

# Whangaehu Flood Resilience Uplift Project

## Summary Findings – January 2018

In September 2016 Rangitikei District Council (RDC) started a project to look at the issues and impacts associated with flooding in the lower Whangaehu valley, and to identify options and actions for managing those impacts. This project was co-funded by the Government (the Ministry of Civil Defence Emergency Management – MCDEM), and supported by the Horizons Regional Council (Horizons). The project was led by Professor Bruce Glavovic, EQC Chair in Resilience and Natural Hazards Planning, Massey University.

The project was also supported by an advisory group of community and stakeholder representatives. The Whangaehu Valley Community Advisory Group included representatives from Ngati Apa (Whangaehu and Nga Wairiki Ki Uta), Kauangaroa Marae Committee, Federated Farmers and local community representatives, and supported by staff/elected members from Rangitikei District Council, Horizons Regional Council and Whanganui District Council (WDC).

### BACKGROUND

The Whangaehu valley has experienced four major flood events since 2004. On each occasion dwellings, community buildings, businesses and farms have been inundated, resulting in considerable damage, economic loss, social disruption and displacement of local people for many weeks. The villages of Whangaehu and Kauangaroa are particularly susceptible to flooding, but no enduring solutions to avoid or mitigate the effects of flooding had been found. It is clear that these flood events will continue and, within a climate change context, we could expect large flood events on a more frequent basis.

The risk to human life and property – notably dwellings and community facilities – is significant, so removing or reducing these risks is a desired outcome. Further development in these high-risk zones is effectively controlled through the Rangitikei District Plan and the Building Act/Code. However finding solutions for existing properties is not straightforward. There is a range of options (e.g. localised flood protection works, raising floor levels and relocation) to reduce risk and increase resilience, although conventional community-wide flood protection measures are not currently considered practicable or affordable.

Increasing resilience to flooding centres on risk management and reduction, and requires a multi-agency approach and active community engagement that builds shared, evidence-based understanding of the problem, barriers and opportunities, and leads to potential solutions. International and local experience shows this is a complex challenge in practice.

Whangaehu communities are not alone in New Zealand when it comes to flood risk, and this project focused on the need to find enduring solutions to the continued occupation of at-risk flood areas.

### PROJECT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The project concluded in December 2017, and the final report is available on the Rangitikei District Council website at [www.Rangitikei.govt.nz](http://www.Rangitikei.govt.nz). The Executive Summary of the report is replicated overleaf.

RDC, Horizons and WDC are committed to working with the Whangaehu valley community to implement the report recommendations. In particular, the councils will work with the Government (and government agencies) to ensure the development of the necessary policy, legislative and capability building arrangements are given priority attention. This work is not only important for the Whangaehu community, but others like it across New Zealand where the ongoing risk and impacts of flooding are high.

**TABLED DOCUMENT**

Tabled at TRAK 13/2/18

## FINAL REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Whangaehu Valley was ravaged by four major floods between 2004 and 2015. In 2017, a massive flood was anticipated but did not take place. Future flooding is inevitable. Fortunately, to date, no lives have been lost – despite several near misses. There is a real prospect of tragic loss of life, especially for those living in Whangaehu Village. Proactive steps need to be taken to prevent this prospect from becoming a reality. Much has been done to reduce flood risk in the valley since 2004. More can be done to improve public safety and resilience by building on existing provisions for flood risk reduction, readiness, response and recovery. Meaningful collaboration between valley residents and district, regional and central government agencies, iwi and hapu, and non-government stakeholders is essential to address concerns and develop and implement feasible and sustainable solutions.

The key recommendations of the report are to:

- 1. Establish a representative Whangaehu Valley Community Advisory Group (WVCAG):** *Action:* Valley stakeholders to establish the WVCAG with the support and / or participation of the Manawatu-Wanganui Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Group (M-W CDEM Group), Rangitikei District Council (RDC), Whanganui District Council (WDC) and Horizons Regional Council (HRC), Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management (MCDEM) and other stakeholders as appropriate. *Recommended Timeframe:* By the end of March, 2018.
- 2. Undertake two priority tasks under the auspices of the WVCAG:**
  - a. Review, revise and operationalize a valley-specific Community Response Plan:** *Action:* WVCAG, M-W CDEM Group, RDC, WDC, HRC, MCDEM, and other relevant government agencies and non-governmental stakeholders to circulate a first Community Response Draft Plan to valley residents and stakeholders. *Recommended Timeframe:* By the end 2018.
  - b. Prepare a valley-specific post-disaster Community Recovery Plan:** *Action:* WVCAG, M-W CDEM Group, RDC, WDC, HRC, MCDEM, and other government agencies and other parties involved in rural recovery, to circulate a first Draft Community Recovery Plan to valley residents and stakeholders. *Recommended Timeframe:* By the end 2018.
- 3. Review and if necessary revise District Plan provisions to prevent new development in high flood risk localities:** *Action:* RDC, WDC and HRC to submit a report(s) to relevant Councils. *Recommended Timeframe:* By the end 2018.
- 4. Review legislative, policy, funding and capability building provisions to enable local authorities to (a) prevent rebuilding of houses in high risk locations that have been subjected to repetitive extreme events and, where necessary, (b) facilitate planned relocation of at-risk communities:** *Action:* Government needs to determine how best to address these complex, precedent-setting matters, e.g., by a whole-of-government Technical Working Group or by a Government or Public Inquiry, such as a Royal Commission. *Recommended Timeframe:* In the course of 2018, the WVCAG should invite the Director of MCDEM, and other relevant government agencies and stakeholders, such as Local Government New Zealand and the Insurance Council, to report on progress made and likely implications for the Whangaehu Valley.

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