



Ministerial Inquiry into land use in Te Tairāwhiti, Tūranganui-a-Kiwa and Te Wairoa

www.environment.govt.nz/MILU

NEWS RELEASE

12 MAY, 2023

Ministerial Inquiry Report and Recommendations Released

The Panel for the Ministerial Inquiry into Land Use in Tairāwhiti and Wairoa has published its report, *Outrage to Optimism*, with nearly 50 recommendations for turning around the communities' post-flood desperate circumstances and despair into hope for a positive future.

Members of the panel responsible for the report are Hon Hekia Parata (chair), Matt McCloy and Dave Brash. The report was delivered to Environment Minister Hon David Parker and Forestry Minister Hon Peeni Henare this morning. The report can be found here:

www.environment.govt.nz/milu-report.

The Report's recommendations are wide ranging and include: a call for an immediate halt to wide-scale clear felling of forestry and replace it with a mosaic of staged logging; to transition extreme erosion zones out of pasture and production forestry into permanent forest; and a broad package of government support for clean-up, infrastructure and economic development in the region.

"Our recommendations reflect the fear, anger and doubt, but also the hopes and aspirations we heard at the numerous hui we held in the Gisborne and Wairoa districts," says panel chair Hekia Parata. "We believe that, if these recommendations are implemented, they will deliver that better future the people need and deserve."

In the Report's foreword, the panel says: "While we make findings and recommendations for both Districts, the urgency of the situation across Ngati Porou is unassailable. An environmental disaster is unfolding in plain sight.

"We are not a third world country. We heard from experts that the situation is perilous – the time to act is now. In their estimation we have five to 10 years to turn this environmental disaster around."

In the report, the panel finds that "the forest industry has lost its social licence in Tairāwhiti due to a culture of poor practices – facilitated by the Gisborne District Council's capitulation to the permissiveness of the regulatory regime – and its under-resourced monitoring and compliance. Together these factors have caused environmental damage, particularly to land and waterways, and they have put the health and safety of people and their environment at risk," the Report says.

Further recommendations include:

- Establishing a Woody Debris Taskforce to lead current and future clean-up activities in Tairāwhiti and Wairoa, with most of its funding coming from forest owners (the rest split between local and central government).
- Seeking to address isolation of communities caused by slips and flooding, and building future resilience, through adequate maintenance and renewals of local state highways, fixing drinking water supplies and initiating self-sufficient electricity supply systems for smaller communities in Tairāwhiti.
- Creating market opportunities and commercial use for harvest residues.
- Changes to forestry legislation to restrict the use of land for plantation forestry. Tightening of compliance monitoring of these rules.
- Recommending the establishment of a world-leading biodiversity credit scheme to incentivise permanent indigenous forests, piloted in the region.
- Partnering between the Government, whenua Māori landowners and the East Coast Exchange for a range of investment-ready development projects to transition to high-value land use and biodiversity.
- Appointing a Commissioner to assume responsibility for the Resource Management functions of the Gisborne District Council and to oversee new Regional Spatial Strategies and Natural and Built Environment Plans (which determine long-term land use or development suitability) and prioritise Tairāwhiti to be one of the first regions to implement the new Acts.

The panel finds that “much of the current land use is unsustainable. The unintended consequences of successive government strategies and inadequate local authority intervention have arisen from a failure to recognise the complexity of the regions’ well-known geomorphology, and people. The loss of soil is perilously close to being irretrievable... Around half of the erosion in Tairāwhiti comes from highly erodible gullies, despite them only representing around two per cent of the region’s area.”

In recommending capital funding to provide for economic development, the panel finds: “Māori landowners had a longer-term view and a more sustainable relationship with the environment, despite many obstacles. The land is generally located on the most marginal land zones, with poor or no accessibility, it cannot be sold and is constantly predated upon in the public interest.”

ENDS