

Mayoral Column | 25 January, 2024



## LAKE WAIKAREMOANA

I am thrilled the Lake Waikaremoana Great Walk is again open. Te Urewera is a jewel in our district's crown, and this reopening has been long anticipated.

It has taken nearly a year of recovery work to repair the damage caused by continuing high lake levels. This mahi was led by Te Uru Taumatua, the board and Ngāi Tūhoe, as guardians of Te Urewera. Getting the Great Walk back on track and meeting the necessary health and safety requirements has been challenging and is a tribute to the hard work carried out by Te Uru Taumatua.

We are so lucky to enjoy this natural paradise, and we must remember that it is a privilege, not a right, to have Lake Waikaremoana and Te Urewera on our doorstep.

It is also great to see the launch of the Wai Wai Xpres Waikaremoana water taxi service, which the Wai Wai family operates. Well done to Blair for providing a service that makes this amazing destination accessible to all.

Wairoa is blessed with beautiful natural tourism, such as Lake Waikaremoana and our beautiful beaches and waterways. I now look forward to the reopening of the Morere Hot Springs so we can truly put Wairoa back on the map.

## INDEPENDENT FLOOD INVESTIGATION

An independent investigation has been launched by the Wairoa District Council into why Wairoa flooded so severely during Cyclone Gabrielle. This investigation is vital as our district cannot move forward until we know for certain why flooding on the northern side of town was so extreme.

I have made an appeal through social media, asking people to supply information, records and photos that may be helpful. I was surprised by some comments and the confusion many people have concerning the roles of different organisations and authorities.

District councils manage the provision of local infrastructure, including drinking water, sewerage, stormwater, and roads, environmental safety and health, district emergency management and civil defence preparedness, building control, public health inspections and other environmental health matters.

Regional Councils manage the effects of using freshwater, land, air and coastal waters, by developing regional policy statements and issuing consents as well as managing rivers, mitigating soil erosion and flood control, regional emergency management and civil defence preparedness.

Cyclone Gabrielle was a national state of emergency,

and the response was based on legislation as per the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act, which appoints a National Controller.

At a regional level, the Hawke's Bay Emergency Management Group has overall responsibility for Civil Defence. This group is governed by a joint committee, including Hawke's Bay mayors, with the Hawke's Bay Regional Council as the administrative authority.

The group employs 14 staff across Hawke's Bay, with one staff member based in Wairoa. The regional Group Controller coordinates regional emergency services, utility companies, and local council responses.

Cyclone Gabrielle was an unprecedented disaster. Wairoa's response was led by the Civil Defence local controller and involved local people, including Council staff seconded to work for Civil Defence. Many of the Civil Defence and emergency management responders were personally affected and did the best they could, particularly hard for Wairoa with no communication and being totally isolated for days on end.

A national inquiry and a Hawke's Bay Civil Defence response review will be completed in the next few months. The extreme conditions Wairoa operated under will form part of these works to make improvements for the future.

We need to remember that after Cyclone Bola in 1988, there were discussions about flood protection for Wairoa. Yet, nearly 40 years later, there has been no change. That is why we must get it right this time. 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 whānau, mainly in North Clyde, from 2A to Land Category 2C and 1. But to plan and build solutions, we need to know with certainty what caused the flooding.

We know there was a series of contributing factors, including debris and slash backed up like beaver dams on bridges, a massive volume of water that came into the Wairoa catchment, the location and openness of the Wairoa bar and the tide, shallow waterways, management of 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, though, is knowing why we flooded so significantly so we can work on a solution.

This flooding investigation is not the responsibility of the Wairoa District Council, but if we don't do it, it won't be done, and we could again find ourselves left with no appropriate flood protection. Making plans and rebuilding our district without gathering this information would be irresponsible. The future prosperity of our community depends on it. I will



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

### COUNCIL FORUM

Tuesday, February 13, 10am

### COUNCIL MEETING

Tuesday, February 13, 1.30pm

be lobbying to have this investigation paid for externally, but in the meantime, we must get on with the job, complete this process, and get our whānau out of Category 2A so they can rebuild their homes. It would be easier to walk away and do nothing, like after Cyclone Bola, but for Wairoa's future, I cannot allow that to happen. Wairoa and our people are too important to do nothing. We must remember also that while we are trying to do as much as possible to protect our district, at the end of the day, we cannot control Mother Nature.

If you have any information, records, photos, etc, that could assist the flooding investigation, please email it to [floodinfo@wairoadc.govt.nz](mailto:floodinfo@wairoadc.govt.nz).