

**Tuesday, 24 February 2026**

**PROJECT UPDATE**

**Three years on from Cyclone Gabrielle – Wairoa turns the page as flood protection nears construction**

Last Saturday, 14 February, marked three years since Cyclone Gabrielle devastated parts of the Wairoa community – an event that changed lives, displaced whānau, damaged homes and businesses, and left an enduring mark on the people of Wairoa.

As the community reflects on the third anniversary of the Cyclone and the June 2024 flooding that compounded its impacts, the Wairoa Flood Mitigation Project stands closer than ever to delivering the protection Wairoa has long needed, with early construction expected to commence in May.

Crown Manager, Lawrence Yule, says the anniversary is a time to honour what the community has endured, while also acknowledging the significant progress that has brought Wairoa to the cusp of construction.

“Three years ago, Cyclone Gabrielle caused devastating impacts across the Wairoa community. For many whānau, the effects of that event are still deeply felt. This anniversary has brought back difficult memories and emotions for some in our community, and it’s important that we pause to acknowledge that,” Mr Yule says.

“But it’s also important to reflect on just how far Wairoa has come. Three years ago, this community was in a state of emergency. Today, we have a fully funded and approved flood mitigation solution that is progressing through the detailed design phase, and which will break ground this construction season. That is a testament to the resilience, courage, and collective commitment of the people of Wairoa.”

Since Cyclone Gabrielle, the project has progressed through extensive community engagement, technical design, cultural impact assessments, land access negotiations, and procurement – achieving a series of critical milestones that have paved the way toward construction.

In recent months, the project has secured formal approval from National Infrastructure Funding and Financing (NIFF), which manages the Government’s Cyclone Recovery Funds for the 2023 North Island Weather Events programme, near-completed all land access negotiations within the floodway footprint, secured resource consent, appointed preferred contractor Goodman Contractors through an Early Contractor Involvement process, and completed extensive Cultural Impact Assessment activity, including three Marae-led CIAs.

“We are now in the final stages before construction begins,” Mr Yule says. “Resource consent has been granted, detailed design is progressing at pace, and our contractor is

ready. After three years of planning, engagement and determination, Wairoa is about to see the physical delivery of flood protection begin.”

Mr Yule acknowledged the whānau and landowners who have made significant personal sacrifices to enable the project to proceed, including those who have provided access to their whenua, and in some cases, given up their homes.

“This project has asked a great deal of some people in this community. There are whānau who have made incredibly difficult decisions – about their land, their homes, and their future – so that the wider community can be protected. That is a significant sacrifice, and I want to acknowledge each and every one of them.

Cultural values and mātauranga Māori have been central to the project throughout its development. Four Cultural Impact Assessments – one overarching assessment and three Marae-led assessments from Takitimu Marae, Ruataniwha Marae, and Tawhiti a Maru Marae – have been completed, with additional cultural assessment work continuing as the design progresses. Together, these assessments provide comprehensive guidance for ensuring cultural considerations are integrated into all aspects of construction and delivery.

“We remain grateful for the ongoing engagement from mana whenua, whose input ensures we protect whānau, whenua, marae, urupā and cultural taonga throughout this process. The appointment of cultural monitors and a cultural lead is now being actively progressed as we prepare for the construction phase,” Mr Yule says.

Once constructed, the Option 1C+ flood mitigation solution will enable 627 properties currently classified as Category 2C to move to Category 1, protected from a 1-in-100-year flood event. The \$70 million fully Crown-funded project represents the largest infrastructure investment Wairoa has seen in decades.

“For three years, people in this community have lived with uncertainty and rain anxiety. Every time it rains, there is fear. This project changes that,” Mr Yule says.

“We are turning months and years of planning into action. Construction commencement will be a moment for the whole community – a moment that says Wairoa’s future is being built, not just talked about.”

## **ENDS**

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