

Recovery Update: February 15 2024

Cyclone recovery – shared thanks and appreciation

A year on from the devastating impacts of Cyclone Gabrielle, we are gradually moving out of the stage where the focus is on immediate response and working through repairs, as our recovery and resilience teams are now looking at ways to help the Port Waikato community be prepared for future events.

We value all the input that we've had from local residents, building a community that is even stronger together.

We still have many challenges to overcome. From the battle to secure additional funding, to navigating the complexities of working with multiple local, regional and national agencies. It may sometimes feel that it's a long road with lots of barriers along the way, but our staff continue to battle hard on behalf of our affected communities and will keep doing so.

I would like to thank everyone who has pulled together and continues to give their time and expertise to help Port Waikato and areas affected by Cyclone Gabrielle come back stronger, safer and with that recognisable community spirit that serves us so well.

Ngaa mihi nui and warmest regards,
Mayor Jacqui Church

Update at 15 February 2024

Recovery progress

The process of recovery is complex, with many agencies, funders, contractors and community groups working together to help affected property owners get their homes, and lives, back to normal.

The immediate response in the aftermath of the Cyclone prioritised getting roads open, making sure properties had power and other essential services, and, most importantly, that Port Waikato residents were safe.

After such significant damage, the journey back to normality takes time, so our thanks go to all those affected residents for their patience and understanding while the process is worked through. There are several whaanau still displaced

from their homes and many families are facing a tough time while future options are being confirmed.

Funding recovery efforts

Severe weather events and natural disasters are impossible to accurately budget for, so every district affected by Cyclone Gabrielle has had to seek support from central government and other funding sources. There are many councils all trying to secure contributions from various agencies, but we have been successful with lot of our funding applications and our team is working hard to continue to find ways to help us through these challenges.

Thanks to the Waikato District Council Mayoral Disaster Relief Fund, we have supported 48 individual applications for financial relief that together total \$228,493.00. We have also funded geotech assessments to the value of \$78,195.00. In total council has spent \$306,688.61 of the fund.

As at the end of January 2024, Waikato District Council's disaster relief fund has \$216,122.30 remaining, which has been committed to 10 remaining properties who are still working through their processes.

The Mental Wellbeing Fund was also secured from the Ministry of Social Development, making \$26,377 available for community-building activities in the area. Around a quarter of the fund has already been allocated, with a number of well-attended events over Christmas in particular. Applications remain open for events and activities that must be completed by the end of June 2024.

The Stormwater Fund was also confirmed late in 2023, with over \$2.3m available to be allocated to stormwater works in the Port Waikato area. More details, including public consultation on prioritised activities, will follow soon. A further \$1.1m has also just been promised to help homeowners protect their homes in the future.

Working together to plan together

The focus for council's recovery teams is around minimising risk to life, getting people as prepared as possible. It is council's responsibility to enable locals to manage response to severe weather events as much as they can, supporting and guiding with the advantage of local knowledge and community connections.

Making our infrastructure as resilient as possible in the face severe weather patterns that we know will be more frequent, is complex, particularly in a challenging location.

Council is supporting the dedicated team of locals to create a community response plan that will ensure that clear plans and guidelines are in place that are fit-for-purpose for Port Waikato to respond to future emergencies, in a way that is feasible and manageable for the unique needs of that community. [Scott Bult](#) is your local contact for emergency management in our district.

Our thanks go to the many local residents who give up their time and wisdom to support in this planning. The work that has been done to date has been invaluable in helping shape our future response and we are continuing to work together to build on that.

Benefitting from stronger marae connections

Marae were at the heart of Port Waikato's supportive community after Gabrielle hit, offering food, shelter and safety for many displaced residents.

Waikato District Council has recently appointed a dedicated group to work with iwi and local marae to put clearer plans and systems in place to help in any future emergency response. Gannin Ormsby and his team are responsible for prioritising marae resilience planning in affected areas and supporting our connections and relationships with iwi locally.

Infrastructure updates with a future-focus

Climate change means that future events are more likely and may be more frequent, and both the location and geography of the Port Waikato area puts it at risk. The priority has been to get people back in their homes while also looking at ways to reduce future risk.

Stormwater systems come under intense pressure during major weather events like Cyclone Gabrielle. In Port Waikato, one major response area was Maunsell Road with drains blocked and water needing to be pumped from numerous flooded properties.

Repair to damage is progressing throughout Port Waikato and the team is navigating a complex set of problems around geotechnical considerations, access, drainage system design and funding. All work is planned in a way that will build greater strength and longevity into stormwater management locally. The funding we have managed to secure from central government will be a huge help.

Roading infrastructure can be a cause of anxiety and uncertainty amongst rural communities. Roothing access was severely compromised and ongoing reliability

is a concern that council is pushing through with the various authorities. Work has already started on repairs across the district and will continue for a number years to come.