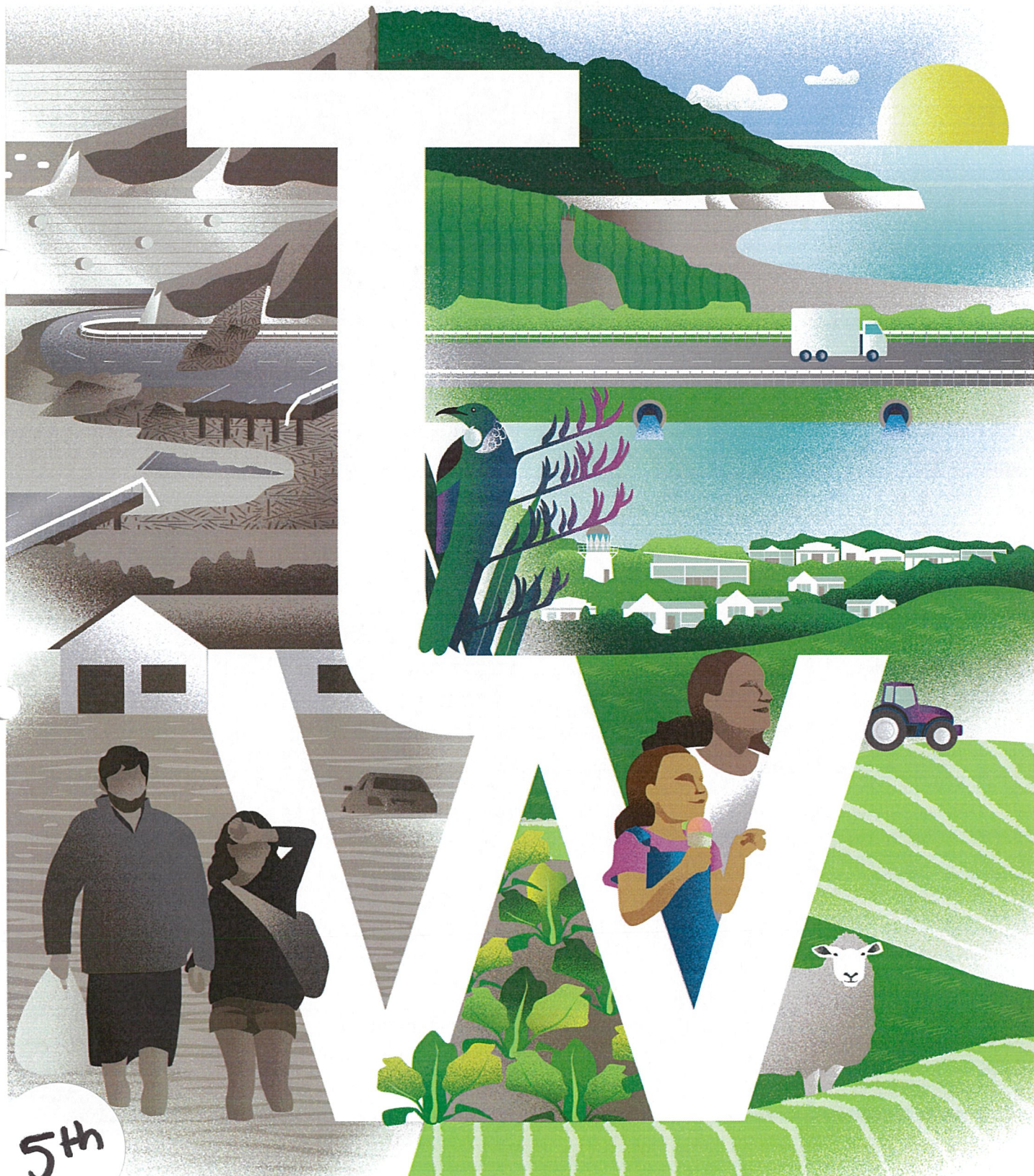


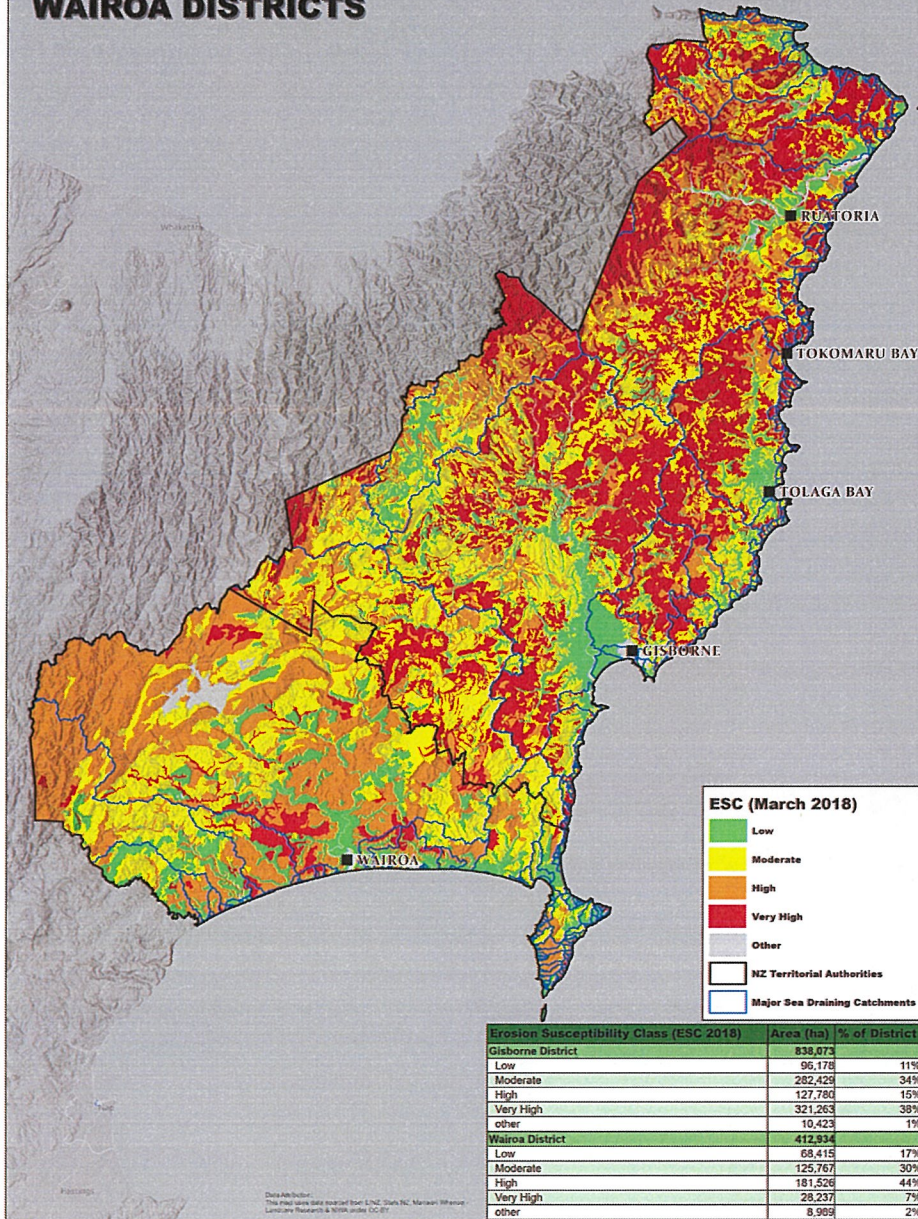
# OUTRAGE TO OPTIM

Report of the Ministerial Inquiry into land uses associated with the mobilisation of woody debris (including forestry slash) and sediment in Tairāwhiti/Gisborne District and Wairoa District



5th

## EROSION SUSCEPTIBILITY OF GISBORNE AND WAIROA DISTRICTS



Correction note: This report was first published on 12 May 2023. An updated version was published on 17 May 2023 to correct recommendation numbering errors and internal references to the recommendations only.

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# Contents

Mihi	5
Foreword	6
Approach	8
Woody debris, sediment and waterways	10
Infrastructure	14
Land use	19
Forestry	22
Whenua Maori	26
Economic incentives and constraints	29
People and transition	32
Leadership and governance	35
Alignment of vision	39
Appendices	43
Glossary	44

## Foreword

**P** Ministers commissioned our Panel to urgently investigate the situation in Tairāwhiti/Gisborne and Wairoa<sup>1</sup> as a result of weather events – most recently Cyclone Gabrielle – which flooded woody debris and sedimentation into land, waterways and infrastructure, leaving people disconnected and desperate, feeling angry and abandoned.

We found that the impact was different in each of the Districts. Different soils, topography, land-use history, cumulative storm battering and fragile infrastructure meant there were obvious degrees of damage. Tairāwhiti experienced greater and more widespread impact than Wairoa. Across Tairāwhiti, outer communities of Te Aitanga-a-Mahaki and Ngāti Tāmānui were devastated and Rongowhakaata and Turanga flood plains flooded, while Gisborne city, except for failure of the water infrastructure, was largely resilient. Ngāti Porou communities took hit after hit in broken roads and bridges, lost power and communication, delayed and undependable emergency provision. Accordingly, while we make findings and recommendations for both Districts, the urgency of the situation across Ngāti Porou is unassailable. An environmental disaster is unfolding in plain sight.

Papatuanuku is battered and bleeding, Ranginui a fury, and Tāne Mahuta bent and breaking. Sedimentation from more than a thousand untreated gullies, trees, logs and slash off hills that should never be planted or clear felled, waterways choked with debris flows, riverbeds aggraded, coastlines suffocated and dangerous, roads and bridges unfit, unpassable, and many broken.

Ngāti Porou tangata whenua, the people of this land, are in peril, at risk of becoming homeless and landless. We saw and listened to their grief, exhaustion, fear – of the next storm, of the next rain, and for the future. We felt called to urgent action.

We are not a third world country. We heard from experts that the situation is perilous – the time to act is now. In their estimation we have 5 – 10 years to turn this environmental disaster around. To urgently reset the future of Ngāti Porou, and the whole of Tairāwhiti.

Where there is huge risk there is great opportunity. The opportunity here, in Tairāwhiti, is to move with purpose and pace to implementing our international commitments on climate change, our policy statements on adaptive transformations, to make investments in biodiversity, ecosystem restoration, bespoke land and catchment use, quality water and waterways, resilient infrastructure, reliable emergency management. The uniquely complex and isolated environment

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<sup>1</sup> For ease of reference, we use the broad inclusive names of Wairoa and Tairāwhiti throughout the report, unless we are specifically referring to the Territorial Local Authority, Wairoa District Council (WDC), Gisborne District Council (GDC).

of Ngati Porou and the East Coast offers the context of a living laboratory for practical application of these commitments, in real time, in plain view. Now.

We have the opportunity to grow a climate adapted, biodiverse, flourishing environment and economy in Tairāwhiti. Establishing the basis for a sustainable approach is possible in the next decade. Over ensuing generations, we can look forward to science and tikanga based relationships with the environment that create quality livelihoods and lives. And reciprocate with transportable models and practices of what can work in other parts of our country, and the world.

With commitment to this vision for our environment and for the people and communities who live within and with it, the critical ingredient to realising success for Tairāwhiti will be strong, shared, selfless local and regional leadership and governance – mana whenua, mana tangata. A modern, forward looking honouring of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, with principles of protection, participation and partnership will mean that quality citizenship for all, can be realised here.

We have 10 years.

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# Woody debris, sediment and waterways

## Findings

1. The Panel found that lives and livelihoods were put at risk. People were isolated, and suffered trauma to their social, emotional and mental health. Woody debris and sediment caused destructive debris flows and resulted in widespread damage to properties, infrastructure and ecosystems. These symptoms of failure, weaponised by cyclonic winds and weather bombs, have created an emergency and require urgent clean-up action.

## Debris and sediment clean-up

2. The residue of sediment and woody debris dumped across the region continues to impact the physical, and mental wellbeing of affected communities. In many cases the clean-up is beyond the capability of the local community – although some clean-up is happening, it is ad hoc. Much of the focus is on the visible debris, but the residue sitting in streams and on hillslopes further up the catchment is poised to repeat the cycle of misery in the next storm. Although money is being made available to support the clean-up effort, we think the clean-up will benefit from coordination to clean-up the existing debris, to de-risk catchments of debris dams and debris that can be remobilised, and to plan and prepare for a more rapid response to future events.
3. We recommend the establishment of a Woody Debris Taskforce to lead the planning and delivery for current and future clean-up activities across both Wairoa and Tairāwhiti. This will need independent leadership, and involvement from all three councils<sup>5</sup> and the forestry sector. We think the lion's share of the funding for that taskforce needs to come from the forest owners with the remaining contribution split between central government and councils. In our view, the forest owners have an obligation to establish a sustainable funding system to support current and future clean-ups and to help restore their social licence within the community. One possible option for that funding is through the Forest Owners Association levy on log sales. We recommend that Ministers ensure that a sustainable funding model is established, using regulatory powers if required.
4. We heard clearly through our engagement that priority should be given to employing local people, such as hiring out-of-work forestry crews for clean-up activities and supporting the work of existing Jobs for Nature projects.
5. We propose that the taskforce undertakes the removal work on a risk-priority basis, with the debris removed for reuse as biomass wherever practicable or otherwise mulched and spread where the wood chips cannot enter waterways to cause further problems. We are unconvinced

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<sup>5</sup> GDC, WDC, and HBRC.

through this Inquiry, and with our recommendations on incentivising native planting and developing a biodiversity market.

86. We know protecting and restoring freshwater is a key focus of the Government. The Ministry for the Environment and Stat NZ's April 2023 report, [Our freshwater 2023](#), shows in stark relief the degraded state of our waterways. Implementing the recommendations in this report will include restoring gullies, incentivising native tree cover, expanding Jobs for Nature programmes and making water infrastructure more resilient. These actions will not only make a significant contribution to improving water quality in Tairāwhiti and Wairoa but will also provide important lessons that could be applied more broadly.

## Giving life to the vision

87. A vision is not useful unless it is accompanied by action. The recommendations we offer are intended to ensure concrete, long-term commitment to Tairāwhiti and Wairoa.
88. We recommend a broadly applicable statutory vision for Tairāwhiti. In the case of Wairoa, we expect the Hawke's Bay Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) development process will be the key tool for setting a vision and drawing support and investment. To support Wairoa in that process, we suggest considering whether a statutory weighting for the vision articulated in this report should be applied in the Hawke's Bay RSS process.
89. Although legislation would provide for a vision and accord it a legal status, the vision itself would sit outside the legislation, to ensure it could be reviewed and updated in the future. The statutory vision needs to be in place as soon as possible, to strategically guide the scale of action required. Therefore, as a first iteration, we suggest a simple statutory vision could be drafted on the vision this Panel has set out. Once the regional leadership collaboration model is established, we expect future, and potentially more detailed, iterations of the vision (similar to [Te Ture Whaimana](#) – the Waikato River Vision and Strategy) could be driven by regional leaders with intensive community engagement.
90. The development of an investment model will ensure that the vision is resourced and that investment is coordinated and strategic. Specific applications of the investment model are covered in the relevant sections of this report.

## Recommendations

Our recommendations on alignment of vision are as follows.

We invite Ministers to:

- R47. Submit an Order in Council to the Severe Weather Emergency Response legislation to provide for a statutory vision for Tairāwhiti. The Order will have legal weighting in government and regional policy, including the development and review of legislation, national direction, government strategies, and regional planning documents.

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- R48. Consider whether the first iteration of the statutory vision for Tairāwhiti, as it could be applied to Wairoa, should have legal status in relation to the Hawke's Bay Regional Spatial Strategy process.
- R49. Submit an Order in Council to the Severe Weather Emergency Response legislation to provide for a long-term, multi-sectoral, regional co-investment model for Tairāwhiti, to achieve the statutory vision.