

Silt cleared in first furious week of cleaning

A MACKLEY Street resident watched the water coming up the drains on the morning of February 14 a year ago.

His wife was soon furiously gesturing to him, miming the waves coming down the road.

The water was soon under the house and his wife woke the children and they set off for Taihoa Marae.

The family did not want their names revealed.

Now they live a few metres from their home which they and their whānau cleared of silt in that first furious week of cleaning, after one- and-a-half metres of water had receded, leaving thick, gloopy mud behind.

They have lived for almost a year in Tātau Tātau o Te Wairoa cabins and lost patience with Wairoa Recovery after going to their meetings and hearing the “same old”.

“Tātau Tātau have been here for us from the beginning.

“They kept saying to us that once they get the funding, they would start moving and work has started on our house.”

The couple’s eldest son got the silt out and their older granddaughter and the man’s wife cleaned the floors.

“We had a bare house, no walls and with the silt gone and windows and doors open, it dried out quickly.

“We decided how long do you wait for the silt removal? So we did it ourselves.”

For the rest of the repairs, they are waiting their turn.

“The floorboards are good.

“On that same day we took out our furniture, whiteware and wall linings up to the ceiling.



THE CLEAN-UP BEGINS: Mackley Street in the first week after the flooding.

“Our level of dryness reading was at 14 compared to others who were sitting at 35.

“Then we had to get our electricals checked by an electrician before we could get a white sticker, so we had all our electricis replaced.

“We were hoping we would be back in our home by February but we want it done properly and we would rather wait until it is done right.

“We have waited this long.

“It will be nice to have my wife and mokopuna back in our house together again.

“We had no help from the council but the rates still went up.

“We hoped they would come and do our yard but it was people from Gisborne and Māhia who came with their diggers.

“We did not know their names but they came and offered.”

His wife said Wairoa Recovery called them late last month about picking up the silt,

which had been taken away months earlier.

Questions loomed large, including why nothing was done after Bola 36 years ago.

“We were lucky with Bola. It did not come into the house.

“This time we came around the corner and said, ‘Oh it has gone inside’.”

“It seems like they are blaming Hawke’s Bay Regional Council.

“That seems the trend, keep blaming the next one and the next.

“We have moved on from our big questions. We are over waiting for answers. Look at our weather now. It is not going to stop.”

In those first few days he remembers feeling disappointed at seeing so many people lining up for the free burgers when they were tired and muddy and waiting while others, not flood victims, were there waiting too.

“I would not have minded if it was the old people standing there, but these others were from south of the bridge. Perhaps it was for the public.”

But they were impressed with the support that soon arrived in North Clyde.

“It was awesome for Kahungunu Executive and Hinemihi Marae when they started delivering food to us so we had a short break and then could get back into cleaning.

“Breakfast, lunch and tea.

“Te Whare Maire had boxes of food that you could pick up or have delivered. That was awesome.

“Red Cross too. They have been doing deliveries of bundles. Where would we be without those awesome bundles?

“Hookmade (a local building company) keep in touch with everybody and on a Friday recently, they dropped containers of food off to flood victims. That was a nice package supported by St Vincents.

“It’s been a long time coming but we are almost there.

“The electricians came that is a start.

“We are so grateful to Tātau Tātau. They even replaced our kowhai which we lost in the flood.

“These cabins mean we can be near home.

“Look at Eskview. We can rebuild.

“We will have a picture gallery of the rebuild, a dedicated wall to that work including Maria Gobbie who went around the Wairoa and the East Coast taking photos for free after the flood.

“We had already stripped the house by then but we have those pictures.

“She was awesome and it was for us, a memory to have of that time.”

Plenty to learn from

“This was one hell of a storm.”
Nathan Heath, HBRC staffer

NO amount of preparation could have helped Wairoa deal with the nature of Cyclone Gabrielle, says a Hawke’s Bay Regional Council staff member.

Nathan Heath, Northern Hawke’s Bay Māori relationships manager for the regional council was a member of the Wairoa Civil Defence team in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone.

A year on, he says there was a lot of good work done, but also plenty to learn from.

“There is an important qualifier — this was one hell of a storm.

“No one was prepared for what we had to get done or the impact the storm had on our environment.”

Concerning criticism from locals about how civil defence was managed in Wairoa after the event, Mr Heath says he would be amazed if someone couldn’t find something to criticise among civil defence reviews.

“The fact that no one died on our watch and we got done what needed to be done on our own with no external sources was good.

“We could not get help from anywhere because State Highway 2 was closed at both ends.

“It was not until we were open at the Gisborne end that we were able to get help.”

He says it would have been a different scenario if it was only Hawke’s Bay that was hit.

“Everyone around the country like Wairarapa and Tararua, the East Coast, Coromandel and Bay of Plenty was crying blue murder — everyone had been nailed.

Waking up on February 14 at a normal time, Mr Heath was in Māhia and planning to work from home.

With no power he thought he would drive around “to check things out”.

He couldn’t get to Mahanga and thought that Māhia had a wet night but that everything was all right.

“The fire brigade came round to my home and said that Civil Defence wanted me in town, so I was on my way.”

As he drove through Nūhaka and Whakaki he saw that there was a bit of suffering to the environment.

As he got to Te Uhi hill, Mr Heath could see a sea of water, cars and people.

“It was bizarre... I was like ‘holy shit’.

“Getting down to Taihoa Marae there were hundreds of people; tractors with trailers and people on top of them.”

Driving through Mahia Avenue he realised that this was no regular car trip to work.

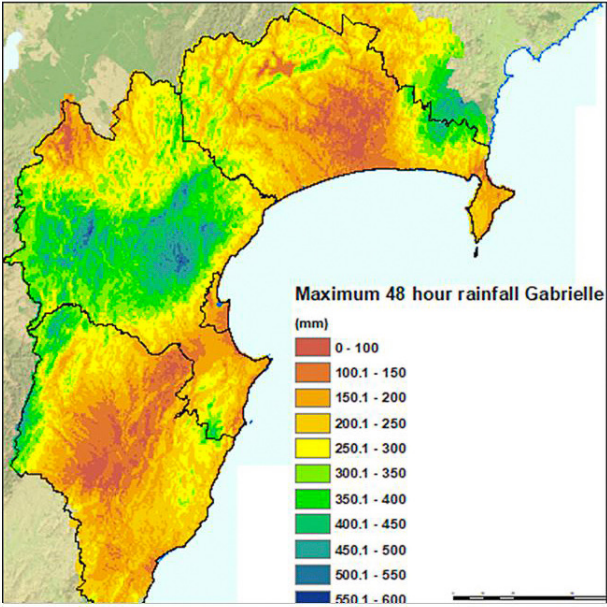
“Instantly I realised this was much more significant than I thought and that it was game time.”

As soon as he walked into the Civil Defence space, the people in charge needed a break and Mr Heath took up that challenge.

“You’re trying to get your head around what’s happening. Are people safe, are we evacuating people? The first thing was to make sure that people were safe.”

The team had to rely on word of mouth since communications were

Cyclone Gabrielle Maximum Rainfall (mm) - 24 & 48 hour periods		
site	max_24hr	max_48hr
Kopuawhara Stream at Railway Bridge	130	148
Ankylon Park HQ	236.5	305.5
Bushy Knoll	204	245.5
Cricklewood Climate	163	187
Fairview	432	501.5
Hangaroa River at Doneraile Park	185.5	208.5
Mt Manuoha	189	255.5
Mt Misery Repeater	105	136.5
Nga Tuhoe	225.5	267.5
Pukeorapa Station	431.5	484.5
Pukeorapa Climate	367.2	419.6
Rocky Pad	162	201
Ruakituri River at Tauwhareto Climate	79	96.8
Upper Waiau at Monarae	200	228.5
Waiau River at Ardkeen	75.5	92
Waikaretaheke River at Terapatiki	171.5	196
Waimaha	199	234
Wairoa River at Marumaru	67	84
Wairoa River at Railway Br. RADAR	75	84
Tahekepu Stream at Glenstrae	147	160.5
Kotemaori	252.6	284.2
Te Rangi	289	339.5



RAINFALL AT 24 HOURS: This table shows the most rainfall at 24 hours during Cyclone Gabrielle. At the Railway Road Bridge it was 75mm and 200mm at Monarae.

down.

“We were having to rely on the skills of our emergency services.

“They did an incredible job. The professionalism and their knowledge of what was going on was amazing.

“With both ends of State Highway 2 cut off, we had to work together for ourselves.

“It was a skeleton crew so we needed that support from emergency services and from outside Wairoa.”

Over the next 96 hours, more information was getting out, making life easier, but other problems were popping up — things like three waters

(stormwater, drinking water and wastewater), running out of petrol, New World having to shut down.

“At one point we were down to having a day-and-a-half supply of water.”

But there was never panic for Mr Heath in the aftermath of the cyclone.

“You wouldn’t be doing the job if you did panic.

“There was a lot of stress though because you did have to make decisions without a lot of information.”

Moving forward with the recovery, Mr Heath would like to see momentum build on a daily basis.

“We need ongoing commitment and support for the rebuild.

“That is to get people back in homes, protect the health and wellbeing of residents and work on infrastructure too.”

For river protection he is not sure if the Government’s pledge of \$70 million for flood mitigation in Wairoa is enough until a firm option is in place.

“The tripartite agreement between Tātau Tātau o te Wairoa, Hawke’s Bay Regional Council and Wairoa District Council is working on models.

“Finding something that is viable for Wairoa is the number one priority for flood mitigation.”