

LG

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STRENGTH *in numbers*

Rebuild unity in
Central Hawke's Bay

 Stantec



FROM response to RECOVERY – COMMUNITY IS KEY



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When Cyclone Gabrielle hit Central Hawke's Bay, Mayor Alex Walker's primary concern was the isolation of her community.

Within 333,000 hectares of land, the Central Hawke's Bay district encompasses only 15,000 people, and the cyclone's impact was immense. Hundreds of roads were closed, thousands of people had lost power and the means of communication, and the situation was volatile and rapidly evolving.

The immediate aftermath of a natural disaster is extremely dynamic, and it needed a response to match. The crucial first step in Hawke's Bay was getting people on the ground to help. That's where Stantec came in – our team was present prior to the event and support

arrived quickly, which enabled Central Hawke's Bay District Council (CHBDC) to start making progress right away, assessing the damage and reinstating route security.

Every second counted but, we needed to balance speed with strategy. We worked closely with CHBDC, bringing in senior Stantec staff who could make crucial decisions while out in the field. Our team's strong relationships were key to a collaborative response; being the existing professional services provider for CHBDC's roading network gave us a foundation of trust that was invaluable during a crisis.

As the response phase progressed, so did the damage we discovered. To capture real-time data at pace, we established a GIS framework



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Mayor Alex Walker of Central Hawke’s Bay District

action and built an alternative track across his property, providing the isolated community with interim access.

This gave the Council time to acquire response funding and install a temporary river crossing, which will remain in use until the permanent bridge solution is designed and constructed. The resilience of Central Hawke’s Bay’s community inspires the work we’re doing to make the district stronger for the future.

Mayor Alex Walker believes strongly in the role of localism and teamwork, and empowers this thinking in Council and contractors as well as the community. “Our people in Central Hawke’s Bay are, and continue to aspire to be, a proud, prosperous, and thriving community. But, our mantra is that ‘together we thrive’, acknowledging that working together is pivotal to our view of thriving,” says Mayor Walker.

“We must do things together and Stantec accepts that challenge in our community – to work together with local knowledge and direction at the centre.”

How do we carry this forward? Our community-focused response must be followed by a community-focused recovery. Their diverse perspectives are essential as we pick up the pieces of the district they call home. We must permanently reconnect our impacted communities or find better alternatives if resilience requires challenging the status quo.

Here, local engagement is essential for building trust, sustaining support, and meeting expectations. Currently, CHBDC is gathering the valuable perspectives of those affected throughout the district through

targeted engagement sessions and using them to inform the recovery.

During the response, the community helped us prioritise areas of the network posing the highest risks. From there, we were able to reinstate infrastructure and reconnect people faster. As we transition to recovery, community input continues to help us determine what damage needs attention first and what levels of service need to be restored where.

The transition from response to recovery can be awkward, but, we’re planning for it together. It’s important to maintain momentum while thinking carefully about an effective strategy, all of which is complicated by the process of securing funding. Disaster recovery is about getting a community back on its feet, but there’s no one way to do it.

When infrastructure is damaged, we must assess if it’s best to build back better, look for opportunities to add resilience, retreat from hazards, or try something entirely new. There’s no blueprint for disaster recovery in Aotearoa, adding to the challenge of finding the right solutions.

Unlike response, the path to recovery is often murky with uncertainties, which is why we must be smart about prioritising the most efficient and effective use of funding, especially for rural Aotearoa. Ultimately, disaster recovery is about making the biggest difference we can with the resources we have.

Our team is proud to have been right in the thick of the response, just as we are in the recovery. We’re even more proud to stand alongside the CHBDC team, supporting them as they continue to deliver for our community. **LG**

that allowed people throughout the transport network to capture information on their phones.

Users could create a summary of what and where the faults were with photographic evidence, which helped us prioritise actions and reporting. People all over the district helped us identify landslides, bridge failures and washouts, damaged roads, substantial volumes of slash and debris, and scoured bridge approaches, among other infrastructure eroded by the extreme weather. In the end, the faults in the network totalled over 3000.

The role played by the local community isn’t just beneficial; it makes all the difference. Take the rural Douglas Cutting Bridge site, which was damaged by high river flows with one of the abutments completely washed out. This rendered the sole access bridge impassable, which completely cut off the community relying on it. In response, a local farmer jumped into