

Rising Waters

Stories of community resilience in the Tasman floods of 2025

Compiled by Tasman District Council in association with Health New Zealand



Cover photo © Ollie Langridge

Pitfure Stream, between Brightwater and Wakefield

Foreword

The thing that sticks with me most from the 2025 floods is the community response. Whether it is the collective strength of a community, or the efforts of some amazing individuals, the amount of volunteer support that came from within the region and from outside, was extraordinary.

Specific groups and entities stepped forward: Taskforce Kiwi volunteers, the Student Volunteer Army, the Rapid Relief Team, community members and businesses. I think of local eateries running events to feed whole groups of community members in the aftermath, all trying to support the recovery.



From these weather events, that is what always stays with you. So does the resilience that so many landowners demonstrated. That stoic response, and the comments I heard over and over again – "There's someone worse off than us" or, "The people down the road have got more issues." In many cases you were standing there in the middle of devastation on their property, and yet they were more concerned about their neighbours.

As Mayor, I definitely felt the weight of it, but not from a logistical perspective. In a District like this, many of the people you are visiting are friends, acquaintances, people you work with or people you know through the community. So it is not so much the technicalities around Civil Defence, emergency management or response processes – they are what they are. It is when you go up valleys to visit people you know that it really brings the impact home.

Sadly, we have had a lot of these events recently: ex-tropical cyclones Fehi and Gita in 2018, the Pigeon Valley fires of 2019, and more recent events in both Nelson and Tasman. We learn from each one, and we hope always to do better, particularly in that initial response and in supporting communities through recovery. The lessons broaden into a focus on resilience looking forward, asking how we make communities more resilient. Flood and river management is only one factor and we will never be able to protect ourselves entirely from extreme weather events.

Providing accurate information is crucial so people understand what the risks are where they live. What role they have in looking after themselves, their homes and their properties. Having an evacuation plan, knowing what to take with you, and what to do about pets and livestock – that is the part people can largely control themselves. Protecting or preserving a home or property is often a bigger challenge. Some people have the resources, ability or financial position to recover and manage going forward. For others, it is difficult.

That is one of the main frustrations with a challenge of this scale. We all want to do more, but it is not possible to solve every issue. The District's population has grown a lot over the last 20 to 30 years, much of it during a relatively benign weather period. History tells us that significant weather events have happened before, and it is likely they will become more frequent again. That makes awareness, preparedness and resilience even more important for all of us. And that's why people sharing their very real experiences here are so important.

My thanks to everyone who contributed to the response and recovery, and everyone who has provided us with a historical reminder of the recent past and learnings for the future.

Tim King
Tasman Mayor

The perfect storm

In late June and mid-July 2025, the Nelson Tasman region was hit by two severe weather events that caused widespread damage to hundreds of properties. Individually they were both significant, but being spaced just two weeks apart resulted in a chain of extreme events that was unprecedented.

Human stories are inextricably linked with events of such magnitude. Emotions range from panic, shock and grief but these are also natural disasters that, despite the adversity, allow the best in people to shine through. This book contains a collection of first-hand accounts by residents impacted and the people who helped them.

It started as a one-in-one-hundred-year weather event. Significant in its own right, this resulted in Tasman Mayor Tim King declaring a state of emergency on Friday 27 June 2025, due to torrential rain and flooding across the District, particularly to the Motueka Valley and Wakefield surrounds. The District had little time to recover before heavy rain arrived again the following week, hampering recovery and further saturating the land. Then inconceivably, another one-in-one-hundred-year event – accompanied by destructive wind gusts – occurred on Friday 11 July which caused significant destruction across the District. Rivers forged new channels, small streams became raging torrents and millions of tonnes of silt and debris were left strewn across the countryside.

By early the next morning, more than 600 kilometres of roads and state highways were impassable due to fallen trees, slips and flooding. This isolated rural communities and left some properties reliant on vital supplies to arrive by helicopter.

Other critical infrastructure was impacted, with power lines brought down, sewerage and water supply systems disconnected, and internet and phone services severely compromised.

Farms, orchards and homes were either damaged or destroyed. Some properties were hit by both the June and July events, compounding the hardship for those affected.



Upper Motueka River at Motupiko

High water history

Tasman is prone to flooding, being naturally exposed to severe weather from three points of the compass, which is unusual in Aotearoa.

Two of the worst weather events in recent times were in 1983, causing widespread damage, and then Cyclone Gita in 2018 which severely impacted Lower Motueka, Riwaka, and Upper Tākaka. Prior to these, records suggest the February 1877 'Old Man Flood' in the Motueka catchment was probably the most severe we have seen in European times. Almost every house in the Motueka Valley basin was reported to have been damaged or destroyed in 1877. (Author, J.P. Salisbury describes it, "*all the floods before, and they were many, were water floods, but this was an earth flood*".)

If that was the 'Old Man', the events of June/July 2025 were the Everyman. Every man, woman, child – and livestock too. The 2025 floods combined the widespread impact of the 1983 flood with the volume of the 1877 flood but also included a Cyclone Gita component within it – strong easterly winds into the Lower Motueka area.

To make matters worse, damage from a single flood can be brutal, but floods in quick succession are much more destructive. Steady rainfall continued to soak the ground during the two-week interval. Saturated conditions result in more runoff, and riverbanks are also much more vulnerable. This was very evident looking at the damage from the July flood compared to the first, in particular the severity of bank erosion and change of river course.

A considerable clean-up effort began immediately after the June flood, but it was completely undone by the massive volume of water that arrived in July. Recovery efforts started over again the following day and lasted for many months, while repairs to some badly damaged roads continued well into the following year. The reinstatement of many of the rivers' stopbanks will continue for still more years to come.

In late 2025 we sought feedback from residents to a series of questions about the events they experienced that winter. When we looked at the compiled responses, we decided to capture them more permanently and this book is the result. We also asked technical experts in the fields of hydrology and river engineering to explain why this was – unfortunately – the perfect storm.

A huge thank you to those who shared their stories, to Health New Zealand Nelson Marlborough for funding, and to Tasman District Council staff for their contribution.

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Te Whatu Ora

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Helping unravel the issue of gravel

David Aresenau, Tasman District Council's Team Leader, Rivers and Coastal Structures, explains the complexities involved in the maintenance of our waterways.

The presence of gravel in our rivers has been a perennial talking point for decades, involving landowners, engineers, and scientists. Lengthy discourse has taken place on riverbanks, in reports and studies, and of course, in the Council Chamber.

The major floods of 27 June and 11 July 2025, and the widespread damage and disruption they've caused, has amplified calls to restart major gravel extraction in the rivers to provide capacity for flood flows, an activity which we manage under the Soil Conservation and River Control Act 1941 and the Resource Management Act (i.e., the Tasman Resource Management Plan).

It is impossible to do this complex topic justice here, but what I can do is share some key points on the state of gravel management to help provide an overview of the regional issues.

To begin, we have always extracted gravel from the rivers, which continues to this day. We have an ongoing collaboration with contractors who use the aggregate for a variety of uses. The quantities and locations of extraction vary depending on where the need is identified from year to year.

We extract gravel to address identified river management issues which depends on the specific river and the type of management work that we do in that river. Most rivers are managed to minimise bank erosion. In these areas, we do not extract gravel to increase flow capacity or reduce flooding, since that almost always leads to a significant worsening of bank erosion.

As well, we would need to extract an enormous amount of gravel from a river to have any noticeable benefit during the kinds of floods we experienced. This would lead to deep channels with constantly eroding banks and would contribute to lowering of the groundwater table as has been seen on the Wai-iti River.

We carry out extraction of river gravels under a global resource consent which, on the Motupiko, Motueka and Waimea Rivers, requires us to maintain the riverbed within an average elevation range. This range was established based on historical surveys of river cross-sections. It prevents over-extraction while also allowing any extraction required when too much gravel accumulates.

As well as monitoring gravel levels in the rivers using cross-section surveys, we recently began using LiDAR (laser imaging) surveys which has allowed us to monitor gravel volumes much more accurately.

Through these historical and ongoing surveys, we have seen that our river catchments, on average, do not supply enough gravel to the rivers to keep them stable, and our rivers are generally cutting down rather than building up.

Gravel supply to the rivers is also dependent on floods, landslips, and other major events in the catchment, which are unpredictable and unplanned. This makes it difficult to safely extract a consistent amount of gravel each year, and any extraction needs to be considered against long-term trends.

For example, our ongoing gravel surveys in the Upper Motueka River showed significant loss of riverbed material in recent years. Over the entire managed section of river – from the Wangapeka River confluence to around North Road Bridge – there was a loss of 345,000 cubic metres of material from 2022 to 2023, and a further loss of 142,000 cubic metres from 2023 to 2024. The average riverbed elevation was, before the recent floods, at a level that would prevent gravel extraction under our resource consent in many areas.

What we have observed, because of the floods, are areas where gravel has built up, along with areas where gravel has scoured and moved downstream, and in both cases, there are extreme examples. The faces of the large gravel rivers have significantly changed, with some gravel beaches growing, some disappearing completely, and entirely new beaches appearing along the river.

> *In these areas, we do not extract gravel to increase flow capacity or reduce flooding, since that almost always leads to a significant worsening of bank erosion.*

While rivers are dynamic, constantly changing systems, the floods pushed them into a new state and a new balance that will continue to adjust and settle for some time.

The long-term recovery work on our rivers has this new dynamic shift front of mind. We are reviewing river management practices, old and new, including gravel extraction, to prepare us for the next major flood as best as possible.

In summary, there is no easy fix to prevent a river from flooding. Too little gravel, too much gravel, adherence to resource consents, unpredictable weather events and natural changes in flow and course – these factors impact our waterways and always will. However, we hope that as technology continues to advance, councils including ours will gain even greater insight into how best we can maintain effectively a natural feature of our District's landscape that is both highly valued, and inherently complex.

David Aresenau
Team Leader Rivers and Coastal Structures
Tasman District Council



Woolf Creek

A ‘blur’ of floods

For Tasman District Council Principal Hydrologist Martin Doyle, the floods were unlike anything he had faced before. What began as a familiar forecast quickly shifted into a complex, fast-moving emergency, testing the District’s flood monitoring systems and the experience of the Hydrology team. Here, he offers a behind-the-scenes view of how the event unfolded.

We actually dealt with three separate weather systems because in the period between 27 June and 11 July, there was also a sustained amount of heavy rain.

They were expected to be ‘typical’ weather systems, in the sense that all our big floods come from the north where warm moist air is dragged down from the tropics. These systems can also be generated by ex-tropical cyclones sitting off the coast. The 2025 storms certainly had those same characteristics but as we were to find out, there were a few misleading aspects that impacted our decision making.

Firstly, until the day prior to the June storm, the weather forecast was for north-westerly flows, and based on previous experience we knew to expect bigger floods from the eastern hills such as those behind Richmond, and in Golden Bay.

The trouble came when the system swung round to a much more north-easterly pattern which was hidden away in the forecasts. This caught us off guard as we really didn’t expect to have so much rain in the Upper Motueka catchment. The seriousness of the situation was also compounded as floodwaters rose in the dark of the night, in a location that nobody expected – the Moutere River.

As a north-easterly weather system, it was reminiscent of the 1983 flood. The 1983 storm wasn’t a particularly quick moving weather system and all the big floods in the big rivers built slowly. They tended to build up over a day or so and had the whole catchment contributing flow, and the June 2025 flood did the same thing.

The overnight rain was relentless and by the morning of 27 June the Moutere River was carrying large volumes of water. So too was the Wai-iti River and all the smaller streams around Wakefield and Brightwater, resulting in many evacuations from nearby homes.

As the day rolled on, water levels in the Upper Motueka tributaries rose, further boosting the flow in the main river.

The Motupiko River was also badly affected but unbeknown to us, there was a huge beaver dam of logs 50 to 100 metres upstream of the bridge which had diverted all the water away from our flow recorder. This distorted our data, preventing us from understanding the full magnitude of flooding occurring in that area.

All the rivers and streams that we were monitoring peaked at different times throughout the day. In the Motueka Valley, the floodwater started moving down through Tapawera and Woodstock and into the lower reaches of the Motueka River with the highest levels somewhere between six and eight o’clock at night. It was after dark from memory though the size, speed and scale of the situation (much like rivers running) has created a bit of a blur.

> *In June 2025, we dealt with three in-river floods over three days. It was unprecedented. Each time we thought we were over the worst, another would come through in a different river catchment.*



Wai-iti stopbanks

The result was that the June flood flowed for about three days, but it built up over several days prior due to steady rain the week before this storm – the ground was already saturated.

In the Flood Room we would think, "Okay, we're out of the woods there." But at the same time, another river would be starting to reach its peak elsewhere, then that would drop, and then data from another rising river would come in.

The Upper Motueka catchments were impacted last of all, but we were unsure of the overall effects because of the damage that had already occurred, particularly in the Motupiko area.

We've certainly had long drawn-out floods like this previously, but not to such an extreme degree. In August 2022 we also had massive flooding over three days, but that was in a north-west weather pattern, and it was piling rain primarily into the Maitai catchment behind Nelson city.

In June 2025, we dealt with three in-river floods over three days. It was unprecedented. Each time we thought we were over the worst, another would come through in a different river catchment.

Here we go again

When the next major weather system appeared in MetService weather forecasts two weeks later, it became obvious that this could be a case of rinse-and-repeat.

It was still a low probability initially, but we saw a potential there for further major problems and unfortunately, that's what we got.

It wasn't identical to the first big flood – there were lower flows, particularly in the Motueka River – but the damage was far greater in the July flood because of the previous soaking. All our riverbanks and stopbanks were still absolutely saturated making them very vulnerable to erosion, and it was generally in this second flood that a lot of those riverbeds just blew out in size.

The July flood was much larger for the Tākaka River and while we weren't too worried about the Tākaka River or Tākaka township in the first one, it certainly got quite concerning second time around.

Our initial concerns were with the Moutere area and the Pitfure catchment, where many of the properties that were flooded previously unfortunately got flooded again. We knew it was serious, but it wasn't until water started approaching Tapawera Township that we began getting a picture of the true magnitude of this flood.

As the floodwaters started moving downstream, we realised we had further problems with our monitoring equipment at Woodstock.

Woodstock is the mid-Motueka catchment, it's where those upper streams all come together and is our first major river monitoring station. Once again, we had some problems with the flow recorder there. The data wasn't showing the flow as high as it should be compared to what we were seeing further downstream – it didn't gel with what we were fully expecting and that was concerning.

I grew up on the Motueka River just downstream of Woodstock. I could visualise what the effects were through late Friday afternoon, going into the evening. It was a reality check – I thought, "Crikey, this is not very good at all." We had to scramble to notify residents at places such as Peach Island which gets flooded regularly because of its very low-lying nature and did again in this event. Fortunately, we were able to give them the information they needed to get to higher ground.

Into the night Friday 11 July

It was at nightfall on Friday 11 July when we realised that Motueka township could be under threat of flooding. Never had we been in the situation where the water level was getting near the top of the stopbanks down by the state highway bridge, just above the sea – it was new ground for us. Literally. I'm not a river engineer and I don't know about stopbank design, but we all realised it wasn't a great situation to be in.

What we didn't know at the time was, that although we were receiving data from the automated river monitors, a couple of other sites were supplying inaccurate information. The likes of the Motupiko River showed that while the situation wasn't good, it didn't look severe. However it was actually a very bad flood, the same thing happening at Woodstock.



River monitoring equipment, Woodstock

We were concerned that the extremely high river flows were coinciding with high tide so prior to midnight when all the river flows were coming together, we advised Civil Defence/Emergency Management to begin planning to evacuate Motueka township.

Then around midnight, the flow values of the Wangapeka River and Baton River upstream of Woodstock, started showing signs of a slight reduction, and teams in the field downstream of Motueka River Bridge reported river levels were visibly dropping and the threat to Motueka was easing – but for a while there was a lot of tension and anxiety in the Flood Room.

The worst of it was over at that point – from the perspective of rising rivers, at least.

Flood monitoring equipment

Our automated monitoring equipment records every five minutes out in the field, and we typically get the data back into the office (via radio signal) every 15 minutes, so during events like these we are constantly watching and waiting.

You may remember that during these storms other electronic communications systems failed all around the District. The fibre optic network went out, cell phones got knocked out, but our relatively old analogue radio system held up well. We've deliberately maintained this system because the radio waves will bend over hills and get into far-flung valleys with no reliance on internet or anything else – the data just comes straight into our office. The system absolutely proved itself, especially in the second flood. We continued to see perfectly what was going on out there.



Motueka Valley

What we've learned from flood after flood around New Zealand is that you've got to have radio-based or satellite systems.

After the hardware equipment damage of the June flood, we made it a priority to get it repaired as soon as possible which was fortunate because the Woodstock recorder is a key site for us. We leaned heavily on our Rivers team to get out there to secure that recorder because it had a lot of erosion around the base of it. If we'd lost that, I don't what we would have done because this equipment provides real time data of river flows which is one of our first lines of defence when monitoring flood levels.

> *What we've learned from flood after flood around New Zealand is that you've got to have radio-based or satellite systems.*

How are floods forecast?

There are generally three different methods we use for forecasting flood risk. Firstly, we're pulling in forecasted rainfall data from MetService which is updating continuously. We feed that into our system and then we collect information from the 50 or so rain gauges right across the region – this includes both Nelson and Tasman because we share a flood forecasting service. We then run that data through our flood forecasting models. These models calculate rain levels falling in certain places and simulate what could happen. It also calculates water stored in the soil, and the time it takes to flow downstream.

The computer modelling is an important tool for us, but we're also looking at past events. As mentioned, the June storm was like 1983 but we didn't have too much recorded data from 1983 to work with. However, we did have other event records, one of the most notable was 1990 where we had a three-day flood in the Motueka catchment. This 1990 data – the volume of rain and the resulting river flows – told us we were facing something much larger than that.

The last feature of flood forecasting is human IP. The combined experience, intuition and knowledge that exists within our Hydrology team. Between the four of us, we have close to 100 years of experience. We're very, very lucky in this District to have that collective experience and combined knowledge base but it can be stressful and tiring, especially when you're on duty for an extended period and constantly evaluating and assessing information from numerous sources. The complexity takes a lot of mental capacity to keep on top of it.

On reflection

In a way, they were the kind of floods I've been training for all my life, but I didn't see them coming our way due to misdirection, both from weather forecasts and from some sites in the monitoring network which provided incorrect data. It was extremely frustrating and – deep down – I felt a bit of a sense of failure that I've never felt before.

The wind direction in June caught me out because the early forecasts had all said it was going to be north-west, when in fact it came from the north-east which presents a totally different scenario.

An additional problem was all the global weather forecasting models that we monitor were showing different things. MetService is the official provider to Civil Defence/Emergency Management, so we always follow them. But in hindsight, that crucial information missing at the time we were creating our flood models meant we didn't predict the flood in the Upper Motueka River in July to be as massive as it turned out to be.

We've done some real soul searching since then and over the next three years, we're putting in duplicate monitoring systems at some sites, thanks to funding from central government.

During those three years, we'll also look hard at the resilience of our flood monitoring network using the lessons we've learned from these events, because it's inevitable that we will face this again, and we want to be prepared.

Martin Doyle
Principal Hydrologist
Tasman District Council


JUNE 2025
weather event
Main river valley flooding
Tributary / surface flooding
Collingwood
Tākaka
Mārahau
Upper Tākaka
Kaiteretere
Riwaka
Motueka
Lower Moutere
Ngātimoti
Māpua
Upper Moutere
Dovedale
Appleby
Nelson
Stanley Brook
Richmond
Hope
Brightwater
Tapawera
Wakefield
Wai-iti
Kohatu
Belgrove
Motupiko
Wairau Valley
Glenhope
Kikiwa
60
6
63


JULY 2025
weather event
Main river valley flooding
Tributary / surface flooding
Debris flow / slips
Windthrow
Collingwood
Tākaka
Mārahau
Upper Tākaka
Kaiteretere
Riwaka
Motueka
Lower Moutere
Ngātimoti
Māpua
Upper Moutere
Dovedale
Appleby
Nelson
Stanley Brook
Richmond
Hope
Brightwater
Tapawera
Wakefield
Wai-iti
Kohatu
Belgrove
Motupiko
Wairau Valley
Glenhope
Kikiwa
60
6
63

Moving forward: What does our future look like?

People often don't understand the difference between response and recovery, or who is responsible for each phase.

- **Response** happens during and immediately after an emergency to keep people and property safe.
- **Recovery** is about managing the consequences of the emergency and helping communities move forward over time.



Dovedale Road

Response aims to save lives and reduce immediate harm. Recovery aims to help people, places, and communities recover, adapt, and thrive in the months and years that follow. This can include rebuilding homes and infrastructure, supporting businesses and community groups, and restoring social, economic, cultural, and environmental wellbeing. While response is often measured in days or weeks, recovery can take months or years and begins before the response phase has fully ended.

In Nelson Tasman, the response phase is coordinated by Nelson Tasman Emergency Management and is a multi-agency effort. You might see people from Fire and Emergency New Zealand, Police, Red Cross, utility providers, contractors and other organisations working in the community. They are all part of the response and are coordinated through emergency management arrangements.

When the immediate risk to life and property has reduced, the focus shifts to recovery. This phase is managed by the local council (or councils if an event affects the wider region). Unlike the fast-paced nature of response, recovery is strategic, complex, expensive and long-term. It involves helping communities make decisions about rebuilding, restoring services, supporting wellbeing, and planning for the future.

Student Volunteer Army



To help the District prepare for future emergencies, Tasman District Council has invested in a dedicated pre-event recovery planning role. The role works with communities, iwi, businesses, partner agencies, and council teams before an emergency occurs to understand recovery challenges, identify opportunities, and develop plans that will help recovery happen more effectively when it is needed. The goal is to ensure the District is better prepared to recover from future events.

Stories from the community

Sunflowers, prayers and a yellow toilet

We live in the Upper Stanley Brook, right at the end of the valley, about five kilometres from the main road – we're one of four households up here.

At the time of the first flood, my partner Andrew and I had just demolished our little "he-shed" which was a little bach in the middle of a paddock.

I moved up here about eight years ago and about two years after that we built a little "she-shed" over on the banks of the creek, under some beautiful big mature beech trees. It was just one room with a big deck on the front of it. It was where I'd go and do my meditation and run a spiritual group once a month. It had such good vibes, there was a nice feel about it.

So, we demolished our bach in November 2024 and launched a project to build a new house. Firstly, we had to subdivide a bit off the farm where our new house was going to be built.

When we stripped out the bach, we took anything that we could and turned the deck of the she-shed into a kitchenette, reusing a gas stove, fridge and kitchen sink. Then the rest of that bach went down the paddock to become workers' accommodation.

We decided that we were going to live in my she-shed on the edges of Stanley Brook Creek, which was normally dry in the summer, while the build was happening.

When the first flood came, we were settled in. We'd built a little shower block on the side and finally got permission to start building the new house. We had a carport with a toilet, the washing machine was plumbed in, and the builders had started on the house.

In the days before the June flood, it just rained and rained, but the builders kept going. I'm a gardener, and if it rains I can't work, so I was at home watching the rain gauge, watching the water come up and watching our usually dry little creek turn into a torrent. It continued to rise; the water was coming closer and closer – when our footbridge went under water, I realised it was a serious situation.

At that stage we had the foundations down for the new house and through the rain the builders were starting to put the roof on. All the framing was up and they were on a mission working in the pouring rain to get it all done.

As night fell, we watched the water level continue to come up. I said to Andrew a couple of times, "That water's getting very close". It was just a brown blur, flowing down the creek. Three cabbage trees out the front became a gauge to how deep the water was getting. I lifted some things up off the floor, onto the bed and made sure I knew where the cat was and that everything was safe.

We had our dinner and regularly shone the torch out the window – the rain continued and water levels showed no sign of dropping. At about half past eight we checked again, shining the torch into the carport where all the builders' stuff was stored – it was starting to go under water.

That prompted a mad panic to first get the cars out. The water was coming up faster. We picked up all the builders' stuff and moved it onto the house pad which is up a bit higher – fortunately the roof was on by now, so it was dry where we were putting things.

By this time the water was knee deep outside – it became a blur how fast it came up. We waded back to the she-shed and got the things that I had put on the bed, grabbed the dog and his bed, and rang a friend, Robert, who lives on higher ground up by the shearing sheds. I told him we're coming to stay, he said we were welcome to bunk down on a mattress on the floor.

But Andrew decided he didn't want to leave. He wanted to stay and watch to see if the water was going to go anywhere further. By this stage it had reached the toilet of the carport.

Andrew finally relented and we drove through the floodwaters in the dark up to Robert's place where he had the fire going. In the meantime, another neighbour checked in with us and offered a room in her B&B, but we had the muddy dog with us so declined her kind offer and crashed on Robert's floor.

During the night the two men went back to check on things and returned with news that the she-shed was likely to go under water. It was then that I sort of said a wee prayer and asked that it be spared or we wouldn't have anywhere to live.

The message I got back, either through heart or hearing was, "Don't worry, the trees will save it!"

The next morning, the rain had eased significantly, and floodwaters were dropping. I cooked up a big breakfast with food we'd grabbed out of the fridge as we left and after a good feed of bacon and eggs, set off to survey the situation.

We found that the water had got to about a metre deep in the toilet in the carport. The washing machine was up on its side and debris had come right up.

The shower block was still standing and a large storage container behind the she-shed had been shunted into the back of it but fortunately didn't cause any damage. There were piles of branches everywhere, and somehow two big beech trees behind the she-shed had snapped off and where they fell, they diverted the raging waters away – the she-shed was saved!

It was time to cleanup. I knew we had builders coming back so we had to push on and get things cleared.

Our lovely neighbours Nicola and Lucas came and dug out the toilet for us. We were all very busy. Andrew has a digger, so we were very lucky. We just put all the silt along with logs and whatever we could into a big pile, then brought a truck in and scooped it all up.

But just a fortnight later there was a repeat performance – we were hit with another deluge.

It had rained virtually non-stop, between the first flood and the second – just one grey day after another. The toilet in the carport is a flush loo, and when we first moved in, I painted it bright yellow, so during those bleak days it became a bit of a refuge for me. We have a pot belly fire in the hut so we were lovely and warm, but it was the lack of sunshine that really got to me and the bright yellow loo was a bit of a "pick me up."

That toilet room and my feel-good fire helped get me through so I promised myself that I would, as a gardener, grow lots of sunflowers in the future, which I have done.



"We have a pot belly fire in the hut so we were lovely and warm, but it was the lack of sunshine that really got to me and the bright yellow loo was a bit of a "pick me up."

At the start of the second storm. Andrew leapt on the digger, got in the creek and formed a bit of a stopbank, thinking that would be good enough to divert floodwater away. It was successful, the only thing in the she-shed that was affected was the back wall, which got a bit wet.

I couldn't believe that it was all happening again and this time the floods came with very high winds. I thought, right, I'm going to be prepared. I started putting stuff in the car quite early. Andrew was over battering the walls in the house. It was his way of dealing with it, I guess. He just wanted to keep building our house.



I left it until I could see that the water was starting to flow rapidly and I had both cars full of stuff ready to go to Robert's once again. I went over to the house where Andrew was working and told him that the water was coming over the stopbank he'd created. Luckily it wasn't coming near the she-shed, but it had cut through the hedge and was now over my vegetable garden, heading out into the paddock.

He looked at me and said I was over exaggerating, but I convinced him to check it out himself. At that point, he came out and just went, "Holy shit, it's happening again."

In all the years he's lived there, it's never flooded – not once. He got a shock that it had come through again. We didn't have to shift anything out of the carport because it was all in the garage, but the wind continued to increase.

Two big beech trees further up the creek that usually provided a beautiful canopy were being thrashed around threatening to fall. I was very worried, the ground was soddened, and there was nothing to hold them. If we didn't get out then we could have been trapped, especially if other trees along the driveway came down.

I said to Andrew that we could get stranded, but he said no, we'll be alright. However, I put the dog in the car and we took off, dodging big fallen branches as we went. I rang Robert and said, "Here we come again", and by the time we arrived he had the fire going and we just bunked down on the floor in his lounge.

The blokes went back three times to check on the new house. The water rose up to the garage door, so they put a board across it then piled up gravel because we didn't have sandbags.

> *In hindsight having two floods so close together was almost impossible to comprehend. How could this be happening to us again? At one stage there was just anger and frustration, surely it can't be happening again, but in reality, it was.*

The next morning, we couldn't drive in because two big trees had come down on the driveway. So, Robert got his chainsaw out and Andrew grabbed the digger and cleared a path through.

We were able to get in and found that, this time, the damage and debris around the she-shed were not as bad, but we still had to dig out the carport and the toilet. We had to basically start all over again, but we were very grateful that we didn't have a lot of wet stuff this time. The water did go through our container, which we had a lot of stuff stored in, but our furniture and bed were dry ... and miraculously the she-shed stayed dry a second time, so we were very, very lucky and blessed with that.

The she-shed wasn't insured because it's just a little two room space so if anything happened to that we would have been in the poop. Luckily the shower block, which is just an old builder's hut on piles, stayed intact too.

I went up to the door and tentatively, opened the ranch slider. I put my head in and looked around, then reached in and switched the light on and because we're on solar power, everything worked. I went over to the gas stove, turned it on, looked at the gas bottles, they were all still connected, despite having debris all over them. Then once again I proceeded to cook a hearty breakfast – it was kind of like, by the second time round everyone knew what they were doing.

After the first flood the builders had to wade through the mud to get on site, but another lovely thing happened this second time round. The Wakefield Quarry, who Robert works for, gifted us a truck load of gravel, which was fantastic. Having the yard cleaned up and clean gravel down meant mud wasn't being traipsed everywhere. The gift of gravel to us just made such a difference – we were so grateful.

We had to put a big effort in for the clean-up and Andrew had to come off the house building project to focus on other jobs.

On one part of the farm, a huge crevasse had opened, big enough that Andrew could put the truck that he uses to carry the digger right into it – and that big gap is still there today.

Mother Nature really just let rip and for months after, trees were still coming down all round the valley. I work at Stonefly Lodge, and I'd say for a while there, trees were falling every day. I was okay to get chainsaws out again.

On the positive side I can see the regeneration happening, we've planted over 700 natives in that block.

... And as far as the house goes, we moved in at Labour Weekend – that was a happy, happy ending to a dramatic few months.

I can now sleep at night, but after the second flood it was stressful every time it rained – a post-traumatic stress thing. I'm from Karamea on the West Coast so naturally I'm used to the rain and raging rivers, but these storms really rattled me!

In hindsight having two floods so close together was almost impossible to comprehend. How could this be happening to us again? At one stage there was just anger and frustration, surely it can't be happening again, but in reality, it was.

We got off relatively lightly compared to the people down the Motueka Valley, and the likes of Mārahau and Motupiko. We were very grateful for that.

I've always had a spiritual nature and know that Mother Nature will always be there, and I understand we must look after her but at the same the whole episode has taken its toll mentally and physically.

At the end of October, I'd been to town for a lovely lunch with my sister because it was my birthday. As I arrived home I saw a ute coming up the driveway and thought this looks a bit official. Two men got out – I recognised one as Evan Baigent, then saw the other bloke was Richard Kempthorne from the Rural Support Trust, and they said we've got a basket of goodies for you.

I told them they may have got it wrong, and they should take it to the lady further up the road from us, she was worse off. But they said no, it's for you. It was a beautiful basket of goodies – I really appreciated it and being on my birthday made it even more special.

The whole episode hasn't put us off living here. It's our little piece of paradise. The people living around us are also extremely important. We had a bit of a debrief over a couple of wines where we all just talked and shared. That really helped, especially with other people who've gone through it and can understand what you're feeling.

In the long run that's what neighbours are for, and that's what farmers do – it's a true community.

Pauline Bliss
Stanley Brook resident



The following pages share the memories of Tasman residents who, through a series of questions and answers, reflect on their personal experiences of the weather events of winter 2025.

How were you and your community affected by the floods?



McGazzaland, Wakefield

Nara: The floods significantly impacted Tapawera, a small rural community. Homes and businesses were inundated with water, causing damage to property and infrastructure. Roads became impassable, isolating residents and complicating relief efforts. The local economy, heavily reliant on agriculture, suffered as fields were submerged, leading to crop loss and financial strain for farmers. Despite these challenges, the community came together, showing resilience and solidarity, as neighbours supported one another in cleanup and recovery efforts.

Pearl: We own a home up Tadmor Valley. At the time my partner and I were still working and living in Australia. We had owned our home less than a month before the floods broke the bank and tore through the property, taking all the fencing and any greenery with it. We were lucky enough to have an extremely supportive family that told us to stay across the ditch and work as long as we could, because we were going to need the money. The floods out Tadmor destroyed countless farmland, forestry and roads. Safe to say we were the lucky ones. The river met the front door on the second flood but didn't manage to barge on in. The small but mighty community of Tapawera and Tadmor pulled together and did some amazing things for the area.

Di: All of a sudden this massive tree appeared. I thought it was going to hit and swing across the river and completely block it, but it didn't. It just hit the tree and jammed up against it... There was just all this stuff. It was really terrifying.

Jenny W: We have a permanent site [at Bethany Park], and our site was one of the lowest. Brian and I would have been one of the hardest hit. It was really terrible for us because Brian's on oxygen 24/7 and I rang palliative care in the afternoon, because it looked like it was going to come up, and they virtually laughed at me, and said, 'We'll get you out'. There's no way they could have, because I just got off the phone from them, and within 20 minutes it was all over. The floods just come in so quick. The forestry up above comes through and broke the dam coming down. They evacuated us that night because we couldn't get out of our caravan.

Jenny: My property was cut in half as the culvert was destroyed.

Carolthe: The water came up and around my house and completely lifted out an entire section of 1.8 metres high wooden boundary fence like it was paper. It moved my sleepout off its foundations and it was just so unusual and completely unexpected. Our neighbours at Quinney's Bush lost so much stuff and a very much-loved car was written off. My rabbits died after the flood, due to it. Just as I said, it was so unusual and unexpected we didn't even think to move anything more than we had. The worst part I think was the fact it was just starting to drop then within minutes it came up three feet. Panic clearly hit – first the confusion and then the sudden need for me to run through waist deep water to save all my animals. People don't understand that it wasn't just sad and scary but it's the not knowing what to do next... helplessness... that is imprinted.

Cornelia: My partner and I, and our neighbour, were cut off by six slips on our road. My neighbour lost about a quarter of her land, plus a lot of fencing and other infrastructure.

Brett: Our farm has been devastated by the floods which blew out our stopbank, so without it the property had no protection. We have lost sheds, land, trees, a tractor, a dinghy and countless other paraphernalia. Our once productive land which produced grain, baleage and lucerne is now, without the reinstatement of the stopbank, mostly worthless. I've got photos here of 40 years ago, and the riverbed has shrunk in width – not in length – 146 metres. So 146 metres in width of riverbed has been lost due to a build-up of accretion. That water used to be able to get away, but it now can't.

Anonymous: Loss of access due to trees fallen over the roads.



Kerryn: As I live in the Motueka Valley I witnessed firsthand the devastation of the floods from my property. I watched the valley fill with water as the river flowed over its banks. I heard the roar of the debris-filled water long into the dark night. I helped neighbours and community members shovel silt out of their homes while staring in disbelief at the forecast for the next approaching storm. I held people's hands as they cried while sorting through their collection of books and the weight of the reality came crashing down. I dropped off food, water, snacks, gift cards, blankets, and hugs wherever I could.

Karolyne: My entire property except my house was underwater for both floods. We were still cleaning up six months later.

Tracey: My 65-acre farm was hit hard by the floodwaters from both events, topped off by two massive blowouts from forestry, spilling slash, debris, silt and Separation Point granite over 60% of the farm, some 1.5 metres deep. We lost over five kilometres of fencing, cattle yards (twice), sheds, roadways, horse yards, tack shed. Culverts and ditches filled with debris, silt and sand. Road fences were destroyed, including post and rail. The farm became a lake. We also lost around 60 baleage and 400 conventional bales of hay. We have lost a 1.5 kilometre strip of land along the river side, in some places 20 metres wide. We lost the native planting which had mature trees and various other mature natives.

John: Slips; extensive fences were lost along the riverbank. A considerable amount of land was lost to river overflowing banks and eating into the property.

Debbie and Bruce: It was a big shock that the second flood came straight through our property. It was knee deep and on other sections of our property, way above your knee. We even had a waterfall flowing through – could've floated the boat out the drive and on to the main highway.

Sue: I was unaware of how the community was faring as my road was blocked by six slips. The power lines were in the river, the landline cable was broken and the cell reception poor. Large blocks of land had disappeared from my river frontage and the rest of the paddocks were strewn with debris and downed fences.

Jamie: There was a fair bit of creek damage, blocking roads and keeping people in the valley. I lost electricity, so some screen detox happened. Being a bit of a shut-in, this was pretty hard on me personally.



Motueka River West Bank Road

> *It was heartbreaking to talk to people who'd had floodwaters go through their homes... People wading through knee-deep floodwaters in the dark, being rescued by tractors, terrified if their pets or stock were going to survive.*

Della: My property was unaffected by the floods, however my Tapawera community and many of my neighbours were devastated. Nearly every property directly adjoining the Motueka River, Motupiko River, Tadmor River, Stanley Brook or any of the smaller tributaries were adversely affected. Some side valleys were cut off for many days, sometimes weeks, from washed out bridges and slips.

I was more affected by a change in role from Community Connector to Flood Relief Coordinator for the Tapawera Community. It was heartbreaking to talk to people who'd had floodwaters go through their homes and property and who were facing a devastating cleanup. People wading through knee-deep floodwaters in the dark, being rescued by tractors, terrified if their pets or stock were going to survive. Many local farmers faced the destruction with a brave face, getting stuck in to start the major cleanup of their paddocks and fences. After the second event people became more exhausted and less resilient. The adrenaline had worn off, and their hard work had been washed away. You could hear the stress in their voices and see the exhaustion in their faces.

Marth: Bridge was gone, our only exit to town and work. No internet, no TV; the phone was working but I had to be careful because I could not top up. Hillside came down, stuck for four days on the property. Luckily we had enough food, fluids and animal food. Transistor radio not useful with a lot of advertisements and hardly any news that was relevant to us. And had to be careful because of the batteries.

Janine: Tapawera and Tadmor Valley were affected differently in each flood event. We saw water where it hadn't been for a very long time, surprising even 'old-timers' in the valleys. People who always thought they were 'resilient' suddenly realised they weren't! Tapawera was cut off in every direction for many days, as were several other valleys, with no easy way in or out.

Personally, our home was surrounded by floodwater both times, and my beloved art studio, and hubby's workshop/office were inundated, threatening many items of sentimental and financial value. The second flood peaked higher, in the middle of the night. It was really frightening as we were unable to go anywhere, and we couldn't see it, but it sounded like a raging, angry ocean engulfing our home. We were (thankfully) centimetres from it coming through the floor and taking out everything, including what we'd tried to salvage from the first event.

Then came the unfamiliar stresses of trying to get insurance claims sorted and the long delay in getting my 'happy place', and his workshop reinstated. Five months on and we might be back in by Christmas. Two separate flood events meant two expensive insurance excesses, adding to financial stress, but the silver lining was the insurance company agreed many months in, that it was only fair to pay one excess. All of this, on top of being part of our small community Civil Defence team sure took its toll emotionally, mentally and physically. Even months later I felt I could sleep for days and that I wasn't quite firing on all cylinders.

Richard: I'm the team leader for Tasman Village Emergency Management. Several of the (volunteer) team helped to man the Motueka Recreation Emergency Management Centre from 27 June onwards to give the Motueka team a break.

Tasman Village and surrounds was hit by a 25-hour power outage due to fallen trees during the July storm. Numerous trees came down and several roads were blocked temporarily.

Sandra, Laura, Rupert and Poppy: We lost all our fences over the road. We lost 175 bales of hay that were stacked in our stable. We watched on as the water got so high and dozens of bales of baleage came crashing through our property along with structures and objects that took out our fences and horse houses. At first it was stuck in the fences but the wires made a horrible screaming sound as the pressure built up and the fences gave way. We counted dozens of bales of baleage.

The water could not escape so it built up so fast it flooded our safe areas. In a matter of five minutes, our horses' safe area started flooding. It was up to their knees then while we were putting halters on them it went up to their bodies. They were put in our driveway while we rushed to save our alpacas – it only took a few minutes for the water to get up to their necks. We got them onto our driveway too and created makeshift pens to keep them safe. We were all shaking from cold and shock. We quickly got them some hard food and hay to warm them up.

We had no idea how the community around us were affected as we were completely blocked off with water. Rupert went back trying to save hay. He managed to save six bales but we stopped him going back as hay can be replaced and it was too dangerous. This was the first flood – if someone had said you will get another worse flood in a fortnight we would have never believed them. Laura and I have lived here for nearly 49 years. Over the years we have seen many floods but Cyclone Gita bringing hundreds of tonnes of trees and sand onto our place was the worst, then two years later another huge event. Some of the fences were only up a year or so ago and now they're all gone. It's the same for many up and down the river.

The night of the second flood we stood at our gateway hearing the sirens going on and on. All we could do was pray that everyone was safe, its a spine-chilling moment, many tears flowed. Even all these months later the tears still flow, some days it's just too much, you feel like it's one step forward and two steps backwards.

> "If someone had said you will get another worse flood in a fortnight we would have never believed them."



> All of the flat area in the campground was completely covered in mud and debris.

Bethany Park, Kaiteretere

Di: I was living in my caravan at Bethany Park campground at the time of the floods with my 17-year-old-daughter. On that Friday I went to work. I knew about the expected rain. We had been living in the caravan for four years before this storm and had lived though many storms before, so I felt that I didn't really have a lot to worry about.

Nobody expected a log jam to occur in the hills behind Bethany Park that created a flash flood and sent mud, debris and a lot of water through the campground. In the area that we were parked, behind the chalets, the water was waist deep. My daughter had to abandon the caravan for higher ground. Two others in the campground lost their caravans and vehicles during the floods. One elderly couple had to be carried from their caravan. The water force was strong enough to knock one chalet off its piles and send another floating towards the office across the volleyball green.

About 3.45 pm my daughter rang me and told me the camp was flooded. Most of the roads to Kaiteretere were closed due to flooding and slips so I had to stay somewhere in Motueka. I'd heard about the Civil Defence assistance at the Motueka Recreation Centre so I went there.

> *The water force was strong enough to knock one chalet off its piles and send another floating towards the office across the volleyball green.*

The power had gone out but I continued with my job as a support worker. I was unable to shower elderly people, but I checked that they were OK, had a source of light, and reassured them. Having a 4x4 ute meant I could still access people through the flooded streets. When I returned to camp after spending the night in Motueka, I found a scene of complete devastation. All the flat area in the campground was completely covered in mud and debris.

Many people were finding it hard to get through the mud, and people were falling over after becoming stuck in the mud. In many places it was up to your knees. Only bigger tractors could get through. I had to leave my ute in the car park and try to get through on foot. It took me half an hour to reach the caravan, a normal trip from the car park is only a few minutes.

I found my daughter in 'Parkhouse', one of the houses in Bethany Park that is used for holiday accommodation. Others in the camp had provided her with meals and blankets. I then made the difficult journey to get through to the caravan. The mud was more than knee deep in places, my boots weren't long enough.

The awning that had withstood many storms over the years had collapsed and was partly buried in mud. The pallets had been overturned leaving the contents a mess, and some things had been completely covered in mud. The caravan had been knocked off its blocks and shunted off its site. The mud and mess in the awning made it very difficult to access the caravan itself.

Once inside the caravan, I found that several inches of mud and water had gone through the interior. Anything on the floor was gone. Fortunately many of my personal belongings were in plastic containers and some things were high up out of danger. My daughter had the front end of the caravan. She did store things under the bed. Many books and other things of hers were destroyed. Things on top of the bed were OK, as well as her clothes.

After my visit I took my daughter and went up to a mate's place for the night. The next day we started the cleanup. My son and mate began to remove everything from the caravan and awning. It was carried up to Parkhouse to be sorted and cleaned. It took two days to clear it all out.

Around the campground, everyone was doing the same – washing things and digging themselves out. Bethany Park had the use of a few two-tonne diggers that were busy trying to clear the roads around the park. My son continued to help for a week. My mate had to return to work on Tuesday.

My daughter and I stayed in Parkhouse for two weeks, and after that we were given temporary accommodation support in a motel for another two weeks. The caravan was written off by the insurance company and I was paid out.

Now I'm currently house-sitting. My daughter is living with her godfathers up north. I am also looking for a new caravan.



Taskforce Kiwi

During the floods, and in the days that followed, what did you find helpful? What were you thankful for?

Nara: I found the support of the local community to be incredibly helpful. Neighbours came together to assist each other, sharing resources and offering shelter to those in need. I was immensely thankful for the tireless efforts of emergency responders, who worked around the clock to ensure everyone's safety. The overwhelming generosity in terms of funding and donations was a beacon of hope during this challenging time. These contributions greatly eased the pressure on families and local organisations, allowing for quicker recovery and providing essential supplies to those affected. The sense of unity and compassion demonstrated by people from all walks of life was truly heartwarming and reaffirmed my faith in humanity.

Anonymous: I had a very capable person come and stay a few hours. Emotional relief.

Ollie: The community coming together to help each other. Funds for help. Guidance from Katie, a Flood Recovery Navigator from Tasman District Council. Also public meetings organised by the local community council. Tasman District seemed quick to fix infrastructure which was great.

Pearl: We were thankful for family, neighbours, the Student Volunteer Army, Rapid Relief Team and many more volunteers. They all helped turn a mucky, debris-ridden mess into something that made coming home feel less stressful.

Jenny W: We were evacuated to my nephew's place as I have a very sick husband who is on oxygen 24/7, so none of this has been easy on me as I have to do everything.

Carolthe: My neighbours because they are just so pleasant to talk to. They brought me down to a manageable level of crazy.

Cornelia: Checking in with each other. We had mobile internet so could find out what was happening, even though we had no power.

Veronique Ann: Friends, neighbours, and AA Insurance.

Brett and Debra: Enhanced Taskforce Green were absolutely brilliant, OneFortyOne (the forestry company) were also very helpful. Friends checking to see if we were OK, Civil Defence dropping off supplies and checking we were OK, and last but not least the Tasman District Council Navigators keeping in touch. We are truly thankful to all of the above.

Anonymous: Community effort to work together to clear the fallen trees and reopen the road, rather than waiting for the (very over-stretched) contractors to come and open the road.

Kerryn: I was thankful that my home was not impacted and that I was in a position to be able to help others. I found the community spirit to be remarkable as so many came together to help out those in need.

Karolyne: I was thankful for all the offers of help. I am a Facebook user and found lots and lots of offers of help on there. I also was so thankful for the Mayoral Relief Fund, we were fortunate to receive some money to help repair the damage to our lifestyle block.

Jenny: Enhanced Taskforce Green and the Student Volunteer Army.

Tracey: I was grateful we didn't lose any stock and even though a bit battered, we still had our sense of humour. We are ever thankful for friends and family that came to help us after both flood events, which gave us hope and a great starting point to move forward.



Motueka River West Bank Road

Della: During the floods our local Civil Defence volunteers came together to offer support to the community. This involved reaching out to make sure residents in the township and surrounding valleys were OK and providing reassurance and a place to connect. Two days after the first flood the community centre put on free hot soup and scones, and our local kai cart supplied free fry bread.

Throughout the two flood events I realised that there were many isolated members in our community, living simply and privately, tucked away unnoticed by most. I am thankful that because of the floods these residents became more connected and supported far more than before. Knowing about these residents has meant we have been able to connect with them and grow stronger as a community.

Marth: I am thankful that our neighbour had the good sense of asking for help for all of us here in Stanley Brook.

> *Being with and supported by other locals who banded together to help each other out willingly, even when they too were being impacted. The camaraderie went beyond the initial event and the learnings from each event helped form better preparations for future events.*

Janine: Being with and supported by other locals who banded together to help each other out willingly, even when they too were being impacted. The camaraderie went beyond the initial event and the learnings from each event helped form better preparations for future events when we are isolated from the wider region. I was really thankful to see the Rapid Relief Team finding their way in, seemingly miraculously, on day three to bring some basic but well-received food boxes for those affected, as well as encouragement that we were indeed in people's thoughts. Then six days later the Tasman District Council Navigators arrived to meet the community and offer help and support for those most affected after the first event. I later realised that while I was connecting others with these agencies, I hadn't thought of our needs and to register ourselves. I think the adrenaline was still running high at that point.

Debbie and Bruce: Extremely thankful for the Wakefield Big Bake Up, their help and actions were so appreciated, and of course Katie, a Flood Navigator from Tasman District Council – you guys were so supportive, and helped put a plan in place.

John: Getting a small relief from insurance. Assistance with fencing products given by the Rapid Relief Team relieved a lot of stress. The contribution from the Mayoral Relief Fund helped with the relief of wondering how we were going to afford repairs.

Jamie: Spending time with family – board games, candlelight stories.

Sue: The determination of my family to get food and a generator to me. The kindness of my neighbours who put me up for the night after I evacuated. The people of the community who were advocating for me, unbeknown to me at the time.

Di: I'm thankful to other people who lived at Bethany Park for taking care of my daughter when I couldn't return on the Friday night, and to Bethany Park management for the use of the house. My son and mate that dug me out. Tasman accommodation support. The motel owner. My mate's neighbour for a hot bath and change of clothes. Civil Defence that found me a place to sleep on the Friday night.

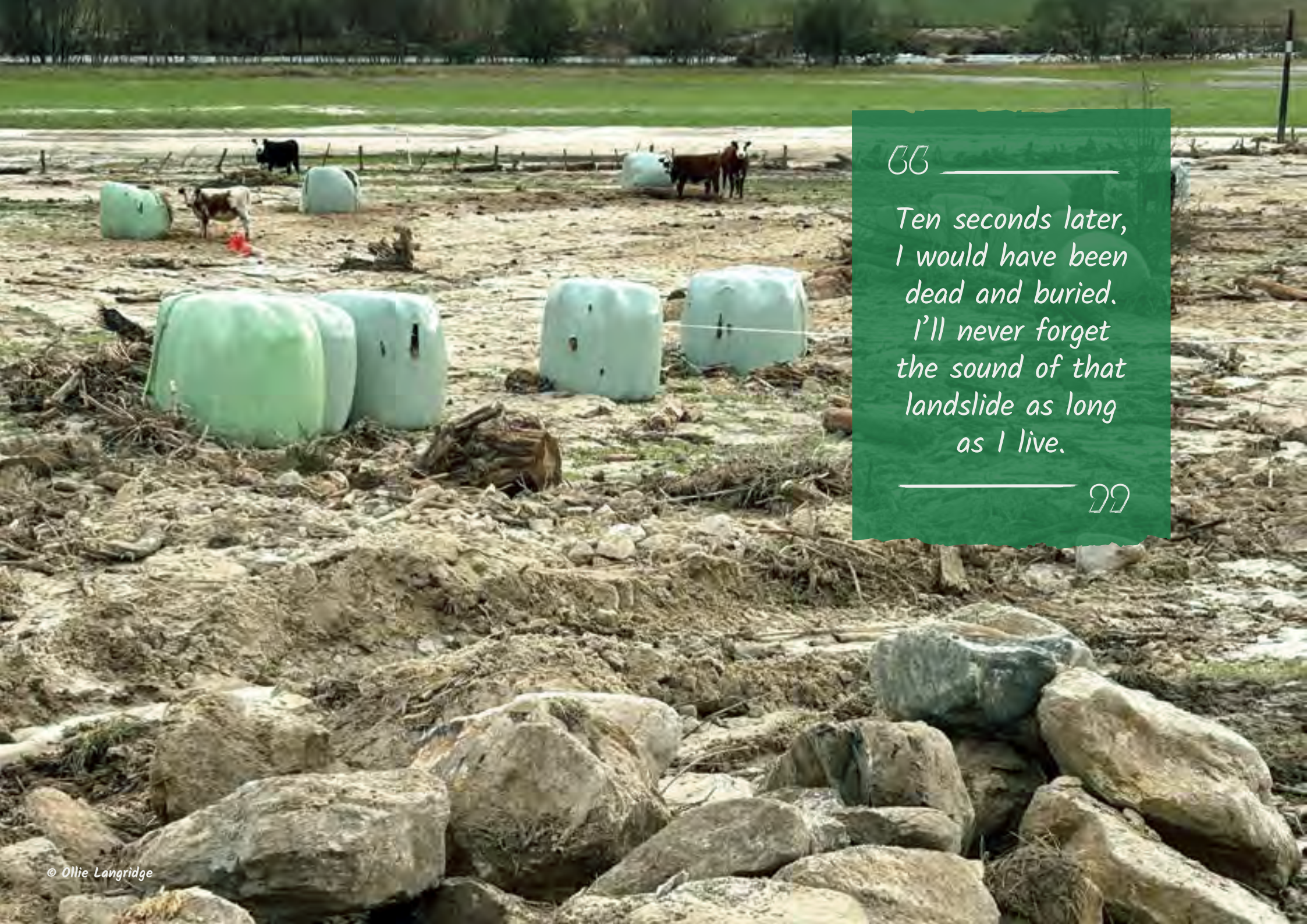
Richard: The emergency management training I'd undergone. Regular updates from Tasman District Council. I'm thankful for volunteer and community responses.

Sandra, Laura, Rupert and Poppy:
We found many kind people, meals cooked by many including a lovely lady in her 90s. We were grateful our animals were safe, thankful to our wonderful neighbours Steph and Mark for helping Rupert remove the wet hay out of the stable as it had heated up to such an extent that it would have burst into flames. It was so heavy all Laura and I could do was hold torches so they could see in the darkness. We will never forget the smell, some of the hay was smoking so we were very lucky. Grateful to our other wonderful neighbour Lynn for using her headlights to let us see in the darkness to try and save a few bales of the replacement hay after the second flood.



> *Community effort to work together to clear the fallen trees and reopen the road...*

Community pulling together



> “Ten seconds later, I would have been dead and buried. I’ll never forget the sound of that landslide as long as I live.”

© Ollie Langridge

Landslips and memory blips

In the middle of the heaviest burst of rain, I ventured out onto the land and saw the destruction happening in real time. I felt compelled to be there and experience nature in its full force. Entire cuttings were sliding off the hillside and slumping down onto the driveway. The watercourses had long since been overwhelmed.

Down on the valley floor, the river was making the sound of a freight train – a loud rushing torrent flowing down a single channel that had already burst its banks, spewing silt all over the paddocks. I could see apple crates, trees, drowned sheep and bales of hay in plastic wrapping in the muddy brown churning water, now flowing faster than I have ever seen it. It looked like the entire lower catchment was flooding and rising fast.

On my land, the dam was overflowing and the water was ripping through my native tree plantings below it. As I went around the side of the dam I stepped into what I thought was a thin trickle of muddy clay. Suddenly I sunk in up to my thigh and fell heavily to the ground.

I hauled myself out on all fours and got covered in mud, but made it over to the other side without my boots. At that moment there was an audible groan and the entire hillside where I had just been stuck, collapsed. Ten seconds later, I would have been dead and buried. I'll never forget the sound of that landslide as long as I live.

Further up, a drain had blocked and the driveway had sheared off the hillside, taking some of the road with it, along with hundreds of tons of dirt and trees. My socks were filthy rags and my feet, which I couldn't feel until that evening, full of gorse.

I hadn't realised at the time, but I was in a state of delayed shock. Two days later I was working at my laptop and all the colours on the screen started to go weird. I thought I needed a new computer and cursed my luck. Then I looked outside and I saw the exact same thing was happening to the trees – this wasn't a computer problem, it was me. Then I realised I didn't know why I was sitting at my laptop, or what I was meant to be doing.

It was time to pick up the kids from school so I pulled myself together and drove up the valley where the carnage was shocking, I saw areas utterly destroyed, plastic netting snarled up everywhere and a bright red kayak flattened, then wrapped around a tree, by the force of the water.

> *"I couldn't remember the names of any of the parents, or my friends, or their children. I was completely lost."*

When I got to the school I realised that I couldn't remember the names of any of the parents, or my friends, or their children. I was completely lost. A teacher came up to me and I described what was happening. She told me to call the doctor immediately. The doctor thought I'd had a stroke and advised me to get to Nelson A&E immediately to get a brain scan. So I did.

Electrical nodes were placed around my chest and I was ferried along a polished steel conveyor belt into a big silver machine that looked like something out of a sci-fi movie. The results came back negative, it was labelled as 'transient global amnesia' which is a temporary state caused by extreme stress, luckily nothing to do with a stroke.

The next day, I came back and turning into my driveway, amongst the smashed apple crates and slash, I saw a neighbour cutting a dead cow out of a tree in the middle of the paddock with a chainsaw.

The driveway is still massively damaged and will take a large amount of money, which I don't have, to fix. The insurance company didn't want to know anything about it as it was more than 60 metres from the house, therefore not covered by my policy. I can still get to the house by car, but no water tanker or fire truck could make it through in its current state, as it's so unsafe. The house is one more storm away from becoming a stranded asset.

Let's see what the future holds. In all honesty part of me doesn't care, I'm just glad to be alive, with a new appreciation for every day, for which I'm just so grateful.

Ollie Langridge
Motueka Valley resident



Motueka Valley

What examples did you see of people helping each other? What is helping your community get through?

Nara: The Tapawera Connect Flood Relief Team, along with dedicated volunteers, has been instrumental in helping our community recover from recent flooding. These individuals have worked tirelessly to provide essential supplies, offer emotional support, and assist in the rebuilding process.

Ollie: Many examples from emergency shelter through to food donation through to advisory help in public forums, as well as the obvious work on the ground throughout the valley – there were excellent scenes of people being kind to each other and helping each other which are heart-warming stories.

Pearl: I was amazed to see how so many businesses offered free services, materials and general help. How retired fencers and builders stepped up to offer a hand. What is helping the community get through this? That's each other.

Jenny: My neighbours helped move stock.

Carolthe: I didn't really because I was here at my place and hardly saw anyone. My neighbours definitely helped as far as keeping in contact and sending the people with a food parcel to my place and getting my essentials because I had no car at the time.

Cornelia: Our neighbour came to stay with us when the river rose the first time. It was great to stay connected. We had dinner with her while the power was out, as she had a range to cook on. We borrowed her generator to charge phones and used her washing machine. It felt like we were in it together.

Jenny W: Several people at the camp did get in and help but my nephew rung the police and fire brigade and they got in through closed roads so he could get to us and dig us out as the water and silt was so deep I couldn't get out of the awning.

Veronique Ann: Locals helping neighbours when there was no support from authorities. Clearing roads, properties and sewerage systems.

Brett and Debra: We were isolated for some time as our access road was inaccessible but we knew the community were rallying around. We kept in touch with our neighbour to make sure she was OK, though we couldn't get through to her. The phone lines were out of commission, but fortunately we have Starlink and have since engaged Kiwi VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol).

Anonymous: Three or four different neighbours came and joined in with helping me to cut and clear trees.

Kerryn: I witnessed people showing up with shovels, brooms, and gloves to shovel out silt. I picked up parcels of food that were baked by members of the community and delivered to workers and those impacted alike. The powerhouse of the Motueka High School with the food drop off was awe inspiring. So many different organisations have come together to offer support for those affected – and continued to do so as the Christmas season approached.

Tracey: We all checked in on our neighbours and helped each other where we could. The best help was the hugs.

Karolyne: We were offered help from the Student Volunteer Army, and lots of locals in Brightwater and further afield. We accepted help from colleagues to clear the debris off our fences and to help move our cattle. Our neighbour had a large group of people come over one day to clear all the silt from their large driveway.

Marth: Apparently the community came together in Tapawera but because they could not get to us we saw only what was happening after we got our internet and TV back working.

Debbie and Bruce: We had help from some friends, the Student Volunteer Army group and a lot of support from Tasman District Council Navigator Katie.



Sunday Creek Road, Dovedale



Della: Initially we had a surge of local volunteers. People stepping up to help out others in the community with practical support of cleaning, providing food, taking in people whose homes had been flooded, feeding stranded livestock, clearing fences and roads. External organisations also stepped up – supplying food, fencing supplies, additional volunteer labour, significant funding support, Civil Defence support and navigational assistance for those requiring additional support such as insurance and counselling.

Despite all the practical help, some of the most important help provided was a simple phone call or visit. Just touching base with each other, asking if each other is okay and listening to each person's story. Knowing that no one is truly alone in this is the biggest help of all.

Janine: It sure brought some amazing, community-minded country people together – pulling together to fill gaps for immediate needs that couldn't be filled by external agencies like food, fuel, help to retrieve vehicles, caravans, pets and furniture from further flood damage, repairing driveways, fences and attempting to provide access for emergency services. Sharing what we had to help others, whether physically, mentally or emotionally.

John: As we were isolated temporarily, we did not see a lot, except one of our neighbours came with a large tractor and made an access for me to get to our stock that had been isolated when water levels resided.

Sue: After five weeks of being isolated by a blocked road, Tapawera Connect were overwhelming with their support when I thought most volunteer groups had moved on. The volunteers who came to help me clean debris off fences were nearly all local people who I had not met before, and worked like Trojans. The support from this local group continued with help for funding and moral support.

Jamie: The family came together more and got the barbecue going and the generator working after several days. I did see some folks collecting gravel for some repair project or other that I wasn't aware of.

Di: When something like this happens most people pull together and just start digging themselves and each other out. Lots of meals and gear got donated by those that can't directly help with cleaning up property which was great to see.

Despite all the practical help, some of the most important help provided was a simple phone call or visit. Just touching base with each other, asking if each other is okay and listening to each person's story. Knowing that no one is truly alone in this is the biggest help of all.

Richard: People checking on neighbours and mending damaged structures. Also clearing roads of fallen trees from dawn onwards so that everyone had a means of escape by road if needed.

Sandra, Laura, Rupert and Poppy: Kindness from strangers, people stopping and giving you a hug. Because so many were affected a lot of support arrived, we had so many kind people. A friend from Greece, Richard and Trish, Sarah from our doctors, Alena, Josh a dairy worker from away, Melissa and her husband, Mr Rowling, Pete and his wife, the lovely Plunkets, Dunstan Horse Feeds, Repost with lovely Greg and Dansy, River Haven for opening their doors, The Lions Club, Motueka Rotary, the Mayoral Relief Fund, The Smoking Barrel, The Beached Whale, Rapid Relief Team, plus Ray and Richard who helped get the posts to us. Also, the marvellous Lizzy Gray, her mum and team of kind helpers who provided many boxes of wonderful vegetable seedlings, compost and straw to support people who did not have the time or energy to think about vegetable gardens. In such a stressful time it felt like we were so supported.

What examples did you see of people helping each other? What is helping your community get through?

> I was amazed to see how so many businesses offered free services, materials and general help.



Example of windthrow forestry damage

What are your hopes and dreams for your community after the floods? What does recovery look like to you?



Pretty Bridge Valley Stream

Nara: In the aftermath of the floods, my hopes and dreams for our community revolve around resilience, unity, and sustainable recovery. I envision a community where homes are rebuilt stronger and infrastructure is designed to withstand future natural disasters. Recovery to me means not only restoring what was lost but also enhancing our preparedness for the future. This includes the establishment of more robust Civil Defence facilities and comprehensive training programmes to empower residents to respond effectively in emergencies. By fostering a culture of preparedness and resilience, we can transform our community into a safer and more supportive environment for everyone.



© Ollie Langridge

Ollie: All uninsurable land should be returned to native wetlands. I hope that destructive forestry practice is not allowed to continue on Separation Point granite which it is entirely unsuited to. I hope that no one is allowed to build homes on the flood plain.

I hope that whitebaiting is banned for at least a decade while endangered native fish stocks recover. I sincerely hope that all cows are fenced off from waterways so they don't continually defecate in the tributaries. All riparian margins should be heavily covered in natives.

I hope people understand that we need to change in order to live with the river and the increased flood risk due to climate change, sooner than constantly trying to enforce our will to dominate nature.

As the river at peak flood was just a few centimetres from the top of the stopbank at Woodman's Corner, I hope that the people of Motueka actually understand the level of risk they are exposed to, especially as they are only just above sea level.

All these are hopes and dreams for a more resilient community, and part of a broader understanding of what long-term recovery may look like.

Pearl: I hope that when an event this severe comes through again, we will all be as strong as we were during these past floods. Recovery looks like establishing our lands again, rebuilding the riverbanks and just being there for each other where we can.

> *After 25 years at my place it's hard to explain but it's everything you put into the place and knowing the years it took and now having to start over and it's just way harder.*

Carolthe: It was a weird kind of understanding amongst people close by that things just happened as they were able to be done. I was unaware of much really as I was stuck at home but my neighbours on both sides worked in with each other to repair the fencing. I was overlooked for the help offered. Civil Defence put my name down and so I just waited... but waited too long to say anything and they had finished.

After contacting Rural Support Trust and being referred to Evan Baigent he found someone to help me for a day. That was nice. I'm unable to do the major jobs on the boundary fences by myself and have just left them and the neighbours don't seem to mind.

Recovery is a hard one to answer because it's not just the land and buildings and animals etc, but the people. I spoke to a lady in Motueka and she was feeling like me... mentally drained... tired but can't sleep. After 25 years at my place it's hard to explain but it's everything you put into the place and knowing the years it took and now having to start over and it's just way harder.

Councillor Kerryn Ferneyhough from Brooklyn School with a small thank-you gift for some of the crew cleaning up in the Motueka Valley



Jenny: That we build a more resilient community as local and national government do not care or protect us.

Cornelia: That we have a better understanding of how to live by the river, and the river margins are more open for recreation and conservation, and not farmed right to the edge.

Brett and Debra: We've viewed substantial river works along the Motueka River with gravel extraction, remediation of stopbanks and clearing of flood debris. Unfortunately the help we've received has come from volunteers and a $1,000 grant from the Mayoral Relief Fund which goes nowhere.

> *I hope that people now have an emergency supply of candles, batteries, food, water etc for when services are cut off.*

Jenny W: I'm just hoping it never happens again as it hasn't been easy on us. We had insurance but to replace everything we had to call on some of our savings.

Tracey: I'm wishing everyone a speedy recovery in getting their property moving forward again. I hope that the close community stays close in the coming years. I also hope people are more prepared, both personally and with their farm management for any future emergencies that may arise.

Marth: That we never have to go through this again and if so, that we have learned a lot from this disaster. When it comes to the financial burden, I hope there is some sort of cash to get us through.

Kerryn: I would like to see an upskill in everyone's community resilience plan. I hope that people now have an emergency supply of candles, batteries, food, water etc for when services are cut off. I hope that there will be a system in place that can quickly connect volunteers to people in need, rather than people like me using Facebook to patch together support efforts.

Della: We are now more resilient as a community, with better emergency preparedness and knowledge to face any future events. Our Civil Defence systems and communication tools are far more robust. Many people have invested in grab bags and generators to ensure that they can be more self-sufficient. While the silt cleanup still lingers for many in our farming community, most of the infrastructure has been replaced and we have learned new ways of doing things to lessen the damage in any future flood events.

As a member of Tapawera Connect, I am promoting training for more members of the community and offering free or heavily subsidised workshops to foster greater resilience and connection. My hope is the newly formed connections among our community will continue to grow and strengthen, resulting in a stronger more caring and connected community.

Veronique Ann: Maintain drains and waterways. Monitor areas where there is logging to lessen impact on communities.





> The old saying 'there is no 'I' in team' certainly rings true in isolated, rural communities. If we all pull together for the collective good, then there is nothing we can't withstand and could certainly show the 'townies' a thing or two about 'commUNITY'.

Janine: That we hold on to that sense of unity and camaraderie and foster that going forward. Building further resilience as we learn from what we so obviously lacked in facilities during the emergency. Working together and congratulating each other on what we have achieved instead of finding fault in every little thing that we think should be done differently. The old saying 'there is no 'I' in team' certainly rings true in isolated, rural communities. If we all pull together for the collective good, then there is nothing we can't withstand and could certainly show the 'townies' a thing or two about 'commUNITY'.

Debbie and Bruce: Well hopefully it never happens again. Still working through our insurance company, it's a long process even being fully insured. Just to have some form of normality.

Richard: Stronger community resilience.

John: That more notice is taken of river care and that final road and river repairs are completed. That more river protection plantings are available. We were contemplating selling our property and this has put it back considerably. Being elderly in our mid 80s, physical assistance is needed with fencing.

Sue: Accepting the new normal which is that I cannot afford to restore the farm to its previous condition; becoming more self-reliant which includes having a generator and Starlink so all communication is not lost.

Anonymous: More large rocks put in more areas of the Motueka River / Upper Motueka and especially in the lowland areas next to river. Much, much more digging out of the rivers like the catchment board used to do and then use that product for other things.



Hinetai Road, Tapawera



Enhanced Taskforce Green © MSD

What message of support, āwhina, or encouragement do you have for other areas of Aotearoa New Zealand affected by natural disasters?

Nara: To those affected by these natural disasters, kia kaha – stay strong. The resilience and unity demonstrated by New Zealanders in the face of adversity are truly inspiring. Remember, you are not alone. Communities across the country and around the world stand with you, offering support and āwhina. Together, through compassion and cooperation, you will rebuild and emerge stronger. Keep hope alive, and trust in the strength of your whānau and community.

Ollie: Kia kaha. We're in this together.

Pearl: Buildings can be rebuilt, grass can regrow, fencing can be stood back up – yes it may take time and it may hurt the bank account in significant ways, but just remember that it will be as it once was or better. As long as you are safe, your family are safe, your friends are safe that is all that really matters in times like these. You will have a strong community behind you because that's the Kiwi way.

> *Communities across the country and around the world stand with you, offering support and āwhina. Together, through compassion and cooperation, you will rebuild and emerge stronger. Keep hope alive, and trust in the strength of your whānau and community.*

Jenny W: Stay strong as it's not easy, and for me having a sick husband was even harder.

Carolthe: Make sure to remember that just because it's a natural disaster, prepare yourself emotionally for the random person in government services to act like they have a clue what you are going through (mainly due to being a country-wide service)... or the "and what" statement like it's not a big deal. And it was through Work and Income which was worse because they were supplying Civil Defence support payment. The guy I spoke to didn't think being hit by the flooding twice was a big deal and he didn't think I needed it. Situations like a natural disaster can make anything like that extremely hard to deal with... expect the unexpected.

Jenny: Join together and do not rely on government... make the corporations pay for the damage caused by them.

Cornelia: Don't focus on blame – focus on doing better and looking after each other.

Anonymous: Don't wait for the Council to fix everything, if you have the skills and/or the equipment to help with cleanup safety, do so.

Kerryn: We are all in this together. It was us yesterday, you today, and a new community tomorrow. As a country we need to stay strong together and focus on supporting our communities through resilience programmes, adaptation plans and early warning systems. It is only through unity that we can overcome such trying times.

> *Don't focus on blame – focus on doing better and looking after each other.*



Karolyne: I don't really have an answer to this question, except that community support is great, however it would be better to have had information from authorities too. Especially given the level of flooding to our property. I'm so surprised the Council didn't show any interest in finding out how the rivers behaved in the floods on our property.

Tracey: We are all in this together. I wish everyone the best, and hope they get through.

Di: It's always hard to see the devastation brought on by a disaster. Even long after the event is over the effects can live with you for a long time.

Marth: That the government is not so "scrooge" with helping the financial side. Somebody stated why give millions to countries that are corrupt and are not home for their own people. Those in Wellington have no worries with a good salary and money for insurance.

Janine: Just take each day as it comes. Don't put too many expectations on yourself or others, as there will be emotionally low days that you might be unfamiliar with. Breathe in, breathe out, repeat! Sometimes you just need to step aside and let someone else take the reins, and that's OK. Help is on its way! Kiwis are amazingly generous and kind people. Be prepared to reciprocate when you see others in need.

Debbie and Bruce: Stay strong and it's a long process with your insurance company.

Brett and Debra: Most importantly, keep yourself safe.

Jamie: Hang in there. Things will improve. Try to stay positive and things will generally get better.

Della: From the silt, mud and floodwaters, new connections have been made and a stronger community formed. Natural disasters show us that we have hidden depths of resilience, and we can adapt and survive.

Eventually it will become another story and chapter in your life. You can and will eventually move on.

Richard: Use your lessons learned to build in less risky places and to build community resilience.

Sandra, Laura, Rupert and Poppy: Just take it one day at a time, accept help when it's offered and try to do something to switch off. The stress takes its toll and you feel like you have been run over by a steam engine. You can't switch off properly, even in your sleep you're reliving it, but watching a good series or reading a good book does help calm your mind a bit.

Most of all talk to others, it might help you but also it may give support to someone else going through the trauma. We hope to be able to get back to some of our hobbies, do things we really enjoy and unwind from the ordeal so many are going through.

> *Sometimes you just need to step aside and let someone else take the reins, and that's OK. Help is on its way! Kiwis are amazingly generous and kind people. Be prepared to reciprocate when you see others in need.*



Thorn Road, Dovedale



Is there anything else you would like to add?

Nara: In the wake of the floods, it's important to extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who played a crucial role in helping our community navigate through these challenging times. To the first responders and emergency services personnel, your prompt actions and unwavering dedication have been nothing short of heroic. Thank you for your courage and commitment.

A special thank you goes out to all the volunteers who stepped up without hesitation. Whether you were filling sandbags, distributing supplies, or clearing debris, your spirit of generosity and solidarity has been a beacon of hope. Your selfless acts illustrate the strength and compassion of our community.

Gratitude to the local businesses and organisations that offered resources and support during this crisis. Your contributions, whether through donations or services, have made a significant impact in aiding recovery efforts. Thank you for standing by our community in times of need.

Thank you to the government officials and staff who worked around the clock to coordinate relief efforts and ensure that everyone received the support they needed. Your leadership and diligence have been instrumental in managing the crisis and facilitating recovery.

Lastly, thank you to every individual who reached out to help a neighbour, whether by offering a warm meal, a place to stay, or simply a comforting word. Your kindness has fostered a sense of unity and resilience that will carry us forward. Thank you to each and every one of you for your incredible support and dedication.

Carolthe: There would be a benefit if those affected were visited again by a couple of friendly people, just clued up common sense people who have some understanding of the situation. Just a welfare check, or a quick hello. There's a lot of people who are just functioning and doing what they need to but are still suffering effects. Basically, to let people know they haven't been forgotten about.

Brett and Debra: We are amazed that our Government could find in excess of $150 million to give to Ukraine plus millions handed out to Pacific nations, I would have thought charity begins at home.

Richard: Councils (and central government) must not allow or encourage residences to be built in flood risk or other natural hazard risk areas.

Kerryn: There are options to train with the Civil Defence that I recommend to everyone in a position to do so. Civil Defence also has neighbourhood resilience programme templates that can help with preparedness.

Tracey: In the aftermath of a disaster like these flood events, look after one another. Find a starting point for rebuilding and take your time to work out from this point. Say yes to any help offered and make sure these people hear your gratification. Take time for yourself and family, and take time away from the cleanup.

Marth: I do hope we here in beautiful peaceful Aotearoa New Zealand have learned from this disaster and pray that this was, and is, the last of this weather disaster.





> The advice to have three to five days drinking water for each person really is vital when the aquifers are polluted or the taps run dry. We can't rely on others to bail us out.

> Thank you to every individual who reached out to help a neighbour, whether by offering a warm meal, a place to stay, or simply a comforting word. Your kindness has fostered a sense of unity and resilience that will carry us forward.

Janine: One of the major learnings I took away is that each home needs to think about and be responsible for their own clean water supply. Just because the pump might be working and the water is running clean, that sure doesn't guarantee safe drinking/bathing water! Also, the advice to have three to five days drinking water for each person really is vital when the aquifers are polluted or the taps run dry. We can't rely on others to bail us out.

Sandra, Laura, Rupert and Poppy: We realise many were struggling but if the organisations are wanting to help it might be good not to make any offers unless they are followed through. We had the promise of a digger and fencer – it never happened. We were already going through so much and to wait and wait for promised help only to not get it is so disheartening. We realise everyone was busy but better not to build up someone's hope as it's just another blow when it does not eventuate.

Veronique Ann: Local authorities are neglecting rural areas.

Jenny: It is about time corporations and the super wealthy started in paying their share.

John: We hired a contractor to clear our fence lines of debris and recover posts. Unfortunately, the job wasn't completely done correctly, and we were left with a mess which will incur a further financial burden that we cannot afford. This used all our insurance that we received.

The Mayoral Relief Fund assisted with repairs of slip damage, but obviously not anywhere enough. What was sad is we had started to get organised to prepare our property for sale and the little "nest egg" we had disappeared. Overall, a lot of people were affected much more than us, so I guess we were lucky.

Ollie: Thanks for the opportunity to give feedback.



Stories from the helpers

Ongoing rural support for locals

Richard Kempthorne, Trustee and Chair for the Top of the South Rural Support Trust (TOSRST), reflects on the Trust's response to the floods, and the importance of rapid rural assessment to link those that need help with those that can.

TOSRST had an extraordinarily busy time connecting with and helping farmers and growers following the floods.

We are embedded within Civil Defence – we're involved right from the start. We generally will have good warning that an event could happen, and then by following the Council website and rainfall and river flow, we can see very clearly whether there's a significant issue.

The Trust is here to help farmers and growers when they are struggling for various reasons. On this occasion it was to help them during an adverse event to identify their needs, and as much as we can, help them find solutions to those needs.

In this situation, we used a detailed assessment form created by MPI, and we contacted about 240 rural property owners immediately after the floods. We then used this information to inform the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) as to where to activate the Enhanced Taskforce Green (ETFG) programme, which then deployed 18 people to help property owners clear and repair their lands for more than four months after the flood.

For quite a lot of the people that were on the farming and horticulture properties, the damage was very significant, and they're really struggling still with, "What can we do on our property by the river and in the river, and what can we not do?" That's a big question for many people going forward.

I thought we would get some people that were unhappy and angry, but just about everybody I spoke to said, 'Oh, thanks very much for phoning, and for your help.' It was surprising when they'd just been through this absolute hammer, how positive people were.

The ETFG crew were stunning and very well received by property owners. We linked with many groups helping rural people including Civil Defence/ Emergency Management, Tasman District Council, Catchment Groups, Taskforce Kiwi, Ministry of Social Development, Enhanced Taskforce Green, Tapawera Connect, as well as farmers and growers. It was harrowing and exhausting but very rewarding, helping where we could.



The key lesson for me is the importance of the rapid rural assessment which is a swift, semi-structured data collection method used to evaluate local rural systems, community needs, or environmental hazards to gather first-hand information.

Apart from that, it was the TOSRST's connectedness through all of the agencies involved, including Civil Defence, MSD, MPI, and how valuable the good relationships that we have with them are in these crisis situations.

We were treated very generously with donations to help us assist those affected by the flooding devastation. Thank you to everyone who helped us.

Richard Kempthorne
Chairperson
Top of the South Rural Support Trust

> *... just about everybody I spoke to said, 'Oh, thanks very much for phoning, and for your help.' It was surprising when they'd just been through this absolute hammer, how positive people were.*

About us

The Top of the South Rural Support Trust is part of a nationwide network, working with rural individuals and their families to help solve problems relating to adverse events, financial pressures, animal welfare, or personal challenges including physical and mental health.

The Trust covers all aspects of rural agribusiness: dry stock, dairy, cropping, horticulture, forestry, poultry, viticulture and rural contracting. We support all rural people – owners, managers, staff, and contractors.

www.rural-support.org.nz
0800 787 254



Enhanced Taskforce Green: Restoring hope after the Tasman floods



When Tasman was hit by the floods, rural communities faced a mountain of destruction. But for many farmers, the damage wasn't just physical – it was a loss of their dreams.

To help shoulder some of the burden, Minister Louise Upston activated the Enhanced Taskforce Green (ETFG) programme through the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) to help with cleanup and recovery. On 16 July, two crews of nine local job seekers – men and women – were recruited through MSD's Work and Income sites at Motueka and Richmond. These were people who had been unemployed but volunteered to step up when their community needed them most. As one crew member put it, "I heard the news that people needed help and knew I had to lend a hand."

MSD funded an initial $500,000, followed by another $300,000, to cover the living wage for the crews, equipment, transport, food, work clothing, tools, supervision and training through to December 2025.

> *We really noticed how the mental health of farmers and property owners had been affected. Their eyes were dead when we arrived. They'd been hit hard and didn't know where to start.*

Andre and Isaiah © MSD

The Rural Support Trust surveyed damaged properties and earmarked those where ETFG could make the biggest difference. MSD contracted local outdoor education provider, Whenua Iti Outdoors, to train and supervise the crews for the length of the programme. Whenua Iti Outdoors used the skill and expertise of its trainers, and its long experience of working with groups, to build a solid team culture in the days before the ETFG crews were deployed, instilling in them the importance of health and safety, and also of respect, pride and care for each other.

From Tapawera to Riwaka and along the Motueka Valley, the crews got stuck into work. They cleared kilometres of debris-choked and broken fences, rebuilt structures, untangled and repaired irrigation systems, removed debris, replanted, and developed new clearing techniques along the way. But their impact went far beyond physical labour.

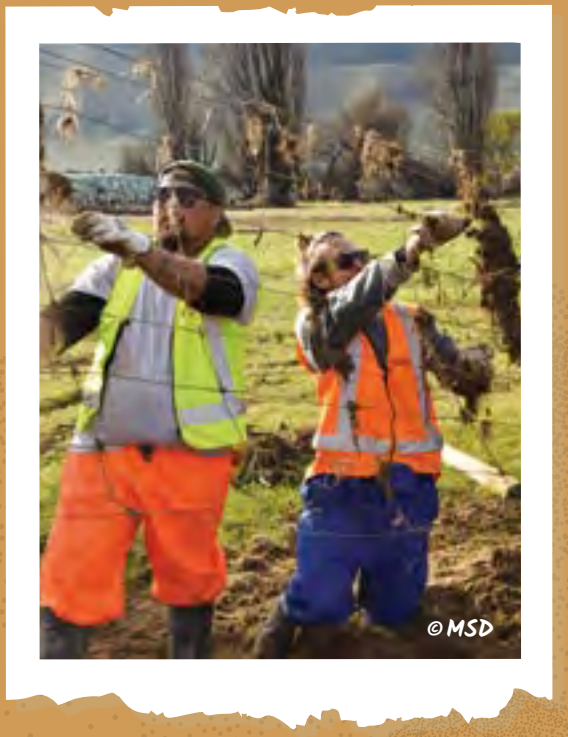
"We really noticed how the mental health of farmers and property owners had been affected. Their eyes were dead when we arrived. They'd been hit hard and didn't know where to start – they were overwhelmed. Their dream had disappeared. The work we were doing wasn't just physical. We were also a listening ear for these folks in their mental anguish."

Many farmers were struggling financially, with the crews reporting some had picked up day jobs just to keep up with interest payments on properties. Others faced physical and emotional challenges, some with family far away.

Farmers often worked alongside the ETFG crews, joining them for lunch, sharing stories and sometimes food from their own freezers.

"The farmers brought us mince or sausages, or home cooking from their hearts for us to share with our whānau – it's Kiwi culture at its best. We were working with salt of the earth, old pākehā farmers with hands like blocks of concrete. They'd never met us before, but here we were working alongside each other."

These moments mattered. They lifted spirits and reminded everyone what community looks like. "The best thing was seeing their smiles when we returned to their properties. The crews wanted to get it right – when the 'quality controller' farmer is smiling, you know we're getting it right."



The crews themselves grew in ways they'd never imagined, gaining new practical skills, but also growing as people. They stepped up and developed both the hard skills of the job but also the soft skills of empathy, resilience, good timekeeping, teamwork, reliability, and great attitudes. Each crew member brought something different to offer and contribute. Says one, "I knew nothing about fencing until the farmer taught us and now we can see we've really made a difference."

And there were moments of beauty amid the hard work with crews wowed by the beautiful rural landscapes, the rolling farmland and snow-capped mountains.

For the farmers, the help was life changing. The ETFG programme isn't just about repairing fences – it is about restoring hope, dignity, and connection. In the words of one crew member: "It's not just tidying a fence line. It's allowing a farmer to realign himself. The best thing is being able to complete the job and see the farmers happy."

In reflecting on the programme, MSD Regional Commissioner, Craig Churchill, sang the praises of the ETFG crews. "Firstly, we were overwhelmed by the response of local job seekers wanting to get involved with the clean-up, with 60 voluntarily attending the recruitment seminars back on 16 July. We've heard nothing but praise for the successful candidates since – not only the results of their hard work on the land, but also the empathy they've shown landowners."

> "It's not just tidying a fence line. It's allowing a farmer to realign himself. The best thing is being able to complete the job and see the farmers happy."

"With the skills and experience they've picked up and the work ethic they've demonstrated, we've had some crew members move on into permanent jobs. As the programme draws to a close, and after meeting the community's needs, our focus is shifting to securing permanent employment for the remaining ETFG workers. We will be building on what they've learned through the programme to support their long-term careers and employment goals."

Craig Churchill also said it was a privilege for his Regional Labour Market and local Work and Income employment staff to help the community through the floods. They administered the ETFG funding and contracts and recruited the crews, and local Work and Income teams also helped flood evacuees with Civil Defence payments for food, bedding, clothing and emergency provisions in the immediate aftermath of the flooding.

"For us, the impact was very real. Some of our team were affected by the flooding too," he said. "So, seeing them suit up every day and selflessly serve the community in this direct way was humbling and I'm immensely proud of every one of them."

Ministry of Social Development



© Ollie Langridge

By the numbers

The following statistics are not a full and final tally of the work that was carried out by Tasman District Council staff, contractors, and out-of-town workers brought in to help during and after the storms, but they give an idea of the sheer scale of the clean-up efforts.

600
km of Council roads closed

35,000
hours of roading work

14,000
hours of work for Civil Defence

3,300
roading-related jobs logged

175
people working on road cleanup

5,000
hours by Council's Hydrology team
(of just four people)



What are your reflections of the events one year on?



Spooners Tunnel, Tasman's Great Taste Trail

Di: I thought my mental health was fine, but probably about six weeks after the second one, the power went off one night, just out of the blue, and I just completely lost it. I was surprised by my own reaction. It was just one thing, too many.

I'm also much more empathetic. Like when they had the one [major slip with fatalities] in Tauranga, I watched the news all the time; I thought, at least nobody got killed here.

If you've got no cell phone reception and the landline disappears, and you've got no power, you have absolutely no way of communicating with anybody. That's the biggest issue, really. That's when you feel really isolated.

A few weeks back, when they said we were going to get struck again, it wasn't blasé, but I said to one of my neighbours, who was panicking, 'We know that we can cope with 300 millimetres, and it's got to be really, really bad before it's actually going to get into our house', so I'm probably a little more relaxed.



Batchelor Ford Road, Motueka



Ollie: I'm getting construction/geotechnical quotes for trying to protect my uninsurable driveway from further slip damage before the house becomes a stranded asset, there is a picture of it above with my car for reference of scale – this was the worst of seven major slips on this property.

I think a lot of people have/have had ongoing mental health impacts in the valley, which is a tricky subject to talk about. Every time there's a significant heavy rain warning, the anxiety goes off the dial – we all know it's coming again, it's just a matter of time.

> We think we are above nature, as something that we can control, but we are part of it.

Even though an Olympic swimming pool worth of water was flowing under the bridges every single second, there are those who still think that removing some gravel from the river is the answer to the issue. It is most certainly not. The river needs to be allowed to meander – it has to be allowed to slow down.

Due to human activity, most of the Motueka catchment, but particularly the lower catchment, got drained or burnt and turned into farmland monocultures, mainly orchards, due the fertility of the soil. The loss of biodiversity was calamitous but this was seen as 'progress'. The river got strangled and forced into a single channel. In order to contain it, stopbanks were built.

Because the river is now forced into this single channel, unable to slow down, unable to meander, the water moves at tremendous speed in flood and it rips the banks apart, carrying huge amounts of silt that it dumps directly into the ocean. All shellfish have been buried by this silt for a wide radius, whereas once this would have been abundant. There will be tonnes of sunken plastic from orchards and farms off the coast from these floods which is an unseen environmental disaster.

Humans are so arrogant. We think we are above nature, as something that we can control, but we are part of it.



Nicolle: I guess frustration at how much of a setback it was. We lost our car in the first one and two weeks later had significant damage and lost the front of our property from forestry slips. Financially damaging and extremely time consuming. Was nice how the community came together to support one another though. Standout memory of support provided by RRT and also a free community dinner at the Smoking Barrel in Motueka. Some decent people out there making it less of a burden to wear alone.

I am grateful overall for our personal safety and the community who showed their true colours of generosity.

Fiona: This year we had QV come through, and they've taken 10 grand off our rates because of the flooding. The other thing the Council did do when we had the flood was they did pay for us to have a couple of skips here, so we could get rid of flood-affected furniture and stuff.

Wilson: The first thing that comes to mind is the overwhelming frustration of trying to find even one avenue of help from official organisations that are thought to be there for helping!

I spent the greater part of a day searching and found no help at all from Tasman District Council, whom I visited in person and was repeatedly told it was out of their hands because I live on a state highway and therefore it was not their responsibility. Having had this very same flooding two previous times during the same type of weather pattern I was very aware we would be under water within 12 hours from early that morning. This was my only window of opportunity to sandbag our dwelling as we had been forced to do in the previous two years of flooding. This left the three of us aged between 61 years and 83 years to fend for ourselves regarding the filling of hundreds of sandbags to protect an old cottage in the path of an incoming flood.

I have spent the year from the last flood event until now searching for a positive response from NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi regarding what they intend to do to improve the non-existent drainage along the five kilometres of this state highway, as it is their responsibility to keep state highways safe and functional. I even managed to have a visit from the area manager for Tasman for two hours during which time the matter was discussed in fine detail. The result of this discussion was that he could do nothing at all as the water that builds up along this state highway would end up being channelled into a road that is then Council's responsibility and he has no jurisdiction to channel water there.

The conclusion is there are too many conflicting authorities who end up using each other as an excuse to be unable to respond to a problem that none of them can financially afford to fix.

I don't know if it's like this in other countries, but I feel ashamed of New Zealand for having lost its way so badly.

Pearl: It proved to us in times of need we could rely on family and the community. That despite the flood running through our paddocks and spared our house, we count ourselves lucky. And are now coming up with silver linings. The paddock fencing was a mess and needed redoing at some point in the future we knew, so really the flood had sped that process up for us. Instead of thinking negative we started thinking positive as the months went on.

Diane: It's hard to believe a year has gone by! I had stored my household stuff in a shed while I travelled overseas so I wasn't in the area when the floods hit. I lost almost everything in the floods and it totally changed my life. I quickly realised that it would be too expensive to start again in New Zealand. I decided to keep on travelling as I can afford to save on my pension if I live outside New Zealand.

Kathryn: An overwhelming gratitude for the outpouring of support from the Motueka Valley community! We received so much baking, water and essential supplies and had neighbours just turn up (without being asked) the day after the flood to get stuck in with the clean-up. It was humbling to be the recipients of such awesome support and it gave us a much-needed boost to tackle the overwhelming clean-up job.

Kurt: For me what comes to mind when I think about the July flood is the anxiety and hopelessness of everything flooding and there being no way to make it better/stop the flooding. I get flashbacks of packing my three cats into my car and evacuating to my parents' house. It was really frightening to find out how close the Motueka River was to bursting its banks and flooding Motueka as well. In a way it makes me regret buying my house in Riwaka as now I'm always scared of it flooding again and any weather warnings really put me on edge now.

Vicky: Getting the right advice and help was very, very difficult. Civil Defence was great for basic needs but I still feel stressed when I think back to all the bouncing around we got regarding the house receiving a yellow sticker. Council referred us to insurance, insurance referred us to Council. Then Natural Hazards were contacted by our insurer which added another layer of back and forward calls. It was all very difficult and unclear. All the while we could not get an answer to dealing with all the silt, particularly under the house and we were told by insurance if we didn't get it out then we would not be insured further for moisture damage. We did it by hand. In the end my mother who works for WINZ heard about the Tasman District Council Navigators at work and I called them. They were amazing and helped us get somewhere. What stands out to me is the added level of stress on top of the utter mess trying to get advice pre-Navigators. I was not present when the house was stickered.

Mary: The community support shown to us from the residents in Mārahau. It was highly shocking. And we are grateful that no one was hurt.

> *We are lucky that we go forward, but my heart goes out to those people that are still struggling with the damage to their property, and loss of animals.*

Marth: Reflecting back on those horrible days reminded me how lucky we were compared with the other flood victims. But still, if I think back, I wasn't scared, just annoyed that we did not have internet or TV and the radio that we used was useless without any information about the situation. That was the hardest part, not knowing what was happening. We were stuck for four days on our property because a hillside blocked our driveway. We were lucky we had a small digger and it took my husband four days to clear the path so it was safe to drive over it.

It was really good and very much appreciated that Tasman District Council and Rural Support Trust gave us the time to talk it over, and with all the other flood victims involved. And their advice where to go for financial help or mental help. So, this is my personal view of this horrible time. We are lucky that we go forward, but my heart goes out to those people that are still struggling with the damage to their property, and loss of animals. Would it be a good idea to have the help of the army?

Brett: The floods last year changed the river, and it's headed straight for a nearby road – which is part of our access road – and it just took it out. They're still working on that now. Both my wife and I have ended up in ICU with heart attacks.

Susanne: It took 10 months before I could move back into my house. I lived in my paddock during the fix up. I suffered anxiety every time it rained hard and still feel concern. I hired a digger to dig out a front road ditch which filled with silt. My worry going forward is that Council have not cleared the waterway which is dammed up and runs the length of my one-acre property. Any excessive rain and the ditch fills to the top.

Despite discussions and a visit from a man from Downer and his referral to Waterways New Zealand, nothing has been done.



Student Volunteer Army

How have you prepared for future weather events and what advice would you give to others?



Alexander Bluff Bridge, Motueka Valley © RNZ/Samantha Gee

Nicolle: My advice, always know your insurance policy properly. Know what's included and what's not. And never drive in floodwaters. Even if the road is open, it's not worth the risk.

Anon: Download the Antenno app for updates.

Wilson: A very large trash pump with a petrol motor has been purchased to try and avoid the enormous build-up of water that forms against the state highway and then creates a knee deep lake, one kilometre wide by five kilometres long.

Kurt: With preparedness there isn't much I can do apart from have an evacuation stash of stuff to keep my cats okay if I ever have to evacuate again. I wish I could just put some sandbags around and all will be fine but it's not that easy for my property.

Vicky: We have prepared by spending thousands of money on sealing off doors on sheds and the garage and creating bund-type gardens around the dwelling. And added drainage under our entire driveway when we rebuilt it. We do not own the bridge or land around it that got blocked by debris and diverted water so not much we can do there other than try to encourage the upstream farmer to maintain it going forward. Nor can we maintain the culvert on the other side of our property that blocked (and sent water to meet the bridge water), My father told me it has been reported many times over the years to Council as failing. Can only do what we can inside the boundary so our hands still feel tied. It would benefit the public to have the Navigators engage with affected parties early on somehow or advertise the service better.


© Gebhard Krewitt

Mary: We built a large debris wall to try to protect the house from further landslides. Know your neighbours. Have an evacuation plan ready.

Pearl: We have reinforced the bank that runs along the river, added a stopbank. We've planted willows and flax.

Diane: I feel like we always have to bear in mind that we live in a country vulnerable to climate change and earthquakes. I felt reasonably prepared for the uplift of the Southern Alps but my emergency earthquake kit also got lost in the floods!

> *... take in what's around your property that affects other people's places.*

Marth: Because of this horrible situation, I now have a backpack filled with some warm clothes underwear, toiletries, passport, money, some meds, and all my jewellery. So knowing that I have it ready, gives me a good feeling, because I noticed that I was so stressed I could not think straight.

Fiona: I have been getting rid of stuff that can potentially float away and cause issues. I had a whole heap of tyres around my riding arena. I'm getting rid of them – you're allowed to take them to the dump, five tyres a day for free.

Do your history on your property. I would never buy next to a creek or river, as pretty as it looks.

I contacted Council because we've got a big row of oak trees this year and said that with all the acorns that have dropped we now have saplings growing and there's water pipes underneath going to other houses, so take in what's around your property that affects other people's places.

Di: We were very underprepared. My son turned up here a few hours later with all sorts of things, because the biggest problem was my husband. Everybody else was trying to keep their phones charged, but once his cochlear [device] goes flat he can't hear a thing, so that was a major concern for us.

A neighbour had these really bright little lights that are in a cage with a hook on them so I bought two of those. They're battery powered, and I bought an extra lot when I went to give the camp oven back five days later.

We had no cell phone reception at all before, but with Toby's local DoveNet, we do.

We used to always have candles and stuff, but they're just not practical. It made a huge difference having the camp oven, so I bought an extra set of those little gas canisters. We've got everything together in one place, and I will replace this radio too. It's a crappy little radio, but at least you can hear what's going on.



Student Volunteer Army

> *I must say that Civil Defence were absolutely amazing. They put us up in accommodation for, I think, about five weeks. They were absolutely incredible, what they did for us.*

Paul: We're limited in what we can do. We can't get into the creek with a bulldozer or a digger. We're not allowed to do that, so we're confined to the stuff that we can actually do on the land that we own.

The shingle of the river now is actually higher than the land, so the gravel needs to be removed but further up the Eighty-Eight Valley stream, there's a log in the river there that's growing, and it's narrowed it right down, so the water actually floods through a farmer's property there into the reserve, and then in turn into us, and in turn, into our next door neighbour as well. There's a paper road there, so we've actually put a ford in the road so that we can take a bit of the sting out of what's coming behind us. I have spoken to the lovely gentleman from Tasman District Council, David Aresenau. He's been out, he's had a look at what the situation is, and in fact is going to try and get a digger driver here this week to clear the blockage in the stream.

We can handle 180 millimetres of rain here, but up on the hills of course you're getting, say, 200 or 300, and that's when the creek will come up very quickly and turn into a raging river. It's a very, very uneasy feeling when it starts to rain, and you know that there's a possibility that we're going under again.

We quite honestly thought we'd done enough in creating the ford that we put across the road here. It was properly done, but it's just not enough. I feel that Council are finally listening to the issues, and yes, they've got confines they've got to work within.

We've got a situation with the next door neighbour, he doesn't live here actually, he's in Canada at the moment, but there are trees there that, if we're not careful, are going to fall into the creek because of the undermining of the creek. So they're going to have to be removed before they crash in there and create a dam. The willows that used to be through here have all been taken out, so of course that doesn't help.

I must say that Civil Defence were absolutely amazing. They put us up in accommodation for, I think, about five weeks. They were absolutely incredible, what they did for us.

> *I still think this is the best place to live.*

Kathryn: Concentrate on keeping safe in a major weather event, as property can be replaced, but lives can't. Don't rely on weather forecasts to be completely accurate. It's better to err on the side of caution and move stock to higher ground earlier rather than later. Regularly check and update your insurance policy. Consider purchasing a generator and a powerbank for phones.

I still think this is the best place to live.



Simple ways to get ready for the next weather event

NELSON TASMAN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT GROUP

1. Know your risk.

Check with Nelson City Council or Tasman District Council whether your home is in a flood-prone area (or at risk from any other hazards). If you know your risk, it's easier to plan for it.

2. Make a household plan.

A household emergency plan lets everyone know what to do and where to go if you need to leave home. Work it out together so the kids know it too.

3. Plan for your animals.

If you have pets or livestock, decide now what you'll do with them if you have to evacuate. On a lifestyle block this takes more forethought than most.



4. Identify higher ground and your evacuation route.

Know your evacuation route to higher ground or a safe area away from floodwaters, and practise it.

5. Store enough water.

Have at least nine litres of water per person for three days for drinking and basic hygiene. Clean, empty fizzy drink bottles work well. Avoid milk bottles, which are hard to clean, and glass jars, which can break.

6. Stock three days of supplies.

Long-lasting food that doesn't need cooking, food for babies and animals, toilet paper, work gloves and a properly fitted P2 or N95 mask. If you have dietary or medical needs, keep enough to last three days.

7. Pack a grab bag for everyone.

A small bag with essential supplies, medications, a first aid kit, torch, radio and batteries, kept somewhere you can grab in a hurry, even in the dark.

8. Prepare your property.

Regularly clear drains, gutters and downpipes so they're clear before heavy rain, and take steps to reduce potential flood damage.

9. Check your insurance.

Make sure your policy covers you for flood damage before you need it, not after.

10. Act fast and stay informed.

If you see rising water, don't wait for official warnings. Head for higher ground and never try to walk, swim or drive through floodwater. Always treat floodwater as contaminated and wash your hands and property after any contact. Keep a radio or your phone handy to follow Nelson Tasman Emergency Management.

11. Download the free Antenno app.

Antenno is simple and easy to use – no personal information or log in details are required. Find it in the app store on your smartphone.

Find out more online at nelsontasmancivildefence.co.nz

Where to turn when you need help

If your life is at risk, phone 111.

For the latest Nelson Tasman Civil Defence updates during an emergency, visit nelsontasmancivildefence.co.nz or follow their Facebook page (search Nelson Tasman Civil Defence).



Useful contacts

MPI (animal welfare)
0800 008 333

MSD (Civil Defence payments)
0800 559 009

IRD (tax relief or income assistance)
0800 700 334

Lifeline (mental health support)
0508 828 865

Nelson Bays Primary Health
(psychosocial support)
03 539 1170

Red Cross
0800 733 27677

Salvation Army
0800 530 000

Rural Support Trust
0800 787 254

Citizens Advice Bureau
0800 367 222

Tasman District Council
03 543 8400



Useful links for information

MetService warnings
metservice.com/warnings/home#upper-south

Updates on local road conditions
roadinfo.ramm.com/nz/roadclosuremap.html

Updates on state highway conditions
journeys.nzta.govt.nz/regions/tasman

River flow reports
tasman.govt.nz/flow-report

Rainfall reports
tasman.govt.nz/report

Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

tasman district council | Te Kaunihera o te tai o Aorere