

## **Northern Hawkes Bay – HBRC Māori Relationship Manager update**

**17 February 2026**

Tēnā koutou katoa

I haven't done a monthly update for a while but appreciate the value of keeping you all informed with some of the changes issues that are happening around us at the moment, which continue to come thick and fast.

I will continue to share periodic updates as things evolve – or contact me directly if you require further information.

### **National Environment and Planning Bills**

Submissions closed on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> February. Many of you will have been working on submissions to these Bills. There are positives and negatives being proposed depending on your perspective but whatever the outcome it will be a significant shift to the way the mahi in the Taiao is carried out.

There are some very useful sources of information that outline what the Bills contain, the areas they impact on and the pathway forward to the process.

Via –

NZ Parliament

[https://www3.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/make-a-submission/document/54SCENV\\_SCF\\_BA467863-D6B0-4968-1027-08DE369D9192/planning-bill-and-natural-environment-bill#RelatedAnchor](https://www3.parliament.nz/en/pb/sc/make-a-submission/document/54SCENV_SCF_BA467863-D6B0-4968-1027-08DE369D9192/planning-bill-and-natural-environment-bill#RelatedAnchor)

Poipoia (Independent Briefing Paper)

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5872e480f7e0abf4984eed38/t/695d847cbdaff36b59e3e11c/1767736444170/Briefing+Paper+Natural+Environment+Bill+and+Planning+Bill+POIPOIA.pdf>

Ministry for Environment

<https://environment.govt.nz/acts-and-regulations/acts/natural-environment-bill/>

It will be interesting to see how this progresses as there is still quite a bit of detail required over the next 2 years through specifying the spatial planning process and the setting of national direction, acknowledging treaty settlements developing the framework and limits for managing freshwater that is yet to be released.

### **Simplifying Local Government**

This process is moving fast also. Submissions close on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February for this consultation process.

<https://www.dia.govt.nz/simplifying-local-government>

Local Mayors, Chairs and CE's have been involved in some initial kōrero to pre-empt taking a plan back to Central Government.

From what I am seeing it is likely there will be change to the way environmental management mahi is carried out regionally and locally but I am confident that many of the functions undertaken by Regional Councils will still need to be carried out whoever is responsible for their delivery.

## **Weather event 14-15 February**

The community and Wairoa Incident Management Team were well prepared for the rainfall event over the weekend. Modelling and the predicted impacts changed rapidly and at one stage looked like they could be significant as what eventuated in the regions to our south.

It was good to be part of such an improved approach to our preparation for these types of events and I commend Juanita Savage and the team for the effort they have put into this. It was great to have Minister Mark Mitchell attend our briefings and stay in Wairoa overnight. It is not getting any easier to stay awake all night!

## **Waiatai Valley Tuna Deaths**

Most of you will be aware of the Tuna deaths that occurred in the Waiatai Valley around the 12<sup>th</sup> of January.

In summary it was not a pollution event but rather highly likely what is known as a Blackwater event. This is not without precedent in New Zealand but not common either. When freshwater is in a Blackwater state, the amount of organic matter in the water can cause it to become hypoxic or even anoxic (without oxygen), there can also be other complicating factors (as was the case with this event) such as the water pH, sediment load and high levels of mobilised metals which seriously stresses any organism trying to survive in it.

As a natural event it does raise the concern of, will it happen again, where else could happen and what can be done from preventing it? All important questions with no simple answers.

On Friday in an attempt to take advantage of weather conditions that would reduce impact on Tuna and enable the upper Ikanui to drain the bund was removed. We are in dialogue with those impacted parties about this.

## **Wairoa River Mouth**

During the last significant rain event, a second mouth was successfully opened to enable the build up of water within the Wairoa Matangirau to flow out to sea. Work was undertaken to support a preferential flow via the new opening however conditions did not allow the work to be completed

HBRC is working closely with TToTW and WDC and will meet with the Matangirau Reserves Board tomorrow to keep all parties informed and respond to concerns and issues, in what is quite a dynamic operating space at times.

## **Wairoa Flood Protection Project**

Late December, National Infrastructure Funding and Finance confirmed that the project would be fully funded by Central Government <https://www.wairoafloodproject.co.nz/news> The consent has been lodged now through the OiC process to be considered by an Independent Commissioner. Work is continuing to progress alongside the Contractor who will be undertaking the work to refine the projects final design. Work is also progressing to ensure mana whenua participation in the process is fully enabled.

## **Local update**

- The Wairoa HBRC Office staff would like to congratulate Trevor Waikawa on recently becoming a WDC Councillor and Abby Miller on the birth of her new pepe!
- Following on from what was actually a very dry spring for the district, the recent rain events have made for a challenging month or so to whānau and whenua. Māhanga, Nuhaka, the Rahui Channel at Whakakī, Opoho and Wairoa have all recently required mechanical opening to enable water to flow.

- Significant debris has again washed up on Mahia Beach and Onepoto and there are multiple reports of there still being a quantity floating out at sea. The majority of the wood appears to be willow or poplar, with little to none being freshly created slash.
- As the recent rainfall events on January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> of January and again on 15 February have shown there can be quite considerable variation in how much rain falls in any particular location in Wairoa and the difference can be quite marked. It has also highlighted that very local impacts do not always reflect broader predictions or impacts, with those on the ground best positioned to make the judgement call as what to do and when.

### **Further Information & events**

- For those interested in related regional discussions, GDC's Land Use Transition in Tairāwhiti proposal <https://www.gdc.govt.nz/environment/land/transition-programme-business-case> was released and submitted to Central Government. The document is a comprehensive and detailed long term plan for reducing soil erosion, protecting vulnerable land and building community resilience. This proposal is a follow on from the independent enquiry into land use impacts and slash in the Tairawhiti and Wairoa Districts (Outrage to Optimism). It was estimated to cost \$600 million over the next 10 years, while recognising that recovery costs for the Tairawhiti Region were approximately \$1 Billion for last year alone. Unfortunately the initial proposal was rejected by Central Government.
- A link to further information on hypoxia in our waterways can be found via <https://www.waikatoregion.govt.nz/assets/WRC/TR202419.pdf>
- The link below is to the HBRC State of the Environment webpage. Behind that document are multiple technical reports that can be found on this webpage <https://www.herc.govt.nz/environment/state-of-the-environment/three-yearly-report/> These reports go into significantly more detail about the data captured and what this means for our Taiao on a local basis.

Over the next few months I am looking forward to

- What progress is made to both the National Environment and Planning Bills and Simplifying Local Government proposal and the discussions being had about what that means regionally and locally?
- The opportunity to have a wider community kōrero about the Waiatai Valley Tuna deaths.
- The opportunity to meet with the new Chairs, Trusts, Committees and Councillors that I haven't had the opportunity to do yet.
- The on-going discussion around the Wairoa River mouth and continuing to improve on how the kaupapa is handled both in the short and longer term.
- Hopefully another layer of understanding of what all this change means to our local voice, Māori participation and the protection and enhancement of our Taiao.

In the meantime my focus locally is staying connected with councils, mana whenua and community leaders, helping share accurate information and supporting good process where issues are moving quickly.

Ngā mihi



**Nathan Heath**

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