

## MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, 25 March 2024

### **Joint Committee fully accepts Civil Defence Independent Review findings, commits to overhaul of Hawke's Bay's approach to civil defence**

The Hawke's Bay Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Group Joint Committee fully accepts all of the findings of the Independent Review into the Group's response to Cyclone Gabrielle and confirms its commitment to an overhaul of the region's approach to emergency management, and to working with central Government, Iwi, local communities, and business leaders to ensure the Review recommendations are used wherever possible to strengthen Hawke's Bay's readiness and response capabilities for the future.

The Independent Review, led by former Commissioner of NZ Police, Mike Bush from Bush International Consulting, was tasked with identifying a range of learnings and opportunities that can be used to improve resilience for future events, the Joint Committee said.

"The Review report released today has once again reiterated that Cyclone Gabrielle was one of the most devastating weather events to hit New Zealand in living memory, and that our region's emergency response system – whilst attempting to do the best it could under extremely challenging circumstances – was fundamentally overwhelmed by the scale, pace, and magnitude of the event.

"Earlier this afternoon, Independent Review panel lead, Mike Bush, provided us with a high-level summary of the Review findings and recommendations. The reality is, some of those findings are complex and include recommendations across local, regional, and national levels. Regardless of the complexity, what is clear is that as a region, we need to be prepared to undertake a complete overhaul of our approach to civil defence to ensure that our communities are better prepared to manage or mitigate the devastating impacts of an event like Cyclone Gabrielle."

Together, the Joint Committee reiterated the purpose of the Review was to identify areas for improvement for the future, which it has.

"In identifying opportunities for improvement, the Review found the region took a 'best case scenario' rather than a precautionary approach to planning, communication, and warnings – and that this optimism bias was undoubtedly intensified by the lack of situational awareness underpinned by multiple communications failures, total power outages, and a lack of reliable, timely and accurate data. While some of this was outside of the CDEM Group's control, combined these factors created significant blind spots and led to some critical mistakes.

"The Review also indicated the region had low multi-agency operational experience which contributed to the inefficient coordination and utilisation of resources, including communities, Iwi, volunteers, utility providers, contractors, and agencies.

"Another finding of the Independent Review was that the current national emergency management system is not fit for purpose, and that there has never been a more critical time for enhancing national coordination, assurance, consistency of training, and depth of professional leadership in response to emergencies. We are hopeful the Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events, which is due to be released in the near future, has some similar findings and recommendations that may support the case for enhancing emergency management at a national level."

Whilst the Review report was only formally released today, the Joint Committee said it was important to acknowledge the significant amount of work already underway to identify and address areas to improve the region's future civil defence capabilities.

"Right across Hawke's Bay we have been implementing a range of initiatives designed to enhance our approach to civil defence, starting with the inclusion of significant and increased levels of funding specifically for civil defence resilience. Additionally, more than \$2 million in external funding has been used to enable community-led capability strengthening through Community Hub planning and resourcing with critical supplies, including the purchase of two mobile welfare trailers and planning for 60 community resilience hubs underway across the region.

"With the support of the Hawke's Bay CDEM Group, over the last year more than 200 emergency management personnel received training designed to enhance operational readiness and covering everything from the Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) to Response and Recovery Leadership. By the end of 2025, this number is expected to exceed 800.

"Four separate region-wide public education campaigns have been held with a focus on improved levels of community readiness and resilience, our local Emergency Operations Centres have successfully completed nine individual response exercises, and an additional national Tier 4 Exercise is scheduled to take place in June this year."

The Joint Committee members said they would do everything possible to ensure meaningful change occurs as a result of the Independent Review.

"Whilst it's clear that there are no silver bullets, together the Joint Committee is united in its commitment to working with our CDEM Coordinating Executive Group and Council partners to develop a detailed action plan over the coming months.

"To be clear, this is not about incremental change – we see this as a complete overhaul of how we approach emergency management in Hawke's Bay, and we intend to establish a dedicated workstream to ensure this important mahi is fully resourced with the support and expertise needed to deliver meaningful change for all of our communities for the future.

"It is critically important that, as the risk of extreme weather events intensifies, the lessons identified through this independent review process become lessons learned for everyone involved in the Civil Defence system – not just here in Hawke's Bay, but right across New Zealand."

The full Independent Review report, which is 117 pages long and contains nine tier one recommendations and a further 66 tier two recommendations, is available online:

<https://www.hbemergency.govt.nz/cyclone-gabrielle-review/review-release/>.

**ENDS**

**Note to the Editor:**

*This media release has been distributed on behalf of the Hawke's Bay Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Group Joint Committee which represents Hawke's Bay's five councils and is supported by advisory members from Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi and Tātau Tātau o Te Wairoa Trust. Members of the Joint Committee are Hinewai Ormsby (Chair), Alex Walker, Bayden Barber, Craig Little, Kirsten Wise, Leon Symes, and Sandra Hazlehurst.*

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