

Progress Report from the Ministerial Advisor for the Ministerial Inquiry into Land Use (MILU) response in Tairāwhiti/Gisborne District

PURPOSE

1. This report provides an update on my progress as the Ministerial Advisor - Facilitator to support reducing risk and strengthening resilience in Tairāwhiti. It sets out my preliminary findings and recommendations.
2. This report should be read in conjunction with the report of the Resource Management Advisor for Tairāwhiti.
3. The Terms of Reference for my appointment are broad and driven by the scope and depth of MILU's work. The MILU report or, as it is called in Tairāwhiti the O2O report (Outrage to Optimism), is a comprehensive assessment of current context and provides a blueprint for an optimistic future for Tairāwhiti.
4. The Resource Management Advisor and I have not reconsulted on the matters contained in the O2O report. We saw no need to do that. The report stands as a public record.
5. As set out in the Terms of Reference for the appointment, this work supports the immediate recovery and improving resilience to future events.
6. This Progress Report is not intended as a fully referenced document given its interim nature and the breath of topics that could be addressed. It builds on initial observations provided as an introduction to the submitted Project Plan.

KEY MESSAGES

Existing Environment

7. The communities of Tairāwhiti have faced repeat extreme weather events (16 events since 2017), including the 2023 cyclones. Sustainable land use is a longstanding regional challenge.
8. Te Tairāwhiti, Ngāi Tāmanuhiri, Rongowhakaata, Te Aitanga a Mahaki and Ngati Porou are actively leading and supporting communities and have clear expectations of ongoing leadership.
9. The forestry sector and Gisborne District Council (GDC), for different reasons, have borne the brunt of community dissatisfaction on land use management. Both have good people working very hard for their community who are also under sustained pressure.

Recovery

10. Early observations in this appointment identified a GDC Recovery programme that lacked appropriate scale, structure, and systems. Over the last month, GDC has been proactive in responding to advice and is embarking on a significant change project. It appears that good progress is being made to up-scale, but this event is beyond the capacity of a small Unitary Council to manage on its own.
11. There is a strong case for ongoing government assistance in the recovery. Establishing regional priorities will be critical and the government, iwi, and council will need to consider how the people of Tairāwhiti have a say in determining what those priorities should be and in what order they will be delivered.

Woody Debris

12. The woody debris clean-up is currently a function of the GDC Recovery programme and GDC have received the bulk of funding. There have been issues with reporting on the treatment of woody debris, including reporting on volumes treated, treatment rate and volumes remaining in the system.
13. GDC has clarified (as this report was being finalised) that continuing woody debris clean-up work through until March 2024 is contingent on obtaining a further allocation of \$18 million. Government should expect applications from the region (GDC and iwi) for further significant funding for the treatment and clean-up of woody debris.
14. There have been issues between the GDC, the forestry sector and iwi, which has led to a fragmented approach to the clean-up. There are also reporting and communication problems with the community around expectations of the clean-up.

Forestry Recovery Plan and Land Use Reset

15. Social license of the forestry sector in Tairāwhiti is tenuous, however forestry remains a key contributor to the regional economy.
16. The forestry sector itself is finding recovery extremely challenging with financial losses, infrastructure damage, and many people losing their jobs and businesses. The forestry sector is not prepared for the change that the community expects. The forestry sector needs to be included in the recovery plans and plans for the region's future. Government needs to provide access to information and expertise to support transition.
17. Forestry is an established key income earner for the region and a significant part of the Māori economy. Trees grow well in the region, faster than most parts of New Zealand. But the future is unlikely to be the status quo. While many in the forestry sector are both anticipating and leading change, I am not convinced the sector is ready or prepared for the reset that much of the Tairāwhiti community expects of it.

GDC Plan-making Capability

18. The Resource Management Advisor to make recommendations to you under Section 24A RMA. I provide this section as a high-level commentary reflecting engagement and from my experience of the challenge councils face in completing plan reviews.
19. The Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan (TRMP) are outdated and considered not fit for purpose. The importance of building and delivering a well-resourced TRMP plan review (and/or changes) is a critical piece of community infrastructure that Tairāwhiti needs.
20. GDC acknowledges these inadequacies and has made provision in its Long Term Plan (LTP) for rolling plan reviews. Pressures on Tairāwhiti, the financial constraints facing GDC, and the chronic staff shortages, are risks to the staged nature of progressing the plan review progressing in a coordinated way. The implications of an ineffective or uncertain change process could seriously undermine social, economic, environmental and cultural outcomes for the region.
21. I encourage Ministers to consider all mechanisms that may assist the community of Tairāwhiti in receiving a fit for purpose TRMP delivered in a timely way.

Assessment of Regional Partnerships

22. There is no Regional Governance Group of iwi chairs and the mayor, as is common in other regions. There is a mechanism for Chief Executive collaboration via a Statement of Unity, but this is in early stages of development. The Rau Tipu Rau Ora Governance Group has previously provided a vehicle for regional governance, but this is not an option for governance of the Regional Recovery, as the mayor (earlier this year) withdrew from participation in Rau Tipu Rau Ora Governance Group. In addition it is unclear if Rongowhaakata is active in the Governance Group at this time.
23. Efforts are underway to reignite a shared leadership approach and positive progress should emerge and principles are being progressed at an operational level with a view to re-engaging at Rangatira/Governance Leadership level in 2024. Difficult conversations need to be had between the parties for the principles to have meaning.
24. If Ministers consider that facilitation is required to advance the broader Regional Governance, it would be more appropriate, in my view, for a Tairāwhiti leader to lead facilitation. I expressed that view when undertaking this role and I have confirmed my view during these initial stages.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

25. This report records my interim findings and recommendations. This report addresses specific areas that I wish to bring to Ministers attention rather than representing the full Project Plan.
26. Further information and analysis to support this Executive Summary is provided below in the Background section of this report.
27. Both Ministerial appointees are available to discuss their reports at your convenience.

Current Environment

28. Geologically the Tairāwhiti is young and moving. Much of the original forest has been removed and there is a significant erosion problem. Twenty-five percent of North Island's most severely eroding land is found in Tairāwhiti. Some rivers have sediment loads higher than anywhere in NZ.
29. Tairāwhiti is a region in recovery, and it will be for many years. Much of the damage from recent cyclones remains highly visible, especially the mountains of woody debris, collapsed riverbanks, and damaged roads. Some of the damage is unrecoverable as hillsides collapsed and large volumes of soil continue to plume out to sea; and homes have been left uninhabitable.

Recovery

30. This is a highly complex and large-scale recovery and needs to be structured, resourced, and operated with this in mind. The current recovery system is out of step with the scale of the event.
31. GDC has not had adequate systems and resourcing in place to lead this recovery. The Recovery team has done their very best but there are not enough people in the team, and they are missing critical expertise and technical support.
32. Over the last month GDC has been receptive to advice and are making positive changes. Some improvements have been made but the recovery team is carrying approximately 30 vacancies (at the time of submitting this report). Steering group oversight and governance needs to be bolstered. Expecting a small unitary council to have ready access to the required capability and capacity within its own operations is unrealistic. There is a strong case for ongoing government assistance.
33. Recovery in Tairāwhiti is not one programme. Iwi led Recovery Programmes are underway with work plans being developed in conjunction with the Cyclone Recovery Unit (CRU). I was advised by the GDC chief executive that, at the time of writing this report, GDC did not have visibility of the content of iwi workplans that CRU and iwi were progressing. Good communication and relationship lines between iwi, GDC, and CRU to support the programmes and work plans is critical. It is unclear who has ownership of the overarching strategy that links these programmes. How multiple recovery programmes will operate needs to be clearly understood by all participants.
34. Supporting recovery and future resilience is part of the next steps in my project plan but the resources required to assess mitigating actions go well beyond the scope of my role and warrant the attention of the appropriate government officials delivered in a coordinated way.
35. I am of the view that Tairāwhiti needs significant additional help with its recovery and recommend commentary on recovery in this report is provided to the Minister of Emergency Management and Recovery.

Woody Debris Clean Up

36. The woody debris clean-up is currently a function of the GDC Recovery programme, and it has received the bulk of funding. Clean-up and contracting of work have not progressed at the pace expected. The ground needed to dry out before machinery could access sites but the initial estimates of progress that informed my commentary in the Progress Plan have not materialised.
37. It is likely that the lack of Recovery systems and processes (including undertaking contractor pre-approvals) has slowed down this work.
38. There have been reporting issues with completed woody debris clean up and volumes of woody debris that remain to be treated.
39. Woody debris is a complex risk across catchments, within river systems, and with significant residual risk existing in forests due to gully erosion and mid-slope failure. A coherent evidence-based strategy needs to be developed through a risk reduction lens. There is no zero-risk scenario, so trade-offs need to be understood across the full recovery programme. Without visibility of this analysis and a sound evidence base, making funding recommendations for effective risk reduction are too speculative at this point.
40. Catchment risk reduction needs to be properly informed by land, timber harvesting, flood, water management expertise, and Mātauranga Māori). This information will be the precursor to land use assessments that will inform plan changes and forestry catchment plans. It will also inform the future for forestry discussions that need to occur in Tairāwhiti.
41. I support the recommendation in the O2O report that a Woody Debris Taskforce is convened, supported by a Technical Advisory Group, and as a start this is used as the mechanism to inform the recovery planning for woody debris clean-up and residual risk reduction.
42. A Taskforce would have strategic advantages over the status quo as further detailed in the background section of this report, including around ensuring industry and iwi have appropriate involvement in prioritisation and funding, as well as reporting on progress and communication with the public.
43. Broader than woody debris, a recommendation is made to consider consolidating government funding for recovery activities to reduce the workload for applicants in region via an all of government funding panel or portal. This has the added benefit of giving the public service in region a greater opportunity to target funds to needs.

Future of Forestry in Tairāwhiti

44. In the cyclone recovery environment, the forestry sector in Tairāwhiti presents as vulnerable. The impacts for the sector have been extremely challenging in terms of direct losses, job losses, business failures, and an eroded social license. However, forestry is an established key income earner for the region and a significant part of the Māori economy. Trees grow well in the region, faster than most parts of New Zealand.
45. The future is unlikely to be the status quo. While many in the forestry sector are both anticipating and leading change, I am not convinced the sector is ready or prepared for the reset that much of the Tairāwhiti community expects of it.
46. Given the current significance of the forestry sector to Tairāwhiti the impact of climate change and land use change, and future regulatory change, it will be important to ensure a comprehensive and well-sourced evidence base is applied to decision-making that will set re-set the sector's future.

47. This change needs to be constructed around positive future opportunities. Examples could include consideration of alternative species, alternative management practices, including harvesting, strategic retirement of high-risk and low-value forest, workforce development including workplace health and safety and skills development, secondary processing, and innovation options to transition waste-wood into a value commodity.
48. It is important that impacts on the forestry sector are included in the region's recovery plans to address immediate needs and to plan for the future. To be appropriately targeted those plans need to be contemplating how transition will occur in Tairāwhiti. Change will need to be managed.
49. Government entities hold much of the best information and expertise on forestry, land use, geology, and climate change that is required for regional discussions and decision-making. Economic analysis and forecasting will be needed including consideration of ETS implications and potential future biodiversity credits. Te Uru Rākau, Landcare Research, GNS, and Scion people need to be made available to support the Tairāwhiti recovery and rebuild. This is not only providing the science but making sure it can be received, interpreted and applied. Specific research may need to be commissioned for Tairāwhiti and pilot schemes should be identified and enabled to test new opportunities. Allocating government resources to access these services and opportunities will deliver dividends.
50. My recommendation to Ministers is for officials to actively engage in this part of recovery planning and reset for forestry.

GDC Plan-making Capability

51. It is for the Resource Management Advisor to make recommendations to you under Section 24A RMA. I provide this section as a high-level commentary reflecting our engagement and from my experience of the challenge councils face in completing plan reviews. I have provided previous advice to former Ministers for the Environment on this topic, including via a Technical Advisory Group in 2012¹.
52. A recurrent theme during engagement was that GDC had failed to update its planning documents. Major omissions related to erosion prone land, riparian margins around waterways, soil conservation and other regional functions (including those related to coastal waters).
53. The Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan (TRMP) are outdated and considered not fit for purpose. The importance of building and delivering a well-resourced TRMP plan review (and/or changes) is a critical piece of community infrastructure that Tairāwhiti needs. Hence the O2O report recommendations for urgency and use of Orders in Council.
54. GDC acknowledged these inadequacies some time ago and resolved in June 2020 to undertake a full review of the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan (including RPS), and to apply to the Minister for the Environment to approve a Streamlined Planning Process as prescribed under section 80(B) and 80(C) of the RMA. GDC's LTP provides funding for the plan review.
55. Given the existing pressures on Tairāwhiti, the financial constraints facing GDC, and the chronic staff shortages, there are risks to the staged nature of the plan review progressing at a pace and in a coordinated way. The implications of an ineffective or uncertain change process could seriously undermine social, economic, environmental, and cultural outcomes for the region.

¹ Report of the Minister for the Environment's Resource Management Act 1991 Principles Technical Advisory Group, Chapter 7.

56. I encourage Ministers to consider all mechanisms that may assist the community of Tairāwhiti in receiving a fit for purpose TRMP delivered in a timely way. In Tairāwhiti land management is a regionally significant issue. Access to technical specialists, best practice modelling, and data analysis in that area would be a valuable contribution.
57. In addition, RMA Commissioners, alongside elected member, and iwi representation, to oversee the pace, content, and process of the plan development phase could be a worthy investment to ensure a robust plan was delivered through to notification to meet the needs of the region.

Assessment of Regional Partnerships

58. While there have been a range of views expressed on working together, there is currently no Regional Governance Group that enjoys active membership from the Iwi chairs and mayor where collective guidance and oversight of the Regional Recovery can occur.
59. There is a mechanism for Chief Executive collaboration via a Statement of Unity, but this is in early stages of development.
60. The Rau Tipu Rau Ora Governance Group could be used as a Regional Governance Group for this Regional Recovery, however GDC is no longer a member, although other members would welcome the mayor's return.
61. I am encouraged to hear from iwi representatives and the mayor that efforts are underway to reignite a shared leadership approach and positive progress should emerge in the new year. I understand that council and iwi are progressing some principles at an operational level with a view to re-engaging at Rangatira/Governance Leadership level in 2024.
62. Principles are one thing. Difficult conversations are another. There is no doubt some difficult conversations need to be had between the parties for the principles to have meaning.
63. If Ministers consider that facilitation is required to advance the broader Regional Governance, it would be more appropriate, in my view, for a Tairāwhiti leader to lead facilitation. I expressed that view when undertaking this role and I have confirmed my view during these initial stages.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recovery

64. Supporting recovery and future resilience (within scope of the response to the O2O report) is part of the next steps in my project plan but the resources required to assess mitigating actions go well beyond the scope of my role and warrant the attention of the appropriate government officials delivered in a coordinated way.
65. I am of the view that Tairāwhiti needs significant additional help with its recovery and recommend commentary on recovery in this report is provided to the Minister of Emergency Management and Recovery.

Woody Debris Clean Up

66. I support the recommendation in the O2O report that a Woody Debris Taskforce is convened, supported by a Technical Advisory Group, and as a start this is used as the mechanism to inform the recovery planning for woody debris clean-up and residual risk reduction.
67. Consideration needs to be given to silt. There may be value in addressing silt as part of the woody debris approach set out above. This requires further discussion. It would be consistent with a catchment-based approach.
68. I recommend that a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is established across both woody debris workstream and RMA land use programmes to provide a coordinated approach to scientific and technical information, ensuring access to a robust evidence base for decision making and prioritisation.
69. Broader than woody debris, a recommendation is made to consider consolidating government funding for recovery activities to reduce the workload for applicants in region via an all of government funding panel or portal. This has the added benefit of giving the public service in region a greater opportunity to target funds to needs.

Future of Forestry in Tairāwhiti

70. It is important that impacts on the forestry sector are included in the region's recovery plans to address immediate needs and to plan for the future. To be appropriately targeted those plans need to be contemplating how transition will occur in Tairāwhiti. Change will need to be managed.
71. My recommendation to Ministers is for officials to actively engage in this part of recovery planning and reset for forestry.
72. Consider the advice and resources that the government and its entities can supply or commission to support a forestry sector recovery and reset.

GDC Plan Making Capability

73. I encourage Ministers to consider all mechanisms that may assist the community of Tairāwhiti in receiving a fit for purpose TRMP delivered in a timely way. In Tairāwhiti land management is a regionally significant issue. Access to technical specialists, best practice modelling, and data analysis in that area would be a valuable contribution.
74. In addition, RMA Commissioners, alongside elected member, and iwi representation, to oversee the pace, content, and process of the plan development phase could be a

worthy investment to ensure a robust plan was delivered through to notification to meet the needs of the region.

Assessment of Regional Partnerships

75. If Ministers consider that facilitation is required to advance the broader Regional Governance, it would be more appropriate, in my view, for a Tairāwhiti leader to lead facilitation. I expressed that view when undertaking this role and I have confirmed my view during these initial stages.
76. As I do not have accountability to the Minister of Local Government. I recommend Ministers share the findings on the competency challenge with the Minister for Local Government for consideration.

Immediate Recovery Programme

77. As GDC introduces external support it will be important to focus on building capacity within the system, not taking over. Recovery capacity building needs to encompass all participants in the system including iwi partners.
78. In addition, I have received feedback during engagement that rural communities (including lifestyle block holders) and the primary sector feel their voices are not being adequately prioritised in recovery. Concerns have been raised about road transport connections and social and economic impacts. It is important for the remainder of community plans/needs assessments to be complied with urgency to ensure the needs of rural communities are being captured and resources allocated according to priority.
79. As I do not have accountability to the Minister of Emergency Management and Recovery. I recommend Ministers share the findings on recovery in this report with the Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery. I welcome an opportunity to brief officials on my findings to date and engage with them on what assistance can be offered to Tairāwhiti.

Woody Debris - Progress Reporting and Funding

80. As of December 2023, woody debris and silt continue to be a significant risk across catchments in the region. Woody debris consists of mobilised material, captured material blocking rivers and streams, material in riparian margins that will remobilise, and existing trees and wood that is sitting on mid-slope failures and within gullies. Woody debris will be a feature of the Tairāwhiti environment that needs to be addressed for many years to come. Silt is also a complex issue to address and could be incorporated in the recommendations I am providing for woody debris.

Forestry sector and woody debris clean-up

81. To date GDC has been particularly reluctant to work with the forestry sector on recovery planning and actions citing issues relating to its unitary council RMA regulatory compliance functions. I don't find this reason adequate to exclude the skills and capability of forestry in the recovery operations. Hawke's Bay counterparts have been clear on the value proposition of using this experienced workforce. Clear council separation of RMA compliance and operational functions should be standard practice. Not accessing forestry sector expertise and capability is a lost opportunity to the recovery effort and is potentially adding cost and risk.

Future funding requirements

82. As a general comment, there needs to be improved coordination around funding the recovery effort. Multiple funding sources are valuable for accessing different funding streams, but multiple reporting requirements are adding to in-region workload. Consideration should be given to establishing an all of government funding

panel/portal that oversees requirements for applications (including reporting requirements) for recovery workstreams (not just for Woody Debris). Such a funding panel/portal may wish to link with non-government sources of for recovery to improve coordinated efforts.

BACKGROUND

This Appointment

83. Following the Government's consideration of the Ministerial Inquiry into Land Use report – Outrage to Optimism (O2O report), I was appointed as Ministerial Advisor-Facilitator. The role is to advise the Minister for the Environment and the Minister for Forestry (Ministers) on opportunities to facilitate and support a cohesive, integrated, and effective approach in Tairāwhiti/Gisborne District to the Government response to the recommendations in the O2O report. The focus of this appointment is to support reducing risk and strengthening resilience in Tairāwhiti.
84. This report provides an update on my progress, including my preliminary findings and recommendations for Ministers. The Terms of Reference of this appointment have required prioritisation over the first three months.
85. To deliver on the purpose of the appointment and advance responses and actions, I have engaged extensively but my no means completely. I believe my understanding of the issues is sufficient to state the findings and make recommendations in this report. An engagement summary will be provided in my final report or on request to Ministers.
86. I specifically note that I have talked to iwi chairs (some, not all), iwi managers (some not all), hapū representatives (some, not all), GDC mayor, deputy mayor, councillors (some), chief executive, and senior staff. I have met with representatives of the primary sector, including forestry and farming, environmental groups, the public service, and scientists. I have reserved meeting with the wider business sector until the new year. I have also undertaken my own research and applied by knowledge and experience to the topics I have been asked to advise on.
87. The purpose of engagement meetings was to build relationships and gain regional insights and intelligence as follows:
 - Understand and assess at a high-level the basis of the immediate recovery programme.
 - Understand the land use and management challenges.
 - Review progress and identify suitable next steps on woody debris clean-up and the need for further remediation work.
 - Provide an initial assessment of regional partnerships.
 - Provide input into the assessment of GDC's performance of its RMA functions.

Context

88. The topography of Tairāwhiti is one of extremes with large areas of steep highly erodible land which restricts economically viable land use options. The approach to land use has been driven by historical incentives to clear the land for farming and then plant the land in pine trees to stop erosion, specifically in response to Cyclone Bola.
89. The model for forestry has also changed over time from New Zealand Forest Service's stewardship to a return-on-investment model influenced by a private equity model, noting that Māori retain a significant stake in the Tairāwhiti Forestry sector as landowners, forest owners, managers, and in the workforce. The introduction of the ETS has introduced another investment lens with income earning options and also challenges in retiring forests and addressing liabilities.
90. The O2O report and Ngāti Porou's Recovery Plan set out the seriousness of the situation – "tangata whenua...are in peril, at risk of becoming homeless and landless. Our people are grieving for their whenua, taiao and kainga, they are exhausted and fearful of the next storm, the next rain, and the future." These sentiments were expressed repeatedly from many people over the last three months.

91. Many people are wanting to see significant positive change in their region. They have had enough of the status quo approach, of going from one emergency event to another, impacting their lives and their land.
92. In presenting this interim report, it is important to acknowledge that Tairāwhiti has been operating in a response and recovery environment for several years with consecutive storms causing further damage and social and economic upheaval. This has included 16 significant events since 2017 with intense and sustained rainfall (estimated to be more than 6m during 2023). Without doubt the communities of Tairāwhiti are faced with immense challenges.
93. Environmental impacts from weather events are not shared equally or able to be observed in all locations. To a visitor, Gisborne's urban area, after beach clean-ups, looks relatively unscathed (although this is not the cause for category 2 and 3 properties). However, inland and along the coast, landscape scale impact is impossible to ignore. Māori have been disproportionately impacted.
94. The issues and context in Tairāwhiti are different to its neighbour, Hawke's Bay. Tairāwhiti has sustained many years of repeat weather events, its geology and land uses are different. It is also missing in-region public service directors (most are based in Hawke's Bay and service Tairāwhiti). This has been raised as a significant disadvantage due to distance and community connections.

A Question of Competency

95. Trust and confidence matters have been a key theme throughout engagement. The O2O report made findings that challenged GDC's leadership competency. The findings had an impact on GDC leadership and the moral of the council, at a time when the council was under sustained pressure addressing emergencies it also felt under attack.
96. The O2O report reflected what the Panel heard about GDC, and this is well set out in their report. I have heard similar concerns in undertaking my work. GDC have borne the brunt of community dissatisfaction particularly over regulatory processes (planning, consenting, compliance, land management, emergency response).
97. I have endeavoured to encourage a more nuanced discussion around the circumstances GDC has been operating under for a number of years (rolling response/recover, a highly erodible landscape, responding to a reform storm from government (Water Services, RMA reform, Future for Local Government), slim rating base, significant staff shortages and heavy burden carried by key personnel) and this has elicited more empathetic responses. But empathy isn't the same as affirmation of competency.
98. Once a question of competency is widely circulating in the community, and with partners including mana whenua and government, a local authority's ability to function is inevitably compromised. This question of competency needs to be addressed so GDC and the region can focus on the work that needs to be done through the recovery to spearhead the future of Tairāwhiti.
99. I have considered my advice on how to resolve this matter. Part 10 of the Local Government Act 2002 (LGA) provides the Minister of Local Government with powers of assistance and intervention. An informed vote of confidence in GDC from the Minister of Local Government could go a long way to changing the narrative. If additional resources and support are needed to achieve that vote, then this should be undertaken transparently and in a planned way.

100. GDC has taken active steps to address some of the regulatory deficiencies identified in the O2O report and these steps are highlighted in the report from the Resource Management Advisor. Other steps are underway and communicating these steps to partners, stakeholders and the community is critically important.
101. For some of the challenges GDC is facing, such as staff shortages, there is no quick fix. This is an issue shared by many other agencies in the region (examples are Police and Health). I have encouraged the Chief Executive to communicate the critical gaps to the local government sector and government agencies. I understand some options for secondments and shared services are underway. This needs ongoing attention and support and a regionwide approach to supporting Tairāwhiti people into these good jobs.
102. In addition, in areas specific to the purpose of this appointment, I have considered options for improving performance of both the council and government systems and have made recommendations for Ministers to consider in this report.

Tairāwhiti Forestry sector

103. Many forests have exposure to highly erodible land with the negative impacts this causes for management within forest and within catchment. Intense rainfall events are exacerbating impacts and forest is not performing as well as expected in protecting land from erosion.
104. Export dependency is high, social license is compromised and the workforce lacks security due to weather disruption and market conditions. Many forests are a distance from port and travel is via an unreliable roading network. The region lacks secondary processing opportunities.
105. Adding to this is ongoing regulatory uncertainty associated with GDC plan change processes. The Resource Management Advisor has expressed concern about the methods used to develop a plan change that intends to limit harvesting. In addition, GDC is considering a decision to join a class action claim for forestry debris.
106. However, in Tairāwhiti there are forests that have performed well under extreme rainfall, that are well-managed, and that have protected land, forestry is a key economic driver for the region (10-12% of regional GDP), forestry is a significant part of the Māori economy, and innovation opportunities are emerging, including for processing of waste timber.
107. There are many highly skilled people who work in the forestry industry or provide support services to forestry operations. These are hardworking capable people who care deeply about their community and the work they do. These are people Tairāwhiti needs to retain, not lose to other regions or overseas.
108. It is evident that dialogue between GDC and the forestry sector has been limited with little interaction over several years, mostly undertaken in the regulatory setting of resource consent applications. Forestry managers expressed frustration at their inability to get GDC officers to engage with them in proactive problem solving in an industry/council forum or field trips on site.
109. The Eastland Wood Council (EWC) provides the collective voice for forestry in the Eastland region. Members reflect the supply-chain and include forestry companies, forestry managers, contractors, trucking organisations, Eastland Port, ISO (stevedoring), timber mills and export. EWC members represent approximately 80% of production forestry in Te Tairāwhiti.

110. In July 2023 EWC and GDC entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to foster and strengthen a proactive and sustainable working relationship. The overarching goal is to ensure that the region's catchment areas, infrastructure, waterways and beaches are not unduly impacted by forestry activities. Out of the MOU a Forestry Focus Group has been created. It is in an establishment phase and held its second meeting in early December. It will take some time to develop a constructive relationship that is outcome focussed but this is a positive start.
111. Some forestry companies have undertaken voluntary clean-up work in parts of the region. The EWC and GDC are working on a process to undertake future beach clean-up.
112. Given the current significance of the forestry sector to Tairāwhiti, and the impact of climate change and land use change, it will be important to ensure a comprehensive well-sourced evidence base is applied to future decision-making about land use change.
113. It is critically important that impacts on the forestry sector are included in the region's recovery plans to address immediate needs and to plan for the future. To be appropriately targeted those plans need to be contemplating how forestry transition will occur in Tairāwhiti. Change will need to be managed.
114. Government and research entities hold much of the best information and expertise on forestry, land use, geology, and climate change that is required for regional discussions and decision-making. Economic analysis and forecasting will be needed including consideration of ETS implications and potential future biodiversity credits. Specific research may need to be commissioned for Tairāwhiti and pilot schemes should be identified and enabled to test new opportunities. Allocating government resources to access these services and opportunities will deliver dividends.
115. It is promising to see the catchment-based planning evolving and this is covered in more detail in the Resource Management Advisor's report.

Immediate Recovery Programme

116. My Terms of Reference include assessing the immediate recovery.
117. Early observations in this appointment identified a GDC Recovery programme that lacked a coherent structure, systems and resourcing. As noted earlier in the report, this recovery is complex, and comparisons have been made to the Kaikoura earthquake recovery. Over the last month, GDC has been proactive in responding to advice and is embarking on a significant change project. It appears that good progress is being made to scale up.
118. I have some unanswered questions on who, if anyone, at a national level was monitoring GDC's recovery system and why such a depleted system was not highlighted and addressed as a risk, especially given the scale of the government funding that was coming into the region.
119. It is reasonable to ask, why did GDC not self-identify and communicate this risk to government as it transitioned from response to recovery? This requires more analysis. I talked with the Recovery Manager about the concept of a national level fly-in Recovery unit, like the response support that is available from NEMA. They confirmed that assistance would have been welcomed had it been offered.
120. The Recovery team has been working extremely hard and making effective process in many areas. They have been making do with what they've got, which is a theme on many levels in Tairāwhiti. People have continued to move from recovery roles back to response roles as new weather events occur, often doing their BAU day job in between. The Recovery team's dedication to their community cannot be faulted.

121. What has been missing is a strategic overview, systems and processes to take the Recovery team beyond a reactive phase and to build a replicable model that can serve their region well in future events.
122. I have had good conversations about a changed approach with the Independent Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, Chief Executive, and Recovery Manager. There are also some experienced recovery practitioners contracted to GDC and they are now getting cut through. The Audit and Risk Chair is engaged in oversight and external high-level recovery expertise is being sourced to support the programme. Additional governance oversight is being considered.
123. As GDC introduces external support it will be important to focus on building capacity within the system, not taking over. Recovery capacity building needs to encompass all participants in the system including iwi partners.
124. The Recovery Plans and programmes are the critical building block that follow emergency response. Iwi and GDC Recovery plans were integrated into a Tairāwhiti Recovery Plan which was submitted to the Cyclone Recovery Unit (CRU) in July 2023. The intent was for a collective of Chief Executives to maintain coordination of the Tairāwhiti Recovery Plan and its individual work plans and programmes, although this needs to be tested as available documentation and current processes are not providing visibility of that outcome.
125. There is no Regional Governance Group that enjoys active membership from the Iwi Chairs and Mayor where collective Regional Recovery leadership and oversight can occur.
126. The CRU would be best placed to comment on how the government will respond to determining regional priorities for future funding and support as it was the recipient of the integrated Tairāwhiti Recovery Plan. The CRU would also be best placed to comment on how the Te Tairāwhiti Cyclone Recovery: Memorandum of Understanding between Tairāwhiti Iwi and the Crown integrates into the regional recovery, and particularly the coordination of work programmes including with GDC.
127. In addition, I have received feedback during engagement that rural communities and the primary sector feel their voices are not being adequately prioritised in recovery. Concerns have been raised about road transport connections and social and economic impacts. It is important for the remainder of community plans/needs assessments to be compiled with urgency to ensure the needs of rural communities are being captured and resources allocated according to priority.

Summary

128. GDC's Recovery programme has been operating without adequate systems and resourcing (approximately 30 FTE vacancies). GDC has made progress in recent weeks on system improvements and vacancies, but the region is somewhat from having a fully resourced system in place.
129. How multiple recovery programmes will operate needs to be clearly understood.
130. Securing Investment in a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated Regional Recovery programme, undertaken over the next few years, is an essential building block of future prosperity in Tairāwhiti.

Woody Debris - Progress Reporting and Funding

131. My Terms of Reference prioritise supporting progress on woody debris clean-up including lessons learnt, funding requirements, priority areas and gaps in technical expertise.
132. As of December 2023, woody debris and silt continue to be a significant risk across catchments in the region. Woody debris consists of mobilised material, captured material blocking rivers and streams, material in riparian margins that will remobilise, and existing trees and wood that is sitting on mid-slope failures and within gullies. Woody debris will be a feature of the Tairāwhiti environment that needs to be addressed for many years to come. Silt is also a complex issue to address and could be incorporated in the recommendations I am providing for woody debris.
133. GDC estimates the total volume of woody debris created by the cyclones was 1.2 million cubic metres which equates to around 800k tonnes. Some of this woody debris was created after the 2018 storms and which became remobilised because of Cyclone Gabrielle. The assessment of 800k tonnes does not include debris within the forestry estate that risks mobilisation in the next weather event, such as post-harvest material, mid slope failure, or timber in gullies.
134. Most of the woody debris clean-up has been undertaken as part of the GDC Recovery Programme which has been the recipient of over \$60 million in government funding for clean-up activities (silt and woody debris) from a number of funding streams. Early estimates of the cost of woody debris clean-up were in the range of \$75 million to \$145 million.
135. GDC has reported the clean-up of over 35k tonnes² of woody debris as part of milestone reporting on the MPI administered woody debris fund (WDF).³ I have not been provided with information about the total quantum volume of woody debris that has been treated by GDC, so I am not able to report on the total clean-up rate, cost of clean-up by volume, or further funding requirements for the clean-up. I have not been provided with information that demonstrates systems are in place to collect and report on this information.
136. GDC had indicated that it had sufficient funds to continue work until end of March. GDC clarified (as this report was being finalised) this is contingent on obtaining a further allocation of \$18 million. Officials will need to provide Ministers with confidence this \$18 million meets application criteria (including reporting requirements). Maintaining momentum through until March is important.
137. The lack of recovery systems and processes, noted earlier in the report, appear to be impacting woody debris clean-up and reporting. Agencies have advised that obtaining the level of information they require for reporting or consideration of additional funding requests is challenging.
138. Given the importance of maintaining momentum on the clean-up, and to ensure public funding is delivering results, resolving these issues has been given high priority and have been raised with MPI, MfE and GDC.
139. Operational improvements on reporting have been made in recent weeks with improved communication and some technical support (mapping) being provided by MPI to assist GDC with reporting, although I am yet to see the output.

² Current to 6/12/2023

³ The Woody Debris Fund is for \$10.15 million and administered by MPI. \$4.6 million was available for Tairāwhiti and \$4.6 million for Hawkes Bay. \$2 million of this fund was allocated to TPK for the administration of contracts to Maori for clean-up on whenua Maori.

140. Public facing reporting of woody debris and silt clean-up and risk reduction is very important to demonstrate progress - how funds are being allocated and spent, what results are being achieved, and how and why work is being prioritised. This is a work-on area for the Recovery programme. I understand that a communications person has been appointed recently.

Forestry sector and woody debris clean-up

141. The forestry sector has also undertaken clean-up activities, reporting to have removed 100k tonnes of woody debris from the forestry estate and from communities. The forestry sector accepts its role in the clean-up and has been keen to partner with GDC.
142. To date GDC has been reluctant to work with the forestry sector on recovery planning and actions citing issues relating to its unitary council RMA regulatory compliance functions. Not accessing forestry sector expertise and capability is a lost opportunity to the recovery effort.

Woody debris clean up on Māori land

143. Two million dollars from the Woody Debris Fund (WDF) was allocated to Te Puni Kokiri (TPK) who have managed some of the contracts for clean up on some Māori land. As at late November, over 11K tonnes of woody debris has been treated using this appropriation. An additional appropriation of \$13.3 million was provided to TPK (separate to the WDF) for clean-up of debris on whenua Māori. This has been fully allocated.
144. In the Terms of Engagement between the Crown and Tairāwhiti iwi in relation to the Te Tairāwhiti Cyclone Recover, resourcing for slash removal and resourcing for Tairāwhiti Iwi to actively participate and meaningfully engage in responding to the Ministerial Inquiry on Land Use in Te Tairāwhiti is out of scope.
145. Ngati Porou have advised that a comprehensive Ngati Porou entity approach to woody debris and silt removal is included in its Recovery Plan with a request for direct government funding. This is to ensure Ngati Porou receive a fair and equitable share of the woody debris funding that central government has invested in the region.

Future Funding Requirements

146. In the interests of maintaining momentum, it is imperative that a better understanding of woody debris priority areas, clean-up rate and cost and fulsome reporting around clean-up is improved. If assistance is required to progress these matters, then I can support this work.
147. At this time, I am not able to make a recommendation on provision of further funding directly to GDC for continuing the woody debris clean-up for the reasons set out above. I can confirm that additional funding will be required, and the government should expect a request from GDC for a significant sum.
148. Given the sums being contemplated, the recovery programme needs strategic context to consider woody debris against competing priorities. Is woody debris removal, where it is unlikely to remobilise and cause infrastructure damage, as important as water security and storage? In addition, cost effective delivery of woody debris clean-up work must be a high priority given the financial constraints for government and ratepayers.
149. As a general comment, there needs to be improved coordination around funding the recovery effort. Multiple funding sources are valuable for accessing different funding streams, but multiple reporting requirements are adding to in-region workload. Consideration should be given to establishing an all of government funding panel/portal that oversees requirements for applications (including reporting

requirements) for recovery workstreams (not just for Woody Debris). Such a funding panel/portal may wish to link with non-government sources of for recovery to improve coordinated efforts.

Next Steps

150. The recovery effort on woody debris clean-up is not progressing in a coordinated and quantifiable way with clear priorities and a visible strategy. I consider that a change of approach is needed. This does not mean a stop-work on what GDC is doing as many clean-up sites have already been identified, assessed and contracts for the existing funding pool is already underway.
151. Given the quantum of further funding that will be required to continue the clean-up work, and the extensive residual risk that exists, it is imperative that work undertaken is evidence-based and quantified, with strong project management oversight (including monitoring and reporting), a decision-making framework to determine priorities, and regular public communication.
152. Woody debris recovery work goes beyond picking up sticks and needs to perform a risk reduction function in catchments to improve resilience for people, property, and networks in future events.
153. Taking a catchment risk reduction and resilience lens needs the right skills and people at the table - landowners, land managers, and technical expertise, (science, engineering, forest, flood and land management), and Mātauranga Māori. There has been a consistent desire from iwi, Māori landowners, and forestry and farming sectors, to work collaboratively with GDC on these issues. I also note the positive engagement I have had with environmental organisations in region on catchment-based risk reduction approach.
154. The O2O report recommended establishment of a Woody Debris Taskforce. There has been in-region support for this approach and I consider it a sound approach. A Taskforce would be a valuable contributor to both the recovery efforts, future catchment planning, changes to the future of the Forestry sector, and the review of the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan (TRMP) as it progresses.
155. A Taskforce would have strategic advantages over the status quo as:
 - A taskforce can be a clear separation between GDC CME regulatory functions and its Recovery operations. Not accessing Forestry sector expertise and capability has been a lost opportunity to the recovery effort.
 - A taskforce could also implement a forestry sector contribution (in-kind and/or financial) to woody debris recovery work and/or risk reduction work. Work on in kind contributions from the forestry sector could be progressed by officials' advice to the Ministers.
 - Clear reporting requirements would be in place to reassure the public and government agencies that public money has been well spent.
 - A taskforce approach is compatible with Māori aspirations to be involved in decision making around method of clean-up and prioritisation.
 - Public facing reporting can demonstrate how funds are being allocated and spent, what results and progress are being made, and how and why work is being prioritised.
 - Improved coordination would reduce GDC workload and reporting.
156. I suggest that the Taskforce is given another name that better describes its land management and resilience function.
157. My intention was to progress with Taskforce establishment discussions in-region in late November or early December after briefing the Ministers. Subject to the Ministers

preferences progress will be made as soon as possible to stand up the Taskforce and Technical Advisory Group (TAG).

158. Consideration will need to be given to whether the Taskforce sits within GDC's Recovery Programme or separately with reporting lines. Given the resourcing pressure facing the recovery programme it may be better for the Taskforce to have some separation and dedicated oversight. I would find advice from officials useful and will progress this as a next step if the Ministers are supportive of a Taskforce being established.
159. My advice is that the Taskforce should be supported by a TAG (please also refer to the section Future Forestry). The concept of how these two groups would interface needs consideration and I can progress an initial discussion with officials.
160. I would also welcome Ministers' preferences on seeking a forestry sector contribution (in-kind and/or financial) to woody debris (and silt) recovery work and/or risk reduction work. This may be matter for the Taskforce to consider in the first instance with further advice provided to the Ministers through officials.
161. The Taskforce (and TAG) needs clear Terms of Reference and delegations (including financial), and reporting lines will need to be established, but I do not see these as onerous tasks. There are other successful models to adapt for this situation.
162. I recommend that a TAG is established across both woody debris workstream and RMA land use programmes to provide a coordinated approach to scientific and technical information, ensuring access to a robust evidence base for decision making and prioritisation.

Summary

163. I am not able to recommend further funding be provided to GDC to undertake woody debris clean-up until appropriate structures and reporting of progress are in place.
164. There is a lack of coordination with other clean-up efforts and the different approaches to the clean-up and funding streams (with their different reporting requirements) are not aligned.
165. Additional government funding of \$18 million is required to continue clean-up work until March.
166. I have been advised GDC will make significant future funding requests to continue the clean-up work.
167. Based on my preliminary findings and my analysis of the complexity risk and residual risk, in line with the O2O report, I recommend Ministers convene a Woody Debris Taskforce.
168. Having a TAG across both RMA land use and woody debris programmes will ensure access to robust information and that advice is consistent. This is important given the interrelationship of programmes and reliance on similar information to inform decisions.
169. Consideration should be given to establishing an all of government funding forum/panel that oversees applications and reporting for Recovery (not just for Woody Debris).

Initial Assessment of Regional Partnerships

Change to Terms of Reference

170. My Terms of Reference include facilitating positive ways of working together at a regional level between GDC, hapu/iwi/PSGEs and other relevant stakeholders on matters relating to the environment in Tairāwhiti, including the immediate recovery, improved resilience to future events, and looking ahead to the transition to a new resource management system.
171. The O2O report recommended prioritising the establishment of the Tairāwhiti Regional Planning Committee as envisioned in the Spatial Planning Act legislation, among other recommendations on leadership and governance.
172. For clarity, my Terms of Reference should be updated to remove reference to this new legislation to avoid confusion on the O2O recommendations I am required to respond to.

Current Regional Partnerships

173. While there have been a range of views expressed on working together, there is currently no Regional Governance Group that enjoys active membership from the Iwi Chairs and Mayor where collective Regional Recovery oversight could occur.
174. There is a mechanism for Chief Executive collaboration via a Statement of Unity, but this is in early stages of development.
175. Rau Tipu Rau Ora is a collective of regional leadership groups committed to collaborating for positive impact in Tairāwhiti. The Rau Tipu Rau Ora Governance Group was established to provide regional oversight of the Covid 19 Response and Recovery, it secured significant government funding for its operations, and was highly effective. Rau Tipu Rau Ora has developed a comprehensive set of relationships that link to most regional operational leadership groups.
176. The Rau Tipu Rau Ora Governance Group could be used as a Regional Governance Group for this Regional Recovery, however GDC is no longer a member, although other members would welcome the mayor's return.
177. The all of government agency group is meeting regularly to coordinate aspects of the recovery. Manaaki Tairāwhiti is contracted to lead social recovery.
178. I am encouraged to hear from iwi representatives and the Mayor that efforts are underway to reignite a shared leadership approach and positive progress should emerge in the new year. I understand that council and iwi are progressing some principles at an operational level with a view to re-engaging at Rangatira/Governance Leadership level in 2024.
179. In the meantime, a Woody Debris Taskforce will require cross-sector collaboration and may provide a useful platform to make some ground.
180. If Ministers consider that facilitation is required to support the broader shared Regional Governance for Recovery, it would be more appropriate, in my view, for a Tairāwhiti leader, to lead facilitation, rather than a Ministerial appointment from out of region. The Ministerial Advisor role could support as appropriate.

Summary

181. A regional governance group with participation of iwi chairs and the mayor remains a notable gap in Tairāwhiti. At times of emergency, and during recovery, united leadership between iwi and local government is a core strength to build community

confidence and cohesion. Iwi and GDC say efforts are underway to reignite a working partnership and positive progress should emerge in the new year. This needs to be strongly encouraged.

Providing Input into the Assessment of GDC's Performance of its RMA Functions

182. I have been working alongside the, particularly in the early stages of our appointments as we undertook site visits and orientation within region. To be efficient in the use of our time I have headed most of the subsequent community engagement while the Resource Management Advisor has worked with GDC staff on RMA functions.
183. The Resource Management Advisor will provide recommendations on the RMA functions in his report.
184. I will provide specific high-level commentary that relates to the priority GDC has given planning functions.
185. I have endeavoured to capture feedback from interviews and forums with iwi representatives, the forestry sector, landowners, environmental groups, technical and professional experts, and I await feedback from councillors.
186. While there were a range of views, the recurrent theme I captured was that GDC had under-resourced its RMA planning functions in relation to land use over many years. This was particularly so for erosion prone land and riparian margins around waterways, soil conservation, and other regional functions (including those related to coastal waters).
187. The Regional Policy Statement (RPS) and the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan (TRMP) are outdated and considered not fit for purpose. The consequences of the outdated TRMP were described as allowing unacceptable degradation of the environment, unwieldy consenting processes, not supporting best practice, and a limiting ability to monitor activities (although this matter was also attributed to a lack of financial resourcing).
188. GDC have signalled an intention to undertake a full TRMP review (integrating the RPS) and have made provision for that review in its budgets. Full plan reviews are expensive and time consuming and require a significant amount of human resource to see them through.
189. They also require dedicated leadership and oversight. Competing pressures for elected member time, and financial and staffing constraints, can hamper timely progress on preparation of plan reviews prior to notification. If elected members have limited or no experience in the RMA and its processes, then plan making can also suffer from "planner capture", where advice receives very little testing at the governance table.
190. The O2O report recommended that modified s25 RMA powers were used to immediately appoint commissioners to exercise the RMA functions, powers, and duties of GDC. This recommendation was not adopted by the previous Ministers.
191. The Resource Management Advisor in his report considers that changes to consenting and compliance functions are being satisfactorily progressed. His advice is less confident on the capacity and capability of GDC to deliver the plan making functions that are needed.
192. It is for the Resource Management Advisor to make recommendations to you under Section 24A RMA. However, I encourage Ministers to consider all mechanisms that may assist the community of Tairāwhiti in receiving a fit for purpose TRMP in a timely way given land use is a significant regional issue.

CONCLUSION

193. In compiling this Interim report for Ministers, ongoing Recovery support for Tairāwhiti, whether that is provided to communities, to iwi, to industries, or directly to GDC, is going to continue to require significant government attention and resource in 2024.
194. This report will be one of many that Ministers across government will be receiving. This would be a good time to undertake a Tairāwhiti stocktake to ensure the government and the region have excellent visibility and coordination of workstreams, that priorities are lined up, and significant gaps are addressed.
195. Thank you, for the privilege, of working with the people of Tairāwhiti. Even under the hardship of repeat emergency events, Tairāwhiti's reputation as a region of problem solvers holds true. *I orea te tuatara ka patu ki waho*. A problem is solved by continuing to find solutions.
196. Thank you, Ministers, for the opportunity to provide you with this interim report.