respectfully reflect on the journey over the past year and lay the first foundations for a platform to help establish the aspirational build-back better vision for all of Hawke's Bay. Locally, early plans include a hikoi at North Clyde, whānau events and activities and a concert.

TE REINGA BRIDGE OPENING DRAWING CLOSER

The opening of the temporary repair to the Te Reinga Bridge is on track for next month.

This bridge has been plagued by damage, firstly in the 2021 weather events and then again in Cyclone Gabrielle, which resulted in the bridge having to be pulled down.

Contractors have worked hard over the past year to reinstate access, with continual weather

events and heavy rainfall often delaying progress. We know the closure of this bridge has resulted in massive disruptions and inconvenience, particularly for Te Reinga and Ruakituri residents.

The on-site preparation work is now nearly complete, with the Bailey Bridge expected to arrive this month, and if all goes to plan, the bridge will be complete in February.

The priority is providing temporary access via a safe bridge design. While the focus is on access, there may be some work and finishing touches, which could potentially cause traffic delays after the bridge is open.

INDEPENDENT FLOOD INVESTIGATION

Wairoa District Council has launched an independent investigation into why Wairoa flooded so severely during Cyclone Gabrielle. Wairoa cannot move forward until a definitive answer to the catastrophic flooding is known.

We still have around 140 yellow stickered homes and 627 properties in Land Category 2A. Our focus is on getting whānau back into their homes, but to achieve that, we need to know what caused such extreme flooding on February 14.

Wairoa has secured \$70m, ring-fenced by the Central Government for flood mitigation. WSP engineers contracted by HBRC are looking at flood protection options to take our impacted residents from 2A to Land Category 2C and 1. But we cannot plan and build solutions when we do not know with confidence and certainty what caused the flooding.

This review is not a Wairoa District Council responsibility, but we are concerned about the wellbeing of our people, and we need to know why we flooded before we start river protection and for the future prosperity of our community.

We know there was a series of contributing factors, including debris and slash backed up like beaver dams on bridges, a huge volume of water that came into the Wairoa catchment, the location and openness of the Wairoa bar and the tide, shallow waterways, management of the power schemes and overflows. It may be a combination of these things that was the cause or something that has not even been considered. The key is knowing why we flooded so significantly so we can work on solutions.



Mayor Craig Little

MEET THE MAYOR KANOHI KI TE KANOHI

If you would like to have a meeting with the Mayor, call the council offices on 06 838 7309 to arrange a meeting time. He is available to meet with people on Wednesdays.

FOR YOUR DIARY PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

STRATEGY, WELLBEING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Tuesday, January 30, 10am

A AND P SOCIETY ACTION

This year's A and P Show will go ahead next weekend but with a different venue and format.

Due to damage caused by Cyclone Gabrielle the show won't be held at the showgrounds, but instead will comprise of shearing events and a town-based fair.

The shearing shows will be held at Kauhoroa Station, with the January 19 Friday Night Speed Shear starting at 7pm and Saturday, January 20, Show Shearing from 8:30am onwards.

The fair will be held in town at the Library Green from 10am on Saturday, January 20, with Lulu the Clown, games, Donuts, Bouncy Castles, face painting and much more.

Well done to everyone who is working towards ensuring our district still has a show, I admire your commitment.