

Okawa-Ohiti-Rūnanga Community Meeting
Pukehāmoamoā School
August 9 2023

On August 9, around 70 people from the Okawa, Ohiti and Rūnanga communities met at Pukehāmoamo School to talk about their experiences of Cyclone Gabrielle and the aftermath, voice concerns and identify immediate priority actions so that the community can move forward.

The meeting was hosted by Between the Two Rivers Community Catchment Collective (B2R), which has been set up by landholders and mana whenua between the Ngaruroro and Tutaekurī rivers to work together to improve the health of the waterways and land that sustains us, to create new opportunities for our people and to futureproof our land-based businesses.

The meeting was opened by Mary Tukiwaho of Rūnanga Marae and facilitated by Tom Lowry, Okawa Station.

These are the notes from the meeting report backs. The next steps are to:

- Prepare a roadmap to resolve the issues raised by the community and
- Organise a community meeting in September with the heads of the regional and district councils.

Flooding

Experiences and Issues

- How Gabrielle hit the area:
 - 11 pm Shanley Road underwater
 - 5 am Ohiti Road flooded
 - 6 am Ōmahu whānau evacuated
 - 11 am Korokipo Road
- Extensive flooding of the Okawa Stream, Shanley Road, Dorwoods, Ohiti Road and the Matapiro Crossing; stormwater on the Taihape Road (about 14 km upstream from Ōmahu)
- For some areas, Cyclone Gabrielle was not the first or last time that roads were flooded out this year. It has happened **five times on Shanley Road this year**
- Despite this, the regional council has not engaged seriously with the community, despite repeated attempts to get it to focus on the issues
- Just before the Cyclone, a regional council staff member was due to do a drone-flyover of the area around Okawa-Rūnanga. That never happened
- Essential workers were unable to get to town due to the flooding on the Taihape Road @ Dorwoods. People with life-threatening conditions couldn't access healthcare
- **Swamp Road:** HBRC clears drains on property; HDC does the drains by the roadway. Only one side was cleared. It was a depression; now it's a drain up to the road surface. There is the potential for scouring in next heavy rain. Other side needs completing
- **Pirau Road:** There appeared to be a lack of coordination of contractors. The removal work was erratic, not continuous
- **Oingo:** There was a 2m rise during the flooding (across 300 acres). It took the volume that would otherwise have taken out Flaxmere
- The waterways have changed: the beds, the levels and flows and we need information and analysis to understand the changed flow pathways and drainage
- The amount of debris in the Okawa and Waitio risks making the current, new pathways permanent
- People feel left with further flooding risks at their doorsteps: streams are clogged up with debris that could cause further floods but have been told by regional council that they cannot remove the debris. Yet the council isn't doing anything either
- The **stopbanks on Shanley Road:** there are a lot of questions about the role of this but there is silence at the other end and no agency appears to be taking responsibility for this. Being left in this vacuum of information and communication is frustrating
- The floodplains have changed. Metal is not being extracted and there are and are likely to be new flooding risk areas

- The **weir on Lake Rūnanga** has been a major source of frustration and anxiety since it was installed. The consultation at the time was insufficient – many people living around the lake were not consulted
 - The weir is responsible for the localised intensity and duration of the flooding
 - There are high levels of frustration at how regional council has acted/not acted
- The moisture retention in the soil continues to be very high and source of concern

Solutions

- Overall, we need hydrological analysis and advice about our area
- Extract metal from river to handle the flow of water
- Channelise the rivers from the mouth
- Lake Oingo: Deepen the outlet and introduce a summer weir
- Further stopbanks to protect the land and houses?
- Widening the streams
- Continuing clearing the debris in the streams from Awahuri Road
- Look for spillways throughout the catchment
- “Green” the rivers

Lake Rūnanga

- Knock down the weir
- Lower the lake to pre-weir level
- Ensure there is an overflow path/spillway through Rūnanga Lake

Okawa Stream

- Give proper recognition to the Okawa Stream in council planning documents and the issues that the community has been wrestling with for some time
- Reinstate the stopbanks along the Okawa to prevent further flooding of Dorwoods’ farm
- Clear out the debris in the Okawa Stream to reduce the future risk of further flooding and damage to infrastructure from debris. This includes the willow
- The Hastings District Council should purpose the esplanade reserve on the Okawa Stream upstream from the Lake to reduce the flooding risk
- Spillways/conduites along Rockit Orchard

Communication solutions

- Bridge out warning (to save lives)
- Flood warning signals
- Stop sending council staff that dont have the authority to deal with major issues. It’s a waste of the community’s time
- Better response and actions from Regional Council to complaints from the community

Roading

Experiences and Issues

Safety and retaining access to town is a cause of major anxiety

Major risk areas:

- **The Taihape Road bridge at the Dorwoods** needs to be addressed as a priority to maintain community access
- **Damage on Crownthorpe Settlement Road** is a real concern for the community and the risk of a fatal accident is rated quite high by residents
- **Black Bridge on the Taihape Road** is another high-risk area
- **The Taihape Road and Fernhill Bridge** are essential lifelines to the upstream community
- There has been a lack of maintenance that predates the Cyclone
- Overall, drainage needs to be improved on the road network
- The quality and safety of the roads is a high concern
- There is heavier use of roads than before. Now normally routine wear-and-tear on certain roads is much higher as other access routes are out or less safe
- Other routine practices – such as grazing stock on road verges – can add to the overall risks on the roads
- **Communication** on roading issues has been patchy; there has been some good signage but often too late and largely people don't know what's happening
- **There needs to be better supervision of road contractors**
- Potholes are not being fixed

Solutions

- Better access to Council to resolve the issues
- Maintenance of drains on roadsides
- Raise the bridge and the road at Dorwoods'
- Centralised email address to notify of repairs to council mapping system of the area
- Circulate maps of all roads in the area, especially for new people coming into the area, to show alternative routes
- Community needs to put pressure on Council to ensure black spots and high-risk areas on the Crownthorpe Settlement Road and Taihape Road don't cause fatalities
- A **speed limit** is needed on Crownthorpe Settlement Road due to the high-risk areas
- Community repair of the roads (forgiveness is easier to ask for than permission):

- Tar (ready-made) to put in small potholes and stored at different points in the community
- Better signage on danger areas: store signs locally so that they can be
- Better use of our rates
- Fewer cones and workers supervising

Communication and Information

Experiences and issues

- More communication is needed from the regional and district council
- Clear specific information is vital. Currently its patchy and often late
- There is an informationn gap: it is not clear who to talk to and there is often no response
- It is not clear to the community what councils are responsible for and often community members are sent back and forth between the two
- In the good news department: the hills became a meeting place for neighbours to check on each other and give help. And Unison was an excellent communicator for many

Solutions

Communications from Councils:

- Regular updates on progress would help and can be put through local channels such as local radio and RD9
- Clarity about council roles and responsibilities
- Timely updated timelines (events and solutions) to avoid confusion (such as over bridges)
- Need to hear from Council leads: Councillors, CEOs, Heads of Department, Engineers etc
- Streamlining for solutions
- One phone number, one stop shop
- Joint HDC/HBRC director of comms for both councils
- Property identification system: e.g., Yellow = evacuated; Red = need help; White = OK

Emergency preparedness

Experiences and Issues

- Civil Defence was overwhelmed
- The length of the power outage: a better plan is needed for future events
- There was no hub for help

Communications

- Dial 111: no service
- Dial 105 was overwhelmed with Esk Valley Situation: a call at 9.30 am to rescue a 65 year-old on a roof wasn't responded to until 2.30 pm
- The Red Shed was good but it took too long to find out about it
- Radio New Zealand offered the best coverage but it was still inadequate because it was the only line of information for many people. Need a local station to be at the ready

Solutions

- **Recruitment drive for rural fire and emergency**
- **Create hub(s) and assess what equipment and planning is needed:**
 - Emergency gear
 - Generators and plug and/or solar
 - Medical supplies
 - First Aid
 - Drinkable water/equipment to ensure that (UV filters; purifiers)
 - Dried food stock
 - Dry firewood
 - Toilet paper and other essentials
 - Gas cylinders
 - All potentially in a shipping container
 - Sand bags and sand dump
 - Clear responsibility for maintaining equipment (comms gear, generators) and access to hubs
- Hubs can also function as venue for social events.
 - Suggested hub locations: Pukehāmoama School; Matapiro Hall and Fire Station; Sherenden School; Waiwhare; Otamauri Playcentre; Forestry Camp
- Maintain register of people with life threatening issues
 - Collate the medication needed by the community

- Local talent and kit register: skillsets and equipment
- Secure a 3-phase generator to facilitate water for stock
- Generators on cellphone towers to secure comms in the event of a sustained power outage.
- Approach local businesses to assist with resourcing
- Provide Generators and refuelling to towers
- Local servicing fuel for comms
- Trust relationships
- Multiple RTs
- Starlink and hub
- Emergency Radio Channel: localised and structured
- **Local radio station override:** they are charged with providing on the hour reports and information – e.g., state of roads...

Community Communication and Networks

- Radio telephone and/or Starlink and/or CB radio. Arrangements to ensure that they remain charged and working
 - Recycled, high-end equipment
- Several agreed comms channels: e.g., email, text, call free
- Other channels: RD9 Facebook and B2R communications
- Neighbour to neighbour and/or volunteers reaching out to people, face-to-face:
 - Pooled information in snippets
 - Accurate and timely

Greening the Rivers

Actions

- Everyone needs to plant the margins
 - Plant in ephemeral flow channels
 - Plant deep-rooted flax where the sides of the creek are falling in
 - Right tree in the right place, endemic to area and for resilience to drought and flood
- Walk the waterways
- Work together to plant to a cohesive plan

Observations

- What room does the river require to function?
- Flood channels and river channels are not the same thing
- A wider channel needs specific planting; otherwise it will fill with blackberry and nightshade
- Channels are now missing 2 m of sediment that would have taken 200 years to build up
- Slips will always happen. There are photographs from the 1800s of slips in this area. The issue is scale
- Let's not make decisions in haste now that shut the door to better actions later on
- The stopbanks that survived the Cyclone were covered (mowed grass; unmown grass is useless). Couch grass is very good at hanging on. Holds the banks together and vegetation higher up will slow water down.

Information needs

- Do we know how to plant effectively?
 - What quantities?
 - What goes with what for pollination as well as nutrition for birds
 - What will survive in our conditions (look to locals, including fencers, who see a lot of the country)

Trials

- Looking for a grass with deeper roots (Waitio)
- Buy couch (a stoloniferous plant) from seed rep
- Grows down deep, 2 m tall and intertwines (\$9 per plant). No seedlings until September/October
- Nursery to supply our catchment?
- Firm in Katikati – designs to hold the banks together