

MEDIA RELEASE

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Westport Flood Resilience Programme kicks off

In May Prime Minister Chris Hipkins announced a \$22.9m package to support initiatives that will improve Westport's flood resilience.

On Friday a Steering Group convened to plan how this will work. The Steering Group is a partnership agreed by Ministers to progress the implementation of the funding agreed in the budget.

The Steering Group is independently chaired and comprises key leaders from Buller District Council, the West Coast Regional Council, Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Waewae, The Department of Internal Affairs and the National Emergency Management Agency.

The Steering Group will meet regularly to maintain oversight and synchronisation of the various packages of work that will be delivered by the respective Councils.

The Steering Group has adopted a four-pronged approach known as PARA:

- To **Protect** areas in the short term where this is practical and affordable. Protect does not mean eliminating the risk of flooding; it means reducing the risk of flooding while longer term measures can be put in place.
- To **Avoid** development and intensification in high-risk areas, and as quickly as possible.
- To **Relocate** at risk communities in the medium and long term into low-risk areas.
- To **Accommodate** flooding in some areas through measures such as raising floors and temporary moveable flood barriers.

While exact details are still being planned, the funded packages of work that the Steering Group will oversee and co-ordinate over the next two years include:

- \$15.9m for a ringbank to reduce the risk of flooding, this is in addition to the Westport Rating District's contribution. Further work needs to be undertaken to determine the detailed location and design of the ringbank.
- \$1.5m for the reforestation of the Organs Island area.
- \$1.0m to restore the Regional Council's emergency funds for immediate works on Buller riverbank.
- \$1.0m to replenish the Regional Council's contingency fund (which has been exhausted).
- \$0.5m for a development plan for Alma Road and to support the development of low-risk areas.
- \$0.25m for a Feasibility study into strategic land purchase at Alma or other low risk sites.
- \$2.0m for an Adaptation Relief Fund to assist owners in high-risk areas for initiatives such as raising buildings, or to procure moveable flood barriers for example.
- \$0.5m to improve local civil defence capability.

- \$0.25m for a sea level monitor/tide gauge to improve early warning.

Over and above this funded work, the Government requires a report back from Councils on how they intend to strengthen planning rules to limit further development and intensification in locations at risk of flooding.

Managed retreat and buyouts are not in scope for the Steering Group or for the funding provided. Buller Mayor Jamie Cleine and West Coast Regional Council Chair Peter Haddock agree that the approach is sensible and realistic given the inevitability of climate change and the increased intensity and frequency of weather events in future.

‘We have to get used to living with higher flood flows, more stormwater and eventually, sea level rise,’ said Mayor Cleine.

‘We cannot wish away this challenge. Looking around Aotearoa New Zealand, it is clear that we need to adapt our towns and cities. Westport is at the forefront of this adaptation and fortunately we do have some great options available.

‘Adaptation is a complex issue, and we have an obligation to current and future residents to get started on a multi-pronged approach to dealing with it. In some ways, what we are doing is leading development of approaches to climate adaptation that can be applied in other Districts’, he said.

Peter Haddock agrees: ‘There’s a temptation to focus on the ringbank as solving our problems. Really, it’s just buying us some time - Mother Nature will win this battle eventually.

‘The model we have adopted here shows that careful consideration has been given for residents now and for future generations, and that we have had the courage and foresight to act decisively for the long-term future of Westport’.

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