Community Summary Report on the Ohiti Stopbank Project

September 2025

About the Community Advisory Group

The Community Advisory Group (CAG) on the Ohiti Stopbank Project (the Project) was established in December 2024 in response to community concerns about poor communications and the overall design of flood protection at Ohiti, with many community members left uninformed and/or feeling as if their concerns were not being ignored.

The CAG is made up of Ohiti households ("2C landowners", all of whom are invited to attend meetings); representatives of the Ōmāhu and upstream communities; a representative from a transport company that relies on the Taihape Road; and the Hastings District and Hawke's Bay Regional Councils. Since December 2024, the CAG has met eight times. The Group's purpose is to ensure a good outcome for affected landowners and to ensure that wider community members concerns about potential transfer of risk and the impact on livelihoods from the proposed flood protection measures are properly addressed. It provides a forum for community voices, but it is advisory only. Representatives can give feedback and raise concerns, while final decisions on project design, consenting, and implementation rest with the Regional Council.

For the purposes of this report, when we refer to CAG, we refer to the community membership of the group, as the wider CAG also includes council representatives.

About our report

Our community has been affected in multiple and different ways by Cyclone Gabrielle (Gabrielle) and its aftermath and the proposed flood protection measures:

- 2C landowners and households have been through considerable stress and anxiety, with protracted uncertainty about their future in the area, the viability and affordability of their homes and the challenges of obtaining or maintaining insurance.
- The Ōmāhu community and whānau downstream from the proposed stopbank were heavily impacted by Gabrielle, with widespread flooding of homes, marae and urupā. The proposed stopbank has raised concerns about increased flood risk at a time when Ōmāhu whānau are reinstating themselves in their whare, their kura and their community.
- The community living upstream of the proposed stopbank supports good outcomes for 2C landowners but is concerned that, in the event of another flood, the stopbank will place additional pressures on a bridge that connects them and their businesses to work, schools, medical services, basic necessities and their wider whānau. There is also concern that, by restricting flow in the Ōhiwia stream (Ōhiwia), the stopbank will increase damage to crops, land and buildings.

Our process

These different existential needs and concerns have made for some difficult conversations. They also mean that any report that seeks to reflect all these realities will contain points that not everyone agrees with or considers worthy of attention.

This report has been circulated for review to all 2C landowners; landowners whose properties will be directly affected by the Project or are required for land acquisition; landowners who may be indirectly affected by the design; hapū representatives; and members of the upstream community. Feedback reflected a range of views: some support the proposed 2C stopbank alignment; others prefer to be bought out rather than live with the residual risk; and some advocate for a different approach to flood protection. Landowners and whānau have been invited to provide their own statements of experience where their views differ and where received, these are incorporated into this report.

The first part of this report is addressed to the Consenting Authority that will review the resource consent application for the Project. It outlines the main issues and concerns raised by the community during hui and kōrero on the Project. The community urges the Consenting Authority to investigate these concerns thoroughly before making any final determinations and to set appropriate conditions to ensure that any effects do not negatively impact the community as a whole - whether 2C landowners, the Ōmāhu or the upstream community.

The second part of this report is addressed to the Hawke's Bay Regional Council and outlines our community's experience of the process, the lessons we would like Council to learn from this and the formal commitments we are looking council to make in advance of future weather events and the unpredictable climate we will all have to find a way to live with.

Part 1: For the Consenting Authority

Summary of Recommendations to the Consenting Authority

The CAG urges the Consenting Authority to:

1. **Thoroughly investigate the security of Broughton's Bridge** under Option 2C and evaluate whether Options 2E or other variations to the design assure the bridge's viability.
2. **Require ongoing maintenance of the Ohiwia streambed at the bridge to remove sediment and debris as a condition of the consent**
2. **Require a more comprehensive assessment of the frequency, magnitude and impacts of flooding,** especially in 'over design' events, that accounts for uncertainties in hydrological modelling and climate change projections.
3. **Mandate the implementation of a full and robust early warning system** to ensure timely and effective evacuation procedures for affected residents.
4. **Reassess the cost-effectiveness of Option 2C versus other alternatives** by considering potential financial burdens on landowners, insurance implications, cost-over runs and broader community impacts.
5. **Require that the community upstream from the stopbank is represented on the Stakeholder Advisory Group,** alongside Māori entity representatives and directly affected landowners.
6. **Ensure transparency and ongoing community consultation** throughout the decision-making process, providing regular updates and opportunities for community engagement and feedback.

1. Standing of the Community Advisory Group

The Project is a significant infrastructure investment with potential long-term consequences for the local and wider community.

The CAG submits that it has standing under OIC 15(2)(a) which requires consultation with all relevant Māori entities; the owners and occupiers of land on which the work is to be undertaken or of land whose boundary adjoins the land where the works are to be carried out: and any other person the Consent Authority considers appropriate, if the Consent Authority is satisfied that the person has an interest in the application that is greater than the interest of the general public".

Community members participating in the CAG include:

- whānau and families who own 2C properties that require protection
- whānau of Ōmāhu who may be affected by the flood protection measures and;
- households and businesses above the flood protection measures which rely upon critical infrastructure (bridge and road) to remain connected to the main centres.

2. Community Concerns about Matters of Control

While flood mitigation is essential, the CAG remains concerned about unintended risks and the effectiveness of the proposed solutions. The CAG strongly advocates for a decision-making process that is transparent, informed by robust technical assessments, and considerate of all community concerns - including 2C landowners, the Ōmāhu and upstream community.

Schedule 3 sets out Matters of Control under the Order in Council. These include:

- The risk (likelihood and severity) of flooding upstream or downstream
- Potential adverse effects on infrastructure
- Potential amenity effects on adjacent properties

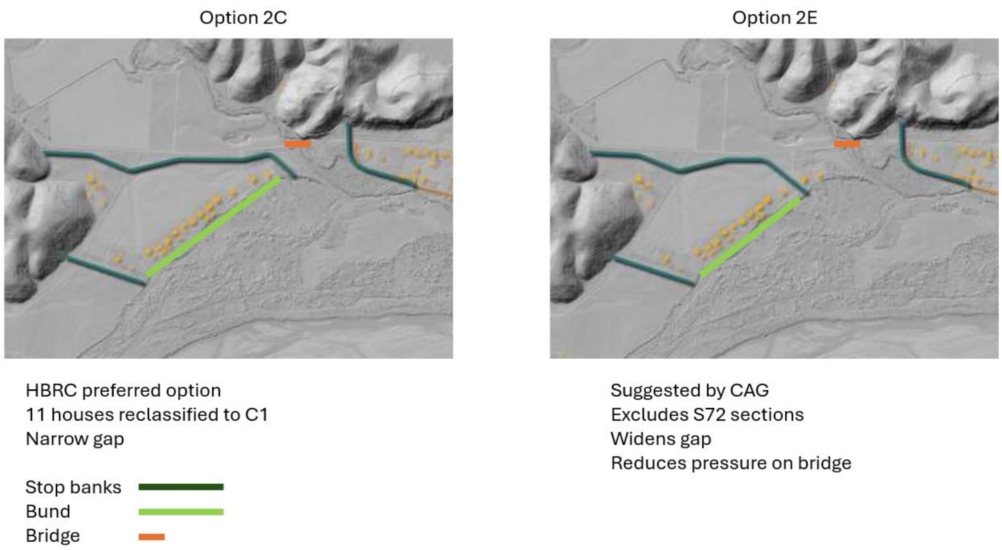
Accordingly, we wish to raise three related matters with the Consenting Authority.

3. Potential Adverse Effects on Infrastructure – Broughton's Bridge

- Broughton's Bridge is a critical piece of infrastructure and its security in a major flood event is a primary concern.
- Damage to the bridge could isolate approximately 600 properties and disrupt vital commercial traffic supporting farming and forestry industries.
- Cyclone Gabrielle damaged or destroyed several bridges in the district.
- The community raised concerns about the impact of narrowing the flood flow path by the stopbank project, and the threat this poses to the bridge.
- The Regional Council favours Option 2C which aims to protect all 14 properties (classified 2C after Gabrielle) from a 1:100 year flood in the Ōhiwia, enabling them to re-classified 1 (see Box 2).
- Three of these properties lie in a flood hazard zone identified by the Regional Council some years ago. Notwithstanding, those properties were sold and two have been built on. The community suggested an alternative stopbank alignment Option 2E which excludes those three properties. Some in the community favour Option 2E because it widens the gap through which floodwaters would pass thereby reducing the risk to the bridge and Ōmāhu community. Flow modelling indicates that, for a Gabrielle-sized event, flood waters under Option 2C would be approximately 800mm deeper at the bridge compared to the *status quo*, increasing the risk of damage. For Option 2E flow modelling of a Gabrielle-sized event indicates that the depth of floodwaters would be similar to the *status quo*.
- The Regional Council does not favour Option 2E, citing the cost of purchasing properties outside the stopbanks. Technical consultants Tonkin and Taylor (T+T), engaged by the Council, have given a verbal assessment that Option 2E offers no significant benefits over Option 2C. However, both 2C and 2E have been modelled, and the results show that Option 2E produces lower depths and velocities near the bridge, as well as lower water levels upstream. While this indicates that Option 2E does appear to offer some benefits, the Council maintains that it provides no advantages over Option 2C.
- T+T assumed that the flood peaks in the Ōhiwia and Ngaruroro coincide – which creates a backwater and slows flow in the Ōhiwia. Some in the community are concerned that a 'weather bomb' in the Okawa, with the Ngaruroro flood peak occurring later than the flood peak in the Ōhiwia, could damage the bridge. T+T responded verbally that making different assumptions is unlikely to cause major changes in modelled flow, but that issue remains a source of uncertainty.
- Recent peer review by WSP of the flow modelling recommended comparing water levels, velocities and stream power (related to scour) between options 2C and 2E. T+T and the Regional Council rejected the recommendation to compare 2C and 2E but said their final

model runs would better document water levels, velocities and stream power for Option 2C.

- Since the flow modelling of 2C and 2E was completed, one house in the flood hazard zone has been sold and relocated, meaning there are now two vacant sections between the Ōhiwia Stream and any buildings. The community has suggested a minor variation to Option 2C that increases the width of the gap through which floodwaters will pass through a buy-out of the two sections in question, while still including all other properties within the stopbanks. Regional Council has said they would consider this but due to the timeline it is under for filing the consent application, we have yet to hear the outcome of those considerations.
- T+T undertook an initial comparison of predicted velocities at the bridge and concluded that scour was unlikely to occur. The Regional Council recently commissioned WSP to undertake a peer review of scour around the bridge piers. WSP reported that the piers were deeply embedded and calculated that worst-case scour was unlikely to make them unstable. WSP noted that a major flood could damage the bridge approaches but that these would be repairable.
- Neither WSP (nor T+T earlier) calculated forces on the bridge from floodwater and debris in order to assess the structural integrity of the bridge.
- Work has been undertaken to remove silt from the vicinity of the bridge and reinforce the banks with rocks. Both the Regional and District Councils have given an assurance this will protect the bridge.
- **Two critical questions for the Consenting Authority to determine are whether**:
    - The bridge can withstand 'overdesign events' given it will be subject to deeper water and more flow under Option 2C; and
    - Option 2E or some other alignment – such as the most recent one suggested by the community - that widens the flow path does not offer significant benefits in terms of reduced risk of bridge damage and reduced upstream and downstream flooding.



Box 1. Schematic of Option 2C (preferred by HBRC) and 2E (suggested by CAG)

- As the work done to remove silt and debris from around the bridge is a basis for the council's view that introduction of a stopbank will not compromise the bridge's security, the Community urges the Consenting Authority **to make maintenance of the Ohiwia streambed around the bridge an ongoing consent condition and, to the extent possible, with due consideration for ecological outcomes.**

- We note the view – expressed by councils at the last Community Advisory Group meeting on September 11 2025 - that it is not ideal for ongoing maintenance to be a condition of consent to construct flood protection measures. We also note that HBRC is proposing that the consent be for a maximum term of 5 years
- However the community's concerns about leaving this requirement outside the consent arise from our experience to date:
    - As the bridge is not the regional council's asset, it expressed no perceived duty of care or responsibility for the impacts of the flood protection measures on this critical asset and we want to ensure that the responsibility to maintain the streambed is structured into the ongoing operations of the flood protection
    - It took considerable effort and pressure from the community for the council to address the bridge's security and as a community, we do not want the ongoing onus of annual and long-term plans to secure the investment required for such core maintenance (that is, it should not be on us)
    - without this regulatory discipline, the necessary maintenance will be left to council discretion and subject to the vagaries of council budgets and that as such, the conditions for preserving the security of the bridge may not be met into the future.
- In the optimal situation, the duration of the consent should be extended to ensure a greater period for maintenance of the streambed. Otherwise, we welcome a first 5 years to establish that practice.

4. Flooding of Property, Including Ōmāhu and Surrounding Land

- T+T developed a flow model noting there are no flow recorders in the catchment to calibrate and test the model. Water levels during an 'over design' event were compared with anecdotal evidence during Gabrielle. Following peer review by WSP, the model was checked using flow data from adjacent catchments.
- T+T has clearly made their 'best endeavors' given the scarcity of flow and rainfall data in the catchment. The WSP peer review highlighted a number of (likely minor) deficiencies in the modelling. Some of these deficiencies will be addressed in the final model runs to confirm stopbank design (due in July, sighted by the CAG in September). Other concerns were simply noted by T + T to be addressed if further modelling is undertaken as part of a catchment-wide flood study.
- The proposed stopbanks are designed to prevent water entering affected properties in floods up to a 1:100-year event[1]. During more extreme events, flood waters are expected to overtop the stopbanks and flood properties. The Regional Council commissioned flow modelling up to the 1:100 flood plus one 'over design' event similar to Gabrielle.
- When T+T first presented their flow modelling results, community members requested analysis of a range of floods greater than 1:100 to gauge the frequency of over-topping events, inundation etc. In their recent peer review WSP also suggested modelling more over-design events to identify weak points, overtopping risk and outflanking. T+T and the Regional Council assert that there is no need for such analysis and that community concerns had been resolved at previous meetings – a statement the CAG does not accept.

[1] 100-year ARI flood level, with allowance for climate change (using RCP 8.5 to 2050), plus freeboard of 700 mm.

- Flow modelling shows that Option 2C will exacerbate flooding upstream and along Taihape Road, with agricultural land, vineyards and buildings facing increased inundation levels and duration, and increased scour damage. For example, community hui have raised the issue of the effect of the stopbank on cropping land and vineyards immediately upstream from Broughton's bridge. During Gabrielle crops were extensively damaged, some farm buildings were partially flooded, an on-farm bridge was destroyed and there was severe scouring in some places. For a Gabrielle like event, Option 2C is predicted to increase water levels by c. 300-600 mm upstream from Broughton's bridge compared with the *status quo* or Option 2E. While it is accepted that crops and vines are likely to be damaged by a major flood (as they were in Gabrielle) the community is concerned that the extra costs of damage caused by the stopbanks have not been quantified. We urge the Consenting Authority to require costs of damage occurring on adjacent properties be included in an overall cost-benefit analysis for the scheme.
- Modelling of the original Option 2 showed that flood waters would flow along the Taihape Road into the Ōmāhu community. Option 2C addressed this concern by adding a stopbank across the Taihape Road near Broughton's Bridge. Concern remains within the community about the risk of extreme events over-topping this stopbank and flooding Ōmāhu. Concern also remains about the risk that flood waters from the Ngaruroro River will overtop the 'bund' and inundate houses from the south.
- Many in the community are happy to accept the stopbank design that stems from the flow modelling. The community appreciates that the accuracy of flow modelling is adversely affected by the sparseness of data. However, concerns persist regarding the limited extent to which the consultants have gone to quantify the impacts of uncertainty in predicted flows, water levels and velocities on scour, over-topping of flood banks and inundation of property. This is particularly true in relation to the size of 'overdesign events' given the lack of data to calibrate and test the model, uncertainty arising from climate change and the interaction between Ōhiwia Stream and the Ngaruroro River.The Consenting Authority is urged carefully examine these concerns.
- The Consequential Flooding Report by Tonkin and Taylor and peer review by Becca suggest that the impacts on surrounding land and properties will be minor in both 1:100 year and larger events:

Table 3-1 Changes in flood hazard category (based on Table 2.1 T+T Effects Report)

Event	Number of buildings affected	
	Increased flood hazard	Decreased Flood Hazard
100-year ARI with future climate	**2** • 174 Taihape Road	**48** • Behind the stopbank at the Ohiti Road subdivision and east along Taihape Road.
Cyclone Gabrielle	**12** • 174 Taihape Road • 27 Ohiti Road subdivision • 131 Taihape Road • Seven in Omāhu village.	**28** • Behind the stopbank at the Ohiti Road subdivision and east along Taihape Road.

- We note that while Becca and T&T both rate these impacts as potentially "minor", no attempt has been made to assess the impact on property values or on the cost of insurance for these properties. We note that the former may be non-existent to negligible but consider the risk of higher insurance costs should be investigated.
- This is at least a question of natural justice, particularly given that insurability has been a primary driver for providing flood protection to the Ohiti properties.

- We therefore urge the Consenting Authority to require this to be investigated and (if required) any compensation package agreed before consent is awarded.

5. Early Warning System to Enable Residents to Evacuate During a Gabrielle Event

- Gabrielle demonstrated that current flood warning systems throughout Hawke's Bay are inadequate.
- The proposed stopbanks are designed to prevent water entering the affected properties in floods up to 1:100 year. Flow modelling shows that larger events are predicted to overtop the stopbanks and reaffirmed in Tonkin and Taylor's report, **Consequential Flood Effects of the Omāhu Stopbanks (page 4)**
- At one hui both the Regional and District Councils suggested that residents self-evacuate in such events. It was noted, however, that in the absence of an early warning system, roads could become impassable with residents unable to evacuate. Residents in Ōmāhu outside the stopbanks voiced the need for an early warning system.
- In initial conversations, the Regional Council took the view that establishing a flow recorder and associated early warning system on the Okawa/Ōhiwia would be expensive. It has since committed to telemetry, which is a welcome and necessary part of an effective early warning systems.
- Telemetry alone, however, is not sufficient and progress on an early warning system has been slow, with the inter-agency confusion adding to community frustration, given the repeated requests for progress on actions that will ensure that the proposed stopbank does actually protect people.
- Without an early warning system in the Okawa/Ōhiwia catchment, roads could become impassable, leaving residents in parts of Ōmāhu and especially those living behind the proposed stopbanks unable to evacuate. The absence of real-time monitoring and communication mechanisms puts residents at risk.
- Modelling shows that the proposed stopbank increases the depth of water, and the duration of inundation, near Broughton's Bridge. The same is likely at other places further upstream that are prone to flooding.
- Temporary road closures were deemed less important than bridge security and the risk to residents of being trapped within the stopbank area. Currently when flooding occurs, locals provide an *ad hoc* system warning road-users (Facebook, locals parked at flooded reaches, text messages). The community suggested, and Councils in principle supported, improvements including: water level indicators at known flood-prone locations, and a road closure alert system.
- Community members have called for:
  - A reliable early warning system using text alerts, sirens, and social media notifications.
  - Coordination between civil defence, Regional and District Councils, and emergency services to develop clear evacuation procedures.
  - Installation of water level indicators at flood-prone locations.

The community urges the Consenting Authority to make an early warning system a condition of consent for the Project.

6. Cost-Effectiveness

There are residual questions about the project's cost-effectiveness:

- The cost-benefit analysis has not fully accounted for: whether all properties to be included within the stopbank will be insurable or that insurance will be affordable; whether natural hazard layers on properties will be lifted; or property resale values. Other community-wide risk transfers include cost over-runs and damage to crops, productive land and buildings on adjacent land. Some, but not all of these, have been addressed in the Consequential Flooding Report. However the timeframe between completion of that analysis and filing of the consent has meant that there has not been sufficient time for affected landowners to review and question the analysis before it was filed as the final word on the scope of risk and cost transfer.
- Whereas the original rationale for the flood protection measures was to protect 14 properties, it is still uncertain whether s72 notices will be lifted off the three Ohiti properties that carry these notices and the Consequential Flood Report by T&T notes that the stopbank will only reduce, not eliminate flooding on 18 and 20 Ohiti Road even in a 1:100 year event. While a reduction of flooding is welcome for those households, it adds another question mark to the value proposition and cost-effectiveness of these flood protection measures.
- Alternative options, such as property buyouts, upstream diversions, or a combination of no stopbank with an early warning system, have not been given adequate consideration. In the case of option 2E, which some community members of the CAG support, this was dismissed on the basis of the cost of buyouts with little attempt to quantify benefits. The final cost of the option 2C that the Regional Council has determined to proceed is as yet unclear.
- The long-term maintenance costs of the stopbanks and potential future modifications due to climate change impacts are unclear.

7. Insurance and Affordability

A critical concern for 2C landowners is whether insurance will remain available and /or affordable if the Project proceeds, **even though insurability of properties has been one of the stated objectives of this Project and, while not in council' control, key to justifying the investment.** Without certainty on insurance, the stopbank investment will not deliver security for affected households, who face being left uninsured or underinsured despite the physical protections.

Here we note communications between the Crown and Regional Council on this:

> ***Value for money***: The project should represent good value for money, delivering greatest benefits for least cost. It is a requirement of NRP [National Resilience Plan] funding that a cost-benefit analysis be included in delivery plans. The Government's expectation is that benefits exceed costs. Assessment of projects should take an area-based approach and include consideration of assets not owned by councils or residential property owners. Cultural values and other non-monetary costs and benefits can be considered. Alternative risk reduction options should be considered and a clear indication why the chosen option is optimal. The Council should use the PARA (protect, accommodate, retreat, avoid) framework to consider options. Identification of initiatives should consider long-term risk from climate change and seek to minimise maladaptation.
>
> The delivery plan must also include information on the risk thresholds underpinning category 2 projects, the investment merit of the projects, and the prioritisation process councils have applied across the programme of work. The Crown expects that local councils will engage/consult with insurers as they develop their category 2 risk mitigation projects. Information must be provided on council's engagement with insurers and its efforts to maintain confidence on the insurability of

projects affected by the NIWE and how the proposed project will achieve expected longer term flood risk mitigation benefits to maintain insurability of such projects. In particular, the delivery plans must address how the intervention will affect the ability of property holders to take up or maintain private insurance (including through the project delivery phase).[2]

Key points for the Consenting Authority to note:

- Access to insurance is currently being denied or is offered at unaffordable premiums for many 2C households or without a reasonable degree of assurance that continued insurance will be available. (We note that while insurance is generally provided on a yearly basis, most property owners can be reasonably confident that their insurance coverage will be rolled over from one year to the next. This is not the case for some Ohiti households).
- Section 72 notices act as a major barrier to insurance, and removal cannot occur until stopbanks are built and certified – with costs falling on landowners.
- Even with mitigation, there is no guarantee insurers will provide affordable cover; uncertainty about premiums and insurability remains.
- This ongoing uncertainty creates serious financial and mental stress for residents, affecting mortgages, property values, and long-term security.

[2] 2023. Invitation to submit proposals for National Resilience Plan funding. Letter from the Minister of Cyclone Recovery to Hawke's Bay Regional Council, October 5

Part 2: For the Regional Council

"It is essential that HBRC treats the region's communities as project partners, rather than consulting and seeking feedback once much of the scoping and critical thinking has already occurred.

Community and stakeholder participation is fundamental to managing flood risk, as is recognising that flood risks will affect many people and can include transferring risk from one community to another."

Hawke's Bay Independent Flood Review 2024

The CAG recognises:

- The extreme pressure that District and Regional Councils have been under given the scale and complexity of Gabrielle's impacts and the urgency and cost of restoring function across the region.
- The need to reassure homeowners quickly post Gabrielle.
- The perverse pressures that aspects of contracts with the Crown placed on the Regional Council.
- The Regional Council's later efforts to work in a more transparent and open way with the community.

However, the Regional Council's approach to the Ohiti flood protection has put considerable, unnecessary pressure and anxiety on 2C property owners, the wider community and community leaders. We do not wish that to be continued in the final stages of this Project or repeated when future such events impact our community, as they will.

For the future, we look to the Regional Council to work to the Independent Flood Panel Review's recommendation that communities be treated as partners in flood protection, rather than as recipients of the Regional Council intention or, in our experience, as adversaries.

To assist with that change in culture, we summarise our experience of the process across two, interconnected issues:

- 1. Communications and relationship with the community and
- 2. Project design and decision-making.

1. Communications and Relationship with the Community

For 2C property owners, the Project process has been difficult from the outset. The first hui in June 2023 revealed that the Regional Council had initially overlooked the 2C area entirely (which was firstly categorised as 2P). It was only discussed once residents raised it themselves. Since then, communication and engagement have been irregular and inadequate.

Key concerns include:

- **Irregular updates and limited engagement**: At the roughly two-monthly hui, property owners often received little to no meaningful information until after the CAG was established.
- **Opinions and experiences not considered**: Early designs were presented without proper consultation. For example, when the first stopbank design was shown, residents immediately pointed out in an event of another flood it would divert floodwaters directly into the Ōmāhu community. This fundamental oversight forced T&T to revisit the design,

adding months to an already drawn-out process. Residents had raised this concern at the first hui, so it should never have been overlooked.

- **Lack of consideration for buyouts**: Many residents expressed a preference for buyouts due to repeated flooding, high risk, and loss of security. This was dismissed primarily due to cost, despite clear evidence that water levels posed a life-threatening risk (including one property that experienced 1.8 metres of water during Gabrielle).
- **Section 72 notices and insurance barriers**: Three landowners (two with houses) have s72 notices on their titles. Landowners asked for support after being told they would not be insured. At the time, the District Council said removing s72 notices was "too hard" and declined to assist. While a process has since been created to remove s72 notices once the stopbank is complete, it came too late for at least one landowner who was denied insurance, forced to sell their home and repay their mortgage in full after their bank withdrew cover.
- **Lack of accountability and empathy**: When asked about the risk of insurance withdrawal, the District Council advised that landowners had accepted hazard risks when consents were originally granted, effectively placing responsibility back onto residents.
- **Prolonged uncertainty and stress**: The absence of timely updates, the slow response to valid concerns, and the lack of recognition of residents' lived experiences have created considerable anxiety and frustration.
- **Community expertise undervalued**: Residents repeatedly provided local knowledge about how floodwaters behaved during Gabrielle, but their lived experience was not given proper weight alongside technical modelling.
- **Financial and emotional toll**: The combination of insurance loss, mortgage stress, lack of options, emotional trauma and repeated delays has placed enormous emotional pressure on whānau, with some forced into selling their properties at a loss.

For the wider community, key concerns include:

Resistance to recognising the concerns and interests of the wider community

The Project was framed narrowly as a solution for 2C property owners, without recognising that any change in flood behaviour could impact Ōmāhu and upstream households.

From the first hui, residents described how floodwaters in Gabrielle flowed directly into Ōmāhu. Despite this, downstream whānau were not engaged until much later, even though the Project posed clear risks to their homes, marae and community assets.

B2R and Te Piringa Hapū approached the Regional Council repeatedly from March 2024 onwards to: get assurances around common issues of concern for the community; urge the Regional Council to release all analysis and technical assessments of flood protection options to the community; and get the Regional Council to talk early and often with the wider community.

The Regional Council senior leadership repeatedly objected to a catchment collective asking questions about what Council deemed to be a "regulatory issue":

- It took repeated requests for core documents (and ultimately LGOIAMA requests) to get the preliminary analysis that the Regional Council had used to arrive at its preferred option.
- It was six months before the Regional Council held a hui to set out its intentions to the wider community (that is, beyond the 2C landowners). That hui only increased community anxieties due to: 1. the lack of analysis to reassure Ōmāhu whānau - still in the process of rebuilding their community – that the flood

protection measures would not increase flood risk to their kainga and 2. Council's entrenched views about what it was going to do.

A more community-led process came too late in the process to be meaningful

We acknowledge the role of the Hastings District Council in recommending that the Regional Council support a community-led process as a way to involve the community and address questions of concern. We also acknowledge the Regional Council's willingness to take that route - or at least a form of it. Broadly speaking, we can commend that approach.

However, a community-led process can only succeed if the Regional Council is truly open to the options. In the case of this Project, the community-led process came too late as by the time the CAG was established, much of the design process was already advanced and the Regional Council had already committed to the 2C property owners to a particular form of flood protection and remained largely intransigent, leaving little room to address fundamental issues in a timely way.

2. Project Design

Commitments to a specific flood protection measure and a budget made before analysis had been done

The Regional Council committed to Ohiti whānau, families and property owners that they could stay in their homes and determined what protection they would be given and how much it would cost even though:

- At the first 2C (initially 2P) hui held at the District Council Chambers in July 2024, the majority of landowners indicated that they wished to be bought out. At subsequent hui, some landowners continued to raise this preference, particularly in light of their category placement shifting from 2P to 2A, as well as ongoing issues with insurance and other related challenges.
- No (serious) analysis had been done on the cost-effectiveness of a stopbank against other possible actions.

That early commitment to a particular approach has meant that other options have effectively been off the table, even if notionally discussed.

Inadequate consideration of other options

The Regional Council analysis of other options for reducing the impacts of flooding on the Ohiti homes has been frustrating for parts of our community because: 1. repeated flooding of the single access road for ca 600 households just a few kilometres upstream remains unaddressed and 2. the potential for solutions there that could significantly reduce flooding risk to Ohiti homes was summarily dismissed at an early stage, well before the Regional Council agreed to communicate with the wider community. This included looking at options higher up the Ōhiwia subcatchment such as the use of spillways, including for Lake Rūnanga. The lake is a sensitive environment and of immense cultural significance to mana whenua and consideration of this option needs to be done carefully, but this was set aside as too expensive or difficult, with no meaningful detail to support this conclusion.

Constraints on how flood protection could be delivered may have come from Crown but the fact remains that opportunities to reduce flooding risk on the Ōmāhu community and the Ohiti homes have not been taken and the same flooding issues just a short distance upstream remain even after such a significant investment in the area.

“Not our Asset”

For months, the Regional Council dismissed community concerns about Broughton’s Bridge on the basis that the bridge is not a Regional Council asset and that it was the District Council’s responsibility to ensure its viability. Latterly, the Regional Council has factored the bridge in the project work, but the frustration for the community until the Regional Council assumed some duty of care/responsibility for the potential impact of its proposed structures in the bridge could have been avoided.

It would be helpful for the Regional Council to understand that for the community on the ground, these bureaucratic or institutional siloes are irrational and cause considerable frustration: if a Regional Council project has the potential to impact an asset that the District Council owns on behalf of the community, then the Regional Council should take responsibility for those impacts.

Commitment we seek from Regional Council

Our experience of the Project has highlighted significant failings in Council's communication, engagement and decision-making culture that have placed unnecessary pressure on our community. These should not be repeated in future.

We are therefore seeking a formal undertaking from Regional Council to **be led by Community** in response to future such events. This means:

1. **Treat us as your partners in problem-solving**, as the Independent Flood Review recommends as we are the ones who have to live with any decisions.
2. **Talk to us early and often**:
    - Bring all directly and indirectly affected communities into the process early, rather than focusing narrowly on a single group. This avoids unnecessary mistrust and ensures risks to others are properly considered.
    - Provide frequent, scheduled updates throughout all stages of the Project, not just once a CAG or similar body is established.
3. **Respect our lived experience**: Give proper weight to our community knowledge and lived experience, especially where it provides insights into flood behaviour that technical modelling may miss. Early community warnings should not be dismissed, as this leads to delays and can ultimately increase project costs.
4. **Genuinely consider all options**: Do robust cost-effectiveness analysis of all options (including spillways, upstream diversions, buyouts and alternative stopbank alignments) before committing to a preferred solution. Premature commitment to one option undermines trust and leaves important issues unresolved.
5. **Release technical and policy analysis early**: Don't wait until the LGOIMA requests come in. Transparency in technical reports, modelling assumptions, and options analysis must be standard practice.
6. Recognise that **flood protection is not meaningful if residents are unable to secure affordable insurance**. Establish clear processes and assistance to support landowners with removal of s72 notices and re-establish insurability once mitigation is in place.
7. **Overcome siloes** (e.g., "not our asset"). If a Council project has potential impacts on District Council assets such as bridges or roads, the Regional Council must accept shared responsibility and work collaboratively on mitigation.

Rather than have this be noted but set aside in the next emergency, because it is not ingrained in council culture and practice, we wish to formalise this in process or policy with the Regional and District Councils and seek a process from here to work through this.

We believe that this can be a blueprint for the future that will support Council in emergencies, reduce the pressures on staff and elected representatives in highly stressful periods, reduce the risk of creating divisions within tight communities and be the cornerstone of true and effective resilience in the face of an unpredictable and changing climate.

Closing

The Ohiti Stopbank Project represents a critical decision point for our community. Cyclone Gabrielle showed the devastating consequences of inadequate protection, but it also highlighted each of these issues must be addressed openly and thoroughly before any final consent is granted.

Ultimately, our shared aim is a solution that protects people, property, livelihoods, and whakapapa — not only for those directly behind the proposed stopbank, but for the entire community up and down the catchment. The Consenting Authority and the Regional Council now have an opportunity to demonstrate that community voices matter, that lessons have been learned, and that recovery from Gabrielle will lead to stronger, fairer, and more resilient outcomes for all.