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# Strengthening Tairāwhiti's Climate Response

An independent review of Gisborne District Council's  
climate policy making and planning to date

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## The Worsening Climate Crisis

The world is in the midst of a climate crisis. Scientists warn we are reaching irreversible tipping points sooner than anticipated.<sup>2</sup> Extreme weather events, floods, fires and droughts are increasing in frequency. Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are not declining, sea levels are rising and according to the UNEP we're on course to reach 2.8C warming by 2100 based on the current commitments of the world's governments. This could mean ecological catastrophe, economic meltdown and societal collapse. The COP27 final report called on governments to urgently review and raise their 2030 emissions targets. The New Zealand Government has declared a climate emergency, adopted national emissions reduction and adaptation plans, and mandated local authorities to work with their communities and central government to confront the crisis. So are local councils doing enough?

## Why an independent review at this time?

A recent public attitude survey<sup>3</sup> found that 83 percent of Kiwis are concerned about climate change, but 51 percent aren't sure what to do to adapt or where to get advice and assistance. The Tairāwhiti region is likely to experience increasingly severe climate-related impacts in coming years.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, we review publically-available information about the work the Gisborne District Council (GDC) has been doing to enable itself, as well as businesses, whanau and communities to reduce emissions and adapt to climate change. We also note issues or critical questions that have arisen during the review. Our aim is to provide a summary of Council climate-related policy making and planning that may be of interest to concerned citizens, as well as identifying challenges the Council may need to address in strengthening internal processes and securing wide community buy-in for 'timely' climate action. We look forward to collaborating in Council-led climate initiatives as appropriate, and being part of the journey toward a low-emissions, climate resilient Tairāwhiti.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/sep/08/world-on-brink-five-climate-tipping-points-study-finds>

<sup>3</sup> EECA, 2021. 'Public attitudes and action on energy and climate change.' December.

<https://www.eeca.govt.nz/insights/eeca-insights/public-attitudes-and-action-on-energy-and-climate-change/#:~:text=Findings,believing%20climate%20change%20is%20real>.

<sup>4</sup> NIWA, 2020. 'Climate change projections and impacts for Tairāwhiti and Hawke's Bay', November.

[https://www.gdc.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0023/19733/2020-Climate-Change-Projections-and-Impacts-for-Tairawhiti-and-Hawkes-Bay-Niwa-Report.pdf](https://www.gdc.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/19733/2020-Climate-Change-Projections-and-Impacts-for-Tairawhiti-and-Hawkes-Bay-Niwa-Report.pdf)

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## Background

In 2019 the GDC decided not to declare a climate emergency unlike several other councils, but instead adopted a resolution that climate change was ‘a significant issue’ for Tairāwhiti. A public climate change summit was held in 2020, partly in response to a petition from local members of Students Strike 4 Climate. Since then, staff and consultants have completed a draft regional GHG emissions inventory and an initial inventory of the Council’s emissions. They have also summarised findings from scientific studies<sup>5</sup> indicating climate change will have increasingly adverse effects on the region’s weather, health and wellbeing, natural environment, taonga species, mahinga kai, food production, biosecurity, infrastructure, and regional economy. Their investigations concluded that ‘timely interventions’<sup>6</sup> were needed to reduce emissions, adapt to worsening impacts, and transition to a low carbon economy. In other words, given where the Council was starting from, *bold measures* were called for.

Instead, the Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee – which is responsible for climate change policy and planning – has chosen to take a ‘cautious’ and ‘practical’ approach, according to its minutes. Presumably this is to minimise the burden on ratepayers, allow more time to engage with key stakeholders/Treaty partners and avoid disruption to the local economy. But the pace of climate change is accelerating, and there will be costs and disruptions regardless of how deliberately the Council proceeds.

To the interested observer, the Council’s climate response so far appears to be a well-meaning but somewhat confusing jumble of high level policy statements, overlapping regional/district plans, future ‘pathways,’ ongoing work plans and operational projects. Not only are these difficult to relate to one another but it’s difficult to determine, at least on current Council outcomes reporting, whether they are actually helping reduce emissions and build regional resiliency.

Let’s begin with high level policy statements and plans.

## Where climate change fits in current GDC policies and plans

### *Tairāwhiti Regional Policy Statement*<sup>7</sup>

The Regional Policy Statement (RPS) is mandated by central government as part of the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan. The RPS is meant to represent not only the Council’s intentions but the aspirations of the community as a whole. Its main purpose is to provide the Council with a high-level policy framework for regional social, economic and environmental development as well as provide a basis for citizens to hold Council accountable.

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. NIWA, 2020. *Climate change projections and impacts for Tairāwhiti and Hawke’s Bay*, November.

<sup>6</sup> Report 21-254 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Workshop, p 3.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://www.gdc.govt.nz/council/review-of-tairawhiti-resource-management-plan/the-regional-policy-statement>

The existing RPS has been under review since 2021. Following a public survey, staff drafted a revised statement that identified four outcomes to be achieved in coming years, the main obstacles to achieving these outcomes, and how these would be overcome. Climate change will affect all four outcomes, but is specifically mentioned in ‘Building resilient communities.’ The RPS notes that the region is already susceptible to many natural hazard risks. Climate change will undoubtedly increase the frequency and worsen the impact of these risks, which in turn will impact people’s wellbeing and livelihoods. Indeed, they are already doing so as we’ve seen from recent extreme weather events. The Council intends holding a full consultation in 2023 to see “if these are still the most relevant challenges.”<sup>8</sup> Wide public participation to the consultation will be important for securing community buy-in to the RPS and providing a mandate for future Council planning and action.

### *2021-2031 Long-term Plan*

Every local council is responsible under the Local Government Act 2002 for developing a long term plan (LTP) in cooperation with the community. The purpose of an LTP is to describe the council’s activities and the wellbeing outcomes it aims to achieve on behalf of its citizens. In effect, it is *the community’s plan*. The planning process provides an opportunity for the public to participate in council decision-making. It’s an example of what political scientists refer to as ‘participatory versus representative government,’ where citizens don’t have leave it entirely to elected officials to represent their views but can have their voices heard on important issues.

The Gisborne District Council’s ten year LTP<sup>9</sup> was adopted in June 2021 after a period of consultation, primarily involving written submissions. The LTP addresses six key issues:

- Improving our climate change resilience through flood protection
- Renewing our water pipes
- Building wastewater wetlands
- Opportunities for increasing our biodiversity activities
- Increasing investment in road maintenance
- Township upgrades

In discussing climate change,<sup>10</sup> the LTP focuses on *adaptation* as does the Regional Policy Statement. It cites climate research indicating Tairāwhiti is likely to see more wildfires, more frequent storms, floods, damage to infrastructure, droughts and risks to water supplies. In response, the Council proposes to undertake a number of projects – most of which are already underway – including flood works,

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<sup>8</sup> Jo Noble, Chief of Strategy and Science, ‘Tackling Tairāwhiti Big Challenges,’ <https://www.gdc.govt.nz/council/news/2022-news/tackling-tairawhitis-big-challenges>

<sup>9</sup> Tairāwhiti Long term Plan, 2021 <https://www.gdc.govt.nz/council/2021-2031-long-term-plan>

<sup>10</sup> Tairāwhiti Long term Plan, 2021, p 33ff.

protecting the city's water supply, implementing a waste minimisation plan and extending cycleways and walkways.

The LTP does not make specific commitments or set targets on reducing regional emissions, notably from transport and agriculture our biggest emitters. It emphasises 'taking the time to properly plan for the future'<sup>11</sup> in consultation with tangata whenua, stakeholders and communities, even though it acknowledges we are in a climate emergency. The LTP states the Council will engage in regional climate change risk assessment, adaptation consultation, and emissions mitigation planning over the next three years. Some will no doubt question whether more concrete action is needed in light of the latest scientific reports.

### *Tairāwhiti 2050*

This is the Council's Regional Spatial Plan for the development of the region over the next 30 years. The label 'spatial' is somewhat of a misnomer because it is not just about planning for residential and business expansion. Tairāwhiti 2050 (not to be confused with the *Roadmap 2050* which we'll discuss later) sets out shared aspirations for the future wellbeing of the region. It identifies the major economic, social, cultural and environmental challenges confronting the region and how they'll be addressed. It is an important document for the Council, because it establishes a basis aligning the Council's strategies and plans with those of other organisations and government agencies to enable collaboration. It also sets a direction for regional planning, decision-making, investments and infrastructure development. It was adopted in 2020 after a period of public consultation.

Climate change response (both mitigation and adaptation) is one of the central focus areas of Tairāwhiti 2050. Outcome 2: 'Resilient Communities' and Outcome 5: 'We Take Sustainability Seriously' relate directly to climate change. Several others are indirectly affected by climate change. The Plan aims for the Tairāwhiti economy to be 'climate resilient' by 2050, which will no doubt mean significant costs and changes to how people live and how businesses operate. These effects have yet to be analysed by staff or discussed at length by Council, and were side-stepped during public consultations on the draft plan.

The Council is carrying out another public consultation between December 2022 and February 2023 on a Future Development Strategy (FDS) to implement the Regional Spatial Plan: Tairāwhiti 2050. To complicate things further, Tairāwhiti 2050 is linked to the Tairāwhiti Economic Action Plan (TEAP).

### **Council planning and action focused specifically on climate change**

The Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee is responsible for developing the Long Term Plan, the Annual Plan and the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan as well as monitoring and reporting on the state of the

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<sup>11</sup> LTP, p 24.

regional environment. The committee is comprised of all councillors and is chaired by the mayor. Because of its environmental brief, it is also charged with developing and recommending climate policies, plans and initiatives to the Council after appropriate public consultation. Council's Strategy and Science section is responsible for gathering climate change information, assessing risks, consulting with stakeholders, drafting policies and strategies, making recommendations and reporting on how the committee's decisions are being implemented.

### *Climate Change Portfolio Plan*

During 2021, the Council established a core roopu (group) of staff led by the Strategy and Science team to develop a climate change portfolio and work plan. The Climate Change Portfolio Plan was reported to the Sustainable Tairāwhiti at its meeting on 10 March 2022.<sup>12</sup> The Climate Change Portfolio Plan is organised around four strategic outputs:<sup>13</sup>

1. Design and implement an emissions reduction plan for Council as a leading example of effective climate response in Tairāwhiti.
2. Work with all regional leaders and stakeholders to co-design and implement a regional emissions reduction plan alongside our regional partners using evidence- and risk-based approaches for the benefit of present and future generations.
3. Work with all regional leaders and stakeholders to co-design and implement a plan to support our region to transition to a low-carbon future.
4. Work with all regional leaders to co-design and implement adaptation solutions using evidence- and risk-based approaches that reflect our need for regional resilience from the effects of climate change for the benefit of present and future generations.

Staff have developed a work plan to implement the Portfolio Plan, organised into three workstreams:<sup>14</sup>

- Mitigation – “reducing greenhouse gas emissions at an organisational level and collaborating with other regional leaders to co-design a regional emissions reduction plan.
- Adaptation – “cooperating with other regional leaders to co-design an adaptation plan to reduce the impacts of climate change on our natural and built environment through suitable measures.

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<sup>12</sup> Report 22-42 Climate Change Update

<sup>13</sup> Report 22-42 Climate Change Update, Attachment 2

<sup>14</sup> Strategy and Science Section paper 22-42 Climate Change Update (by Dr Magnus Abraham-Dukuma - Senior Policy Advisor with MyImprint input), Attachment 2. Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee meeting, 10 March 2022.

- Equitable (just) transition – “collaborating with other regional leaders to co-design a just/equitable transition plan that minimises the impact of a low emissions lifestyle on our whanau.

The work plan consists of a number of different pieces of work being undertaken within the three workstreams, including:

- An overall roadmap/strategy
- Climate risk assessment
- Adaptation planning
- Organisational emissions reduction planning (ERP)
- Regional emissions reduction planning
- Corporate responsibility initiatives
- Emissions measurement, monitoring and reporting
- Carbon credit ownership and trading
- TEAP Action-Just Transition Plan

The Climate Change Portfolio Plan and three year work plan are intended to drive implementation of the Council’s climate response: *Roadmap 2050*.

#### *Roadmap 2050*

The Roadmap 2050 was developed by staff over several months from late 2021 to early 2022 as a plan for how the Council intended responding to climate change. It is divided into (a) actions the Council will take over the next 30 years regarding its own operations to respond to climate change, and (b) actions the Council will take to facilitate regional responses to climate change.

The draft roadmap was first presented to the Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee on 10 March 2022. Staff advised that the roadmap would be “a high-level definition of Council’s overall approach to responding to climate change and build upon the foundation established by the climate change portfolio.”<sup>15</sup> Unlike the regional ‘spatial’ plan, it was not put out for public consultation. It was understood as *the Council’s* roadmap, facilitated by staff, which other stakeholders and the community would hopefully sign up to. As the Council’s website states, “This is *our* high-level climate change journey, milestones and timeframes and how we’ll work with others to support regional climate change goals”<sup>16</sup> [emphasis added]. To be clear, this is not a regional transition plan of the sort developed by the Taranaki Regional Council in collaboration with multiple stakeholders, called *Taranaki 2050* with its eleven transition

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<sup>15</sup> Sustainable Tairāwhiti, March 10, 2022. 22-42 Climate Change Update, p 8

<sup>16</sup> Emphasis added. See <https://www.gdc.govt.nz/environment/climate-change-in-tairawhiti>

pathway action plans. Such a process is still in the preliminary discussion stage between GDC and key stakeholders.

A revised version of the Roadmap 2050 was presented to the committee for decision on 28 July.<sup>17</sup> The accompanying staff report noted the roadmap consisted of seven phases of action over thirty years. The roadmap was needed to help the Council prioritise resources, track progress and “initially scope regional response.” This high level scoping would provide a “foundation for engaging widely with our community and Te Tiriti partners for various pieces of climate change work that staff will deliver.” It was a pictorial timeline of proposed initiatives that could be used to inform and encourage stakeholder and community buy-in to council-led climate action.

After further discussion, the Roadmap 2050 was formally adopted. Some councillors were not completely satisfied with the latest version and the information provided by staff. At least four concerns were raised during discussion:

- Detailed cost/benefit analysis had not been done on the options. Was it better for example to retain council forests to sequester emissions, or cut them down and purchase carbon credits? Shouldn't the emphasis be on encouraging actual emissions reduction rather than offsets?
- The decision to leave council-owned farm emissions out of the Council's emissions reduction plan (ERP) should be re-visited. It just delays having to deal with (and pay for) these emissions in future.
- Staff will present a further major report on council emissions and reduction options in November [delayed till December]. That could cast a different light on emissions reduction targets and proposed actions.
- Council has at present no mandate regarding the roadmap milestones. The community needs to be consulted, especially if it means more cost to ratepayers.

The Mayor and Chief Executive stressed the roadmap was meant to be 'high level' and 'aspirational.' The Council needed to release something soon to show the public it was taking action.

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<sup>17</sup> Report 22-143 Roadmap 2050.

## **GDC's organisational climate change response**

### *Council emissions reduction*

Work on a Council climate policy framework and planning process began in earnest in 2021. In November, the Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee held an in-house workshop to discuss central government's 2050 zero-carbon target, what a regional pathway to a net-zero future might look like, and how the Council could show leadership by reducing its own greenhouse gas emissions by developing an organisational emissions reduction plan.<sup>18</sup> The session was facilitated by MyImprint, a consultancy specialising in helping organisations assess their emissions footprint. Following the workshop, the consultants worked with the Council's Strategy and Science team to provide more detail on possible pathways and targets to net zero for the region and the Council.

In preparation for the November workshop, staff circulated a report<sup>19</sup> summarising climate change scientific evidence as well as international and national policy developments, suggesting possible options for when and how the Council might achieve net-zero emissions. Staff noted that the council-owned enterprise Gisborne Holdings Limited (GHL) may need to be treated differently. The report pointed out that GHL emissions were mainly methane from animals at Tauwhareparae Farms, and agricultural emissions were not part of the Government's zero carbon target for 2050 – at least, *not yet*. Councillors had to consider “whether to include or exclude GHL emissions from our organisational ERP.”

GHL operations make up almost half (47.5%) of council emissions. If GHL were excluded, that would mean the Council could focus on reducing emissions from its landfills and vehicle fleet. It would also mean GHL (and the Council) could delay having to make costly changes to its commercial operations to reach net-zero emissions until a regional ERP was consulted on and adopted. That could be several years in the future, though the business impact on GHL could end up being greater. In the end, perhaps not surprisingly, councillors voted to exempt GHL from having to meet the Council's ERP targets but “include strategic objectives in the Council's SOI for GHL.”<sup>20</sup> The issue certainly would have been of interest to the general public, if they had known about it.

The March 10 meeting of the Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee discussed a report from staff on alternative emissions targets for the Council's ERP, including work consultants MyImprint had been doing to estimate emissions from Council landfill gas, waste and transport.<sup>21</sup> Staff pointed out that setting a *2025 net zero target* would require more urgent action and would have significant cost

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<sup>18</sup> Report 21-254 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Workshop, p 2. Also see Strategy Section paper, 10 March 2022: 22-30 Additional Information for Emissions Reduction Targets

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p 6 and Attachment 6.

<sup>20</sup> Report 22-30 presented to March 10 meeting of Sustainable Tairāwhiti

<sup>21</sup> Report 22-30 Additional Information for Emissions Reduction Targets, Attachment 1: MyImprint *GHG Emissions Reduction Strategy (Gisborne District Council)*

implications for the Council and ratepayers. Setting a 2040 net zero target would give a buffer to gather more evidence and achieve the target, with an estimated reduction in emissions of 30-40% by 2030.<sup>22</sup>

Staff recommended concentrating emissions reduction actions on waste services. The reason was obvious. Transport makes up only a small portion of council emissions. Waste services and facilities like the Paokahu landfill account for an impressive 88% of Council emissions, though only if GHL operations were excluded. If they were included, waste would only be 46% of Council emission and emissions from GHL's farming operations would make up 47%. The advice was it would be virtually impossible for the Council to set a short-term target to achieve net-zero emissions without having a significant impact on GHL's commercial viability.

A number of concerns were raised by councillors at the March 10 meeting, particularly around whether a bolder net zero target could be achieved by cutting Council emissions and insetting (e.g. expanding council-owned forests) and/or offsetting (e.g. buying carbon credits outside the region). There would be additional costs to ratepayers from delaying actual emissions cuts. Chief of Strategy and Science Jo Noble noted the Government had set net zero targets nationally, and Council would be expected to help achieve these. If insetting and offsetting were excluded, then Council would have few options to reach the net zero targets. Noble suggested instead that the committee focus on establishing principles for drafting of the ERP, and worry about insetting or offsetting later.

The committee eventually agreed on *a target of net zero by 2030* for the Council's ERP. Councillors called for further information on the cost implications and the impact on ratepayers from setting such a target. Strategy and Science staff noted that work was already underway on a full report on the Council's 'net-zero journey' including the ratepayer cost information, but would not be ready until the committee's November meeting [delayed till December].

#### *Council adaptation*

Most of the Council's in-house adaptation initiatives are still in the planning stage, though a few have been small enough to be implemented quickly. For example, the committee was informed at their 10 March 2022 meeting that the Council's standard staff travel request form had been amended to include an emissions calculation function.<sup>23</sup> This would improve data gathering around Council's emissions and "gradually socialise the culture of environmentally friendly transport-related decision making."

#### *Council transition*

Staff from the Strategy and Science team informed the Sustainable Tairāwhiti at their 10 March 2022 meeting that the Council was taking an 'integrated' (cross-department) approach in responding to

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<sup>22</sup> Report 22-30, p 8-10.

<sup>23</sup> 10 March 2022, Sustainable Tairāwhiti meeting, Science & Strategy, 22-42 Climate Change Update, p 8-10.

climate change.<sup>24</sup> As part of the process, guidelines had been developed to assist staff in preparing a climate impact statement to attach to policy papers and other decision-making documents. Training sessions on the use of the guidelines were held during February and March 2022.

### **Council actions to facilitate a regional climate change response**

#### *Emissions reduction*

2022 staff and consultants have completed a draft regional greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory. As a consequence, June report 22-111 “staff have identified the need for a *strong decarbonisation focus* in the regional just transition plan to produce a document that helps us understand the critical milestones.

#### *Adaptation*

The Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee was updated at their 10 March 2022 meeting about development of a Tairāwhiti region climate change risk assessment (TCCRA), a ‘key piece of work in the staff Climate Change Portfolio in relation to adaptation planning.’<sup>25</sup> The aim was to identify the climate impacts that most likely to seriously affect communities and businesses in coming years. The project was expected to take until late 2024 to complete. GDC staff would consult with staff in other councils that had recently completed a risk assessment for their regions. The project would be informed by MfE’s Guide to Local Climate Change Risk Assessments.

At the committee’s 2 June 2022 meeting, staff advised that the project had begun in May with engineering firm Tonkin & Taylor contracted to deliver the TCCRA. It was not clear what role if any key stakeholders and the community might have in identifying and prioritising risks. The project design was not open for public comment nor does it appear that a community engagement plan was included.<sup>26</sup> The staff report included the comment: <sup>27</sup>“It should be noted that when and how we engage with iwi and hapū as well as the wider community *is still being considered*, and the timing of phase 1 and 2 may be adjusted to reflect the outcome of this process.” [emphasis added]

As noted in the draft Roadmap 2050, existing council-led adaptation projects such as flood protection were ongoing as part of adaptation. Discussions are now underway on developing and initiating a ‘deliberative decision-making’ process for engaging iwi and local communities in climate adaptation planning.

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<sup>24</sup> “ “

<sup>25</sup> Sustainable Tairāwhiti 10 March 2022, Report 22-42 Climate Change Update

<sup>26</sup> In comparison, see Wellington Regional Council, ‘Regional Climate Risk and Impacts Assessment ,’ <https://wrlc.org.nz/project/regional-approach-to-climate-change-impacts-assessment>

<sup>27</sup> Sustainable Tairāwhiti 2 June 2022, Report 22-111 Climate Change Update

## *Transition*

At their 10 March 2022 meeting, the Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee was informed by the Chief of Strategy and Science about progress on a draft Regional Position Statement (RPS). The initiative was being led by Science and Strategy staff in cooperation with a group of stakeholders initially convened by Trust Tairāwhiti under their Rau Tipu Rau Ora (RTRO) programme. According to the staff report, the RPS includes a timeline of regional initiatives and outcomes. How the RPS relates to the Council's Regional Policy Statement, which is part of the Tairāwhiti Resource Management Plan and the Roadmap 2050, is unclear. It is not included in the roadmap.

Staff have also been undertaking scoping work and holding meetings with stakeholders to develop a regional equitable (just) transition plan, which is a key component of the Tairāwhiti Economic Action Plan (TEAP). At the June 2022 meeting of Sustainable Tairāwhiti, staff advised that Trust Tairāwhiti had engaged Beca engineering consultants to provide technical inputs into the planning process.<sup>28</sup> There was a need for a strong decarbonisation focus in the transition plan to help identify “the critical milestones and timeframes for building a climate-resilient region through a fair process.” Some participants have commented the process has been painfully slow to date.

### **Challenges GDC faces in progressing Tairāwhiti's climate change response**

At the beginning of this paper, we noted warnings from climate scientists and the UN that urgent action is needed to address the climate crisis. Our own region's experience of extreme weather events only underscores that urgency. Recent public attitude surveys indicate most people are concerned about climate change and expect national and local governments to take appropriate action. Looking over the regional plans and policy statements developed by the Council, the deliberations of the Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee and the work being led by the Science and Strategy team along with other staff, there appear to be at least three in-house challenges the Council faces to wants to accelerate planning and achieve wide-spread community buy-in for 'timely' mitigation, adaptation and transition action.

#### **Challenge 1: *Improving coordination of climate action across Council departments***

Strategy and Science staff informed the Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee in March 2022 that “the Council is taking an *integrated approach* in responding to climate change” and that the Roadmap 2050 commits Council to “*considering* climate change in everything we do.” At the June 2022 meeting, staff reported they had been “working to ensure that our organisational ERP *aligns with the key milestones* and timeframes identified in our climate change roadmap that is under development.”<sup>29</sup>

Such statements are reassuring as far as they go. But since they describe approaches or ongoing processes, they leave considerable wiggle room for council departments to delay in achieving Roadmap

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<sup>28</sup> “ “ p 103.

<sup>29</sup> Sustainable Tairāwhiti, June 2022 meeting, Report 22-111 Climate Change Update p 103.

2050 milestones. Or allow other priorities to take precedence over climate change. For example, the Lifeline and Assets division reported to the Operations committee in September 2022<sup>30</sup> that its current Vehicle Fleet Replacement policy favoured 'sustainable vehicles' but gave priority to cost and availability. Staff claimed they would be unable to develop a Fleet Conversion plan to help reduce Council emissions for at least another year due to lack of suitable alternative energy vehicles on the market and cost.<sup>31</sup> Presumably there was nothing preventing staff from regularly monitoring the market and beginning preliminary planning.

Unfortunately, no one seems to have attempted to explain (to Sustainable Tairāwhiti or the public) how high-level Council plans, departmental activities or new projects relevant to climate change relate to Roadmap 2050, Council's emissions reduction plan and the staff's Climate Portfolio 3-year work plan. For instance, there are some obvious overlaps between the RPS, the Long-term Plan, the Spatial Plan and the Roadmap.

Most importantly, although the 'aspirational' Roadmap 2050 has been released to the public, it is unclear precisely how the staff Climate Change Portfolio Plan and 3-year work plan relate to milestones and actions in the roadmap itself. The explanatory note at the top of the published roadmap states that the organisational and regional actions listed "cover mitigation, adaptation and equitable (just) transition pieces of work." Most of the actions/projects in the roadmap are in fact *processes* rather than measurable outcomes. This fuzzy arrangement is likely to confuse citizens and key stakeholders concerned to see effective Council leadership on climate change. It has undoubtedly led to unclarity on the part of some councillors about how the Climate Change Portfolio Plan, 3-year work plan and roadmap relate. It might have been clearer if staff had integrated the portfolio plan and work plan into the Roadmap 2050 something along the lines of the alternative version in Appendix A.

The climate change roadmap may be aspirational but it doesn't have to be vague. And as the 2021 review by staff and consultants stated, it also must contain 'timely action.' Given the various staff climate science updates to the Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee and latest developments as a result of COP27, the question is whether the roadmap is proposing concrete actions soon enough to make a real difference to cutting emissions and adapting to climate impacts. At present, the roadmap primarily involves research, strategizing, consulting and collaborative planning...*until 2027*.

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<sup>30</sup> Operations Committee, 15 September 2022. Community Lifelines-Assets, Vehicle Fleet Update 22-217.

<sup>31</sup> See Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment, 18 October 2022. *Environmental reporting, research and investment: Do we know if we're making a difference*. New Zealand Government, Wellington.

*Recommendation:*

The Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee should immediately seek a report from the Strategy and Science team on how the Climate Change Portfolio, the 3-year work plan and the projects/milestones in Roadmap 2050 interrelate. If not already done, the climate change roopu should be asked to report back with a plan for monitoring climate-related developments in departments across the organisation to ensure they are contributing to the milestones in the roadmap and ERP.

**Challenge 2:** *Greater transparency and wider community involvement in determining priorities, considering options and designing climate initiatives*

A number of the staff reports on the Roadmap 2050 and Climate Change Portfolio work plan emphasise the importance of engaging with key stakeholders and involving the wider community to progress meaningful climate change responses. Unfortunately, some mechanisms and procedures employed by the Council have hindered achievement of that aim.

One of these is the use of in-house workshops. In August 2022, the Chief Ombudsman announced an investigation into concerns that councils were “undermining local democracy” by using workshops to discuss issues and “make decisions behind closed doors.”<sup>32</sup> GDC has made use of the workshop tool with increasing frequency in regard to climate change planning. Sometimes the decisions taken at these workshops can have far-reaching consequences. The Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee’s November 2021 workshop in which they exempted council-owned Gisborne Holdings Limited from the ERP<sup>33</sup> is a case in point. Given the omission of GHL was likely to impact regional emissions reduction planning and increase chances of ratepayers having to eventually pay more for carbon offsets, it was a decision that would have been of considerable public interest. Other workshops are planned in future, for example in the final phase of the Tairāwhiti Climate Change Risk Assessment. Sustainable Tairāwhiti adopted the Roadmap 2050 in mid-2022 without public consultation, even though during discussion councillors noted that “the community needs to be attuned with Council as there will be a series of disruptive changes in the way that they live,” and that there will be “a significant cost involved in transitioning to a low-carbon economy.”

The Climate Change Portfolio work plan certainly raises questions about how and how much to engage stakeholders and the community as new plans and projects are developed, even where these involve the Council’s *organisational* climate response. Take the draft emissions reduction plan (ERP) for instance. In an email in July 2022 to the author, a Strategy and Science staff member stated

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<sup>32</sup> Stuff News, 4 August 2022. “‘Undermining local democracy’: Fairness watchdog to investigate closed council workshops.” Felix Desmarais. <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/local-democracy-reporting/129484575/undermining-local-democracy-fairness-watchdog-to-investigate-closed-council-workshops>

<sup>33</sup> See report 21-254 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Workshop.

“The ERP to achieve the set target will be presented to Council at a later date (yet to be confirmed). We are also yet to determine whether there will be an opportunity for public comment on the ERP prior to its adoption and if so what format that will be. Our recommendation to elected members in the report to Council on engagement *will be based on an assessment in line with Council’s Significance and Engagement Policy.*”

The Significance and Engagement Policy (SEP) is an example of a mechanism that has not been particularly conducive to transparency and not fit for purpose for whether to involve the public in climate change issues before the Council. The SEP establishes the priority that is to be given to staff reports and Council policy decisions, and whether consultation with stakeholders and the wider community is called for. At present, if a report or draft plan is assessed by staff as of ‘Low’ significance and councillors agree, no consultation is necessary. The SEP sets out a number of criteria for determining the significance of a report or issue but none of these include climate change. Instead, tacked onto the end of the statement is the following statement:

“Climate change is an important consideration for Council that is assessed using a Climate Impact Statement (CIS) *rather than being a criteria for significance.* This enables a more detailed analysis to be conducted and also proposes mitigation/adaptation methods.” [emphasis added]

In practice, climate change has been treated separately from the SEP and virtually ignored. This no longer is appropriate, since climate change affects all aspects of council business and decisions. Apparently in recognition of this gap, staff informed the March 2022 Sustainable Tairāwhiti meeting that a CIS format and guidelines had been developed and staff had been trained in its use. To date, however, *few if any reports or policy documents coming before Sustainable Tairāwhiti have contained a CIS assessment.* Even when CIS begins to be used, a number of questions remain around how the SEP and CIS relate and how the climate impacts of a decision or policy will be assessed to determine whether the public needs to be consulted.

Speaking of consultation, given the accelerating pace of climate change and the complexity of planning and facilitating regional responses, it seems timely to reconsider conventional consultation approaches. Calling for written submissions, arranging a series of public presentations and inviting feedback, or convening a consultative stakeholder panel are unlikely to be effective when it comes to community adaptation and transition planning. MBIE’s Just Transition Unit has noted that, based on research on transitions overseas, *“the most successful transitions are those based on community-led planning involving all people, places, firms and sectors”* in a region. Fortunately, a world-wide resource of such tools has been developed in response to the climate crisis. Councillors will be aware of Te Weu Tairāwhiti research (funded by The Southern Challenge) with landowners and communities around carbon farming, in which we have developed models, methods and case studies for what many are

calling ‘deliberative decision-making.’ The aim has been to develop a holistic community-led or collective landowner process for assessing risks, exploring options and adapting to climate effects and transitioning to a more resilient future.

*Recommendation:*

Both the SEP and the Climate Impact Statement are important instruments in determining whether a proposed policy, plan or decision needs to be subject to some form of public consultation. Presumably now that the disruption of the local election is over, all papers coming to the Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee will contain a CIS. For further clarification about how the CIS is to be used in determining the necessity for community consultation, the committee should request a report from staff at the next meeting regarding:

- 1) the CIS guidelines used in training staff
- 2) an explanation of how the CIS relates to the SEP in general, as well as to what bearing it has on specific SEP criteria. Does the CIS stand alongside or take precedence over the SEP? If alongside, how is priority to be determined in specific instances?

Discussions are already underway with a regional stakeholders group, in consultation with MBIE, about how to progress transition planning. We recommend similar discussions begin at a practical planning level on a model and methodology for initiating community-level deliberations and planning around adaptation.

**Challenge 3:** *Speedier action to reduce regional emissions and transition to a resilient society*

The Council’s high level policy statements and climate response planning have so far focused largely on how the Council will reduce its own emissions and on preliminary regional risk assessment and emissions research. Councillors have to date accepted staff recommendations on the need to take a more measured (slower) approach to stakeholder consultation and public engagement in regional emissions reduction and just transition planning. The Roadmap 2050 and staff workstream reports anticipate that emissions data gathering, risk assessment and key stakeholder discussions could take *up to three years*.

As noted earlier, GDC in cooperation with Trust Tairāwhiti have convened an ad hoc regional decarbonisation/transition group of stakeholders to engage in preliminary discussions about a regional ERP and transition to a low-carbon economy. A zoom meeting was organised by Trust Tairāwhiti (RTR0) in September 2022 so council staff and key stakeholders could hear presentations from representatives of the Just Transition Unit in the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and discuss next steps for the regional transition plan.

Setting targets and introducing measures to cut emissions will affect the lives of every household, business and community organisation in significant ways and hasten the need for a just transition plan. Tairāwhiti lags behind many regions in inventorying and monitoring regional emissions, transition planning, business support, and public engagement. Several local authorities are undertaking collaborative planning and community engagement activities *in parallel with* risk assessment and emissions inventorying. For example, Wellington City’s Te Atakura First to Zero plan includes development of a city-wide education and culture-change campaign “to empower Wellingtonians to take climate action by identifying what we can do individually and collectively to make a meaningful difference.”<sup>34</sup> The campaign is facilitated by a City Activation team who engage with mana whenua, community, business, social enterprise, and youth to tell their stories and deliver significant carbon reduction initiatives. Tangible support is available for businesses (the Environmental and Accessibility Performance fund) and community groups (the Climate and Sustainability Fund).

Tairāwhiti can borrow from other regions, as staff reports have noted, but we will have to play catch up in many areas if we are to become a truly resilient region and play our part in helping address national climate change targets.

*Recommendation:*

The Sustainable Tairāwhiti committee should consider asking staff leading the climate response work to consult with the decarbonisation/just transition stakeholders group and report back at the next committee meeting with a revised work plan that (a) brings forward milestones regarding completion of a risk analysis, the emissions inventory and a draft regional ERP; (b) broadens and formalises cross-sector representation in the stakeholders group; and (c) expands the scope of the regional work programme to include community-wide education, information dissemination and technical support and (co)funding for grassroots adaptation/decarbonisation initiatives .

Consultants (e.g. Beca, MyImprint) should be informed of the revised timeline and changes that may be needed to their schedule of work.

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<sup>34</sup> Wellington City – Te Atakura First to Zero, p 3 <https://wellington.govt.nz/-/media/environment-and-sustainability/climate-change/files/zero-carbon-plan-final-web.pdf?la=en&hash=49A63C825646783F06FB13D9AB708AF984324492>

Appendix A

GDC Roadmap 2050 Climate Action Plan  
*Alternative version suggested by Te Weu Tairāwhiti*

(Note: Yellow indicates tangible, measurable outcomes)

	2022-3	2023-4	2025-27	2028-32	2033-35	2036-40
<b>Council</b>						
Mitigation actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adapt net-zero 2030 target for Council emissions</li> <li>Assess options for achieving target (ERP)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> <li>(Lifeline &amp; Assets implement a Fleet Conversion Plan)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce Council emissions by 70-90%</li> <li>Complete gas capture at landfills</li> <li>'Work on' fleet conversion to EVs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council net-zero by 2030 through use of carbon 'insets'</li> <li>'Progress' fleet conversion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review strategies, plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action mitigation projects that take us to a zero-carbon organisation</li> </ul>
Adaptation actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish adaptation outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> <li>(Staff travel request form)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action adaptation projects (?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start larger organisational adaptation projects</li> </ul>		
Transition actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff consider climate in everything we do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>None</li> <li>in every Council report)**</li> </ul>				
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<b>Region</b>						
Mitigation actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Adoption of a Regional Position Statement)##</li> <li>'Support' the region to reduce emissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Adoption of a Regional ERP)**</li> <li>Continue to support regional emissions reduction (?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(Emissions measurement, monitoring, reporting)**</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to reduce regional emissions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review strategies, plans; consider how better to support regional climate action</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support large projects that tackle regional climate change issues</li> </ul>
Adaptation actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start regional climate risk assessment TCCRA</li> <li>Continue existing adaptation projects*</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Complete risk assessment</li> <li>Progress existing &amp; new adaptation work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a plan to address climate risks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with Treaty partners, stakeholders groups on big adaptation projects</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with Treaty partners &amp; stakeholder groups to reduce climate risks</li> </ul>
Transition actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Start working with community groups &amp; iwi (TERG?)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(A Regional Just Transition plan, key action in the TEAP)**</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with Treaty partners, stakeholders to progress just transition projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with Treaty partners, stakeholders groups on just transition projects</li> </ul>		

\* These are current council infrastructure projects, like flood mitigation.

\*\* Pieces of work some of which are part of the staff Climate Change Portfolio Plan, some by other divisions. Not included in the Roadmap 2050.

## Apparently an initiative led by Science & Strategy staff in cooperation with a group of stakeholders convened by Trust Tairāwhiti staff under the Rau Tipu Rau Ora (RTRO) programme. Not included in the Roadmap 2050.