
**Review of the Actions Taken by the
Whakatāne District Council in the
Response and Early Recovery Phases
of the District's Flooding Events of
April 2017**

Summary Report

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Summary of Kestrel Report on Whakatane District Council April 2017 Flood Response 20170908

Summary of the Review of Whakatāne District Council Response to the April 2017 Flood Events

This overview report summarises the key findings, observations and recommendations from the main review report prepared by Kestrel Group for Whakatāne District Council.

Background to the Report

This review report has been prepared in response to a request by the Chief Executive of the Whakatāne District Council (WDC) to review the actions taken by the Council in relation to the adverse weather and flooding events affecting the district in April 2017. The objectives of the review were:

- To provide a summary of the actions taken by WDC in activating and responding to the flooding event when the Rangitāiki river breached its stop bank wall on 6 April 2017.
- To establish the extent to which WDC's systems, processes and capability are aligned with the requirements and expectations of a district council in an adverse flooding event.
- To identify opportunities for improvement to strengthen the ability of WDC to respond to and manage any future significant flooding event.

This review is separate from but complementary to the review commissioned by the Bay of Plenty CDEM Group of the Group's response to the April 2017 weather events, undertaken by John Hamilton of Kestrel Group. It is also separate to the Rangitāiki River Scheme Review commissioned by the Bay of Plenty Regional Council, and chaired by Sir Michael Cullen.

This review was undertaken against Civil Defence Emergency Management arrangements and practices current at the time of the event, noting that a Ministerial Review of civil defence emergency management had been convened prior to the April 2017 weather events to consider the most appropriate operational and legislative mechanisms to support effective responses.

The April 2017 Flooding Events and Response

In early April 2017, the Whakatāne district was hit by ex-Tropical Cyclone Debbie. The cyclone brought with it prolonged torrential rain, resulting in rising river levels across the district's three principal rivers – the Whakatāne River, Rangitāiki River and Tarawera River. Towns in the eastern Bay of Plenty bore the brunt of the cyclone. At just after 0830hrs on Thursday 6 April 2017, the Rangitāiki river breached its stopbank wall at College Road, Edgumbe, causing extensive flooding across the town and its surrounds. A local state of emergency was declared at 0845hrs, and the whole of Edgumbe was evacuated.

A second adverse weather event, Cyclone Cook, struck the district a week after Cyclone Debbie, bringing with it further rain and strong winds which caused major power outages. To ensure the Bay of Plenty region could respond effectively, a regional state of emergency was declared in the afternoon of Tuesday 11 April. The region-wide declaration was terminated on 14 April, and

simultaneously a second local state of emergency was declared for the Whakatāne District to provide for ongoing response efforts in Edgecumbe. On 21 April the local state of emergency expired, and was replaced by a Notice of Local Transition Period.

The floods and the associated complex weather events of April 2017 required a significant response from WDC over an extended period, with the declaration and Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) operation continuing for more than two weeks. The event changed rapidly in nature and tempo, from a local watch to a declared state of emergency, to a region-wide declaration and then back to a local emergency. The recovery efforts for those most affected in the community will continue for many more months, and need continuing leadership and support from Council.

Emergency Operations Centre and Key Response Functions

The EOC operations were well-led and organised, and generally effective throughout the duration of the response and early recovery phase. The nature and scope of this flooding event however severely tested the ability of the WDC EOC to operate effectively for an extended period.

Maintaining a local presence within the EOC teams proved difficult for WDC, and created ongoing challenges for rostering the EOC teams. It is considered that all teams in any shift of the EOC must include WDC personnel, and that the EOC should have access to sufficient trained personnel for a minimum of two shifts. Consideration needs to be given as to how this is achieved and maintained for responses that continue over an extended period of time, and the associated prior training requirements and readiness.

Given the challenges in resourcing the core functions of a local EOC with suitably trained personnel, it is suggested that consideration be given by MCDEM to establishing a national team of operationally experienced specialists in areas such as Logistics, Planning, Intelligence, PIM and Operations to provide the ability to support the leaders of EOC functions by 'shadowing' them during a response.

The scale and geographical extent of the impacts required the involvement of essentially all business units of WDC in the first week of the response. Given the relatively small size of the Council, this created many challenges in delivering emergency response, recovery and 'business as usual' activities, and prioritising the application of resources between them. The priority given to maintaining other Council activities requires specific consideration, both before an emergency event occurs and during the response. An organisation-wide Business Continuity Plan that identifies the critical business functions corresponding to different scales and durations of disruption and emergency response is needed to inform this planning.

The response benefited greatly from the extensive support and leadership provided by the Bay of Plenty CDEM Group Office (EMBOP), including the strategic oversight from the Group Controller. The input from the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management (MCDEM) and experienced emergency management professionals from other regions was another key feature of the support provided to WDC. There were many benefits from having the Group Emergency Co-ordination Centre (GECC) operate alongside the EOC. This proximity did however lead to some role confusion (particularly their areas of difference and overlap), and clarification for people both within and interfacing with the respective centres would have assisted.

The EOC was regarded by some sectors as being somewhat of an internally focused and process-driven facility. Comments were made that the EOC needed to be more adaptable to support community needs, rather than just those of the EOC. As well as the need to connect more effectively with the community, the core products of the EOC (Situation Reports and Action Plans) would have benefited from review and re-focusing as the response continued.

Overall, the co-ordination and provision of Welfare services was a successful aspect of the overall response. The limited local welfare resources available required considerable support from the GECC, MCDEM and other agencies to achieve this. It is however noted that the scale of the welfare response required across the district would have overwhelmed most district councils. It is important that WDC has sufficient locally-based and appropriately trained resources to undertake the initial response, and to form the core of the Welfare team in the EOC. Clearer documentation of how welfare services are delivered locally is also required. The preparedness of designated Civil Defence Centres by WDC for quick and early activation also needs further commitment.

The Public Information Management (PIM) function also faced internal resource challenges early in the event, with one staff member having left the organisation the week prior and another being directly affected by the flooding. In the early stages of the response this affected the level of support given to the Welfare function and to the efforts of the Mayor and Chief Executive in communicating with the affected sectors of the community.

Plans and Operational Documentation

The scope and currency of plans relating to the response to flood in the Whakatāne District is of concern. The context for this concern is that the 2012-17 Bay of Plenty CDEM Group Plan lists flooding of the Rangitāiki River as the one of the highest rating risks affecting the region, having due regard to consequence. A sudden breach of the stopbanks was however not included in the 2013 WDC Flood Response Plan as a specific potential scenario outcome. It is observed that this is a not uncommon shortcoming of flood response plans generally, with there typically being a high level of dependence on engineered protection structures.

The Whakatāne Flood Response Plan is in need of urgent revision, with all relevant agencies needing to provide input. A key aspect that requires further development is how the agencies interact during a response to a flood event, particularly the operational relationship between the Bay of Plenty Regional Council Flood Room and the EOC. Greater attention also needs to be paid to the usability of the flood response plan and related operational plans in an EOC environment, and their ongoing maintenance.

Connection with the Community

The WDC EOC needs to improve mechanisms for monitoring the effectiveness of its output and connection with the different sectors of the community. The Mayor, elected members and Chief Executive provide one of these mechanisms, and in this event provided a very effective linkage with the community.

Engagement with iwi is a component of community engagement that requires particular consideration, given the traditional but often unrecognised capacity and capability they bring to

responses in rural and remote locations, in addition to urban areas. The rural sector is another key sector that requires more specific engagement.

The effectiveness of the connection with different sectors of the community in a response is a function of the time spent with them on an ongoing basis prior to emergency events. How this 'readiness' is to be resourced and achieved in and across Whakatāne District and integrated with regular Council community interactions and processes needs specific consideration by WDC and EMBOP as the delivery agents for Civil Defence in Whakatāne.

Local Resourcing of CDEM Functions

The centralised model for CDEM that was adopted by the Bay of Plenty CDEM Group in 2015 provides a baseline service provision to each territorial authority (TA). There is nevertheless a corresponding requirement for each TA including Whakatāne District to commit to undertake or facilitate locally-focused CDEM tasks, such as liaison with the community. In turn, this operating model requires EMBOP to be actively monitoring the preparedness of each TA, and putting plans in place to address any evident shortcomings.

The requirements and expectations on district councils under the centralised CDEM Group model for preparing for and responding to an emergency should be more clearly stated, along with the arrangements for monitoring by EMBOP.

Understanding the Roles of the Mayor, Elected Members and Chief Executive in an Emergency

The experiences in this event have highlighted the important roles that the Mayor, elected members and the Chief Executive have in communicating with and supporting the affected sectors of the community.

It is observed that there continues to be a lack of national guidance on these roles, and the associated provision of appropriate induction and training for newly elected Mayors and councillors.

Early Recovery Tools and Initiatives

Consideration of recovery arrangements was outside the scope of this review. While it is understood that the recovery operation did take some time to become established, positive comments were made about the range and effectiveness of outputs from the Recovery Office.

Some early initiatives by WDC focused on community outcomes, following a recovery theme of 'People First'. This included facilitating early engagement with insurers, and the development of tools and frameworks such as process flowcharts for the steps to be worked through for the re-occupancy of damaged houses, and the process map for the disposal of hazardous waste from flood-damaged properties. It is suggested that these initiatives should be considered for wider adoption as good recovery practice in flood events.

Key Findings and Recommendations

The April 2017 weather events and consequential flooding across Whakatāne District represented a significant emergency event. This review has found that the response by WDC was generally well-organised and effective. The EOC operations were well-led by the Local Controller, supported by the other controllers from outside WDC. The Mayor of Whakatāne, elected members and the Chief Executive provided an effective linkage with the community, working closely with the EOC.

The response was well supported by EMBOP and the other CDEM Group member organisations, and MCDEM.

The many forms of volunteer input following this event played a significant part in firstly, reducing the impact of the event on people and property, and secondly, hastening the early stages of the recovery.

Several areas for improvement have been identified, including revision of several operational plans that relate to flood response, increasing the presence of local resource in the EOC and improving the early connection with some sectors of the community.

The review makes a total of 16 recommendations under the above headings to improve processes and arrangements, as summarised in the following table.

Many of these recommendations are local in nature; others are regional and some national. It is suggested that the allocation of responsibility for their implementation requires further consideration by WDC, EMBOP and the CDEM Group, and MCDEM.

The principal recommendation is that WDC's Flood Response Plan should be revised as a matter of urgency, and should include the potential breach of stopbanks as a specific scenario.

Summary of Recommendations

EOC Operations, Linkages and Support	
<p>Recommendation 1:</p> <p><i>Consistent resourcing of the EOC with trained local presence</i></p>	<p>The EOC should have access to sufficient trained personnel for a minimum of two shifts.</p> <p>All of the operational teams within the EOC should have local council personnel present in each shift.</p> <p>Council should consider introducing foundation-level training in CDEM for all personnel, in order to provide more effective support to those with designated operational roles in the EOC.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2:</p> <p><i>Ensure that everyone asked to work in the EOC is given an induction covering the functions and protocols</i></p>	<p>A short induction/ familiarisation module should be prepared for delivery by the Response Manager prior to the commencement of each shift.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3:</p> <p><i>Ensure that staff with critical 'business as usual' roles are not assigned to roles in the EOC</i></p>	<p>WDC should develop a Business Continuity Plan that establishes critical business functions corresponding to different scales and durations of disruption and emergency response.</p> <p>To provide clarity with respect to resource availability and to support effective rostering and ongoing delivery from the EOC, staff who hold critical business functions should not be assigned to roles in the EOC.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4:</p> <p><i>Ensure that EOCs have access to sufficient experience to support the key functions</i></p>	<p>Consideration should be given to establishing a national team of operationally experienced specialists in areas such as Logistics, Planning, Intelligence, Operations and Public Information Management (PIM). This would provide the ability to support the leaders of key EOC functions by 'shadowing' them during a response.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5:</p> <p><i>Convey the difference in objectives and activity scope between the EOC and Group Emergency Co-ordination Centre (GECC)</i></p>	<p>The roles of the EOC and GECC (particularly their areas of difference and overlap) need to be actively explained to people both within and interfacing with them during a response. This should include which activities have been integrated (eg Welfare in this event).</p>
<p>Recommendation 6:</p> <p><i>Clearer connection between the EOC and operational activity 'cells' that interface with the community</i></p>	<p>When a community-based activity centre (eg Civil Defence Centre, Incident Control Point or Contact Centre) will foreseeably function for several days or more, a brief protocol outlining the operational linkages with the EOC should be prepared.</p> <p>This protocol should as a minimum cover the agency/ people responsible for the centre, and the method and frequency of interface with the EOC.</p>

Welfare Delivery	
Recommendation 7: <i>The Welfare team in the EOC must have access to appropriately trained local resources throughout the duration of the activation</i>	Ensure that sufficient locally-based and appropriately trained resources are identified to provide the core of the Welfare team in the Whakatāne EOC to deal with foreseeable events resulting in a major evacuation of residents.
Recommendation 8: <i>Clear documentation of the basic elements of the local delivery of welfare services is needed</i>	An operational plan for the delivery of welfare services in an emergency in Whakatāne should be prepared, including the following aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifying regional and local responsibilities • The process for activation and ongoing operation of Civil Defence Centres and method of interface/ liaison with the EOC
Public Information Management	
Recommendation 9: <i>Ensure public information is communicated in a timely and effective way</i>	Where an event involves a mass evacuation, the messaging around where people should go and how to get there must be promptly conveyed via multiple channels. This information must go to WDC's Civil Defence partner agencies, in addition to the public and media.
Recommendation 10: <i>Ensure that community leaders are fully supported in their leadership role</i>	The Mayor, elected members and other community leaders need to be regularly briefed and provided with key messages and information that enables them to engage with the community in an informed manner that promotes community confidence.
Management and Access to Evacuated and Cordoned Areas	
Recommendation 11: <i>Early development of risk- and function-based criteria to support the early access within a cordoned area</i>	Arrangements should be put in place to enable a timely transition from <i>preventing access</i> to <i>enabling access</i> within a cordoned area is important to support the recovery of people and businesses in an evacuated or excluded area.

Plans and Operational Documentation	
<p>Recommendation 12:</p> <p><i>A revision of the Whakatāne Flood Response plan should focus on scope, operational interfaces and plan maintenance provisions</i></p>	<p>The Whakatāne Flood Response Plan should be re-written as a matter of urgency, taking particular account of the following aspects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including breach of stopbanks as a specific scenario • Clearer operational interfaces with the BOPRC Flood Team • Annual review provisions
<p>Recommendation 13:</p> <p><i>Ensure alignment of all operational documents and their usability in an EOC context</i></p>	<p>The revision of key planning and operational documents (the WDC CDEM Plan, Flood Response Plan and Standard Operating Procedures) should ensure alignment, and usability in an EOC environment.</p>
Connection with the Community	
<p>Recommendation 14:</p> <p><i>WDC should establish an operational relationship with iwi of the Whakatāne District to enable marae to be better involved in civil defence planning and prepared for emergency response</i></p>	<p>Iwi should be actively supported in developing practical emergency response plans that meet both Civil Defence requirements and marae protocol.</p> <p>This in turn will enable Civil Defence to make more use of the significant response resource capability that marae represent during an emergency.</p>
Local Resourcing of CDEM Functions	
<p>Recommendation 15:</p> <p><i>Resourcing expectations at the local level under the centralised regional model for CDEM should be clarified</i></p>	<p>The requirements and expectations on district councils under the centralised CDEM Group model for preparing for and responding to an emergency should be explicitly stated, and actively monitored by EMBOP.</p>
Understanding the Roles of Mayors, Elected Members and Chief Executives	
<p>Recommendation 16:</p> <p><i>National-level guidance on the roles of Mayors, elected members and Chief Executives in a declared emergency is required, along with appropriate training and induction</i></p>	<p>The roles that Mayors, elected members and Chief Executives have in communicating with and supporting the affected sectors of the community require national guidance and training.</p> <p>This guidance should cover how their respective roles interface with the Controller and EOC during a state of emergency.</p>

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