

REGIONAL INSIGHTS



The Tairāwhiti Forestry Industry continues to transition affected workers to other work opportunities but remains concerned about the long-term future. Rising production and regulatory costs along with the fluctuating export market is exacerbating the negative impacts of the North Island Weather Events. These are compounding longer term issues that have seen the forestry contractor workforce halved over the last 2.5 years, and the departure of skilled workers for other regions poses a significant challenge for the future of the industry. China is a primary export market, and a significant influencer of local log prices. However, the market has not recovered to pre-covid levels. Industry stakeholders are predicting that the best-case scenario for the Chinese market, is a slight increase due to their housing crisis. Despite a recent uptick in log prices, this will be insufficient (on its own) to drive a return to previous production rates seen in Tairāwhiti.

While some corporate crews are returning good production rates, it is unlikely this pace can be maintained. For example, some local crews are assisting with a windthrow event in Tūrangi/Taupō, but this work is expected to last only six more months. Trust Tairāwhiti has supported nearly 80 contractors under the Manaaki Forestry programme to transition to other industries, primarily civil construction. However, there is a need for longer-term solutions to these recurring problems, especially as the Ministerial Inquiry into Land Use (MILU) review could inform what a 'just transition' might look like for the forestry industry.

The Horticulture sector is shifting its focus from the effects of the North Island weather event to preparing for the upcoming dry season and revitalising operations. The increase of seasonal and working holiday visa holders has bolstered local labour supply. However, the shortage of backpacker-style accommodation limits the region's capacity to accommodate these workers. While the number of seasonal workers is adequate, the lack of permanent full-time staff leads to a less experienced workforce and fewer opportunities for leadership development. The scarcity of skilled and licensed drivers and heavy machinery operators is also hindering the sector's performance. The high cost of living in Tairāwhiti disincentivises skilled workers to stay local and is contributing to the talent drain to Australia. These issues are impacting the sector's attraction strategy to promote Gisborne as an attractive destination for backpackers to earn while traveling.

The Tairāwhiti Growers Association (TGA) has embraced a positive outlook for their refresh, adopting the phrase 'heading into Summer'. The Association is made up of industry leaders from horticulture whose collective purpose is to advance Tairāwhiti Horticulture into the future. Supporting the implementation of TGA is a key part of the horticulture industry's revitalisation plan. As the groups continue to work together, the current focus is on future proofing the industry through people development (particularly leadership) and promoting Tairāwhiti horticulture to ensure that its substantial contribution to New Zealand's produce output is recognised.

CYCLONE GABRIELLE – REGIONAL RECOVERY

Tairāwhiti is keen to work alongside Transport Rebuild East Coast (TREC)* in workforce development for the NIWE rebuild programme. The rebuild programme is expected to take 10-years and offers many employment and upskilling opportunities. TREC utilises a 'Locals First' approach which prioritises the region and ensures positive social outcomes are generated for communities. Although the TREC alliance itself does not employ people directly, it has seconded around 380 local people so far to complete preparation groundwork for infrastructure and roading. While much of the design of the rebuild will be delivered by specialist engineers and architects outside the region, Local stakeholders believe that close collaboration with TREC is crucial to ensuring upskilling opportunities for local workers increase - for example licensing for skilled heavy machinery operators. Tairāwhiti is anticipating a significant surge in vacancies, with some stakeholders preparing for a 30 percent increase. The project is forecast to need an additional five to six hundred people to commence in phases across 2024. However, it will be important to monitor areas of competition, such as horticulture, which also demands workers with similar skill sets.

**TREC is a 'public-private' alliance, owned by Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency and KiwiRail, and partners with roading contractors Downer, Higgins, and Fulton Hogan. TREC, unlike other large-scale infrastructure programmes, was a response designed to address the immediate aftermath of the North Island Weather Events rather than a long-term strategic plan for the region. Having substantially completed emergency response efforts, TREC is now prioritising interim road repairs while formulating long-term solutions. This enables planning and design activities to proceed, paving the way for the actual reconstruction phase to commence in spring 2024 and continue for the next five years.*



REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

In anticipation of Global Entrepreneurship Week, the region was urged to reimagine tech in Tairāwhiti to both unleash its gains and spark conversations of hope. CARE-RSLG members visited [Rāngai Studios](#) who employs students and offers them hands-on experience in screen production roles. This visit generated conversations about central government's potential role in supporting entrepreneurship and businesses. At [TāikiE](#), the Tairāwhiti Tech Talent Incubator (TTTI) reported back to the community about its success in training local coders through 15-week boot camps. In addition to the six graduates, TTTI says that lessons learnt about effective pastoral care for this type of training delivery will be invaluable in informing the future of tech training. To round out the week, the Haututu Hacklab (part of the TāikiE hub) was opened. This is a ground-breaking tech and creative space to bring people and ideas together. It is dedicated to exploration, learning and collaboration, and supports activities ranging from learning digital literacy and coding; to how 3D printers and virtual reality impact work; and how to work with CNC routers and circuitry components etc in digital design and robotics.

TERTIARY EDUCATION COMMISSION (TEC) 2025 INVESTMENT ADVICE

The Regional Skills Leadership Groups formally provide TEC with their advice to inform the planned guidance document for the Tertiary Education Organisations (TEOs) funding round for investment in 2025*. The advice document outlines the qualifications, skills, occupations, and major project needs for each region. TEOs should consider this regional guidance when determining the qualifications and programmes they offer in the corresponding funding year.

CARE-RSLG engaged with employers, providers, and other stakeholders to form the advice for submission to TEC in early November.

Qualifications

There is a need to increase support for qualifications in these sectors:

- Civil Construction and Vertical Construction
- Advanced Manufacturing and Hydraulics
- Nature Based Roles
- Forestry Management Roles
- Screen Production.

Boosting Skills

Skills shortages requiring tertiary training have been identified in the following areas:

- Health – foundation and kaiawhina roles
- Nursery roles (nursery grower – horticulture)
- Mātauranga Māori
- Supervisors and Managers
- Trades workers – foundations (for example trades essentials micro credential).

Major Projects

As the recovery from the North Island Weather Events shifts to the design and planning of the actual reconstruction, four key areas of focus emerge:

- Civil works programme - align skill development with implementation
- House construction - boost regional capability in housing development
- Supporting the Forestry Industry - encourage worker transition initiatives
- Supporting iwi workforce initiatives - enabling iwi to lead solutions.

Broader Priorities

We capitalised on engagements to highlight other issues related to skills training provision:

- Assessing training needs and challenges faced by rural communities
- Resource Management Act reforms require a significant increase in Planners
- Kaiawhina are crucial for a sustainable health workforce
- The nurse shortage is an ongoing concern
- Provision of Taiao related training that is mātauranga Māori based.

**advice for funding for 2024 provision was submitted to TEC in April 2023.*

OUR FOCUS FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS

- Ongoing stakeholder engagements with industry, employers, kaimahi, councils and government agencies to determine cyclone related workforce impacts and mitigations.
- Work to deliver actions outlined in the Tairāwhiti CARE Regional Skills Leadership Group refresh 2023.