

Environment Network Manawātū (ENM) is a member-led environment hub representing 65+ community groups working at the frontline of environmental action and community wellbeing in the wider Manawātū area. We are recognised by Palmerston North City Council as the sector lead for our community and are part of the national Environment Hubs Aotearoa (EHA) network.

Environment Network Manawatu thoughts about MDC's proposed strategic goals

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on your draft strategic goals. We have provided some thoughts and suggestions below. We also strongly encourage you to read the important report recently published by Environment Hubs Aotearoa: *Community is Climate Resilience: Lessons from Cyclone Gabrielle & the Auckland Anniversary Floods*, and consider how you might incorporate its findings into your community resilience planning.

MDC's Proposed strategic goals

– Strengthen Manawātū

Keep our foundations strong, safe and resilient – investing wisely in local roading, three waters, rubbish and recycling, community facilities, and public services

- Roads and local transport networks
- Drinking water, wastewater and stormwater systems
- Rubbish and recycling services
- Parks, reserves and sportsgrounds
- Libraries and community facilities including the Makino Aquatic Centre, halls and recreational complexes, and the Feilding Civic Centre

Thoughts: Strengthening a district involves prioritising community connection and resilience, also future proofing (for sustainability, food sovereignty, and climate resilience)

In our community, Environment Network Manawātū already:

- Connects people
- Coordinates volunteers
- Hosts gatherings and networks
- Is a trusted source of support and information

...which means we are already part of the resilience system of this area.

- Thrive Manawatū

Back our rural economy and local businesses, and plan for smart growth that considers our most productive land and natural environment

- District Plan and land-use planning – zoning to manage land use and planning for growth
- Protecting our most productive land from development
- Enabling residential, commercial and industrial growth in appropriate locations
- Climate adaptation and resilience planning
- Economic development (delivered through CEDA)

Suggestion: “...smart growth that ~~considers~~ prioritises our most productive land and natural environment”.

Support the inclusion of climate adaption and resilience planning. **Suggestion:** Revise the order:

- Climate adaption and resilience planning,
- Protecting our most productive land from development,
- District Plan and land-use planning – zoning to manage land use and planning for growth,
- Enabling residential, commercial and industrial growth in appropriate locations, Economic development (delivered through CEDA).

- Empower Manawatū

Invest in our community through relationships, advocacy, cultural connections and support

- Community grants and funding programmes
- Support for local events
- Relationship building with iwi and marae
- Business community connection and support via Feilding & District Promotion and our development navigator
- Youth Council

Thoughts: What are the outcomes of an empowered Manawatū?

- A well connected community?
- People who are engaged citizens?
- People who look after each other?
- People who are thriving and have their needs met, i.e. adequate housing, access to enough healthy food, clean air, healthy rivers,
- Places to grow together?
- A safe community?

Suggestion: “Relationship building and partnership development with iwi and marae.”

Suggestion: Consider PNCC’s Sector Lead Partnerships model where Council collaborates with community groups to deliver high-quality services and maximise the impact of the rates dollar.

- Showcase Manawatū

Champion a proud rural district with a thriving town and villages, rooted in strong heritage, cultural diversity, and beautiful spaces

- Community events and business community connection and support via our funding contract with Feilding and District Promotion
- Regional tourism and supporting local business growth via Central Economic Development Agency (CEDA)
- Town Centre Refresh
- Community Committees
- Marae and Hapu Committees

Thought: Could the statement of 'proud rural district' include care for the environment that provides for us all as one of the points of pride?

Suggestion: Put Marae and Hapū Committees higher than the bottom?

- Lead Manawatū

Provide strong leadership, deliver cost-effective, customer-focussed services, and ensure the Manawatū is well represented regionally and nationally

- Regulatory services including animal control, building control, consents and compliance, environmental health and monitoring
- Governance and strategy (engagement and representation)
- Regional partnerships and shared services
- Submissions and advocacy to central government

Thoughts and suggestions: Innovation? New ideas and ways of working? Leadership for renewable energy and sustainability?



Community is Climate Resilience: Lessons from Cyclone Gabrielle & the Auckland Anniversary Floods

As you consider your strategic goals for a strong, thriving, empowered Manawatū, and you prepare for your Long Term Plan 2027-37, ENM asks that you consider the findings of this important report recently published by Environment Hubs Aotearoa: *Community is Climate Resilience: Lessons from Cyclone Gabrielle & the Auckland Anniversary Floods*.¹ Some findings of this research:

1. Core Infrastructure

Community systems are core infrastructure

- Community networks filled critical gaps.
- Deep local knowledge enabled rapid action.
- Hubs and marae functioned as physical resilience centres.
- Trust allowed faster mobilisation than formal systems.

2. What made community response effective

Resilience doesn't begin during a disaster — it's built in the everyday work of community connection.

What made community support effective from the research:

- Pre-existing relationships
- Strong local leadership
- Physical gathering spaces
- Volunteer networks
- Flexibility and rapid decision-making
- Planned redundancy (multiple pathways for support)

3. Barriers to community efforts

The research identified systemic challenges:

- Communication breakdowns
- Red tape & reimbursement delays
- Lack of integration with Civil Defence
- Funding delays
- Under-recognition of Māori leadership
- Historic disempowerment of voluntary Civil Defence groups

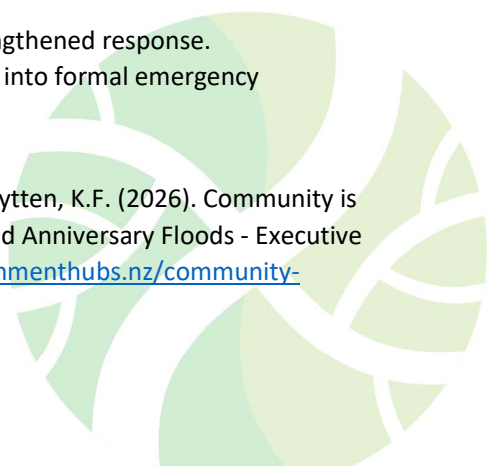
Note: These were structural barriers — not community failures.

The system isn't always set up to support Community Organisations.

4. Māori leadership was critical

- Marae acted as critical infrastructure.
- Māori values like whanaungatanga and kotahitanga strengthened response.
- However, Māori leadership is not consistently integrated into formal emergency management structures.

¹ Pannell, J., Bland, L., Morrison, G., Kerr, A., Els, S., Berandi, R., Hytten, K.F. (2026). Community is Climate Resilience: Lessons from Cyclone Gabrielle & the Auckland Anniversary Floods - Executive Summary. Pahiatua: Environment Hubs Aotearoa. <https://environmenthubs.nz/community-resilience-research>



Genuine partnership with mana whenua strengthens resilience for everyone.

5. Individual preparedness alone is not enough

The research challenges a purely household-focused approach.

While “get ready” messaging is important:

- Not everyone can stockpile supplies.
- Vulnerability is shaped by poverty, housing, isolation, and structural inequities.

Resilience isn't just about go-bags — it's about social cohesion.

ENM looks forward to working closely with Manawatū District Council to support, strengthen, and empower the Manawatū community in the coming years.



Rebecca Bell, Chair

On behalf of the Board and Staff of Environment Network Manawatū

