

Community consultation to inform disaster recovery planning and contribute to community healing

Mark Trüding

Possibility Lab 25 November 2025



Caveats – this session is not ...

- an example of 'community-led Recovery'
- a guide to Recovery planning
- a summary of all of the (hundreds) of Recovery activities we coordinated ...

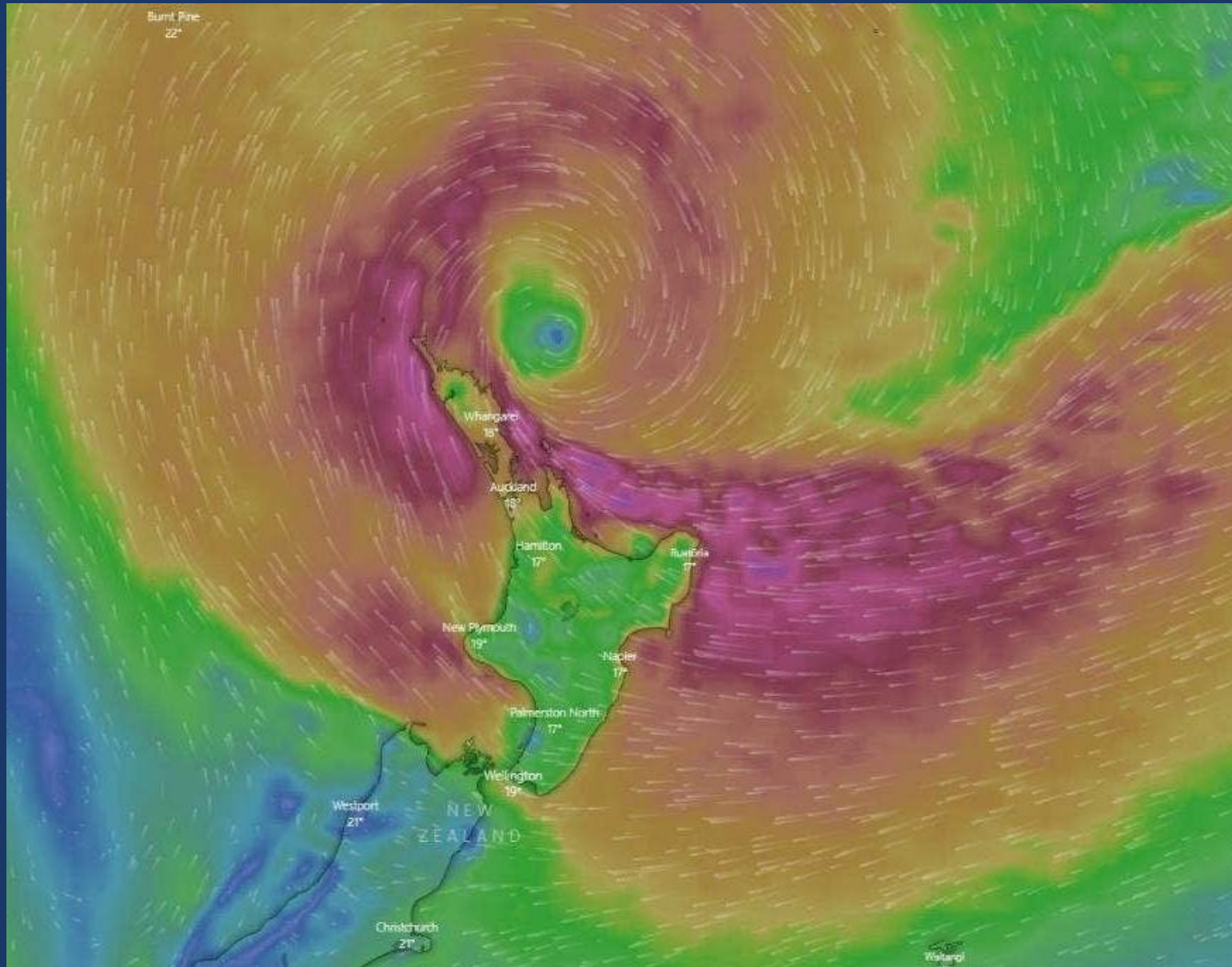
But it is ...

- an example of 'community-centred Recovery'
- a way to do 'rapid community consultation' immediately post-event
- a way to collate diverse voices into a collective document of social healing
- a way to include communities' voices into Recovery planning
- replicable – it's a little bit magical, but it's not magic.

Cyclone Gabrielle – 2023

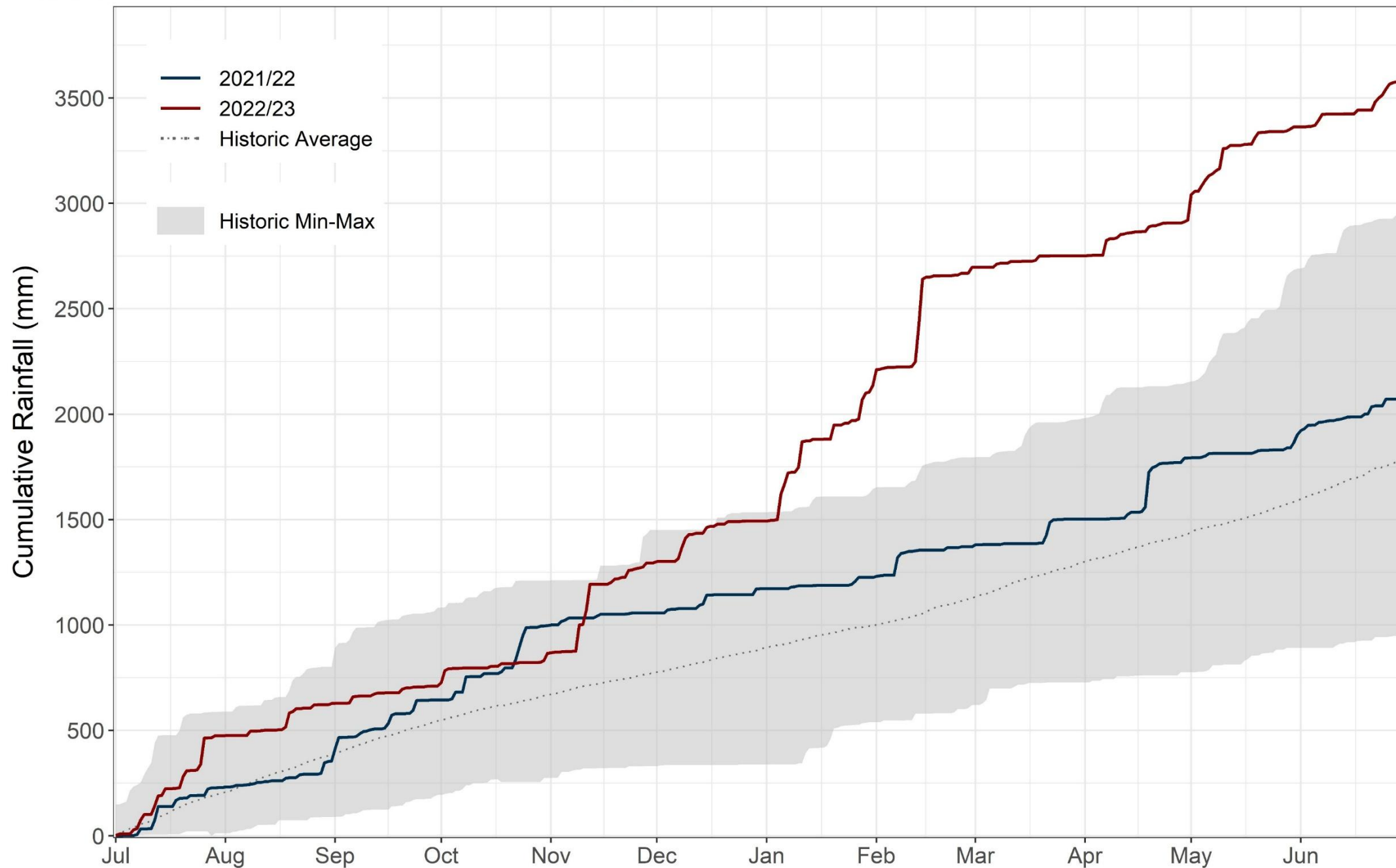


Te Tai Tokerau Northland



Hatea at Glenbervie Forest HQ - Cumulative Rainfall (Water Years)

First complete water year starts - 1948-07-01























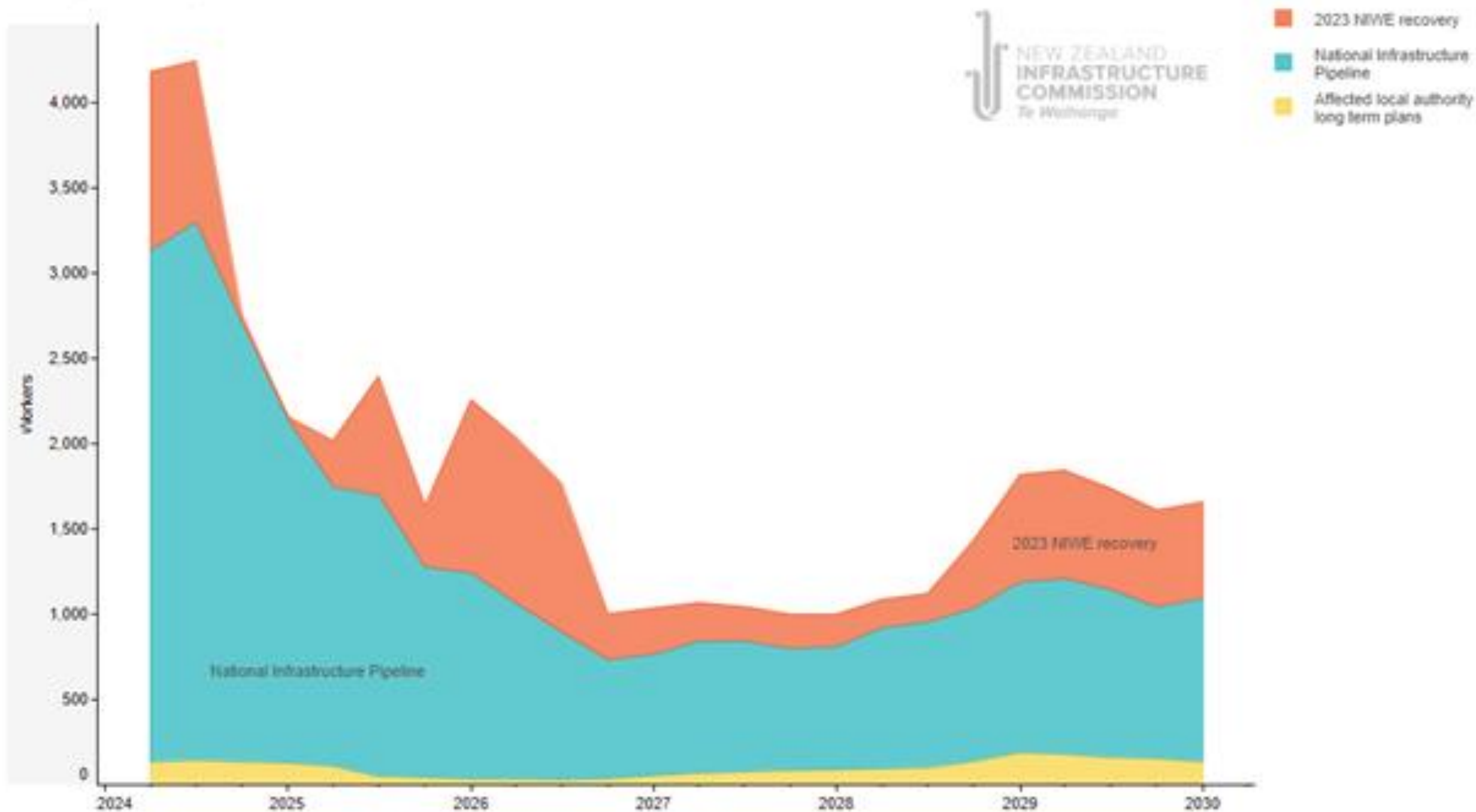






Projected workforce demand

Showing Northland region and 7 sectors.



BUT ...



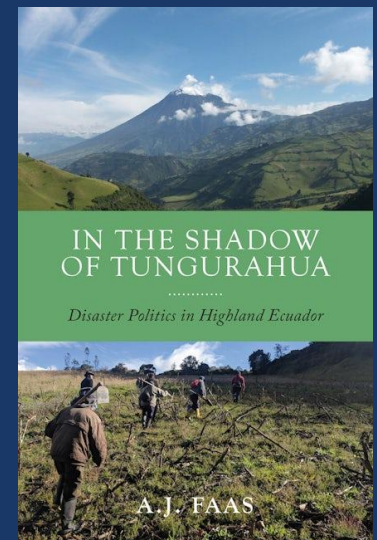
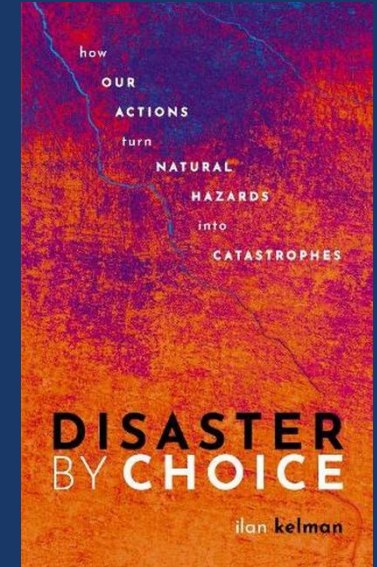
Re-contextualising de-contextualised 'event summaries'



- The phrase 'disaster event' is as bad as 'natural disasters'. – Ilan Kelman



- All of our disaster accounts start from an account of the hazard/event, but this makes no sense if we adopt a social lens, and consider history, culture, risk-increasing policies, and so on – paraphrasing Ricardo Fuentealba drawing on AJ Faas





UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING DISASTER RISK

Who Speaks? Who Suffers?

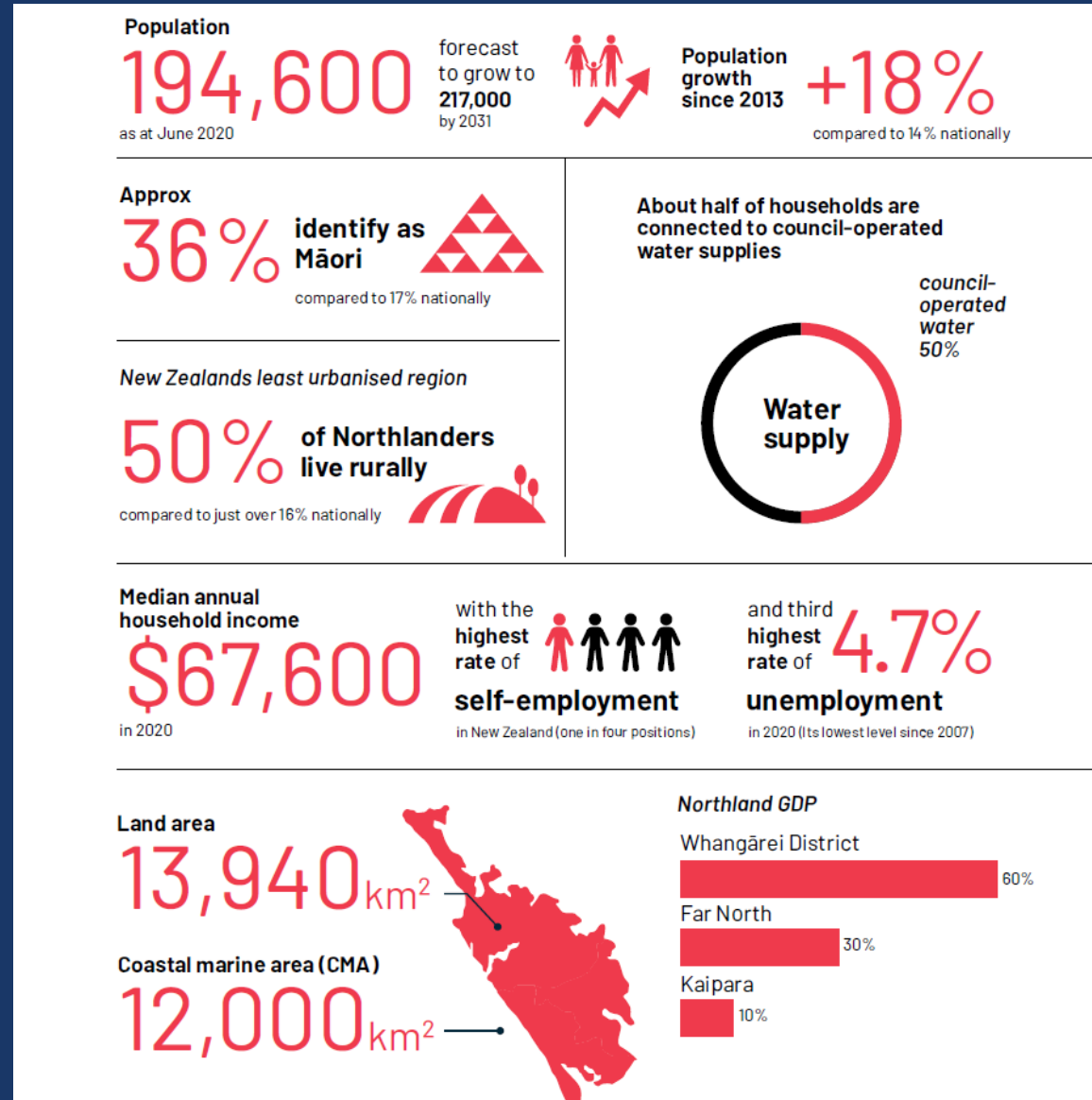
Ben Wisner, Irasema Alcántara-Ayala, JC Gaillard,
Ilan Kelman, and Victor Marchezini



Available FREE at

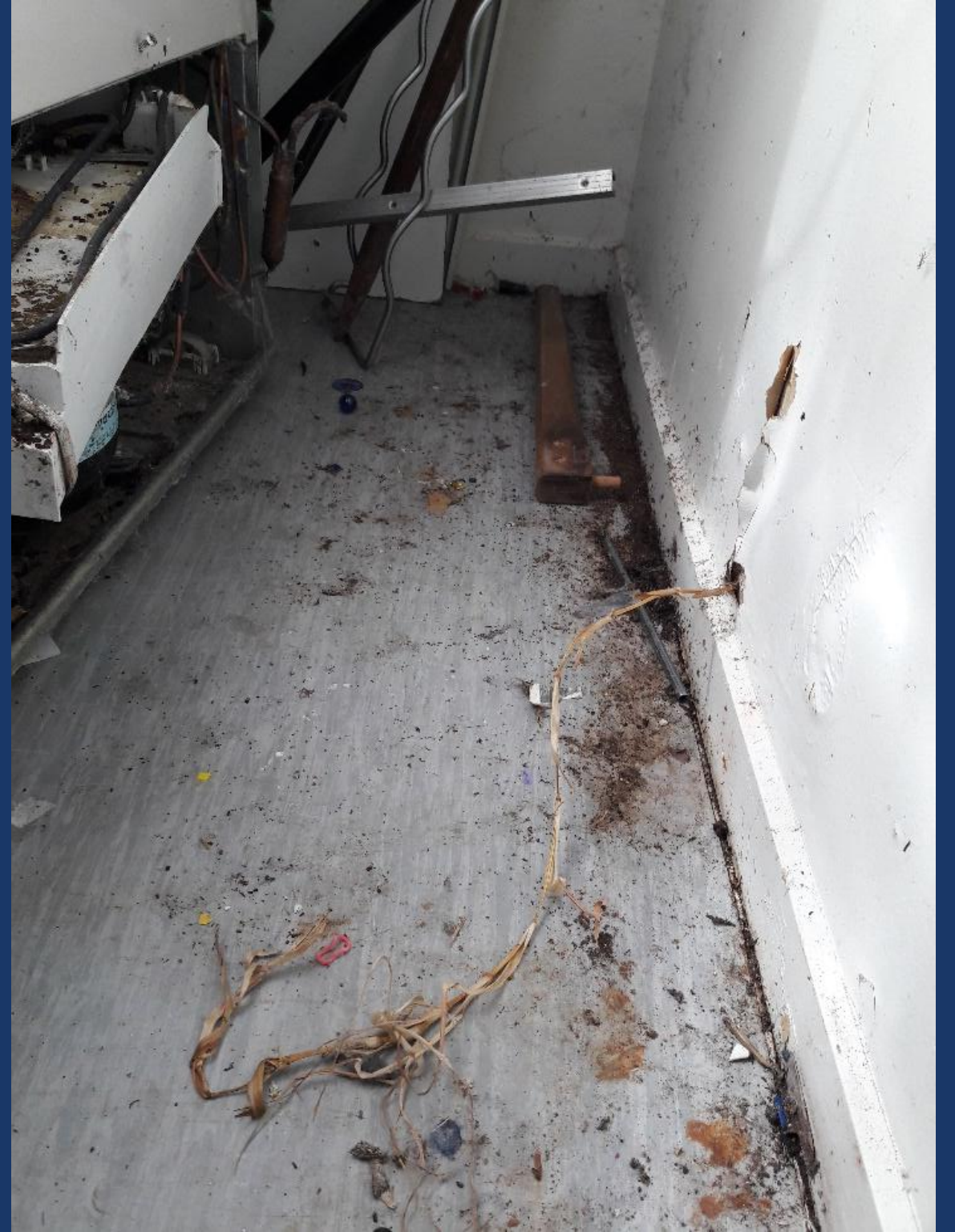
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By (some of) the numbers ...



But numbers are not lived experience ...















Guiding questions

- How might Recovery plans be written and designed with communities in mind?
- How might we include the voices of those we work for?
- How might we keep the people who are at the heart of the work at the heart of the work?

[Tip:

The subjunctive mood is helpful for both thinking, and inviting others into critically reflexive conversations ...]

Community consultation in Recovery



Community consultation

- is essential
- not months, but weeks
- needs to inform Recovery Plan
- is more than possible

Principles of post-disaster consultation

1. Community consultation should not be extractive or re-traumatising.
2. Consultation should be community work in itself and alleviate 'social suffering' / contribute to social healing.
3. It can bring to light solutions, not just for the current event, but preparation for future events.
4. In this way, we can 'rescue' people's lived experience and turn it into actions that benefit communities and help increase resilience.

Four (suites of) questions

- 1. How were you and your community affected by Cyclone Gabrielle?
- 2. During the cyclone, and in the days that followed, what did you find most helpful? What were you thankful for? What examples did you see of people helping each other? What is helping your community get through this?
- 3. What are your hopes and dreams for your community in the coming months after Cyclone Gabrielle? What does 'Recovery' from Cyclone Gabrielle look like to you?
- 4. Some other areas of Aotearoa New Zealand were affected pretty badly. What message of support, āwhina, or encouragement might you have for them at this time?

These questions are ...

- simple, but not simplistic
- highly crafted, just as the responses are highly curated
- designed to elicit 'embodied speech acts'

The Recovery Plan



Cyclone Gabrielle 2023

Regional Recovery Plan for Northland
Te Mahere Whakaoranga mō Te Tai Tokerau



Karakia

E rū ana te whenua

Hikohiko te uira

Papā te whatitiri

Ko te mūmū, ko te āwhā

Ka tau te hau o Tāwhiri

Haumi ē hui ē

Tāiki ē!

This karakia was written for the Northland CDEM Group by Arama Morunga, Kaupapa Māori Consultant (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Wai), 2019



Tīmatanga kōrero Introduction

**Tēna koutou. Tēna koutou. Tēna tātou katoa.
Ngā mihi nui ki ngā hapori, ngā iwi, ngā
hapū, ngā whānau katoa o Te Tai Tokerau.**

Cyclone Gabrielle was the largest emergency event that Northland has seen in a generation. Some of the impacts on our natural environment, built infrastructure, economy, and the diverse communities of Tai Tokerau will be felt — and remembered — for years.

In the middle of this disaster, destruction, and uncertainty were also acts of bravery, hope, and community spirit. Neighbours looked out for one another; marae opened their doors; and local businesses, farmers, and community organisations made sure that people had food.

Emergency responders, power company employees, roadworkers, telecommunications technicians, and many others worked around the clock, often in dangerous conditions. In the background, dozens of staff at Northland Civil Defence Emergency Management and the three District Councils' Emergency Operations Centres coordinated emergency services, responded to welfare needs, and organised support for councils' Civil Defence Centres. Community-Led Centres were often set up by local Māori social service providers, rūnanga, or simply local hapū wanting to help their communities.

When the rain and wind passed, our thoughts, hearts, and prayers turned to people across Aotearoa who had been hit hard. Many of us sent donations south. Some first responders and Civil Defence team members from Northland travelled to other areas to help with their response efforts.

At times, some of us thought we'd got off easy. And, comparatively, many of us had. But this doesn't lessen the real effects that Cyclone Gabrielle — and the flooding at Mangawhai — had here.

This Regional Recovery Plan captures some of those impacts — not only in statistics, but in the stories of the people of Te Tai Tokerau, told in their own words. This document also shows some of the enormous efforts to restore infrastructure during the event, as well as steps that community members took throughout the region.

But this Plan's main purpose is to look to the future — what are we doing in the coming months to continue this Recovery? What needs to happen next year — and the year after?

Throughout this Plan, the voice of community members is strong. The overall visions for this Recovery have been set by communities. People across Te Tai Tokerau have also suggested ideas for repairing, restoring, and rebuilding. Some of their suggestions have already been taken up directly not only in their own local communities, but also by critical utility providers and governments. Some remain as serious wero for the future.

By working together, iwi and hapū, government, businesses, farmers, community groups, workplaces, and the people of Te Tai Tokerau will recover from Cyclone Gabrielle. This will take longer for some than others, and some of the mamae will remain for years.

But we know that severe weather events are likely to be more frequent, more ferocious, and longer lasting. We need to take the lessons from Cyclone Gabrielle, and recover from this event, but also prepare — to protect the natural environment that sustains us, and to be ready for the future.

Kelly Stratford (nō Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Wai, Ngāi Te Rangi)

Chair, Northland Civil Defence Emergency Management Group

Kahurangi, Te Rākau Whakamarumaru o Te Tai Tokerau

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Purpose of this plan

Ngā whāinga o te mahere nei

A more prepared society who uses this event as the baseline for the future and plans accordingly. Changes to housing codes, building codes, resource use, scaled up drainage, more robust power and comms systems, and so on. — Martin

Better resilience planning, and good decisions being made for our infrastructure, particularly roading and telecommunications. The cyclone really highlighted how susceptible to damage and isolation Northland is with very few access routes. — Min

This Regional Recovery Plan captures the key Recovery work needed in Te Tai Tokerau Northland due to Cyclone Gabrielle, and the subsequent rain and flood event at Mangawhai, which affected our region for two weeks in February 2023.

The national model for Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) in Aotearoa New Zealand is based on 'the four Rs' of Reduction, Readiness, Response, and Recovery. (Throughout this document, we capitalise 'Response' and 'Recovery' to show their formal status under this model.)

The Response for Cyclone Gabrielle occurred primarily during the declared State of Emergency. Response is a period of high-intensity work, coordinated in Te Tai Tokerau by Northland Civil Defence Emergency Management, and involving partners such as iwi and hapū, Police, Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ), Hato Hone St John, Te Whatu Ora, New Zealand Defence Force, members of the Northland Lifelines Group (critical infrastructure), Northland Adverse Events Team (rural sector), Welfare Coordination Group (social and community services sector), Northland's three District Councils, and many others.

Following Response comes the formal Recovery period. For events of the scale and impact of Cyclone Gabrielle, this period takes longer, involves more people, and requires more resources,

including funding. This work is again coordinated by Northland CDEM, led by the statutory role of Group Recovery Manager, with work completed by Regional and District Councils, and a wide range of partner agencies.

This plan covers short, medium, and long-term actions that the District and Regional Councils will be taking, along with the rural sector and critical utilities.

However, while these are the larger and more public aspects of Recovery, civil defence in New Zealand involves everybody, from individuals to households, neighbours, suburbs, towns, marae, workplaces, and communities of interest. Recovery therefore also involves everyone.

So, this Plan also offers snapshots of steps that people are taking across Te Tai Tokerau — practical actions to help each other to get through, small acts of kindness, community projects, ideas for future plans, and much, much more.



Purpose of this plan

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A record-breaking event

I live at Baylys Beach and the storm was ferocious. I was fortunate that I was able to get home after a tree fell across the road. — Liz

We experienced gale-force winds and abundant rain. — Lynn

Mangawhai was literally cut off from the rest of the country. What I witnessed was disheartening. Low-lying houses and properties were flooded. Infrastructure was overwhelmed by the sheer amount water. After working my shift at the Emergency Operations Centre, I assisted with evacuating a neighbour's friend from the estuary as she lived alone. — 'Sads'

On February 8, Cyclone Gabrielle formed in the Coral Sea. MetService issued a severe weather warning for Te Tai Tokerau Northland, including both a red severe rain warning and severe wind warning.

The cyclone hit the northern parts of Northland, increased in rain intensity further south near Whangārei, and then lashed Northland's west coast in its wake. Dargaville was especially hit, with overtopping and flooding leading to evacuations over three days. Mangawhai was then hit by a severe weather event on 24 February.

These events had many significant features around Northland, some of them record-breaking:

- The Northland region as a whole received 342 mm of rain during seven days, with Glenbervie Forest recording 420 mm.
- One-in-100 year rainfall amounts over 48 hours were recorded at six sites; one site recorded a one-in-250 year rainfall.
- Wind speeds reached gusts of 165 km/hour.
- Rainfall of 63 mm/hour was recorded for a sustained period on the Pouto Peninsula.
- The cyclone brought large waves, storm surges, and coastal inundation. In the Bay of Islands, a wave buoy recorded a wave height of 10.9 metres.
- Four rivers exceeded heights from all previously recorded maximums on record.

On Sunday 12 February at 4:30 pm, Northland CDEM declared a Regional State of Emergency. At 8:43 am on Tuesday 14 February, a National State of Emergency was declared by the Prime Minister and Minister for Emergency Management. This was only the third time that a National State of Emergency had been declared in New Zealand.

Impacts

Major impacts included damage to State Highway 1 between Northland and Auckland, with access to the region significantly restricted for some days. Other concerns and impacts included:

- access to food and fuel
- wind and tree damage causing widespread power outages across the region (peaking at about 46 000 customers at one time, and 64 000 total customers affected across the event)
- widespread communications outages (approximately 40 000 customers)
- approximately 60 grocery stores and supermarkets had interrupted delivery of food and other essential items
- a total of 86 Northland schools sustained damage of varying levels from minor to extensive.

The extent of the electricity outages is captured in the images below.

During much of the event, many Northlanders were also without communications:

- more than 200 communications towers were non-functional for two days
- approximately 40 000 Spark customers did not have mobile/cell phone coverage
- 29 100 customers were without fibre connections.

This limited the ability of families and communities to know if others were safe and for other critical infrastructure providers, and emergency services, to be contacted.

Throughout Northland, 17 houses were red-stickered (entry prohibited/assessed as unsafe to inhabit), and 30 yellow-stickered (restricted access/assessed as significant damage and/or risk).

Seven vessels sunk at their mooring due to rain or waves and a further 17 ran aground. Three beacons were destroyed. All shipping was suspended in Northland's harbours.

Northland farms were significantly affected. Nearly 70% of the region's kūmara crop was destroyed, more than 250 dairy farms without power during the event, and at least 150 dairy farmers had to dump milk. Some stock animals were killed, and fruit and vegetable crops damaged.



Northpower outages as at 13 February



Top Energy outages as at 13 February

What made a difference?

I really appreciated my rural community's neighbourhood watch group on Facebook. It was the fastest and most reliable way to know about local road closures, slips, and power outages. I was grateful for neighbours keeping in touch.

As soon as the storm had eased enough for it to be safe to leave home, a neighbour came and looked after my kids so that I could check our property and animals while knowing my kids were safe and dry inside. Local contractors offered services to our community (e.g. roofing repairs, arborists) and neighbours were quick to offer help.

Our local marae showed swift leadership in providing shelter and support. School and kindy were quick to make decisions about closing, and communicated this in a timely way, which was helpful. — Anonymous

During the community consultation/whakawhiti kōrero for this Recovery Plan, we asked, 'During the cyclone, and in the days that followed, what did you find most helpful? What were you thankful for? What examples did you see of people helping each other? What is helping your community get through this?'

Members of diverse communities of Te Tai Tokerau offered hundreds of answers. Just a few are included here; many more appear in the companion booklet to this Plan, *Cyclone Gabrielle and Te Tai Tokerau Northland: Stories of community resilience and messages of support for the rest of Aotearoa New Zealand*.

Comments revolved around some key themes. These are captured here, with various community members' voices giving examples. These are not in any particular order, or order of importance — just the order in which the theme emerged.



Rural community spirit

I realised that once you have sorted your immediate household, then you can help others. Locals were very generous with their solar — charging cellphones, etc. We live in a small rural community, so having a 'rural' mindset helps you to cope with the conditions. People are aware of their neighbours' needs. — 'WRRR'

Community members helping with clean-up and repairs

My neighbour saw us struggling on our verandah in the heart of the cyclone late at night and gave that third pair of hands allowing me time to screw things down. We couldn't hold much longer — he came at just at the right time, for which I'm thankful. — Taane

Community connection

My disabled community kept in touch with each other. — Glen

Family, friends, and neighbours checking in

Whānau and neighbours checking in on each other to ensure everyone was safe, had food, and didn't need any urgent assistance on their properties. Staying connected is helping our community get through this. — Jacine

Community sharing resources

I saw the community chipping in by offering shelter, food, and showers to those affected. — Hamske

Community-led Civil Defence responses

That there was a Community Response Group who were able to assist. The local community came together to sort out fallen trees and debris on roads. — 'Feet still wet'

Household preparations

Being prepared with basics like food, water, camp cooking, and flashlights was helpful during the storm. — Anonymous



Emergency services

Amazing efforts by Civil Defence, power companies, roading, NZ Police, FENZ, and the community. Just getting it done! — Anonymous

Support by iwi, rūnanga and Māori social services

Iwi health organisations such as Te Ha Oranga and the rūnanga were amazing in helping with hands-on assistance such as food packs, Starlink, gas bottles etc. — 'KP'

Warnings and enough notice to prepare

Having received a warning on my mobile phone was most helpful. I was able to make sure I got enough supplies to last for three days and would not have to go out on the roads when the cyclone hit Kaikohe. — 'Care Bear'

Communication from Northland CDEM

Transparent communication from Civil Defence and Council regarding the current state of affairs within the region. Power companies being clear about their issues and timeframes around resolution. Communication from our Mayor and Deputy Mayor was wonderful. — Anon.'

Marae manaakitanga

The local community marae, Tauteihiihi in Kohukohu, opened its doors to support whānau in need, with water, kai, showers, and support. We were so supportive as whānau looked after each other. — Patricia

Support from Northland Civil Defence Emergency Management

I was grateful for the McKay Stadium facilities when I self-evacuated on Valentines' Day with people who were in situations worse than mine and had others with them. I'm really grateful for the government grant to help with costs I can't meet in fixing the damage and for it being available quickly so I can make a start. — Dave

Communication and media

The most valuable thing I think we can agree on is the passage of information. Social media played a big part in getting information in and out to members of the public that needed it. — Tom

Continuity of services during the event

It was extremely helpful to have internet connectivity to keep up to date with the progress of the storm. — Scott

Support from District Councils

The free green waste at dumping stations really helped people a lot. — Stacey

Radio

Communications on the radio, as my radio was all that worked. — Maree

Having alternative forms of communication

Copper wire phone line saved us but is considered old tech and we can't upgrade (turned out copper wire helped keep us remain connected). — Viv



Farmers supporting each other

We saw how well the farmers without power worked together to share generators and cowshed. Then Fonterra stepping up to have lost milk paid for. A sense of camaraderie and government financial help has been great. Still a lot of repercussions to come. — Marty

Support from local businesses

The local bakery, 4 Square, and Caltex garage donated food and drink. — Barry

Solar power

We are lucky enough to have solar power panels and batteries — this means that we were not reliant on the power grid. — Kim

Grateful for not being too badly affected

Thankful that none of our whānau were seriously hurt and survived with the support of each other coming together, sharing kai, and experiences. — Lizzie

Knowing it could have been worse

We were pretty lucky compared to other areas. Seeing people worse off put my situation in perspective. — Zak

Power being restored

Power companies made amazing effort to get power back on (and therefore cell towers). — Jim

Roads being reopened

Appreciated the efforts of contractors in getting slips cleared really quickly. — Howard

Trees being cleared away

Trees being cut back as they fell on SH 1 so I was thankful I could get home from work reasonably safely. After the storm, a lot of people helped with tree clearing. — John



Community visions for Recovery

Nga manako mō te whakaoranga

Recovery to me is not just getting back to how things were, but being better prepared for the future. — Erica

Recovery from the cyclone looks like preparing and resourcing our communities/marae to be the first responders as they have been over the last few years through cyclones, floods, drought, and COVID. — 'Whangaruru Whānau'

All properties are repaired, displaced people are re-homed, and farmers are assisted. — Kim

My hope is that infrastructure, roading, and communication systems will improve in Northland to ensure the community can endure future catastrophes. Recovery means regaining a sense of positive normalcy, access to support, and a community that is there for each other. — Gabi

New Zealand's CDEM Act defines 'Recovery' as 'the co-ordinated efforts and processes used to bring about the immediate, medium-term, and long-term holistic regeneration and enhancement of a community following an emergency'.

The main guideline for Recovery planning in Aotearoa further states: 'Communities lie at the core of recovery. Every recovery vision, outcome, relationship, and activity should have the community at the core of its purpose'.

But Recovery means different things to different people. Beyond the facts of the event, what constitutes 'Recovery' will depend on how people and communities *experience* the event and the *meaning* they attribute to these experiences. Recovery will then also depend on what people and communities think 'should come next', based on what they *give value to*.

In that context, this Regional Recovery Plan takes its definitions of 'Recovery' — and its overall visions for the Recovery from Cyclone Gabrielle — from communities across Te Tai Tokerau Northland. These were drawn from responses to the questions in the community consultation/whakawhiti kōrero: 'What

are your hopes and dreams for your community in the coming months after Cyclone Gabrielle? What does 'Recovery' from Cyclone Gabrielle look like to you?'.

One response in the community survey/whakawhiti kōrero project was representative of many — and sums up the interconnection of many issues:

Greater regional, community, and household self-reliance. In particular, a focus on our food security and energy needs. A thoughtful and creative response to the precarious nature of our roads. Let's not invest millions on existing roads that are not fit for purpose, and instead think creatively about transport and how our region can stay connected without massive rebuild projects on roads that will likely fail again. I'd like to see marae and hapū leadership acknowledged and resourced appropriately. We need to consider emergency alerts to cell phones for all those of us who have limited reception — I didn't receive the text about the regional state of emergency. Also, let's consider our soils and our waterways and how we can best support their health. I'd like to see households, communities, and workplaces that are educated, ready, and well prepared for future events. Affordable solar options would help. — Anonymous



Other comments revolved around some key themes — these are captured below, along with various community members' voices giving examples. These are not in any particular order, or order of importance — just the order in which the theme emerged.

This is only a snapshot of community members' voices about what Recovery looks like to them. For a more fulsome account, see the companion booklet to this Plan, *Cyclone Gabrielle and Te Tai Tokerau Northland: Stories of community resilience and messages of support for the rest of Aotearoa New Zealand*.

Community connectedness <i>Recovery is about making sure our families have food and clothing and rooves, that the kids feel supported, and the old people have everything they need for cleaning up and fixing their places. We are lucky that our small community really cares about each other. — Ruby</i>	Flood resilience <i>Would love to see our flood resilience improved. Higher and better stop banks. Increase of work on ditches, drains, stormwater. — Bee</i>
Community resilience <i>That we don't forget, and start building resilience into our communities. — Roger</i>	Housing security <i>That everyone has power and has a safe, secure, healthy home to live in. — 'Ex-Hawke Bay, Gissy, and Wairoa Girl'</i>
Community self-reliance <i>I hope we have the ability to be completely self-sustainable and resilient going forward. — Manawaroa</i>	Increased resilience for critical utilities <i>We should be making the infrastructure much more resilient and able to withstand these events. Undergrounding power and communications lines and strengthening the roads should be a priority. Gabrielle demonstrated the extent to which we rely on the internet for SO much. — Scott</i>
Caring for 'vulnerable' people <i>We want to make ourselves more resilient by being more aware of needs within our community. We have realised that cellphones/landlines cannot be depended on. We are making a register of vulnerable people. We have learnt that we can effectively become an 'island'. — Eileen</i>	Improving roads <i>We hope to see major upgrades to Northland roads as these problems will keep occurring if the solutions are not well planned and future proof. — 'Bream Bay resident'</i>
Self-care <i>I hope that people get a chance to reflect and take care of themselves. — Stacey</i>	Community halls and evacuation centres <i>Get the community hall equipped with things like a generator to help the community. Have future cyclone material all on hand — candles, generator, fuel, gas, and so on. — Fiona</i>
Better household preparation <i>People to be better prepared in emergency planning. Households knowing to prepare a 'get ready' plan. — Craig</i>	Local plans and Community Response Groups <i>We will rebuild a new Civil Defence group and engage with newer community members to hopefully revive and reinvigorate the team as an opportunity to bring people together. Recovery for us will mean recognising that we need to be better prepared, as our peninsula is one of the at-risk locations in the district. — Jane</i>
Marae preparedness <i>We are preparing our marae to be fully self-sufficient in an emergency. — John</i>	

Making houses cyclone-proof <i>We as a community are now looking at cyclone-proofing our homes to increase our ability to stay safe in the event of another devastating disaster. — Maurice</i>	Dealing with trees near roads and powerlines <i>I hope our infrastructure is not only repaired but then 'future proofing' is thought about — for example, so much of the power outage was caused by exotic trees falling on power lines. Should we be proactively chopping down these trees that still stand to below power line level? — 'Anon'</i>
Support for solar energy <i>Possible advancement of solar energy in Tai Tokerau so less reliant on power lines. — Leanne</i>	Improving forestry management <i>A lot of these trees and slash are known about. North Hokianga is another Hawke's Bay ticking; it's happened before. Unless slash is dealt with, some communities will be wiped out. — Ngahau</i>
Rural recovery <i>Recovery for our farming community is to help our farmers connect more regularly, to not work in isolation. — Rachelle</i>	Environmental recovery <i>The beaches clean of debris and the sea not full of large trees. — Maree</i>
Support for businesses <i>Businesses back up and running. — Penny</i>	Increasing food security <i>Assess food security options moving forward due to supply chain issues with roads down between Auckland and Whangārei. Grow more local? — Leanne</i>
Shared community assets <i>I am raising money for a community tractor — I hope we reach the target to buy one. — Taane</i>	More use of railways <i>The railway network which does exist needs to be utilised to take the pressure off roads and ensure goods can be transported to the north. — Gabi</i>
Improved communications infrastructure <i>Recovery could be a more reliable internet service, i.e. the cell tower needs a backup that lasts longer than 6–8 hours. — Anonymous</i> <i>We need better cell phone coverage, which we didn't have for 10 days. How could those that needed help dial 111 if there was no coverage? — Trisha</i>	Improved planning <i>Longer vision on sustainable resilience, such as utilising ecosystem services for buffering extreme flows (flood and draught) — for example, by restoring more wetlands and flood plains. — Hemi</i>
Greater use of radio <i>Most important — Civil Defence or government working on an emergency radio broadcast network. Being cut off from all news and info was the worst. I had a wind-up radio and couldn't find any news on it. Have a go-to radio channel reserved for these situations and make the frequency known in advance. Give rolling updates that cover everywhere. — Jenna</i>	Preparing for climate change <i>A greater acceptance of climate change as a reality and the consequences in terms of extreme weather events would be nice. Climate resilience should be built into infrastructure. — Tom</i>

If we're serious about representing diverse community experiences, then we need to

- talk about 'communities', not 'community'
- and probably use other plurals as well ...

Community members' definitions ...

Recovery to me is not just getting back to how things were, but being better prepared for the future. — Erica

Recovery from the cyclone looks like preparing and resourcing our communities/marae to be the first responders as they have been over the last few years through cyclones, floods, drought, and COVID. — 'Whangaruru Whānau'

All properties are repaired, displaced people are re-homed, and farmers are assisted. — Kim

My hope is that infrastructure, roading, and communication systems will improve in Northland to ensure the community can endure future catastrophes. Recovery means regaining a sense of positive normalcy, access to support, and a community that is there for each other. — Gabi

A constitutionalist understanding of disaster experiences...

The main guideline for Recovery planning in Aotearoa further states: 'Communities lie at the core of recovery. Every recovery vision, outcome, relationship, and activity should have the community at the core of its purpose'.

But Recovery means different things to different people. Beyond the facts of the event, what constitutes 'Recovery' will depend on how people and communities *experience* the event and the *meaning* they attribute to these experiences. Recovery will then also depend on what people and communities think 'should come next', based on what they *give value to*.

Community Recovery in action

E mahi tonu ana te whakaoranga hapori

Community is what gets a community through a disaster. — Bee

This section includes just some examples of Recovery work already being done by communities across Te Tai Tokerau. More examples of these community actions are included in the companion booklet to this Plan, which documents testimonies of community resilience. We have included here examples that relate to actions community members have taken to support Recovery during the cyclone, as well as for building future resilience.

The community are keen to have a meeting and gather momentum around supporting the Community Response Plan. — Karen

I was grateful for neighbours keeping in touch. As soon as the storm had eased enough for it to be safe to leave home, a neighbour came and looked after my kids so that I could check our property and animals while knowing my kids were safe and dry inside. Local contractors offered services to our community (e.g. roofing repairs, arborists) and neighbours were quick to offer help. — Anonymous

We are preparing our marae to be fully self-sufficient in an emergency. — John

We want to make ourselves more resilient by being more aware of needs within our community. We have realised that cellphones/landlines cannot be depended on. We are making a register of vulnerable people. We have learnt that we can effectively become an 'island'. — Eileen

Many people now have Startlink as a result of the storm. — Leona

Recovery will differ, but will look like continued wellbeing support, checking in, clearing of trees, support with insurance claims, support with whānau who do not have insurance, providing mobile cabins as temporary accommodation, mara kai gardens. — Jackie

Our Lions group will complete our Information Pack with a Civil Defence update in it, so all households know where to go. There is more unity in the area. — Beverley

Posts on our community Facebook page coordinating help were good — people could ask for and offer help. We now have a community directory pinned to the top of the page for people who can help (e.g. those with heavy machinery, tools, tractors, chainsaws, and expertise to help with fallen trees, etc.). — Anonymous



I run a chemist. We had some Uninterruptible Power Supply units and have now ordered a generator that's also an inverter. Chemists' prescriptions are emailed now, so we need to make sure we have cyclone emergency supplies like this. — Viv

What's helping us get through this is the constant staying in touch and checking in. Being a member of our community no longer ends at the front gate; we have all been to each others' houses to secure things and to share knowledge and plans for the future. — Maurice

Recovery Programme Groups

Ngā Pou Whakaoranga

Based on community feedback, Northland CDEM have set the following four priority Recovery Programmes, or Pou Whakaoranga, for regional recovery. These were based on an assessment of the consequences/impacts on communities during the cyclone itself, as well as initial community feedback:

- Community Wellbeing
- Critical Infrastructure
- Rural Support
- Marae Preparedness.

Each of these four pou is coordinated by a Recovery Programme Group. While specific work on these pou may be taken up by the District Councils, Northland CDEM will coordinate the relevant work for each across Northland, as these issues are region-wide.

We have decided to call these 'programmes', rather than 'projects', to acknowledge that work will continue in each of these areas after the formal winding down of this Recovery, with this work being taken up as 'enhanced business as usual' by the relevant service providers.

A note on Recovery 'environments'

New Zealand's current emergency management framework refers to four Recovery 'environments': social, economic, natural, and built. The *Recovery Preparedness and Management Director's Guideline for Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups [DGL 24/20]* states that consequences 'must be considered across all recovery environments' and that Recovery environments 'may' be used for organising Recovery Management. However, this model is currently under debate, with some Recovery practitioners suggesting other environments, while some have explored seven 'Recovery Capitals'.

Following the guidance that consequences 'must be considered', the District Councils have included relevant Recovery environments in their action lists that occur later in this Plan. The rural sector has

also used them to group their actions. However, overall, Northland CDEM is not adopting either the Recovery environments or Recovery Capitals as a planning or operational tool in this Recovery Plan, for a range of considered reasons:

- We consider the Recovery environments at best a heuristic, or simplistic thinking tool, but not a useful planning or operational tool.
- While initially intended to ensure that CDEM professionals do not forget important consequences of emergencies, and possibly the interdependencies between 'environments', in practice, we've seen how separating out Recovery thinking, planning, and operations along these lines can actually increase things 'falling through the gaps'.
- We also see limitations in reducing complex social, cultural, and natural worlds to 'capitals'.
- Finally, kōrero and wānanga with tangata whenua has had us seeing the hazards and limitations of attempting separate the world into categories in this way (even if they're considered to be interdependent).



Not 'Recovery environments / domains'

Not 'Recovery capitals'...

But the main themes that came from communities' feedback.

Stories of community resilience



Cyclone Gabrielle and Tai Tokerau Northland

Stories of community resilience
and messages of support for the rest of
Aotearoa New Zealand



Four (suites of) questions

- 1. How were you and your community affected by Cyclone Gabrielle?
- 2. During the cyclone, and in the days that followed, what did you find most helpful? What were you thankful for? What examples did you see of people helping each other? What is helping your community get through this?
- 3. What are your hopes and dreams for your community in the coming months after Cyclone Gabrielle? What does 'Recovery' from Cyclone Gabrielle look like to you?
- 4. Some other areas of Aotearoa New Zealand were affected pretty badly. What message of support, āwhina, or encouragement might you have for them at this time?

Collective narrative practice principles

- a 'de-centred, yet influential' orientation
- 'experience-near' accounts
- 'double-storied' accounts, so as to not be re-traumatising
- no-one is a passive recipient of trauma; people always respond – even if it's only to make sense of their experience
- creating 'unity in diversity'
- 'speaking through us, not just to us'
- 'enabling contribution' to others' lives.

Question 1: Experience-near accounts

- How were you and your community affected by Cyclone Gabrielle?

How were you and your community affected by Cyclone Gabrielle?

'The intensity of the storm made it harder for neighbours to support one another'

Our road and local access routes were closed a number of times (due to trees, slips, silt, flooding). Power went out five times – the longest stretch was 32 hours. Our landline was out for two weeks, and there were periods where cell phone connectivity was even more patchy than usual. School and kindy were closed which meant many adults in our community were trying to work from home, care for kids, and weather the storm and look out for one another all at the same time. The cyclone affected people differently. At my workplace, some colleagues and my worksite experienced little or no direct impact. This meant it took some time before

my workplace made it clear that we were not expected at work and that cyclone leave would be provided if it prevented us from working. High winds and significant rain meant livestock were exposed to driving rain and wind chill, which resulted in our household losing stock animals. We also had some damage to our home. The intensity of the storm made it harder for neighbours to support one another in practical ways, as it didn't feel safe to travel to one another (rural context). As a mum of young kids, I felt isolated. Especially as my partner is an essential worker and was away from home, and we had limited ability to communicate. – Anonymous



'The storm was ferocious'

I live at Bayliss Beach and the storm was ferocious. I was fortunate that I was able to get home after a tree fell across the road. – Liz

We experienced gale-force winds and abundant rain. – Lynn

We had about 20 trees damaged of various sizes. – John

Mangawhai was literally cut off from the rest of the country. What I witnessed was disheartening. Low-lying houses and properties were flooded. Infrastructure was overwhelmed by the sheer amount of water. After working my shift at the Emergency Operations Centre, I assisted with evacuating a neighbour's friend from the estuary as she lived alone. – Sads

Damage to the natural environment

Devastation of the foreshore – many cubic metres of sand washed away, with thousands of spinifex plants. – Heather

Our stream turned into a river. – Raewyn

The stream area on our land was devastated but will recover in a few years. – Howard

Beach sand embankments were massively eroded, revealing tūpuna kōiwi. – Jackie

Tauranga Bay suffered very little damage to dwellings although there were a few trees and large branches downed. Half of the foreshore sand disappeared and the dotterel nesting zone was halved. A lot of the spinifex and pingao planted by the community has been uprooted and washed away. – Panchita

Physical Isolation

We were flooded in. – 'Gardener Mangawhai'

Lots of trees down across our only road in and out of Tinopai, and no power for around six days. Some people's homes were damaged, some people were trapped in the residential road because huge trees and power lines were down across the road. With no phone or internet, it felt really isolated and we had no idea what was happening anywhere else in NZ. – Ruby

We had no exit due to tree down in powerlines. – Jul

Trees blown over blocking access from home; took a week before able to drive out. – Leslie

There was no ferry connecting North Hokianga to South Hokianga. – Patricia

We couldn't move and it was very difficult to travel. We were cut off completely for a day or two with no access to Stage Highway 1 and of course supply chains for food and essential items were all impacted. It was even worse when the next huge Mangawhai downpour came down and the whole road to Kaiwaka and Kaiwaka School was closed completely. Work closed down. We had no power or telephone coverage for quite a while. There was a lot of anxiety and fear across the community. There are still many machines, gates, and so on that don't work because they were all under water for a period at the height of Gabrielle due to flooding. – Mariana



Question 2: Double-storied accounts

- During the cyclone, and in the days that followed, what did you find most helpful? What were you thankful for? What examples did you see of people helping each other? What is helping your community get through this?

During the cyclone, and in the days that followed, what did you find most helpful? What were you thankful for? What examples did you see of people helping each other? What is helping your community get through this?

Rural community spirit

I really appreciated my rural community's Neighbourhood Watch group on Facebook. It was the fastest and most reliable way to know about local road closures, slips, and power outages. I was grateful for neighbours keeping in touch. As soon as the storm had eased enough for it to be safe to leave home, a neighbour came and looked after my kids so that I could check our property and animals while knowing my kids were safe and dry inside. Local contractors offered services to our community (for example, roofing repairs, arborists) and neighbours were quick to offer help. Our local marae showed swift leadership in providing shelter and support. School and kindy were quick to make decisions about closing, and communicated this in a timely way, which was helpful. – Anonymous

Our family is used to camping, or living in primitive conditions, so it wasn't difficult to adjust to these conditions. Everything just takes longer and needs some planning to achieve. I realised that once you have sorted your immediate household, then you can help others. Locals were very generous with their solar – charging cellphones, etc. We live in a small rural community, so having a 'rural' mindset helps you to cope with the conditions. People are aware of their neighbours' needs. – WRRRA



Community connection: 'Community is what gets a community through a disaster'

It brought our little community together and we made new friends in the process. – Calvin

My disabled community kept in touch with each other. – Glen

We had damage to some of our outbuildings due to strong winds, but other than that we were in good enough shape to get on with it and check neighbours and elderly people in our valley. Witnessing my neighbours checking in on each other was great to see; it's brought us all closer together. What's helping us get through this is the constant staying in touch and checking in. Being a member of our community no longer ends at the front gate; we have all been to each other's houses to secure things and to share knowledge and plans for the future. – Maurice

We have great neighbours and a community who looks after each other; I'm thankful for that. – 'BMcD'

As during Covid lockdowns, neighbours are more in touch. – Prue

Community is what gets a community through a disaster. – Bee

Our community pulled together and helped everyone in need. – Cath

What's helping our community is the whānau support and our local networks. – Patricia



Family, friends, and neighbours checking in

Community checking on one another. – Misha

Family came from town to check and set up our BBQ. One neighbour checked in on us. – Heather

Texts checking to see how we were. Messenger chats with family. – Lynda

Thankful for neighbours checking in, helping to remove trees off access areas, propping up fences temporarily. – Arlene

Community-minded people coming to see if we needed help with the damage. – Lea

I checked on our elderly and worked with neighbours to clear roads, share kai, and awhi those most affected. – Anonymous

Friends in NZ and Aussie checking in that I was ok. – Howard

Our Neighbourhood Watch group were out and about checking whether people were okay. – Horiara

That we had a community that checked up on the vulnerable and the elderly in our community. – Margaret

Whānau and neighbours checking in on each other to ensure everyone was safe, had food, and didn't need any urgent assistance on their properties. Staying connected is helping our community get through this. – Jacine

Our neighbour came to check on us. Also, our daughter and her husband came around the next day to help remove damaged trees and repair the fence gate. We check on each other on text messages, and send photos of the effect of storms, our kids, and family. – Bini

The community coming together and checking in on each other. Sharing of supplies, helping each other with access such as using chainsaw to open up roads into remote areas. – 'Whangaruru Whānau'

Question 3: 'Landscape of action' and 'landscape of identity'

- What are your hopes and dreams for your community in the coming months after Cyclone Gabrielle? What does 'Recovery' from Cyclone Gabrielle look like to you?

What are your hopes and dreams for your community in the coming months after Cyclone Gabrielle? What does 'recovery' from Cyclone Gabrielle look like to you?

What 'Recovery' means

Recovery to me is not just getting back to how things were, but being better prepared for the future. – Erica

That people recover okay from the storm and stress it created physically and financially. – 'LBW'

All properties are repaired, displaced people are rehomed, and farmers are assisted. – Kim

Recovery means that communities are returned to their equilibrium that was in place prior to the event, with added resilience for when this type of event occurs in the future. – Sharon

My hope is that infrastructure, roading, and communication systems will improve in Northland to ensure the community can endure future catastrophes. Recovery means regaining a sense of positive

'Greater regional, community, and household self-reliance'

Greater regional, community, and household self-reliance. In particular, a focus on our food security and energy needs. A thoughtful and creative response to the precarious nature of our roads. Let's not invest millions on existing roads that are not fit for purpose, and instead think creatively about transport and how our region can stay connected without massive rebuild projects on roads that will likely fail again. I'd like to see marae and hapū leadership acknowledged and resourced appropriately. We need to consider emergency alerts to cell phones for all those of us who have limited reception – I didn't receive the text about the regional state of emergency. Also, let's consider our soils and our waterways and how we can best support their health. I'd like to see households, communities, and workplaces that are educated, ready, and well prepared for future events. Affordable solar options would help. – Anonymous

normalcy, access to support, and a community that is there for each other. – Gabi

Investing in the right company to assist with the damage that is simply unsafe to take on ourselves. Our shelter belt and property suffered extensive damage and has required months of felling, mulching and replanting. We hope our young children learn through this process, that as much as we love our trees, when they become unsafe during severe weather events, we need to go about removing them safely. They now get to be involved in the planting of new trees and one day pick the fruit from their efforts! – Hayleigh



Community connectedness

More connectedness. – Sarah

Our Lions group will complete our Information Pack with a Civil Defence update in it, so all households know where to go. There is more unity in the area. – Beverley

Improved social connectivity. – Ace

Hope to see the community spirit hang round. – Katrina

Hoping for continued neighbourliness. – Bee

Community resilience

That resilience is built into communities. – Jack

That everyone takes heed to start preparing for more extreme weather events. – Ash

That we don't forget, and start building resilience into our communities. – Roger

Community self-reliance

Everyone 'pitching in' with the clean up; people not sitting back and expecting the Government to fix everything. – Anonymous

Recovery is about making sure our families have food and clothing and rooves, that the kids feel supported, and the old people have everything they need for cleaning up and fixing their places. We are doing pretty good here; the power has been stable, and Northpower did a pretty amazing job. We are lucky that our small community really cares about each other. – Ruby

Recovery will be hard and the memories of this will always be here. We can only hope we are more aware and prepared should it happen again. – 'Sads'

The community has voiced its opinion that a meeting is needed to discuss the affects to the wider community and what we could do going forward once things settle down. – Lynne

I hope we have the ability to be completely self-sustainable and resilient going forward. – Manawaroa

Caring for 'vulnerable' people

We want to make ourselves more resilient by being more aware of needs within our community. We have realised that cellphones/landlines cannot be depended on. We are making a register of vulnerable people. We have learnt that we can effectively become an 'island'. – Eileen

More care around the elderly and better preparations for the next event. – Fay

Recovery is about checking up on each other during and after the Cyclone Gabrielle especially our elderly and friends and whānau who live alone. – John

I would like to see street/road neighbours getting to know each other better. As I get older and not completely mobile, I find that I do not know folk the way I used to. I was disappointed that neighbours with a baby did not know that I had gas cooking until the power came back on. – Anonymous

Self-care

I hope that people get a chance to reflect and take care of themselves. – Stacey



Question 4: Enabling contribution

- Some other areas of Aotearoa New Zealand were affected pretty badly. What message of support, āwhina, or encouragement might you have for them at this time?

Messages of support, āwhina, and encouragement for other areas of Aotearoa

Kia kaha, the love of New Zealand is with you and our arms are wrapped around you. – Kelly

You are not alone. – 'Mangawhai missy'

The devastation in Napier, Gisborne, Coromandel, and parts of Auckland was so bad. I hope they realise they haven't been forgotten. – Lou

As an 81 year-old retired ex-Police and Civil Defence officer with just on 50 years' experience, I offer my best wishes and sympathy for their situation. – Barry

It'll take time and it's okay to still be feeling a lot of strong emotions. Check in with people and keep busy. – Erica

I'm sending love to all those who have lost a loved one, a pet, your home, your livelihood, possessions, or a combination of these. My heart is heavy as I think of all those carrying grief while also attending to the practical work involved in clean up. I imagine it's dispiriting and exhausting and uncertain, and I know the challenges and impact will be long lasting. As a mum, I particularly send love and solidarity to all the mums who are holding their families together, caring for storm-affected kids and grandparents, and being the anchor holding everything and everyone together. In Aotearoa, regional communities can often feel like poor relations to the big cities. So, I'd like communities in the Hawkes Bay and Tairāwhiti to know that their cousins in the North see their realities. We understand what it means to respond to challenges while under-resourced. We'll learn from your experience and we will not forget. Lots of love to you all. – Anonymous

Sending prayers of love for you all. – Boots

You can get through this. The weather was strong, but we are stronger. – Kat

Keep asking for help where it is required. Communicate your needs. Ask what you can do for others. Become involved where you can in making a strong robust community in the future. – Lynda

We feel heartbroken for you all, this is such a hard thing to live through. As the weeks and months pass, do not give up, keep looking for a spot of joy – a smile, birdsong, a helping hand. Reach out to others, both for help and to help them. As we rebuild our communities, we can find strength to carry on. – Bee

Kia kaha to you all. Engage in constructive dialogue with your Councils so that your communities cope with future disasters. – Horiana

I have donated 1200 kgs of meat, and organized the transport of it, as well as organising the transport of other free chilled and frozen foods to Hawkes Bay. My contacts in the trucking industry have been brilliant (as well as all of our locals – we are in need, but what we have excess of, we share). – Raymond

There's power in taking things day by day. – Bob

We from Hokianga and our Bald Angels have sent down to them our aroha, prayers, and awahi. – Emergency Hub Tauteihiki Marae

Naku te rourou nau te rourou ka ora ai te iwi. With your basket and my basket, the people will live. – Kim

We see the absolute devastation that some regions are still facing and we want those communities to know that we care so much about what they are having to deal with. Life is getting back to to normal for some of us, but that doesn't mean the other regions are forgotten to us. – 'Bream Bay resident'

Kia kaha, kia maia, kia manawanui. Support one another as best you can in these times. – Tilly

He mihi aroha to our whānau who have been affected and especially to those who have lost loved ones. Moe mai, moe mai ra. – 'Whangaruru Whanau'

Sending you love and light through this rough period of time. – Emma

Kia kaha e te iwi. Arohamai aroha atu nā Pipiwai. – Lizzie

I wish them a fast and speedy recovery for the whānau and businesses. I hope your local marae can support you as much as ours supported us. – Anonymous

Our hearts go out to you, as the mammoth clean-up continues and the rebuilding of lives and livelihoods. The sun WILL shine, and the skies WILL clear. Hang in there. – Lana

We in the Far North feel so bad for those who were terribly affected. Yes, we were hit first and were receiving messages of support from friends, family, and even strangers. Of course, we could only reply with 'We're fine, we'll get through this' ... just to find out that those very people sending us best wishes were then the very people who were devastated and many becoming homeless, leaving us with a huge feeling of sadness and guilt that we dodged a bullet and they got the full impact. Our aroha goes out to all those who were affected by these catastrophic events. We were wanting to go to Dargaville, Hawkes Bay, and Tairāwhiti to help out, but were cut off from the rest of the country. After all you've been through, please know that we in the Far North are heartbroken to know that you are struggling from one day to the next, that many of you have lost everything. Our hearts and love go out to you all, we are thinking of you and praying that you will recover quickly from this. Ka nui te aroha, kia haumaruru te noho. Until we can all be together again, kia kaha. – Maurice

Kia kaha whānau. We grieve your loss and may we all build stronger infrastructure, but more importantly stronger relationships and connections. – Donna

I just hope they get all the assistance they need, especially those who were displaced and/or those who didn't have insurance on their contents. I hope that they will all find their places back in their own communities. I would say to them, pull together in these hard times and look after each other. – Ruby

I'm not sure words could accurately portray my thoughts for them. My heart goes out to them and what they are having to endure and will have to continue to endure for some time yet to rebuild their lives. – Donna

Deeply feel for those to the east of the country; up here in Northland we were hit hard, but the images from there are unfathomable so we are all thinking of you there. – Scott

Our thoughts and messages of support are well-intentioned and we are with you with all our heart, but really we just want to put on a pair of gumboots and grab a shovel to do the hard mahi to help you out! – Kim

Even though some time has passed since the devastating events, and life has returned to normalcy for many of us, we had a *small* taste of what they went through. We can only hope that each day takes them one step away from the heartbreak and brings them one step closer to a brighter day. – Prue



Differentiation and preventing genre-blurring ...

This work is not:

- A 'strengths-based' approach
- About providing assessments and solutions / interventions
- 'Psychosocial support'
- About 'telling stories' or simply 'collecting stories'

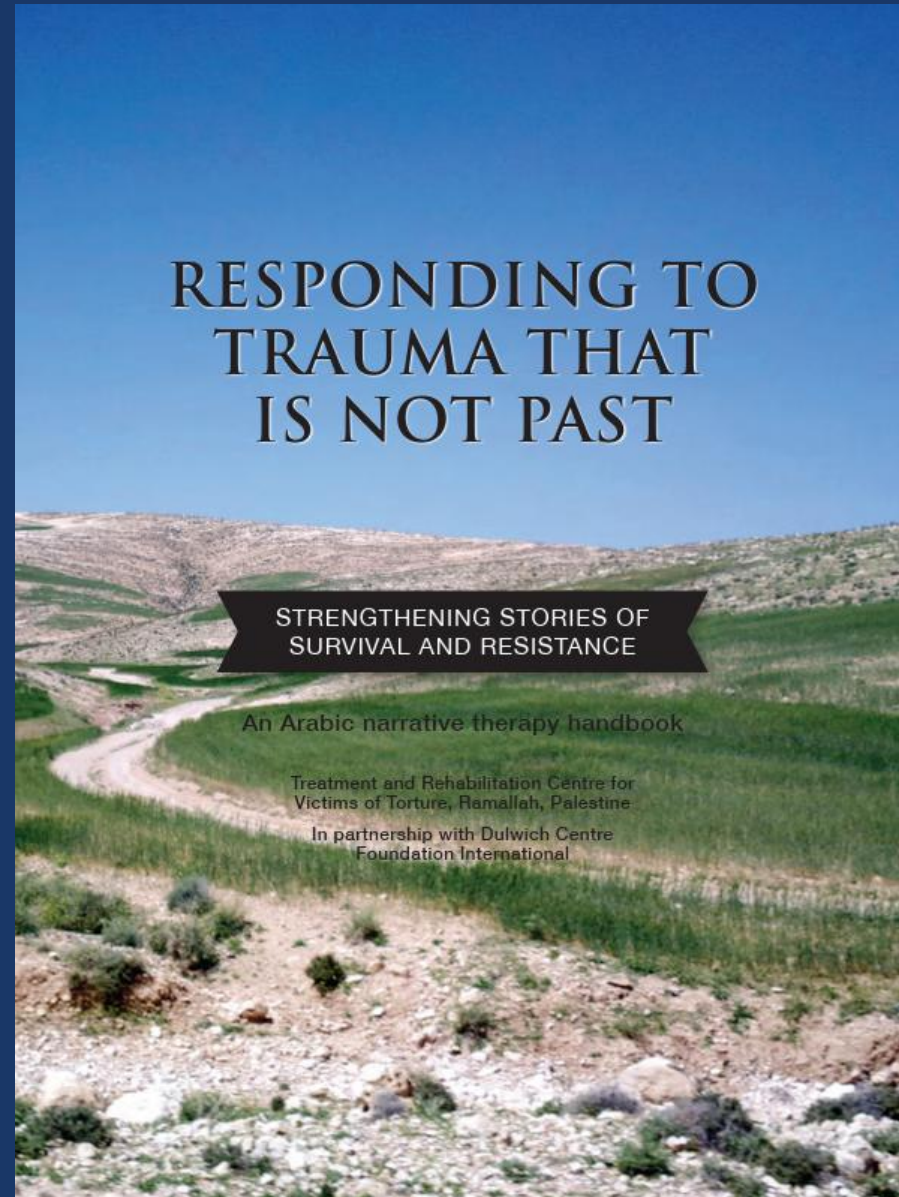
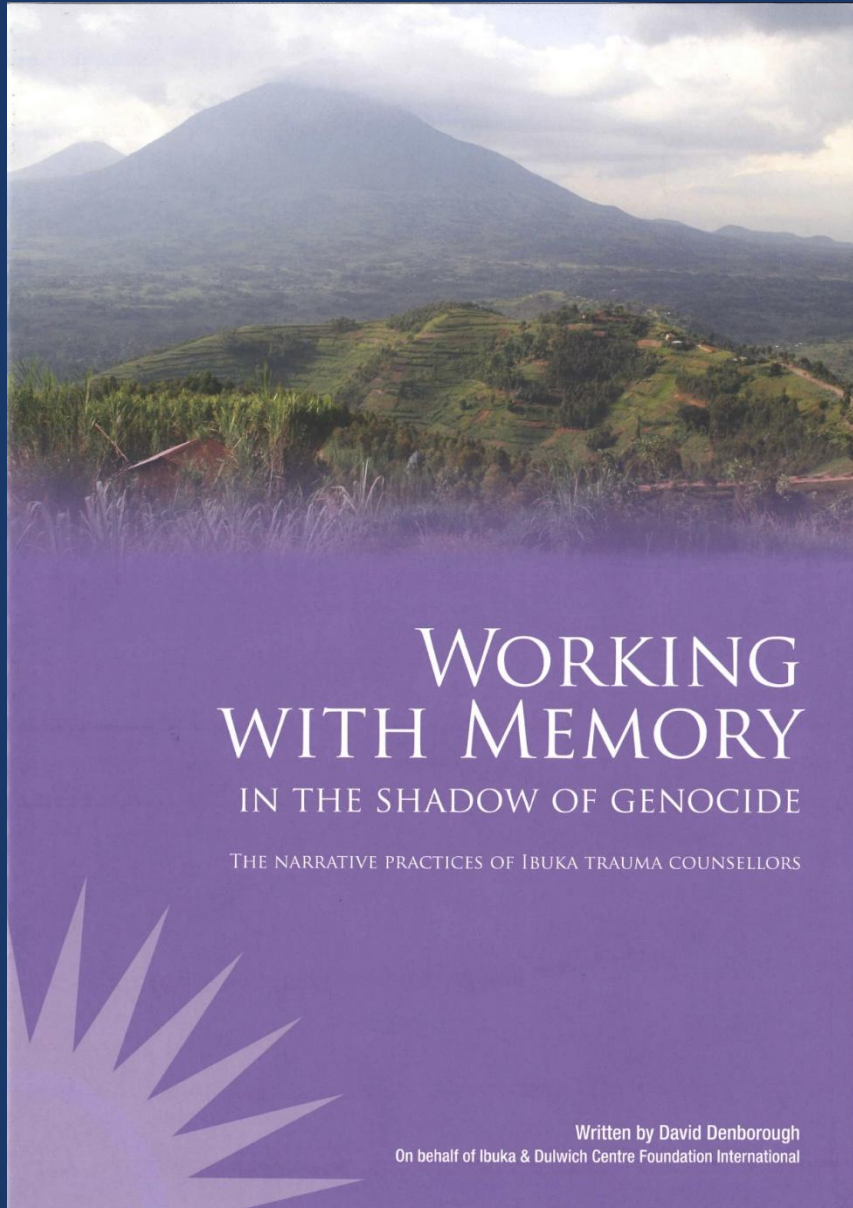
Other ideas behind the work

- Dissensus (Ziarek)
- Assemblage (Deleuze)
- 'Repetition for itself to bring forth difference in itself' (Deleuze)
- Governmentality, 'legibility', and mētis (Scott)

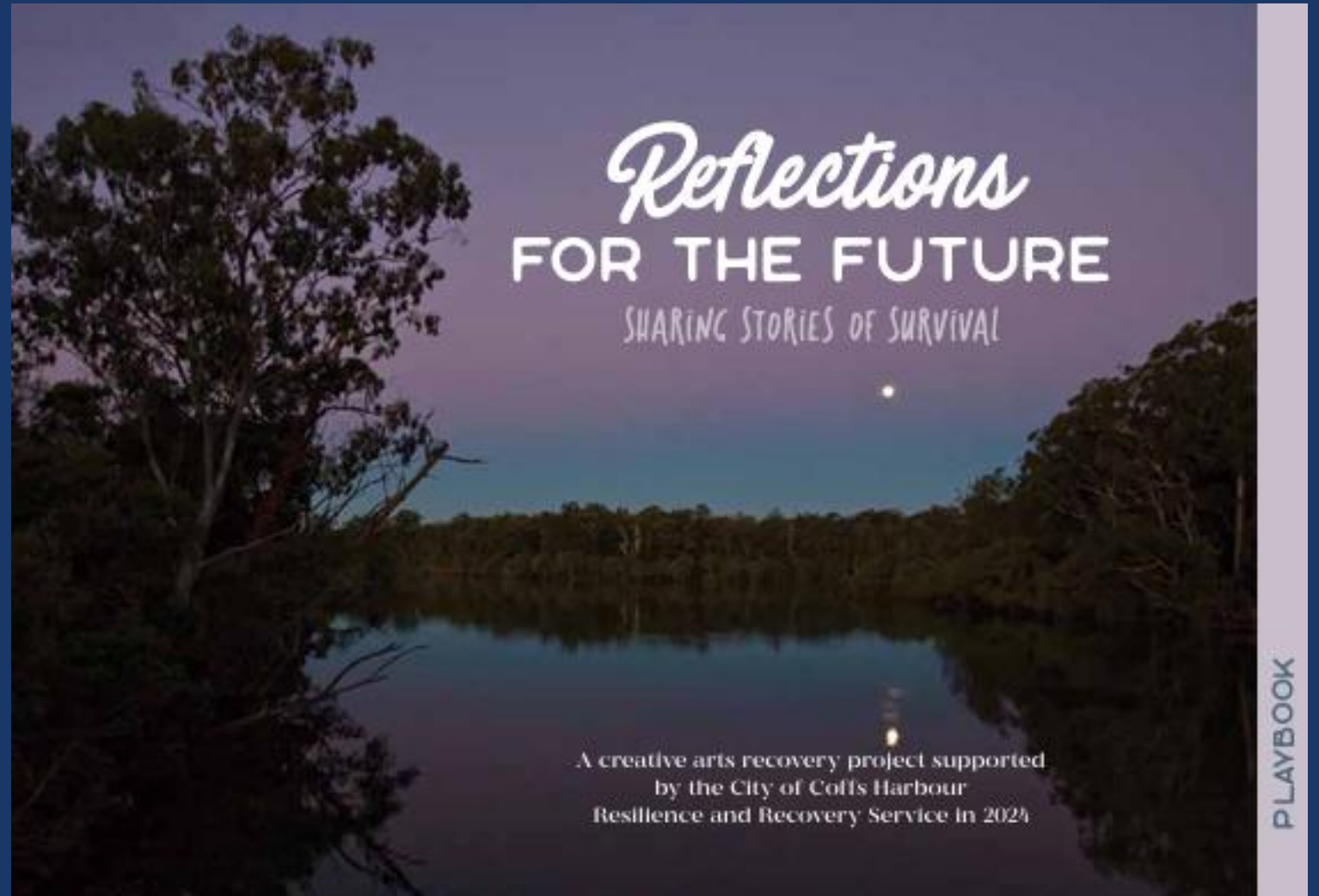
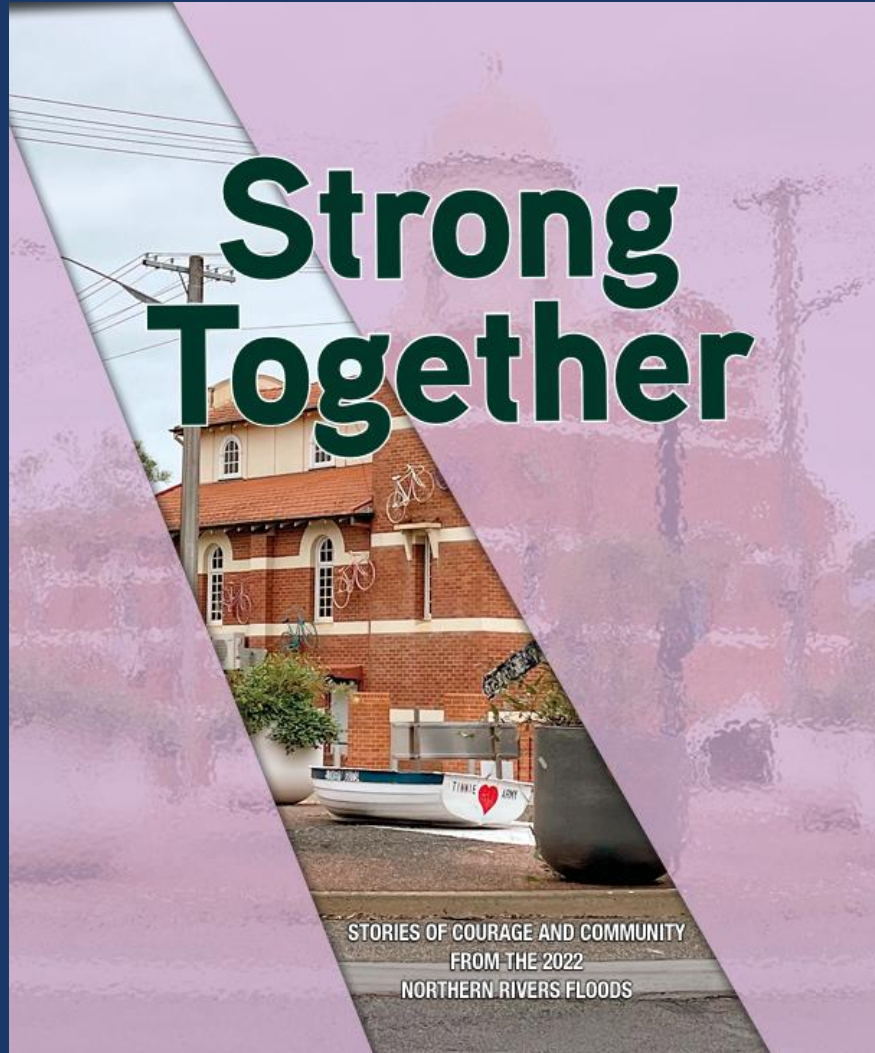
Maurice's response



Other examples of this kind of practice



Other examples of this kind of practice



And reporting...



Titiro Whakamuri, Kōkiri Whakamua

Cyclone Gabrielle Final Recovery Report
for Te Tai Tokerau Northland



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NORTHLAND
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT
GROUP

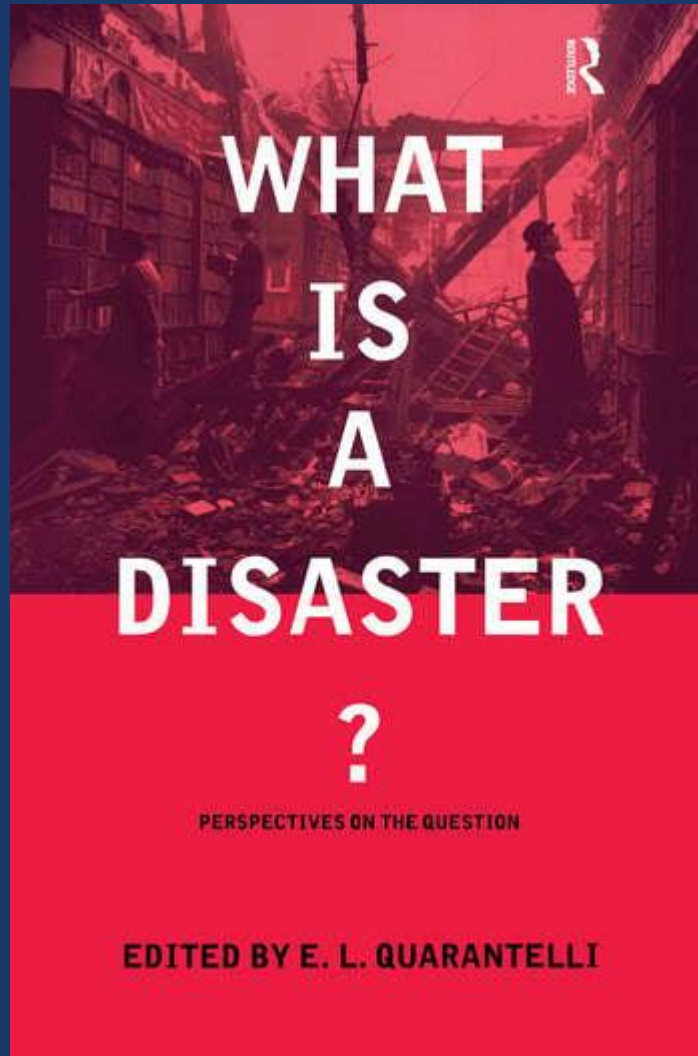
Final question: What is 'Recovery'?

Version as at 1 July 2025



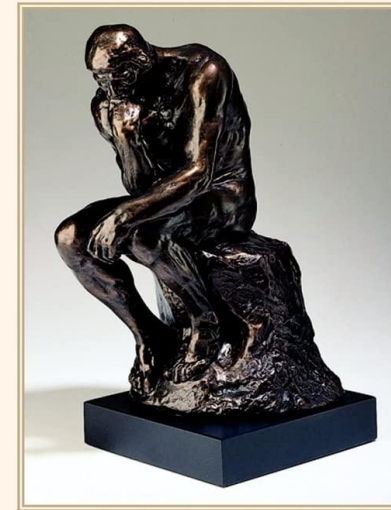
Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002

recovery means the co-ordinated efforts and processes used to bring about the immediate, medium-term, and long-term holistic regeneration and enhancement of a community following an emergency



WHAT IS A DISASTER?

NEW ANSWERS TO OLD QUESTIONS



(EDITED BY)
RONALD W. PERRY
& E.L. QUARANTELLI

Some personal suggestions ...

- 'Recovery is advocacy'
- 'Recovery is the art of the possible'
- 'Recovery traffics in the invisible'
- 'Recovery is not a plan, it's a practice' – Corinne Buxton
- Recovery should be ... what communities say it is

He pātai?
Any questions?

Publications – Northland CDEM

Exton, L. & Trüdinger, M. From community consultation to critical infrastructure resilience: A case study of 3 'invitations to responsibility', *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 39(4), 130–133.

Northland Civil Defence Emergency Management / Te Rākau Whakamarumarū o Te Tai Tokerau (2024) *Titiro Whakamuri, Kōkiri Whakamua: Cyclone Gabrielle Final Recovery Report for Te Tai Tokerau Northland*. Whāngārei, New Zealand: Northland Civil Defence Emergency Management | Te Rākau Whakamarumarū o Te Tai Tokerau.

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