



June 2015 Taranaki-Horizons Storm

Summary report of rural recovery assistance package

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1 Introduction

This final report provides information about on-farm recovery assistance measures provided to the primary sector following the June 2015 storm in the Taranaki and Manawatu-Whanganui regions, which included:

- Rural infrastructure repair via the two regional disaster relief funds;
- Regional council resilience building activities;
- Use of Enhanced Task Force Green crews for clean-up;
- Building business resilience initiatives;
- Capability building – technology transfer; and
- Rural Assistance Payments.

2 Background

A severe storm on 18-20 June 2015 brought heavy rainfall to the Taranaki and Manawatu-Whanganui regions. Rainfall over those two days totalled 100-150 millimetres across both regions, with some areas receiving up to 300 millimetres.

This rain fell on already saturated ground conditions from a wet autumn, causing flooding in some low-lying areas and erosion in the hill country. The Whanganui River and Whangaehu River topped their banks with river level return periods of 70-100 years. About 870,000 hectares were subject to high intensity rainfall and potential damage from erosion, and 5000-10,000 hectares were severely affected by inundation.



Aerial view of Waitotara Valley showing silting of farmland and extensive slips

3 Funding overview

On 1 September 2015, Cabinet authorised the Minister of Finance, Minister for Primary Industries and Minister of Civil Defence to approve additional funding of up to \$1.68 million¹:

- \$1,280,000 contingency funding for rural on-farm infrastructure repair;
- \$300,000 support for regional councils' resilience initiatives; and
- \$100,000 for building business resilience activities.

This funding was in addition to financial assistance provided under the Primary Sector Recovery Policy, such as Enhanced Task Force Green and Rural Assistance Payments. The total assistance package for the rural sectors of Taranaki and the Manawatu-Wanganui regions was around \$2.3 million (see Table 1).



Destruction of on-farm tracks and fencing was common in the storm (the white boxes are beehives)

The funding and support helped farmers recover their businesses and quickly move on from the event. The worst-affected farmers were appreciative of the government funding for on-farm infrastructure repairs. Along with the mayoral relief funds it gave a significant boost to morale.

While the Enhanced Task Force Green scheme took some time to establish demand, it ended up being one of the most successful initiatives.

¹ All figures in this paper are GST exclusive unless otherwise stated.

Table 1: Summary of the government funding provided following the 2015 storm:

Type of funding assistance	Provider/ conduit	Cabinet allocation (\$)	Region	No. receiving assistance	Total assistance (\$)
Rural infrastructure repair	Disaster relief funds	1,280,000	Horizons	30	864,000
			Taranaki	74	416,000
Resilience building initiatives	Regional councils	300,000	Horizons	25	150,000
			Taranaki	216	150,000
Enhanced Task Force Green	Ministry of Social		Both	247	733,000
Rural Assistance Payments	Development		Both	3	11,250
Business resilience (5 events)	Rural Support Trusts	100,000	Both	35	11,000
Technology transfer (4 events)			Both	240	17,400

3.1 DISASTER RELIEF FUNDING FOR RURAL INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIR

\$1.28 million.

The Manawatu-Wanganui Disaster Relief Fund Trust and the Taranaki Disaster Relief Fund coordinated the assessment and payment of grants to farmers affected by the 2015 storm. Separate funding rounds were held in each region and most claims were paid out before Christmas 2015.



Undercutting of a farm bridge by flood waters

Criteria for assessing applications for assistance were:

1. Funding for reinstatement of uninsurable items: on-farm infrastructure (fences, tracks and dams); the re-establishment of pasture, crops and forestry; and the initial clean-up of silt and debris.
2. Priority given to the restoration of roadside boundary fencing (due to the public good benefit), access tracks, and to silted pastures.
3. Funds had to be targeted to those with the most severe damage to their farm's productive capacity or infrastructure. Farmers had to contribute at least 50% of the uninsurable works' cost. An excess of \$15,000 and a cap of \$100,000 per farm applied.
4. The disaster relief funds were required to confirm to MPI that the grants met eligibility criteria and that the grant allocation was fair, consistent and transparent.

Table 2: Comparison of claims and pay-out from the two disaster relief funds

Region	No. of claims	Total claims (\$000)	Average claim (\$)	No. of grants made	Total pay-out (\$)	Average grant (\$)	Lowest grant (\$)	Highest grant (\$)
Taranaki	94	6,075	64,500	74	416,000	5,622	100	29,600
Horizons	135	6,767 ²	50,100	30	864,000	28,800	3,942	87,000

3.2 REGIONAL COUNCIL RESILIENCE INITIATIVES

\$300,000; \$150,000 for each council.

The 2015 storm significantly disrupted Horizons Regional Council's normal soil conservation programme and led to much more interest in sustainable practices. In response to farmers asking if more could be done to assist landowners in the worst affected areas, Horizons Regional Council approved a free winter pole planting programme with funding capped at \$124,000. Additional Government funding of \$150,000 was then approved.

Funding was targeted to the areas worst affected by erosion. Horizons Regional Council took a wider view of resilience, implementing innovative projects that would reduce sediment loss to rivers and have wider community benefit. Funding was a grant on completion of a maximum 70 percent of the project cost. Due to the seasonal nature of some work, some of the funding will not be spent until August 2016.

Table 3: Summary of Horizons resilience work completed and committed during winter 2016

	No.	\$
Dewatering, re-contouring, re-grassing, tree planting and fencing of slumps/earthflows	6	49,740
Riparian retirement and stabilization	11	95,300
Infrastructure protection, with on-farm planting programmes below culverts, etc.	4	7,300
Pond lining trial - erosion-prone land	1	10,000
Sediment traps with wetland retirement or fodder willow planting	3	26,000
Total	18	188,340

Taranaki Regional Council advised that the 2015 storm reinforced the need for sustainable land management practices and its erosion control and riparian planting programmes. The Council announced a storm relief package to landowners to the value of \$395,000. The Government added \$150,000, all of which was spent on riparian and soil conservation tree planting.

² Not all Horizons applications specified the amount of funding applied for.

Table 4: Summary of Taranaki resilience work using government and regional council funding

	No. grants	Area/length protected	Total cost (\$)
Riparian plants & planting	112	25 km	271,185
Poplar/willow units, sleeves and planting	104	297 ha	200,414
STRESS Fence repairs ³	19	2.8 km	29,644
Grass seed	58	293.6 ha	28,830
Total expenditure	293		530,073



Another aerial view taken in the Waitotara Valley following the storm

3.3 ENHANCED TASK FORCE GREEN

\$733,000 for on-farm work.

The Enhanced Task Force Green scheme administered by the Ministry for Social Development sources temporary workers from the local jobseeker pool for clean-up work on properties; and contracts councils and other authorised authorities to be the employer who sets up and runs each programme and provides equipment, vehicles, worker training and administration.

Horizons Regional Council contributed significant resources to put the scheme in place quickly. All Rural Support Trusts employed Enhanced Task Force Green liaison people to help assess the levels of damage, prioritise and organise the work.

³ Due to access damage to the site, some STRESS fence repairs will be delayed until next summer.

Table 5: Enhanced Task Force Green contracts

Contract and dates	ETFG personnel	Areas deployed	No. properties cleaned up
Horizons Regional Council June to November 2015	24 ETFG crew 4 supervisors	Waitotara Valley, Rangitikei, Fordell, Okoia, Mangamahu, Putiki, River Road, Whanganui River, South Taranaki	98
Whanganui District Council November to February 2016	10 ETFG crew 2 supervisors	Putiki, Fordell, Okoia, Kai Iwi, Kaitoki, Mangamahu, Marybank, Parapara, Papaiti, River Road, Whanganui River	92
South Taranaki District Council November to February 2016	15 ETFG crew 4 supervisors	Waitotara, Waitara, Stratford, Uruti, Urenui	57

The majority of work was to restore farm access ways; get boundary fencing flattened or damaged by flood debris and over slip zones up quickly to safely contain stock; remove silt in orchards; and clear and burn flood debris. Teams quickly assisted with clean-up, particularly of silt and fences.

The extensive scale of the event and its occurrence in winter meant that much of the repair work could not be done until ground conditions improved. Ongoing wet weather, and the pressure of lambing and calving in August and September, hindered farmers accepting that they needed help, and that these teams could assist, resulting in low initial take up of Enhanced Task Force Green.

Farmer enthusiasm for the Enhanced Task Force Green assistance increased from September, and overall demand for assistance under the extended programme ultimately exceeded the funding available. The Rural Support Trusts have reported that Enhanced Task Force Green gave farming families a great morale boost as the teams made fast progress with the clean-up. A further \$161,000, managed by the Te Oronganui Trust, provided for 12 crew and two supervisors to remove silt and debris and return nine marae to community and cultural use.

3.4 BUILDING BUSINESS RESILIENCE & CAPABILITY BUILDING/TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER

Building business resilience \$100,000.

Capability building/technology transfer \$50,000.

Only \$11,000 and \$17,400 of these funds was spent respectively. Farmers focused on immediate repairs to infrastructure and quickly moved on from the storm, exhibiting a resilience and stoicism also reflected in the media.

Five 'Farming after a flood' workshops in May 2016 were timed to coincide with final accounts showing the real impact of the event on budgets. They were held in the most severely and most remote affected areas. The Rural Support Trusts separately supported other events around the region.

Tactical, short-term advice on feed management, farm infrastructure, financial management, building personal resilience, and related topics was provided via seminars, events and collateral.

3.5 RURAL ASSISTANCE PAYMENTS

Three applications were received for Rural Assistance Payments and a total of \$11,250 was paid out with the last payment being made on 9 December 2015. Rural Assistance Payments have strict eligibility criteria and are for farmers who have no income or savings left to manage basic living expenses in a medium or large scale event.

4 Conclusion

Farmers prioritised getting their basic farm systems restored and this supported other businesses providing rural services. Flat land was re-grassed, sometimes after cropping, and tracks and boundary fences were reinstated. There is still a lot of internal fencing to be done and as fencers are busy, farmers are often doing this themselves.

Farmers have shown a willingness to seek advice and consider changes to their farming systems, such as their stock policy, lambing dates, reducing stock numbers, and exploring the potential for mānuka honey production on poorer areas.

Experience from the June 2015 Taranaki-Horizons Storm will provide useful input to the upcoming review of the Primary Sector Recovery Policy, particularly in relation to assistance for medium-scale events. It has been suggested that some discretionary, earlier assistance of smaller monetary amounts might be more helpful; and that in some circumstances the timeliness of support might be more important than later, larger payments.