

Amalgamation is coming

Like it or not

Napier's overdue spending

To fix water systems

Repair Café

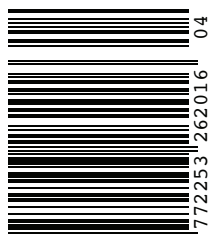
Your alternative to throw-away



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Beyond KiwiSaver: planning for the money goals in between

There's a quiet comfort in knowing your KiwiSaver account is ticking away in the background. It's helping millions of New Zealanders take that important first step towards retirement, doing exactly what it was designed to do: building for the future.

But retirement isn't the only thing we save for – and it's usually not the only priority. Grandparents will often set up investment funds for their grandchildren, sometimes from the day they're born. Other Kiwis may want to save for a future business venture, support ageing parents, or simply build a financial buffer for whatever life might throw at them.

There are many costs no spreadsheet can predict – a health setback, a redundancy, various relationship or family issues. The question is always similar: where will the money come from, without dismantling everything you've already built?

This is a conversation I have regularly with clients. A lot of the time, they're trying to make sense of how KiwiSaver, property, cash and term deposits all fit together, and where each one works best. That's when investment funds tend to come into the conversation – particularly when we're talking through goals that sit somewhere between long-term saving and short-term needs.

One thing that often surprises people is that they already understand investment funds better than they think. Most New Zealanders are familiar with 'growth', 'balanced' and 'conservative' funds through KiwiSaver. What many don't realise is that the same types of funds are also available outside KiwiSaver.

The key difference is that with an investment fund, the money isn't locked away until retirement – making it useful for building wealth alongside KiwiSaver, or for goals that may sit several years earlier.

At Milford, investment funds are structured as tax-efficient PIE investments and can be set up as individual or joint accounts, with initial investments starting from \$1,000. They can then be contributed to over time in a way that suits the client, while still offering relatively quick access if funds are needed.

In practice, I often see parents set up education funds for their children. Others use them to build up capital for future projects or opportunities, or to steadily set money aside for commitments they know are coming – something like repaying a family loan or preparing for a significant future expense.

Many clients also value the simplicity of having their KiwiSaver account and investment funds sitting alongside each other. It can make it easier to separate money intended for different purposes – retirement, children's futures, a rainy-day reserve – while still keeping a clear view of the bigger picture.

Property remains an important wealth-building tool for many New Zealanders, but it comes with a high level of commitment. Capital is often tied up for years, buying and selling can be costly and time-consuming, and accessing funds isn't always straightforward.

“You can't easily sell a room in a house to meet a short-term need, but you can easily sell a share of the units you hold in an investment fund.”

Cash and term deposits continue to play an important role too, particularly for short-term certainty. But depending on the timeframe, investors may be comfortable taking on more investment risk in pursuit of higher returns than cash or term deposits generally provide.

Ultimately, the best approach depends on the goal and the timeframe. It doesn't have to be a choice between KiwiSaver, cash, property, term deposits or investment funds. It's about building a structure that works for both the long term and everything that happens along the way.

If you'd like to explore how that could look for your own situation, pop in for a coffee at 17 Napier Road, Havelock North, or give me a call on 06 930 2000.

Michelle Roberts
Wealth Management
Adviser



This article does not take into account your investment needs or personal circumstances. It is not intended to be viewed as investment or financial advice. Past performance is not a reliable indicator of future performance. Investment involves risks, and returns can be negative as well as positive.

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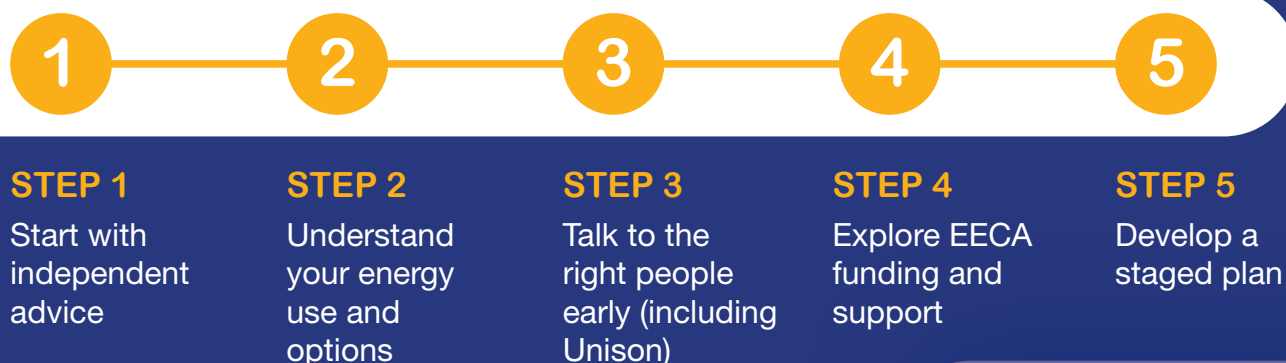


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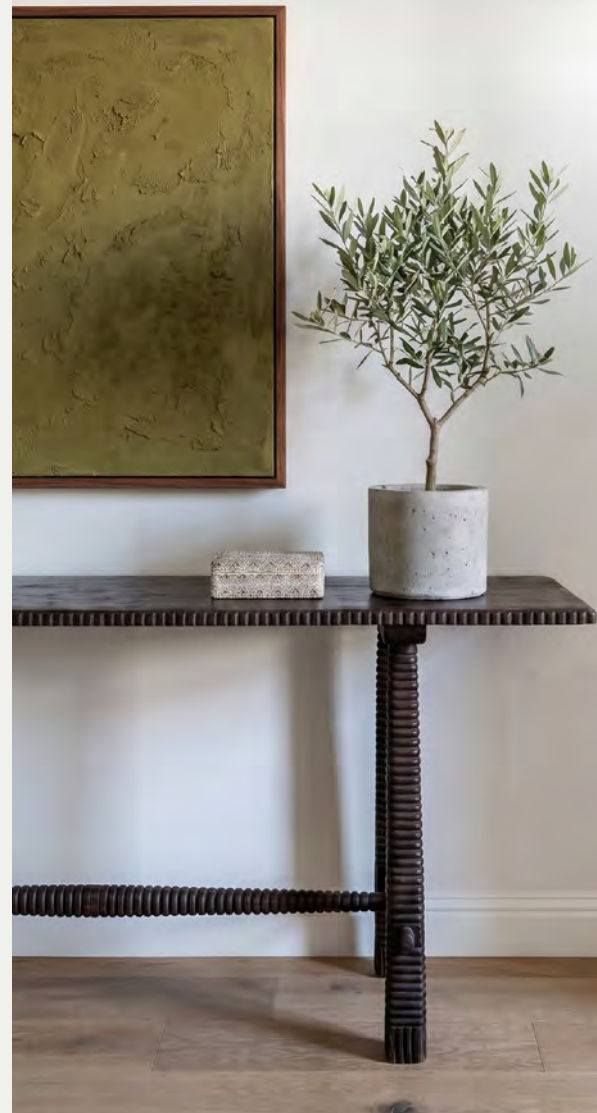
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Big changes ahead. Heaps of analysis and opinion in this edition on amalgamation, water services, water security, HB's food producing sector and our region's energy future. Profiles on some leading HB tech companies. And more inspiration for your lifestyle options -- fighting the throwaway economy, moving to the Sunshine Coast, shifting from crime to kickboxing to pastoral care, gardening to survive WWIII, to simply 'going slow'. WOW ... that's a range!



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From the editor Tom Belford

While this edition of *BayBuzz* is on counters and tabletops through out Hawke's Bay, our local elected leaders will - I hope and expect - have made the momentous decision to amalgamate our region's five councils.

If they haven't, I will have serious egg on my face! And a heap of explaining to do to you *BayBuzz* readers.

They must give their decision by 9 August to the Government. If our local leaders cannot reach agreement, then the Government will dictate the outcome, and has made no secret of its desired outcome - unitary authorities across New Zealand.

Assuming the Government accepts their reorganisation proposal, much more detail will still need to be developed regarding the structure of the proposed Hawke's Bay governance and how some of the contentious issues - from protecting appropriate localism to Māori participation to debt and asset consolidation - described in my overview article will be addressed.

The mayors of Hastings, Napier and CHB are already getting a trial run at the consolidation issue, having decided to merge all their water services - drinking water, wastewater and stormwater - into one entity. This is a huge undertaking. Read Bonnie Flaws' feature article on how complex the issues around '3 waters' is just for Napier, after years of neglecting its infrastructure.

Perhaps more top of mind for many in Hawke's Bay are the warning signs flashed by McCain Foods and Heinz Wattie's with their recent pull-out/back announcements.

Our region's (indeed NZ's) primary sector faces systemic challenges well

beyond the profitability (or not) of any given producer or processor. Many of these challenges arise externally to NZ because of our food export dependency and the expectations of overseas markets. We feature two articles in particular that examine the situation head on - from Fenton Hazelwood, a seasoned agronomist with HB roots and from successful food entrepreneur Murray Douglas of The Figgery.

My Climate/Energy update article describes how some of HB's 'food and fibre' companies - Pan Pac, Apollo and Napier Pine - are dealing with energy costs their businesses face.

Fortunately, HB's food producing economy has spawned and is nurtured by an ecosystem of businesses who are demonstrating that technology innovation is thriving and might represent the IP (or is it AI) future our region needs. Check out the profiles of HB firms Metris, RossAI and CR Automation.

Moving to the 'softer' side of our content in this edition ...

Are you tired of 'stuff' that breaks down or stops working and must be replaced? Tess Redgrave's article offers an alternative for you - rebel against the throwaway economy and take your toaster to Repair Café in Napier and Hastings.

For the ultimate in not throwing things away, take a look at Florence's classic car photo gallery, courtesy of the members of the Hawke's Bay Vintage and Classic Car Club.

And while you're at it, just slow down ... full stop. That's the advice Jess Soutar Barron gives in her back page column this edition.

Maybe you need a more radical change in your life. We offer two

stories to inspire you.

Damon Harvey offers *From 'The Punisher' to The Pastor* - the amazing transformation of a man seemingly destined for the mob.

Life in Hawke's Bay wasn't quite that challenging for Matt and Georgina Miller, founders of digital services agency Mogul. After all, one of their first clients was *BayBuzz* ... they could only go up! And indeed Matt and George packed up six months ago and left for the Sunshine Coast, Noosa to be more specific, still to ply and evolve their trade. Matt gives us an update on how that's working out.

To round things out, Lizzie Russell offers some buzz around wine, new art exhibitions and Italian films, while Ian Thomas urges us to share a meal in the spirit of the Matariki holiday.

Enjoy!

Tom Belford
Editor



You can see our digital subscription offer here.

Tom has been a two-term HB Regional Councillor. His past includes the Carter White House, building Ted Turner's first philanthropic organisation, doing heaps of marketing consulting for major non-profits and corporates.



The Buzz
Lizzie Russell

COLLAB — ORATORS

In this series we shine the BayBuzz light on the people and projects that epitomise the collaborative spirit; this issue we celebrate those who bring together the Hawke's Bay Wine Auction.

Photos by Florence Charvin

What's more of a collaboration in our region than this: the hard-working, hearty people our local wine industry, a community-spirited bunch of voluntary committee members, a line-up of generous and committed sponsors, an audience of supportive, wine-loving bidders and buyers, and Cranford Hospice?

This massive project is pulled together by general manager Samantha Kershaw, who remains stunned by the combined effort and effects of the wine auction.

"What I love most about this event is the community behind it," she says.

"There are so many people who give their time, talent and resources to make the Hawke's Bay Wine Auction happen, especially our winemakers, whose generosity never ceases to amaze me, and the businesses that get behind the event year after year. The scale of that collaboration and contribution blows my mind daily, and it's the reason we've been able to raise more than \$5 million for Cranford Hospice over the past 35 years."

It's not just virtuous either – it's a bunch of fun, a chance to get to know wines and wine people, while supporting one of the region's most valuable causes.

Tickets are now on sale for both the main event and the preview tasting:

- Wednesday 19 August –
Napier Preview + Tasting Evening,
5.30pm-7.00pm
- Saturday 12 September –
Hawke's Bay Wine Auction,
12.30pm-5.00pm

See hawkebaywineauction.co.nz for more info and to secure tickets.



Clockwise from top left: 2025 Hawke's Bay Wine Auction pre-auction wine tasting. Rachel Campbell (Hawke's Bay Tourism), Kim Thorp (Great Wine Capitals Ambassador), Sally Duncan (Hawke's Bay Winegrowers Association). Hamish and Dominique Jardine, Crab Farm Winery. 2025 Hawke's Bay Wine Auction – the moment the lifetime fundraising total topped \$5 million. Mike McRoberts (Event Ambassador) and Samantha Kershaw (General Manager).



Winter exhibition highlights

Burnt Offerings
runs at Muse Art Gallery,
Havelock North, from 9 July
to 12 August.

Here's an exhibition of painting, carving and sculpture shaped by destruction, recovery and renewal. This group show brings together Hawke's Bay artists Kaye McGarva, Te Ara Hihiko collaborators Jacob Scott and Jason Kendrick, and Nelson-based sculptor Chauncey Flay as they explore themes of materiality, atonement, and new beginnings.

In January a fire on the outskirts of Havelock North devastated studios and workshops, and although Kaye McGarva's own studio there escaped major damage, the experience had a lasting impact.

"Fire is devastating and destructive, but it can also represent rebirth, like the phoenix rising from the ashes," says McGarva. "There's also a strong connection with Matariki and the idea of renewal and reflection."

The concept for *Burnt Offerings* developed from conversations McGarva had with Scott and Kendrick,

who often use the Japanese charring technique yakisugi in their carving practice. After visiting the site of the fires, the artists began discussing ways to incorporate the fire - both literally and symbolically - into a collaborative exhibition.

Material for works in the exhibition include large Kauri planks recovered from the burnt shed, custom-built and then charred frames, and charcoal from the site.

"There was something compelling about creating beauty from something so disastrous," McGarva says.

"I hope people connect with that sense of resilience and possibility."

**Paradise – An Exhibition by
Jeremy McCormick**
runs at Boyd-Dunlop Gallery,
Napier, through the month of July

Pop to Boyd-Dunlop Gallery on Hastings Street to see the new show from New Zealand artist Jeremy McCormick. Here, his new paintings sit alongside print reproductions of selected earlier works now held

in important private collections, including the Parkin Collection at the QT Art Hotel.

Jeremy has been exhibiting at Boyd-Dunlop Gallery for over eight years and has built a following of fans and collectors for his paintings which sit at a cross-section between surrealism and hyperrealism. Elisa Boyd-Dunlop comments that, "His dreamscapes depict two worlds in tension, the grit and texture of urban decay set against the raw power of the natural world."

"Each new painting is a thread building a fantastical tale or postmodern fable full of symbolism and grandeur. Each element carries weight, some symbols are universal, drawing on shared human experience, others are personal to McCormick, embedded quietly for those who look closely enough. McCormick exhibits a technical skill that tends to stop people in their tracks. In the age of AI, McCormick's works have a humanity and spirit that is relatable to people of different ages and cultures."

Below: Burnt offering, Kay McGarva.





**Gwen Malden Te Mātau-a-Māui
Art Commissions**
runs at Te Whare Toi o
Heretaunga Hastings Art Gallery
from 1 August

Earlier this year, four Hawke's Bay artists – Asaki Kajima, Leanne Morrison, Raewyn Taura Paterson (Ngāi Tūhoe) and Miria Pohatu (Ngāti Porou, Rongowhakaata, Ngāti Kahungunu) – were selected by a panel of local arts leaders to receive support to develop and exhibit new bodies of work.

The resulting works form the second edition of a biennial partnership between Te Whare Toi o Heretaunga Hastings Art Gallery and the Gwen Malden Charitable Trust.

The group show features a mix of media, explores themes of the environment, relationships, self-image and memory, and is on until Mid-November.

Above: *Paradise*, Jeremy McCormick.
Below: *Neke Moa*, Haumie Tiketike (detail).



Ahakoia He Iti
runs at Te Whare Toi o
Heretaunga Hastings Art Gallery
until 12 September

Curated by Hawke's Bay independent curator and author Tryphena Cracknell (Rongomaiwāhine), *Ahakoia He Iti* is a conversation between eight contemporary adornment artists. The exhibition brings together emerging and well-established names: Pepi-Joy Gilgen, Gina Matchitt, Matthew McIntyre-Wilson, Aroha Millar, Neke Moa, Rowan Panther, Frances Stachl and Keri-Mei Zagrobelna.

"*Ahakoia He Iti* came from the idea of jewellery itself being usually quite small, but behind that there can be a really powerful narrative," Cracknell says. "You have this tiny little object or sculpture, and then you have this big story behind it."

The artworks explore identity, connection to Māori atua, Te Taiao (natural environment), grief, cultural losses of language and social structures. It also celebrates the reclamation of materials like muka (harakeke fibre).



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KIA ORA HAWKE'S BAY!

They're back!

After two hugely successful years, Napier Port's Behind the Gates bus tours will return this summer for a third year, giving locals another opportunity to get behind the gates and experience the Port up close.

More than 600 people took part in our 2025 tours, with tickets proving popular once again, particularly among families. Along the way, visitors heard firsthand from team members from across Napier Port, each sharing a unique perspective on the people, equipment and operations that help keep Hawke's Bay connected to the world.

Once again, we'll be offering a mix of weekday and weekend tours to help make it easier for people to take part.

We're also pleased to continue our partnership with Nourished for Nil, with all proceeds from the tours being donated to support the important work they do in our community.

Tour dates and booking details will be announced on our Facebook and LinkedIn pages, so keep an eye out.

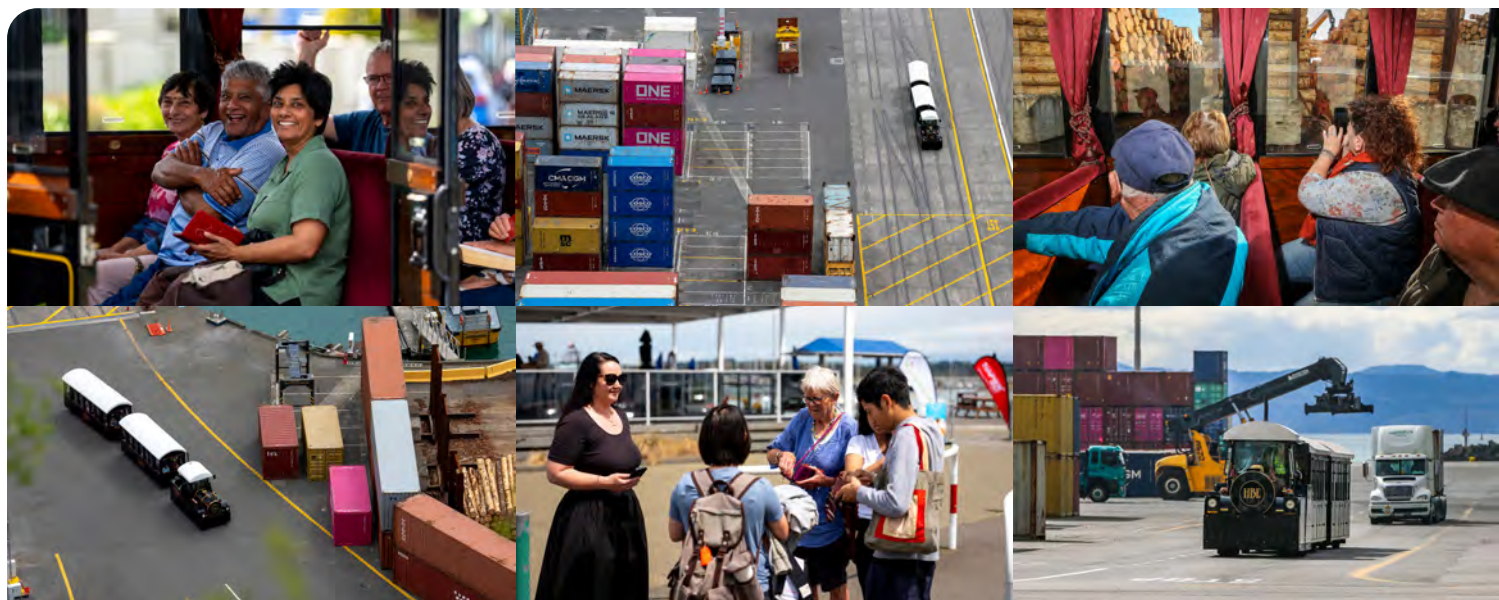
Ngā mihi,
Napier Port team



600+

people took part
in our 2025 tours

Charity Partner:





Italian Film Festival

Set aside some winter hours to warm up with the Italian Film Festival, running in both Napier and Havelock North.

In its eleventh year, the nation-wide festival is owned and organised by founders Paolo Rotondo and Renee Mark who live in Havelock North.

Artistic director Rotondo says the Hawke's Bay season is naturally a special leg for them.

"It's a little bit like a homecoming for us, not to mention the fantastically supportive audiences we have here."

Rotondo, an award-winning New Zealand-Italian film director, actor and writer, says he uses popular films from the previous year's Italian releases as a starting point when curating the festival's annual programme.

"However, it's very much driven, not by what I want to see, but by what I feel Italian film was trying to say about life in the previous twelve months through its cinematic releases. From there we begin to thoughtfully stitch together a programme that reflects a particular dialogue or snapshot of life all driven by the artistry of Italian film," says Rotondo.

The festival hits Focal Point Cinema in Havelock North, from 22 July to 2 August and Ahuriri's Globe Theatre from 23 July to 2 August and then again in mid-December.

See italianfilmfestivalnz.com to plot and book your local Italian escapes.

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LOOKING AT HB'S ENERGY FUTURE

The HB Chamber of Commerce and Unison recently sponsored a valuable 'Energy Summit' that combined 'big picture' energy scenario presentations from the likes of Transpower and the Energy Efficiency & Conservation Authority (EECA) with several local 'hands-on' energy use examples from significant energy consumers like Pan Pac, Apollo and Napier Pine.

A presentation from Toitū, a Crown science entity advising on emissions reduction and sustainability certification, concluded with the admonition: "In God we trust; all others must bring data."

And indeed, if there was one message permeating all the presentations, it was 'measure, measure, measure!'

It's a message that sounds self-evident, but it seems that many businesses and users continue to fly blind in terms of where and how precisely they use energy, where to assign the costs, and therefore how best to achieve savings. Those could be bottom-line operational and capital cost reductions or 'public good' savings (like less climate emissions and health-threatening air pollution).

The pressure is building. In the business world, measurement that started as simply another way to improve profitability, then became further driven by an externally-imposed 'mandate' to reduce carbon emissions, has now been elevated to the status of protecting energy security – ensuring the very survivability of energy-intensive businesses in the face of escalating electricity and gas prices (and threatened access in the case of gas).

Sophisticated energy audits are now *de rigueur* for any significant power-

using business that isn't functionally brain dead.

In Hawke's Bay

Here in Hawke's Bay, the closures at both Wattie's and McCain are in no small part a function of the high energy costs of food processing, and especially freezing.

At the same time, a number of Hawke's Bay businesses 'opened their raincoats' at the summit and talked about the energy solutions they were implementing ... always beginning with thorough auditing of their energy usage, opportunities for demand reduction and then their cost-effective options for alternative power supply.

Amongst this group, the big kahuna is **Pan Pac**.

With two biomass boilers at its Whirinaki plant, Pan Pac is one of New Zealand's largest industrial biomass users. The site consumes up to 250,000 tonnes per year of biomass wood fuel. The power is converted to process heat to dry pulp and lumber.

Their experience illustrates one situation where biomass is proving cost effective – where the need for process heat is steady, not intermittent. Pan Pac says biomass works best for continuous heat users like food processing, industrial drying, industrial process heat, and heating for buildings, hospitals, schools – anywhere with a reasonably steady base load.

Of course, Pan Pac has the sourcing and logistical capacity to meet its wood fuel supply needs directly, and can project that 'real world' supply out 30-plus years, noting that 'theoretical' supply projections sometimes proffered by biomass advocates do not necessarily translate into practical availability.

That said, Pan Pac believes the region's fibre supply is greater than required for HB heat users, saying:

"Biomass Wood Chip (FSC certified) and other biomass wood fuel grades are already available at scale in Hawkes Bay." Currently, Pan Pac's existing 'spare' chip processing capacity is 3600 tonnes per week, equating to around 25,000 GJ/week of usable energy.

According to EECA, around New Zealand there are some 30-plus large industrial users, 80-plus schools and 20-plus commercial installations using wood energy,

One of those is Hawke's Bay company **Napier Pine**.

This company also faces the challenge of drying lumber, and they have made the transition from using natural gas to biomass.

Hawke's Bay uses less than 2% of the nation's current (and quickly diminishing) natural gas supply. Nevertheless, those local businesses who do rely on this source need to do some serious near-term planning.

Napier Pine was using a gas boiler to heat kilns drying approximately 1,200m³ of lumber monthly. Their monthly gas bill (2022) was \$33-\$47,000 per month. The energy cost was \$30-\$43m³ lumber dried.

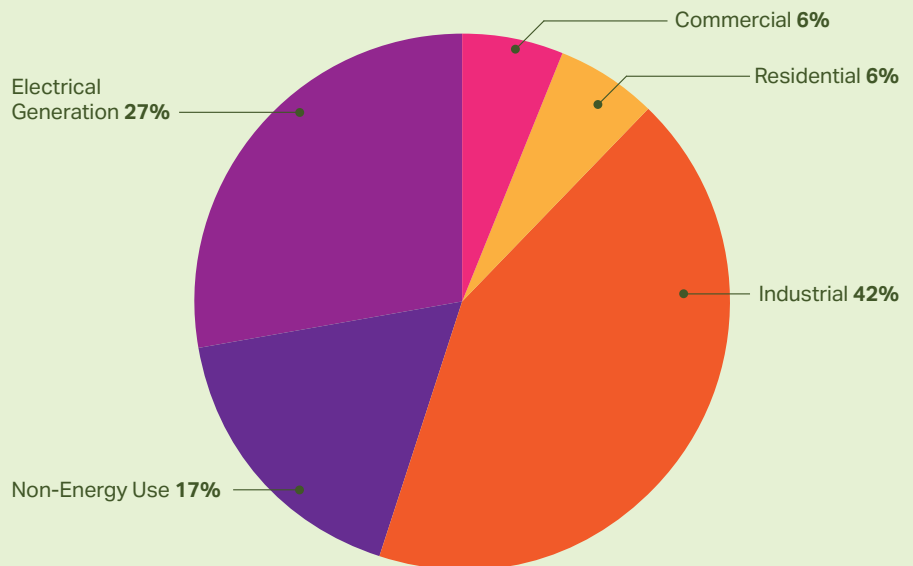
After the switch to a biomass boiler, the drying energy cost went down to \$10m³. Moreover, the projected 6.7 years pay-back time for the investment will be instead only 4.1 years. And with a consented requirement to emit no more than PM10 2.0kg per hour, their tested PM10 emissions range from 0.389 to 0.470 kg/hour.

Sounds like a win-win-win.

Like Wattie's and McCain, another Hawke's Bay processor also faces the challenge of escalating energy costs and dependence on gas.

Apollo, in the juice and milk beverage business (The Apple Press, Picky, Boring), is enjoying strong growth, in the last year moving to 24/7 production.

Industrial users make up a large share of gas demand. As some transition, more supply becomes available for others.



Energy costs account for 16% of Apollo's total overheads. And as they put it: "Energy usage directly correlates to production output." Three-fourths of their energy use is gas, while electricity at 25% nevertheless accounts for over half the energy cost.

On the one hand, Apollo faces a dwindling gas supply, but currently electricity, at two-times the per-unit cost of gas, is too costly to make electric boilers financially viable. So, their immediate step is to achieve about 7,200 GJ in energy savings across two years. Longer-term, they plan to install hot water recovery to cut their on-demand steam load and eventually replace their gas boiler with biomass, requiring as they put it: "Significant capex, contingent on co-funding and partnership support".

These are the kind of trade-offs and options any industrial user of gas would be investigating these days, whether or not a LNG import facility proves to be the best short-term supply band-aid.

Perhaps more promising, the Government has announced its Gas Transition Loan Guarantee Scheme to support fuel-switching and energy projects that reduce gas use by at least 15%. Businesses that use at least 1,000 GJ of reticulated gas per year will be eligible for bank loans of up to \$50 million with the Crown guaranteeing 80% of each loan. EECA will help businesses get investment ready.

National energy future

The latest NZ Infrastructure Com-

mission report on energy notes:

"Questions remain about how gas exits the system: at what pace, with what support for affected users and infrastructure, and how the electricity system's firming needs will be met as gas-fired generation declines. The issue is not whether gas production continues to fall but whether that decline is managed in a way that limits disruption, or reactive in a way that compounds it."

PowerCo, which delivers gas to 23 industrial users, 377 commercial users and 5,028 residences in Hawke's Bay is bullish on renewable options like biomethane, produced from agricultural and food waste and landfill. The company is targeting 20% renewable gas by 2035 with an unspecified long-term goal of 100% renewable.

Overall, according to the Infrastructure Commission, there are \$22.8 billion worth of energy projects in the national infrastructure pipeline. An Electricity Authority dashboard reports 289 renewable generation projects in the pipeline with a combined capacity of 44.29GW, over four times current national generation capacity. The Commission estimates that between \$2 to \$5 billion per year over the next 30 years will be required to meet renewal and business-as-usual growth requirements in electricity generation, transmission and distribution. An additional \$835 million per year on average will be needed to meet decarbonisation-related electricity demand.

Renewable electricity generation in NZ exceeded 95% in the last quarter

of 2025. By now, renewable electricity sources have become much cheaper to build while continuing to have low to zero short-run operating costs, as they don't require fuel. Conversely, thermal electricity generation has become more expensive to run, meaning they now need higher prices to be commercially viable. Seven have shut down in NZ since 2007.

With its abundant renewable energy options, NZ should be well-positioned to resolve the 'energy trilemma' – delivering low priced energy, reliably supplied, with low emissions.

The HB energy initiatives described above illustrate that attentive businesses will identify and respond to win-win energy options when those are locally available. Households will as well. But what we locals cannot control are the policy settings that could facilitate and accelerate transition to these options.

For that, we need a Government that is not committed to extending our fossil fuel dependency. ●



Presentations and slides from the Energy Summit can be viewed here.



BayBuzz energy and climate reporting is sponsored by Unison in support of independent local journalism. This reporting is prepared by BayBuzz. Any editorial views expressed are those of the BayBuzz team.



Napier's Biggest Night Out Returns

For one magical night each year, Napier transforms

As daylight fades on Saturday 3 October 2026, Hawke's Bay's biggest street party lights up the city. Streets and laneways become a vibrant open-air festival of art, light, music and performance.

Now in its ninth year, Nuit Blanche has become one of Hawke's Bay's most anticipated annual events, attracting visitors from across the region and beyond.

From the moment the festival begins at 5:30pm, the city takes on a whole new energy. Families wander the streets together, friends gather for dinner before exploring, and visitors discover performers, musicians and artworks around every corner. Familiar places are transformed into something unexpected, creating a sense of wonder that can only truly be experienced on the night.

One of the things that makes Nuit Blanche so special is that no two experiences are ever the same. There is no set route and no right way to do it. Some spend the evening following the music, while others lose themselves among the light installations, street performers and creative surprises scattered throughout the city centre.

This year's event will feature four live music stages showcasing more than

20 local artists, bands and performers from across Hawke's Bay. From intimate acoustic sets to energetic live performances, music will spill into the streets and laneways throughout the evening.

A highlight of the 2026 programme is a spectacular new interactive light installation that will illuminate the heart of the city. The public will be invited to engage directly with the artwork, triggering colour, light and sound in a dynamic display that transforms throughout the night. Set against the backdrop of Napier's iconic city centre architecture, it's one of the most ambitious visual arts pieces the event has seen.

Adding to the spectacle will be a colourful mix of street performers, including LED artists, fire performers, giant bubble makers, roller crews and roving entertainers. New aerial performances will take to the sky, adding a breathtaking new dimension to the street programme.

Nuit Blanche is also a celebration of Napier's hospitality scene. Restaurants, bars and eateries throughout the CBD will stay open late, with many offering special event-night menus and experiences. Whether you're planning a family outing, date night or evening with friends, the food trail is half the fun.

Early shows are tailored especially for young families, featuring musicians and magicians that will spark wonder in children and parents alike. It's a chance for children to discover live performance, creativity and imagination. Come early, bring the kids, and stay as long as you like - the magic keeps going well into the evening.

"Nuit Blanche is one of those events where you can feel the energy of the whole city," says Napier City Council Event Manager Kevin Murphy.

"People come from all over Hawke's Bay and beyond to be part of it. It showcases the creativity of our region while bringing people together in a way that's really special."

Ahead of this year's event, Nuit Blanche will launch a brand-new interactive website, dedicated Facebook and Instagram channels, making it easier than ever for visitors to explore the programme, navigate the city and plan their perfect night out.

Whether it's your first Nuit Blanche or your ninth, this is a night to gather your friends and family, explore the city and experience Napier at its most vibrant.

It's Hawke's Bay's biggest street party. It's free. And it only happens once a year.

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The political sector of Hawke's Bay appears relatively quiet at first blush, which belies the work and maneuvering happening behind the scenes to address the region's governance and economic future.

Clockwise from top left: Wendy Schollum, Craig Little, Will Foley, Sophie Siers, Richard McGrath.



AMALGAMATION. WATER SERVICES. WATER SECURITY.

Beyond the business-as-usual matters of finalising budgets and rates and delivering basic services, the chief areas of focus are council reorganisation, consolidation of water services, and water security. In each of these areas, most of the current activity is out of public view.

Amalgamation

Yes, it's time to bring back the 'A' word! Because that's what will happen. Given the stance of the Government, our elected officials will come up with an A-plan for Hawke's Bay by 9 August or have one imposed. A new structure will be in place with its elected seats to be contested in October 2028.

Although some laggards amongst the voting public might still be fretting over *whether* to amalgamate, our current elected mayors and councillors know and accept that the only issue on the table is **how**.

Even the mayor of Napier, that bastion of parochialism, concedes that change is coming. In a June column for BayBuzz online, Mayor Richard McGrath wrote:

"It is tempting to say that bigger might not mean better, but this kind of talk too early risks closing the door on regional options that could benefit Napier in some areas. There is a lot of analysis and many discussions underway. The Government is driving change in local government regardless and part of our role as elected representatives is to lead

the community through that change thoughtfully. We mustn't fall into becoming entrenched in one particular position before the options and trade-offs are fully understood."

That's revolutionary thinking from a Napier mayor, but Napierites can be assured that their mayor hasn't lost his commitment to localism. As he concluded: "Structures might change and organisations might grow but whatever comes next local voices must not be lost in the process."

And indeed preserving appropriate local voice, access and decision-making authority is a - if not the - top concern expressed in public consultation the councils have undertaken on reorganisation. It is a 'condition' each of HB's four mayors is committed to. The trick will be how to embed the right level of 'localism' in the new structure without compromising the objectives of regional amalgamation.

As for structure, a number of possibilities exist in theory, given that one requirement from the Government is that any plan submitted from a region must cover a majority of the region's population. For Hawke's Bay, those options would all need to include Hastings District plus either or both of Napier and CHB, with Wairoa rounding out a four council consolidation. But theoretical options aside, the practical reality is that the Government expects unitary authorities to be born.

So - localism aside - what other key issues will need to be addressed?

[You can re visit the starting

positions of our councils on these issues in our Mar/Apr article, *Simplifying local government*.



Obviously with consolidation comes the actual composition and vote weighting of the resulting unitary body. How many councillors, their electoral boundaries, what lower level decision-making or advisory boards, what consolidation of other council-controlled entities, will councillors' voting be weighted? A heap of boxes and lines to connect.

Leading to another potentially vexing representation issue - Māori participation. The Government is legislating to bar non-elected members of councils and their committees from voting status. This in addition to HB's recent referenda that uniformly opposed dedicated Māori seats on our councils, requiring their disestablishment. At the same time, and apart from overall Treaty obligations, other statutes mandate specific Māori participation in various areas, including voting power in the case of HBRC's Regional Planning Committee. What becomes of all of this - a reversion to 'advisory' participation?

Māori leadership at every level across NZ is deeply concerned about where local reorganisation will lead. It may be that this aspect of reform will need to be resolved directly between the Crown and Māori leaders, with new unitary authorities simply following suit.

Adding complication, recall that

Although some amongst the public might still be fretting over whether to amalgamate, our mayors and councillors know the only issue on the table is how.

existing regional councils are to be abolished. But that leaves their key functions – from regional transportation to environmental protection – to be absorbed into and undertaken by the new unitaries.

Assuming environmental protection remains a priority for regional government, how the relevant consenting, monitoring and enforcement roles are housed (with required independence) within the new structure must be sorted. But at least in this regard we have effectively working existing models – like Gisborne – to guide us.

That leaves the issue of rates, assets and debt – ranking right up there with localism amongst the anxious public. Of course, a huge portion of debt and costs will be taken from councils and the new unitary by the offloading about to occur of councils' water services. I'll come to this next.

But that offload aside, there's still the need to re-prioritise, re-price and re-allocate payment for the services the new body will provide and the debt it will inherit and initiate going forward. Plus reorganise the merged (and lowered?) staffs, assets and operations required to deliver the ongoing services the public expects.

Everyone will be watching over the fence suspiciously, worried that they, their community, their very generation might be taken advantage of. It's not clear we have the level of civic education needed to survive this.

The complexity of all the issues above, which compound each other, means that the amalgamation plan put forward by our mayors will be very high level. We should not expect to see (nor does the Government) on 9 August a detailed blueprint for a new unitary authority. Either the HB process will collapse or our councils will have crossed the Rubicon together and we will see the bare bones of a unitary authority outlined.

With their plan, the councils must to some degree show that it will satisfy these Government assessment criteria:

- Be deliverable by the 2028 local elections
- Support the Government's new planning system (embedded in other reform legislation)
- Simplify governance
- Achieve economies of scale
- Provide far and effective local representation

If the submitted plan is approved by the Government (they say pre-November election), then the nitty gritty work will really begin.

Water services consolidation

Moving on parallel and faster track is Local Water Done Well, the other local government reorganisation set in motion by the Government.

You'll recall this initiative involves Hastings, Napier and CHB consolidating into one entity – the Water Services Council-Controlled Organisation (WSCCO) – all planning, financing and delivery of drinking water, stormwater and wastewater services. In fact, the bulk of what these councils do. Wairoa has opted out, but presumably would be absorbed back in if all councils amalgamate.

WSCCO is set to become operational from 1 July 2027, and will deliver these services for a combined population of 144,000, managing approximately 52,000 water connections. The entity is owned 45% each by HDC and NCC, and 10% by CHBDC. This business is expected to make \$1.25 billion in capital investments through FY33/34, with a projected operating budget of \$173 million and debt of \$863 million in that year.

Everything you could possibly want to know about the water systems of these three councils can be found in their combined Water Services Delivery Plan, prepared for the Government in September 2025.



WSCCO is now incorporated and the vital detailed work of organising the transfer of all pertinent staff, assets, liabilities, revenues, consents, contracts, information systems, asset management plans and land from the three councils into the new agency is underway. Councils have budgeted \$14.2 million for the transition.

We're talking about the transfer of around \$2.4 billion in assets here.

If you imagine this as amputating the legs off of each council, hard enough surgery itself, the surgeons must then

sort out how the rest of the council body survives! Council rates will need to be downsized, the WSCCO will be charging us for water services. Remaining council roles, overheads, space etc need to be re-allocated ... maybe even down-sized.

A heap of transitional work for both the new agency and the three councils ... while the latter are also preparing for their further consolidation shortly to follow. Consider it a learning experience.

Moreover, apart from these 'logistical' details and changes, the three councils yielding to the WSCCO will also need to promptly negotiate amongst themselves the formal 'Statement of Expectations' they must deliver collectively to WSCCO regarding the priorities they want to see the agency deliver against. This will be an illuminating test of high stakes political collaboration amongst the councils ... a preview of how they will sort the politics of broader amalgamation.

Water security

Of course we cannot talk about water in Hawke's Bay without talking about water security.

Around Hawke's Bay, 'water security' has different meanings. To some, it means living and growing food within the limits that nature provides. Some stress curbing demand and better managing the available water before seeking to augment or store additional supply (I'm in this camp). Others jump right to water storage as the only guarantee of the region's agribiz growth and broader prosperity.

Advocates of the latter path capture the spotlight these days, with two competing water storage proposals.

One, the Heretaunga Water Storage Project (HWSP) would dam a tributary of the Ngaruroro River, storing around 27m³ of water and service the population and growers of Heretaunga Plains. As conceptualised, one-third of the stored water would protect current growing practices on the Plains, one-third would be allocated to projected growth, and one-third would serve as a reserve anticipating future climate change and more frequent and/or longer dry spells.

The other, the Tukituki Water Security Project (TWSP) is the resurrected Ruataniwha Dam 2, which would dam the Mākāroro River (thence flowing into the Waipawa, then Tukituki Rivers). Storing about 100m³, its advocates say it can service CHB and also deliver significant water to



Potential site of Heretaunga dam

Heretaunga users.

The HB Regional Council, burned on Ruataniwha Dam 1, has washed its hands of dam building, but allocated \$3.6 million to explore the feasibility of a Heretaunga storage scheme, turning that investigation over to the purpose-created Heretaunga Water Storage Limited, whose board includes iwi, grower and council representation (from HDC and NCC). Geotech, cultural, environmental, and financial examination has been underway since early 2025. BayBuzz understands that this group is now ready to file a fast-track application to proceed.

That said, not all potential water users on the Heretaunga Plains are convinced a dam is needed, citing other options like global consents (i.e., basically smart water sharing), irrigation efficiencies, aquifer recharge, and industrial wastewater re-use (or storage). And certainly not needed at any cost. A grower-led group, Heretaunga Sustainable Water, has been investigating the full portfolio of options for enhancing water availability.

A critical driver of these Heretaunga water explorations is the unresolved TANK plan change, still on appeal to the Environment Court, which has capped

water allocation in this catchment (permitting no 'new' water) and set in motion clawback of current consents.

Meantime, the Tukituki Water Security Project, led by CHB farmer and Scales Corp chair Mike Petersen has secured \$21 million in Government funding to establish the feasibility of Ruataniwha Dam 2 (this on top of HBRC's original \$20 million investment in Dam 1's failed exploration). Dam 2 already has fast-track status, however extension of the original consents given back in 2015 is under High Court challenge from Forest & Bird.

The most attention-grabbing aspect of the new Tukituki scheme is its plan to deliver Mākāroro-sourced water to the Heretaunga Plains (via pipeline from the Mākāroro to the Ngaruroro).

Given that the Regional Council's *Regional Water Assessment* (2022), the bible for all water storage advocates, postulated in its most touted scenario a water shortfall of nearly 25m³ of water by 2040 and nearly 33m³ by 2060 **for all of Hawke's Bay**, it would appear the Ruataniwha Dam 2's 100m³ threatens to - dare I say it - flood the region.

Since Dam 1 failed to secure its required number of water purchasers by a wide margin (failing to meet the

46m³ condition set by HBRC), Dam 2 desperately requires a footprint (i.e., user base) much larger than the original 'command area'!

What must be said about both projects is that neither has yet tabled any current cost estimates for their schemes (including financing scenarios) - and therefore the water prices they would need to charge water users - whether those be irrigators, councils (e.g., drinking water) or industrial users. The Heretaunga project says it will deliver the needed costing and pricing numbers in the last quarter of this year. The Ruataniwha team says it can do so as well.

After all the skirmishing about ecological damage, environmental flows, iwi issues, dam design, gravel in-fill, land swaps, and geotech safety, the fate of either dam (let alone two) will come down to the cost of water and the terms of purchase for water users.

Until those numbers are on the table and survive potential user scrutiny, both dams are blue sky fantasies.

Despite a MOU between the competing projects to play nicely and share information, when the numbers are finally tabled the battle of the dams will really begin. ●

FIXING NAPIER'S WATER SYSTEMS

Story by Bonnie Flaws

Photos by Florence Charvin



Napier is making up for lost years. The scale and speed of work required and some of the solutions being implemented may still leave something to be desired.

Napier is currently undergoing massive investment into its drinking, waste-water and stormwater infrastructure with a schedule of capital works that is impressive, and ramping up.

Mayor Richard McGrath campaigned last year on a back-to-basics platform prioritising water and roads, but previous Mayor Kirsten Wise was also known for her focus on water and much of the works programme was already planned and budgeted for in the Long Term Plan.

In some respects McGrath has already lost ground with his council voting in August to proceed with transferring the city's water assets to a regional water entity owned collectively by Napier City Council, Hastings District Council and Central Hawke's Bay Council.

Public consultation before the council vote also favoured that option over keeping the assets in-house, with 79% of the 666 submissions (considered a very good turnout) giving the regional water entity the thumbs up.

The new entity, which becomes operational on 1 July 2027 will, it is argued, offer cost efficiency, shared expertise, enhanced resilience and improved investment capability.

McGrath has been vocally opposed to the regional water entity, calling it 'amalgamation by stealth'.

"If any city could have continued to run its own water under the new rules it would have been us. We had the finance and the desire in the community to do it standalone or in-house. I think we would have been better off.

"Any Napier project would be a number one priority. I have concerns that in the future if there are bigger priorities in other parts of the region, where our priorities might sit. I'm hoping they will be able to do them all at once, but that is yet to be determined."

However, he is forward focussed and "comfortable" with the progress being made.

"We put a plan forward for the next however many years of what the priorities will be. The new water entity will take that on board initially and then it will work to prioritise around the region what gets done. The government says we had to do this because

we weren't prioritising, which is a bit of a shame really. I think we've jumped a little too far too fast by going into the water entity."

Current projects underway in Napier

Across all three waters there is a lot going on.

The city is increasing drinking water capacity and upgrading pipe networks and bore infrastructure, replacing the ageing wastewater outfall pipe, creating an alternative overflow path for stormwater in Maraenui and Te Awa, and building new pump stations - all to be completed in the next three years.

Napier's serviced population is set to grow from 67,490 now to 75,365 in the 2032/33 financial year and the infrastructure must be capable of coping with that extra pressure on the system.

"There are definitely some stresses because we can't head outwards, we tend to have to head upwards, or in-fill, and that creates stormwater pressure because every time you put some concrete down that's another bit not being absorbed into the ground," says McGrath.

Executive Director of Water Services at NCC, Russell Bond says the approximate capital spend for 2026 is \$30 million, jumping to \$60m next year, and \$100m in 2028. The combined cost of water infrastructure upgrades and compliance is projected at \$701 million through to 2034.

Wastewater

Of all the various projects underway, Bond says wastewater is the most urgent due to the public health risk to the community in the event of a Moa Point-type failure, which would result in sewage spilling into Hawke Bay.

The risk is not theoretical. Much of the wastewater network has less than 20 years of useful life left, according to the Hawke's Bay Water Services Plan, with a significant portion of assets assessed as being in "poor or very poor condition".

Accordingly, the concrete outfall pipe that carries treated sewage from Awatoto 1.5 kilometres out into the bay, is being replaced.

Built in 1973, not only is the existing

pipe degrading, it has also been expensive to maintain, with three repairs in recent decades. In 2020, the city spent more than \$1.2m on repairs, and another \$65,000 just last year for a diffuser repair.

Its operating limit is now being deliberately kept 200 litres a second below the consent volume of 14,000 L/S to reduce stress on joints. But this in turn puts extra pressure on the wider network and requires overflow volumes to be kept in storage cells that were completed only last year.

The replacement pipe is currently being designed with construction planned to commence mid-2027, which will take about a year. It will run from the Awatoto treatment plant to an offshore diffuser.

However, previous Bay Buzz reporting laid out how the use of trickling filters and offshore discharge is increasingly outdated by both technical and cultural standards, with advanced systems elsewhere now treating wastewater as a recoverable resource, aiming for zero discharge and energy neutrality.

It's likely that the current system will be non-compliant with future expectations under evolving regulatory standards. Something the new joint entity will need to deal with.

Stormwater

The second most urgent is stormwater upgrades, Bond says.

"Stormwater is a close second, because it affects habitable floors - living areas. There is a lot of work we have been doing in that area. We're looking at improving flood protections there so Kāinga Ora can build more houses. We have committed to that work in partnership with the National Infrastructure Fund. We are looking at construction starting soon on those outfalls and pump stations."

The planned housing developments in Maraenui and Te Awa make the requirement for an alternative overflow path to the existing Plantation Drain, which takes stormwater flows north to the estuary, rather pressing. The existing system did not stand up to the 2020 floods. As a result, the council is redirecting strong flows south to Te Awa's Serpentine Pond, from where it

will be pumped out into the bay.

New pump stations powered by diesel generators are planned on Te Awa Estate Reserve, and a new outfall pipe is being built as well. The pond will also be enhanced to improve water quality and reduce odours. These works are in the design phase with construction due to begin next year, and will contribute to reduced flood risk for both Maraenui and Te Awa.

Another important stormwater project currently underway will widen the culverts at Taradale Road and Herrick Street. "It's another big activity as well. We are trying to provide more capacity through that waterway. In the 2020 floods it was a real bottleneck," says Bond.

Too little, too late?

However, when it comes to stormwater, Regional Councillor Neil Kirton says all this falls short, leaving the city vulnerable to another flood event like the one in 2020.

"My concern is that we really haven't progressed significantly from that event and we still face what I think is the highest level of flooding, concentrated in Napier. We haven't invested significantly to mitigate that. It needs much more than an alternative overflow pathway.

"There are two components of the network - the pipes network and the urban waterway network. And they are interconnected because the pipe network flows into them. The overall state of the network can only be described as poor, it's likely to be functioning at a one-in-five-year flood level. It's supposed to be a one in 50 or one in 100 service level," he says.

Kirton applauds the "significant piece of work" on the Taradale Road and Herrick Street culverts, and acknowledges that there have been some upgrades on some of the pump stations.

Nevertheless, he describes the work as "cosmetic" given the expenditure needed to improve stormwater infrastructure, that he estimates should be in the ballpark of \$150-\$200 million. He reels off a hefty list of important stormwater capex projects that have yet to even begin.

"It's too little and too slow to meet current demand and risk ... I feel that NCC officials are pulling the wool over everyone's eyes."

McGrath responds, "We certainly need to do more and we do need to stay focused", but counters that central government reforms - Three

Waters and Local Water Done Well - have detracted from project delivery, along with the disruption of Cyclone Gabrielle, the impact from which could not be overestimated, he says.

"Those impacts were made worse because of failing stormwater assets including stop banks. That's a key reason why we are taking over the regional council's stormwater assets within Napier. We will maintain those to an urban standard rather than a rural one."

The flow on effects of getting stormwater right will positively impact the city and region, and enable more housing, he says.

"When we say we must do the basics really well, this is exactly what we are talking about. Earlier models of managing water assets haven't been satisfactory. I know that, our water teams know that and the government knows that, that's a main driver for change."

Ahuriri Regional Park - back to the drawing board

The planned recreational park at Lagoon Farm, part of another important stormwater project budgeted for in the Long-Term Plan, is facing considerable setbacks.

More than 70% of Napier's stormwater currently discharges into the estuary, an ecologically and culturally important body of water. The estuary is facing numerous challenges, but stormwater discharge is among the biggest.

A June meeting of the Joint Committee (NCC, HBRC, Mana Ahuriri) that governs the development of the regional park resulted in the unanimous decision to pause the recreational development concept until "viable stormwater and environmental solutions are established".

The separate stormwater project will continue to progress to improve flood mitigation and water quality in the estuary, but the planned wetlands on the park site, which were intended to store and filter, then slowly release water into the estuary, is on hold.

At the core of the issue is the bird strike problem (search 'birdstrike' on BayBuzz website for our previous reporting).

The proposed site lies directly within the zone of highest strike risk, with some of the bird species, like black swan, Canada goose and mallard posing an "extreme risk" of bird strike, according to a new report, which strongly recommended the Joint



Committee reconsidered the location of the proposed park.

"Specifically, the site should be relocated outside the airport's critical approach path, at a minimum, beyond the 3km bird strike buffer zone," it states. Hawke's Bay Airport has the highest bird strike rate in New Zealand as of 2025, and its management is firmly opposed to the wetland and park development on safety grounds.

But recent investigations have also identified another significant challenge with the park's masterplan concept.

"A geotechnical assessment found the highly permeable soils at Lagoon Farm are not suitable for the scale of wetland development originally proposed without significant engineering interventions," the press release states. The cost of addressing the geotech issues is estimated at \$23m, which would take the total project cost to \$56m.

However, new options to move the project forward, rather than relocate it, will be developed collaboratively by NCC engineers, the Mana Ahuriri Taiao team and specialist 'nature based solutions' advisors before being brought back to the Joint Committee for consideration. Joint Committee documents reveal that members feel that "failure is not an option".

Mayor McGrath has previously stated that it wasn't the right time to be spending on recreational developments, but he supports the stormwater retention aspect of the project.

"Just because it's in the Long-Term Plan doesn't mean it gets done. In this situation it really hasn't stacked up. You've got to look for some alternatives."

Drinking water

NCC is working on several projects to increase water storage capacity, along with upgrading the pipe network and installing new bore sites.

Councillor Keith Price, who has prioritised core water infrastructure during his tenure, says, "It's all on the go but it's a long project.

"I'd like to see more reservoirs put in and the treatment that goes on them - I'm talking about underground reservoirs. We are going to put in another couple of bores in Tareha Park. We have to put our bores in where they don't get manganese [discolouration]. Our water has been rating pretty high on surveys now."

The old Enfield Reservoir on Hospital Hill is being decommissioned, but only after two new 9-million litre



Richard McGrath and Keith Price

"If any city could have continued to run its own water under the new rules it would have been us. We had the finance and the desire in the community to do it standalone or in-house."

Richard McGrath, Napier Mayor

water tanks are built. These will be filled with water from the Awatoto bore field and an inter-connector pipe will then join the new reservoirs on the hill to the Taradale reservoir, allowing for two-way transfer. If one reservoir site is out of action, the other will kick in, maintaining security of supply.

New bores are being installed at both Awatoto and Taradale, and a new water treatment plant will be built on top of the ones at Tareha Park in Taradale, to treat the water at source. "We need to bring them together and put a treatment plant on top of them. That will be in the Guppy road area of Taradale," says Bond.

Yet another treatment plant will be built at the Awatoto bore field, but that will come later.

Furthermore, new rising and falling mains pipes will deliver water from the new bore fields up to the Hospital Hill and Taradale reservoirs.

Together these upgrades will bring Napier's drinking water into

compliance with the Water Services Act 2021, NZ Drinking Standards 2022, and Drinking Water Quality Assurance Rules 2022.

"It's all about water treatment ... So we need a little bit of filtering and that's there to protect the UV that is going in, and that is what is going to provide the next level of treatment for Napier," Bond says.

The city needs to be compliant by 2028.

New water services council-controlled organisation

All this is taking place as Napier, Hastings and Central Hawke's Bay are merging the management of their water infrastructure.

Hawke's Bay faces a massive water infrastructure bill, with three councils projecting approximately \$1.25 billion in capital investment for drinking water, wastewater and stormwater services through 2033/34. What this means for individual ratepayers is a projected rise in water charges per connection from \$1974 in 2025/26 to \$3190 in 2033/34.

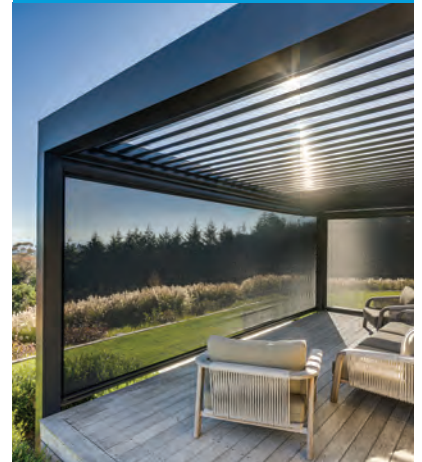
Keith Price, who sits on the advisory Shareholders Representatives Forum is "100%" behind the move. He's also deputy chair of the Transition Governance Group, overseeing the handover.

"At the moment we are being transitioned ... For the shareholders forum we need to select the independent chair of that. They'll take over from the role I'm filling at the moment and I will stay on as a shareholder representative. All councils have three representatives and the company has three representatives as shareholders, but we won't be doing the day to day running," he says.

Under the new entity, water charges will be separate from rates. The council will collect that for the first two to three years, and then it will be taken over and rated by the new WSCCO. "I'm a great believer in user-pays and I liken it to electricity," Price says.

However, Bond says a slow-down in project delivery during this transition is one of the risks he's watching for. "I will actively be working with the transition team because it's about getting all our staff into that organisation as smoothly as possible. It will be staffed by people already working on it. The goal of the councils is to make sure that everyone gets the same level of service on day one and that it is as seamless as possible." ●

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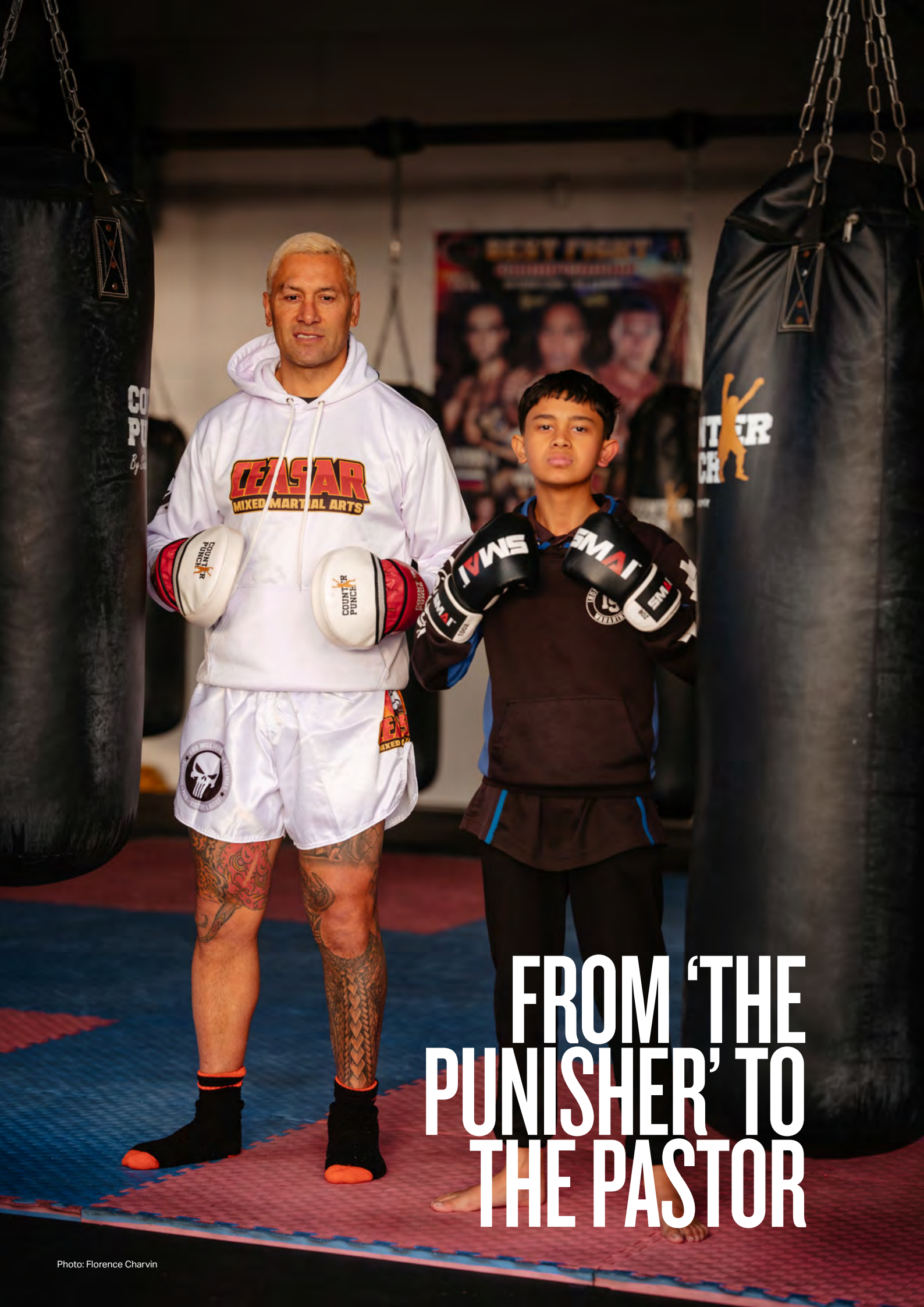
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FROM 'THE PUNISHER' TO THE PASTOR



The first thing you notice about Pane Haraki is the contradiction. He is built like a man who could dismantle a wall, broad-shouldered and physically commanding in a way that fills a room.

And then he opens his mouth, and the voice that comes out is quiet, measured, almost gentle. This is a man who has fought more than 60 professional bouts across kickboxing, boxing and MMA. A former New Zealand Muay Thai heavyweight champion. A man whose nickname is 'The Punisher'.

He is also a grandfather of three, a devoted father to his three daughters, a student of theology, and a man who, at the very lowest point of his life, found something in a prison cell Bible that changed everything.

At 50, Pane Haraki is on one of the more remarkable journeys in Hawke's Bay sport.

Hastings born. Hard road.

Pane grew up in Mahora, Hastings, raised largely by his mother after his parents split when he was three. His father, Jack, was in the mob. As a kid, Pane thought that was cool. The flash cars, the status, the sense of belonging. It took years to see it clearly.

"When your dad is in the mob, you kind of just think he's cool. You don't realise that a lot of the things he's doing are quite unhealthy. And then you grow up a little bit more, and you realise that's not really a life worth having," he says.

His father, to his credit, always told Pane not to follow him in. But as many young men from similar backgrounds know, hearing something and believing it are two very different things.

From 17, Pane was in and out of jail for six years, a cycle of burglaries and assaults that ran in parallel with his early fighting career and a growing use of drugs.

The turning point arrived in a prison cell. He had been clean for a while, then relapsed. His youngest daughter

had just been born. He was back inside.

"I just felt like, man, I'm not going to make it out of here. I think I'm going to end it," he says quietly.

"And then somehow I made it through to the morning. The officers unlocked the door, and I just grabbed the Bible. It took me eight and a half months to read the whole thing."

He notes, with a degree of self-awareness that is entirely disarming, that it still took him another 20 years to fully commit to that path. Redemption, for Pane Haraki, was not a single dramatic moment. It was a long, slow walk.

Fighting his way forward

Sport, it turned out, was the thread that held things together. Pane's introduction to fighting came through his mum, who put him and his older brother in karate classes at Central School when they were about 12. From there, the story takes one of those pivotal, could-have-gone-either-way turns.

Around 2003, Pane walked into the old Physique 2000 gym in Hastings and found two guys kickboxing. Jason Rarere and Charles August, both New Zealand champions at the time. He asked if he could train with them. They said yes. Six months later, his coach asked if he wanted to step into the ring. He did.

"It saved me a little bit, actually," he says. "I could have ended up in the mob or something, but getting into fighting gave me positive goals, gave me confidence, kept me out of trouble. When you're chasing a fight, you don't want to go backwards."

Over the next two decades he accumulated more than 60 professional contests. He won the New Zealand heavyweight MMA title in 2022.

His father, Jack, was in the mob. As a kid, Pane thought that was cool. The flash cars, the status, the sense of belonging. It took years to see it clearly.

He fought in Thailand, trained in Bali, and recently took part in UFC fighter Dan Hooker's bare-knuckle one-minute scraps format, which is currently pulling serious attention across social media and has prize money over \$100,000.

Pane is honest that the money in his fighting career was never substantial. His best payday was around \$5,000 from a boxing bout, but the sport gave him far more than prize money.

At 50, he hasn't fully closed the door.

"I still got a couple more in me," he says, with steely eyes. There is talk of another bare-knuckle event, another shot at a meaningful payday.

Caesar MMA: Building the platform

In 2021, using a small legacy from his late father, who left a piece of land in Hastings, Pane opened Caesar MMA. Dan Hooker came down and helped launch it. The gym ran commercially for about 18 months before the post-Covid economics made it untenable. Rather than fold, Pane converted it into the Maui Kahungunu Charitable Trust.

Classes are free. Monday to Friday, 5pm to 6:30pm. Kids are welcome from 4:30. The gym is now up to its 13th fight show in the Maui Kahungunu series, running events at the gym that platform local kickboxing and MMA talent.

"A lot of parents send their kids down because they're having problems at school or in the neighbourhood," Pane says. "They drop them off and for an hour and a half they don't need to worry. And hopefully those kids are going to pick up something that'll help them later in life."

He is talent-spotting, too. Pane believes the next Israel Adesanya is somewhere in Hawke's Bay, and he means it.



Photo: Florence Charvin

The Caesar MMA scholarship programme was designed to identify that potential and give it a genuine platform. As the UFC, Jake Paul's promotional flex, and Netflix-backed superfights reshape the economics of combat sport globally, the ceiling for a genuinely talented young fighter from this region is higher than it has ever been.

"If these kids can get to the top, man, they can change their whole

lives," he says. "It's just getting them in the gym and keeping them there. Getting them off their devices. Getting them to believe they can be something."

Breaking cycles

What makes Pane's story resonate beyond sport is the broader pattern it represents.

Hawke's Bay has produced a quiet

but significant cohort of community leaders who grew up with whānau in gang life and chose a different path. Pane mentions two in the same breath, and with obvious respect.

Levi Armstrong grew up just up the road from Pane in Mahora, their mothers are related. Levi and brother Junior came from a gang family background and could easily have followed that track. Instead they have both built

careers around hauora (health) and wellbeing, becoming one of the region's most visible community advocates.

Levi uses wellbeing as the vehicle for exactly the kind of work Pane is doing through combat sport: reaching people who have been written off and giving them a reason to show up.

Taurus Taurima took a similar route to Pane, including time inside, before turning his life around with Topline Contracting, which has grown into a substantial and award winning business.

He has since launched a youth employment academy, putting young people who are at risk of exactly the same crossroads Pane once faced into trades, structure, and purpose.

"When you grow up like that and you get a bit older, you realise that's not healthy, that's not what I want my children to see," Pane says.

"So you start making choices to steer your kids away from it. Find them something healthier."

He is clear that none of this was about rejecting their fathers, or their culture, or the bonds of whānau. It was about choosing not to pass the worst parts of a hard inheritance on to the next generation.

His father, Pane notes, always told

Hawke's Bay has produced a quiet but significant cohort of community leaders who grew up with whānau in gang life and chose a different path.

him not to join. He just wasn't able to hear it clearly until he was old enough to understand.

He also fiercely credits his mother. She left his father when Pane was three, went to work at the Tomoana Freezing Works, eventually bought the Housing Corp house she had been renting, and raised her two boys with structure, love, and the occasional reading of scripture.

She is in her early 70s now and still working. "I've got a lot of my Mum's fire in me," Pane says, which may explain more than anything else about how he got here.

Studying to become a pastor

The other thing Pane Haraki is doing at 50, alongside running the gym and

eyeing a few more fights, is studying to become a pastor. He is a member of Calvary Chapel in Hastings, an online theology course underway, a men's group in the works.

"I had to fully immerse myself in the spirit of Jesus Christ and read the scriptures daily, pray karakia two or three times a day," he says. "That has been the biggest thing in my life. More than anything else."

There is something quietly powerful about a man who spent two decades being called 'The Punisher' sitting down and, without any apparent irony, telling you that prayer changed his life. And meaning it. And showing it.

In the gym he built on the land his gang-member father left him, offering free classes to kids from the same streets that nearly swallowed him whole, and is now on the lookout for the next champion prize fighter.

That is a story worth telling. ●

Starting like most kiwi kids playing rugby barefoot on frosty Hawke's Bay mornings, Damon became a sports editor for the local rag and then a sport promoter for the ASB Tennis Classic, the national rugby championship and the Auckland Blues. He served 15 years on the board of Sport Hawke's Bay, five years as chair, and continues to be involved in sport governance locally.



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TONG & PERYER: CHANGING THE WAY HAWKE'S BAY SAYS GOODBYE

1.5 YEARS ON: BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF CARE, BEFORE AND BEYOND FAREWELL

Eighteen months ago, Tong & Peryer Funeral Directors shared a vision for a more personal, community-focused approach to funerals and grief support in Hawke's Bay. The conversation challenged tradition, encouraged openness around death and dying, and invited people to think differently about what a farewell could look like.

Today, that vision is becoming reality.

According to Steve Shaw, Branch Manager at Tong & Peryer, families are increasingly looking for funerals that feel authentic, personal and reflective of the individual being honoured.

"There's no correct way to say goodbye anymore," says Steve. "People are realising they don't need to follow a script. A funeral can feel warm, relaxed, celebratory, reflective, whatever best honours that person."

Across Hawke's Bay, Tong & Peryer have helped families create everything from intimate home vigils and vineyard gatherings to motorcycle escorts, disco tributes, personalised memory walls, pet-inclusive farewells and services filled with as much laughter as tears.

At the centre of this shift is participation.

More families are choosing to spend time with their loved one before the funeral, helping with washing and dressing, decorating caskets and writing messages, creating playlists or gathering in more informal spaces to share stories and memories.

"Many families tell us being involved gave them comfort and connection," Steve explains. "It changes people from feeling like observers to participants. Those moments often become some of the most healing memories."

Tong & Peryer have also expanded their role beyond traditional funeral care, becoming Hawke's Bay's only full-service provider offering funeral services, pet cremation, death doula support and a regular Grief Café, all designed to support families before, during and after loss.

Their Grief Café has created a safe and informal environment for people to talk openly about grief, loss and life experiences without judgement or expectation. The feedback has been so encouraging.

"We've recognised that support shouldn't begin and end with the funeral service itself," says Steve. "People often need connection and reassurance long after a funeral has taken place."

Alongside this, Tong & Peryer continue to work closely with local organisations including Hospice, Aged Care Groups, Compassionate Communities and Dying Matters, helping encourage more open conversations around grief, planning ahead and end-of-life care.

A COMMUNITY HUB FOR LIFE'S MOST IMPORTANT MOMENTS

A Modern Approach to Care, Connection and Community

The funeral profession is changing globally, and Tong & Peryer believe funeral homes can play a much wider role in community wellbeing than many people traditionally expect.

Rather than only being present during times of loss, the team is focused on creating spaces for conversation, education and support before a funeral is ever needed.

Open evenings, grief conversations, educational outreach and community partnerships have all become part of that vision.

"We want people to feel comfortable walking through our doors before they're facing a crisis," Steve says. "Funeral homes shouldn't feel mysterious or intimidating. They're ultimately about people, connection and support."

Technology has also changed the way families experience funerals. Livestreaming, online memorials and digital tribute platforms now allow family and friends from around New Zealand and overseas to remain connected and involved.

At the same time, Tong & Peryer believe technology should support human connection, not replace it.

"There's still something deeply important about physically gathering together, sharing stories, hugging, crying, laughing and being present with one another."

Environmental awareness is also influencing modern funeral choices, with more families asking about sustainable and lower-impact options that better reflect personal values.

But perhaps the biggest shift is the growing willingness people have to talk openly about death and dying.

While these conversations can still feel uncomfortable, more families are recognising the value of discussing wishes early, documenting preferences and reducing uncertainty for loved ones.

"Planning ahead isn't about being morbid," says Steve. "It's about reducing stress for the people you love and giving them confidence they're honouring your wishes."

As Tong & Peryer continue building on more than 140 years of history in Hawke's Bay, the focus remains the same: compassion, adaptability and meaningful support.

Because ultimately, funerals are not only for the departed – they are for the living too.

PLANNING
AHEAD

END-OF-LIFE
SUPPORT

MEANINGFUL
FAREWELLS

GRIEF &
AFTERCARE

LEGACY





Tong & Peryer have expanded their role beyond traditional funeral care.

“We believe that support shouldn’t begin and end with planning a funeral, and funeral homes can play a much wider role in community wellbeing than many people traditionally expect. We’ve evolved the experience to reflect what people are asking for.”

CARE FOR EVERY PART OF LIFE’S JOURNEY



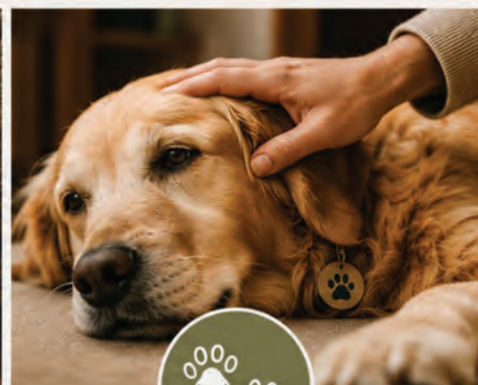
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Trudy Sharpe and Peter Richards. Photo: Florence Charvin



CR AUTOMATION: MECHATRONICS SPECIALIST

CR Automation is an automation engineering business based in Hastings. When director Peter Richards started the business in 2002, industrial automation in Hawke's Bay was largely treated as an add-on to electrical contracting. A few firms had "a couple of programmers or automation engineers" behind a workforce made up of traditional sparkies, he says.

Richards saw both a gap and an opportunity.

"I wanted to differentiate automation from the electrical field and elevate the profession."

CR Automation was set up to signal that difference.

"As opposed to establishing myself in a workshop environment, I worked out of the third floor of a multi-storey building... there was no workshop attached to us, it was a professional environment, and that was a key differentiator."

Although it took time for charge out rates to catch up with the value of specialist automation, the response was swift.

"Very quickly we secured a market share across a good percentage of the main industry, and it was a really great period of time."

Nearly 25 years later, the business has evolved into a multidiscipline industrial automation business spanning postharvest operations, municipal water, machine safety, automation, and service.

A leaner operation post-cyclone

Bay Buzz last featured CR Automation in early 2024, the year after the cyclone. Unsurprisingly, for a business that relies heavily on work connected to the pipfruit sector, CR Automation looks a little different these days, reducing its workforce from 30, two years ago, to 20, today.

"We have downsized, (in response to the market) as have lots of others," says CR Automation General Manager Trudy Sharpe.

"We've managed to keep our core expert staff, which is key to our delivery... our core expertise is still in house."

In the aftermath of the cyclone, pack houses pulled back on their capex programmes for a couple of years, Richards says.

"That industry sort of fell flat ... but it's definitely recovering."

In response, CR Automation is working on rebalancing its revenue streams and becoming more efficient.

Today the business has five main areas: Postharvest turnkey systems (the largest single stream), Water (automation and control for municipal councils), Machine safety, Automation / industrial software development, and Service.

"Post-harvest will always be our largest source of revenue, because it's a turnkey offering," Richards says.

"We're supplying mechanical parts and design, using the whole suite of our engineering services, whereas water uses our automation engineering skills and a little bit of the electrical design."

But he is clear that the company's

"There's definitely more green shoots now than has been apparent for 12 to 18 months."

Peter Richards

risk profile must shift, reducing exposure to the post-harvest sector, by growing other parts of the business.

Machine safety – more than just compliance

One of CR Automation's strongest areas of growth is in machine safety, driven by tighter legislation and greater director level accountability.

"With the change in government legislation and the prosecutions that are coming in, and the associated liability ... people that have had a firewall in the past are now very much in the cross-hairs of WorkSafe," Richards says.

The company's work in this area is largely in retrofitting existing plant, which has been purchased from overseas, or upgrading aging machinery and control systems.

"They're particularly messy because you've got an existing footprint that was never necessarily designed with over-arching safety, and the electrical control systems are potentially very complex."

CR Automation combines certified machine risk assessment with inhouse mechanical, electrical, and software capability to deliver solutions that work on the factory floor, not just in the report.

Safety and control system upgrades can deliver significant productivity



improvements, says Sharpe.

"A lot of companies see machine safety as just a cost ... but we've been able to achieve efficiency improvements when we've done machine safety.

"One of our clients - after machine safety, and control system upgrades - achieved a 25% increase in throughput."

Water, service and hidden risk

Alongside safety, the water and service streams underpin CR Automation's revenue resilience.

In water, the firm operates under service level agreements with councils from Gisborne through to Whanganui, successfully competing against much larger national providers.

"We tendered on a very large project for Tauranga District Council and won that," Richards says.

"I think we're very highly regarded in the water space."

Across water and industry more widely, aging control systems are a growing vulnerability.

"There's a lot of aging control systems out there, and a lot of industries don't know the risk that they're exposed to," Richards says.

"If one of those electronic components was to fail and the parts weren't readily available, then you're talking about some potentially significant downtime.

"We've been quite active with our clients in profiling this risk, but it's a

particularly hard sell because there's no return on investment," he says.

That is where service comes in: troubleshooting and unplanned work, often on third-party equipment.

"Someone might call us if they've got a tricky issue with a piece of automated equipment," Sharpe says.

"If they can't get hold of the original equipment manufacturer, or whoever actually supplied it originally: we can generally come in and help them."

New leadership

After two years of covering both CEO and head of sales roles, Richards has chosen to focus fully on the market.

"At the end of the day, it wasn't sustainable to do both."

That opened the way for the appointment of Trudy Sharpe as General Manager.

Sharpe began her career as the first woman in New Zealand to graduate with a mechatronics degree from a New Zealand university.

"If you look at everything that CR Automation does, it encompasses mechatronics - that mechanical, electrical, software combination - and that's the degree I did," she says.

"It's really nice to have a company that does it all."

Her attraction to CR Automation was as much about culture as engineering.

"Being a nice small company, that family company feel, is attractive to me. I've worked in large corporates

"A lot of companies see machine safety as just a cost ... but we've been able to achieve efficiency improvements when we've done machine safety."

Trudy Sharpe

before. It's hard to get things done, it's hard to initiate change and improvement ... my enjoyment is helping others do their jobs better."

Green shoots and margin over volume

Despite the challenges of recent years, both Richards and Sharpe see momentum returning.

"There's definitely more green shoots now than has been apparent for 12 to 18 months," Richards says.

"We're seeing more investment opportunities coming out of post-harvest"

New apple plantings, including in Canterbury, foreshadow future packing house demand. At the same time, early in the current financial year, CR Automation has secured "some good sales", including projects into Australia, while water, machine safety and service revenue lines continue to grow.

Strategically, the focus is on margin and resilience, not just revenue.

"If you're more efficient at what you do, you don't necessarily need that revenue," Peter says.

"What you need to do is improve your margins ... we're using AI, we're using systems and processes, and if that gives you an extra 5% of efficiency in a project, that's going to hit you better in your financials."

Both Richards and Sharpe are cautiously upbeat about the years ahead. As Sharpe puts it, they're "optimistic about the market improving in all of our sectors" and hope in time to "start to grow again." Richards says the focus is to "invest in our other business streams" to build greater resilience.

Nearly 25 years on, CR Automation is increasingly diversified across sectors and geographies, but still driven by the same motivation, to elevate automation as a profession, and to help industry do, as Sharpe puts it, "Cool, awesome things". ●



ROSSAI: FROM THE PADDOCKS OF PĀTOKA TO CUTTING EDGE AI

Growing up on a sheep and beef farm in Pātoka, north-west of Napier, didn't obviously point to a future in artificial intelligence. But for Callum Ross, founder of deep-tech startup RossAI, the seeds of his AI venture were planted early.

"My father was a shearer. We were always designing, making things on the farm because stuff broke down and you'd have to fix it."

Ross says that number-8-wire upbringing led him into engineering and industrial design, then on to roles with some of New Zealand's most innovative exporters, such as Fisher & Paykel Healthcare, Rockit, and Next Window.

"I've learned so much from those companies and it's filtering through to what I'm doing now."

Today, Ross is the founder/owner of a business that's generating a lot of buzz, and growing at a rate that most can only dream of.

Sustainable origins

It all started around seven years ago, when Ross was approached to help develop a novel packaging product – a cellulose clip – as a substitute for conventional plastic.

"That was our BioClip, which was made out of wood pulp. It kicked off where we are today."

That early work set a direction that still remains.

"Our ethos is around being sustainable," he says. "Fast forward to now, a lot of our products are based on

"We're trying to prove that globally relevant deep-tech products can genuinely be built from regional New Zealand."

Callum Ross

reducing carbon footprint."

RossAI now designs and builds about 95% of its products in New Zealand, from electronics to hardware, and software.

"What we don't make is either the AI chip itself – we bring that in – and anything other than the actual hardware," Ross says.

"That's kind of our unique part. We make as much of it as we can, and where we can't we'll have it made locally."

Being rooted in Hawke's Bay is not just a manufacturing choice, it's central to the company's identity.

"We're designing, prototyping and producing much of the technology locally, working directly alongside growers, manufacturers, councils and infrastructure operators.

"We're trying to prove that globally relevant deep-tech products can genuinely be built from regional New Zealand.

"We want to make things that are Hawke's Bay: Hawke's Bay materials or Hawke's Bay labour," he says. "Everything we do, we want to promote Hawke's Bay. That's our passion, that's our connection to the community. Growing up in Hawke's Bay, this is our home."

Four brands, one ambition

Ignoring the venture-capital playbook that says "focus on one thing", Ross has deliberately done the opposite.

"We've got four brands at the moment," he explains.

- **WasteLens** – AI-powered waste monitoring and contamination detection
- **LabLess** – real-time in-situ liquid and environmental monitoring
- **OpsLens** – real-time operational monitoring and reporting
- **NAGS** – robotic growing and automation systems for horticulture

RossAI is also developing its own AI brain, called AiON that will eventually sit over all of the company's hardware.

"That's really bringing all of our products into one brain," he explains.

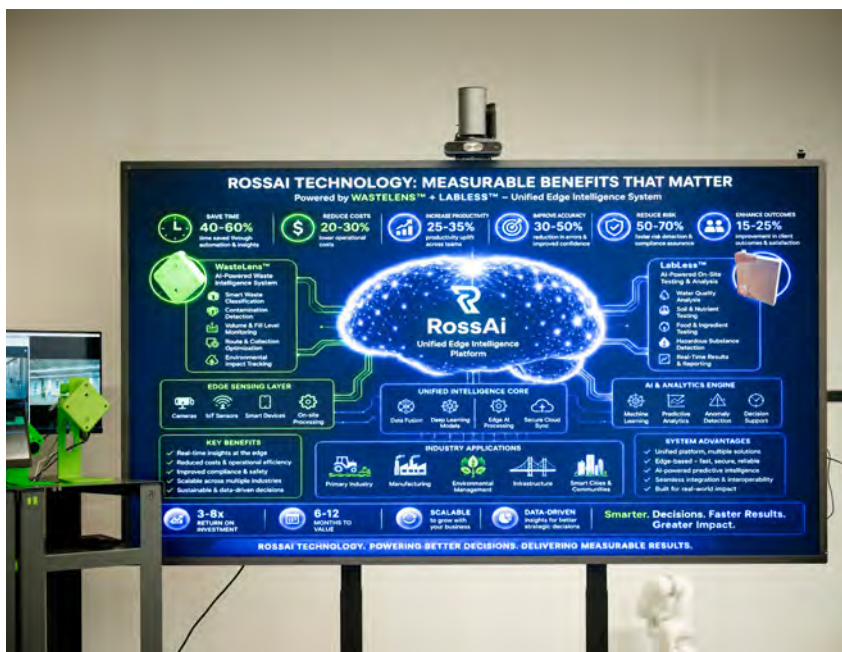
"You're not just reporting in your dashboard, you're actually creating a knowledge bank and intelligence that you can interact with.

"It's multiple areas of your business, that you can access, essentially cutting out all the different types of reporting and software, and simplifying that whole process.

"There's a big disruption, I think, in the market around ERP systems, whereas a brain bank or a system like this can actually replace that, and it's a fraction of cost."

Ross acknowledges that potential investors have pushed him to narrow the focus. "And I've said, 'Sorry, I can't actually do that. It's not me.'"





"We've seen huge growth - about 120% - in the last six months."
Callum Ross

Triple-digit growth

While the technology might be cutting edge, RossAI's product suite focuses on solutions to age-old problems: wasted time, wasted product, wasted energy, saving money, how to make better decisions. It's an approach that's finding favour.

"In the last six months our productivity has just shot up," Ross says. "We've seen huge growth - about 120% - in the last six months."

Today, most revenue is domestic, but not for long.

"We've probably got, in the pipeline, half a million dollars' worth of projects," he says.

"We're moving into that \$500,000-plus range annually. We've just signed an agreement with a company in Canada. New South Wales is a big one for us. We'll be exporting pretty soon."

He's under no illusions about the pace, or the risk. "I think we're going to see a massive uptake (globally) in getting solutions to market. The speed is phenomenal," he says. "It's actually frightening how fast a lot of this tech is moving."

That's why RossAI deliberately "overspecs" its hardware and keeps as much as possible in-house.

"LabLess is exceptionally over-spec'd, for something in the wine industry, but it's actually going to be a great fit for what we're doing now.

"It's configurable and adaptable to all industries, but we're focusing on one or two core ones at the moment."

AI at the edge – and in the office

The RossAI team is surprisingly small, numbering just six (not all of them

full time), complemented by a few contractors.

How do they manage to get so much done, BayBuzz asks?

"We use AI extensively," Ross says, "automating a lot of our processes."

The most staggering example is TenderTed, developed by RossAI in partnership with Co-Intel AI, (and launching later this year) to automate responses to tenders, RFPs and funding applications.

"Instead of taking 30 to 60 hours to do a tender, we can do it within ten seconds," Ross says.

"Responding to a tender takes a huge amount of resource. We can do that within seconds."

That frees the team to spend time on higher-value work.

Crucially, RossAI is betting on "AI at the edge" rather than in distant data centres.

"There's a movement that we're seeing with a lot of our products, and it's called AI Edge," Ross says. "AI Edge technology is processing a lot of the AI in situ. Everything's on the device... it's secure, it's not in the cloud."

He sees security and sustainability as intertwined. "You're not relying on big data centres," he explains. "Data centres obviously consume a lot of power, water - there's huge demand from data centres - but our model is that everything's processed in situ."

Predicting problems before they happen

Across waste, water, manufacturing, and primary industries, RossAI's systems are designed not just to measure, but to predict.

"This is where the evolution of prompting and AI (is going). We're going to see prediction. AI will tell us that this week you're going to have 'this challenge', or this week you're going to see an uptake of usage."

Ross sees big potential in health and safety and infrastructure monitoring.

"We can almost predict a near-miss happening," he says.

"If someone's coming too close to a machine, we can actually say, 'there's a 95% chance that you're going to see an accident this week,' because we've got all this data in between."

For Ross, the real value is making complex operational data understandable - and actionable - for people running plants, factories, and councils.

"Our goal is just helping New Zealand businesses get a little bit more competitive in productivity, just understanding productivity," he says.

"We try and measure against OEE - overall equipment effectiveness - and that can be quite challenging to get up to a level of being effective."

Where to next?

When asked about what the end game is, Ross is clear.

"My goal is to actually have a company ... a tech company here in Hawke's Bay.

"We want to really export our products, and make sure that we retain that sustainability story.

"This is home for us," he says.

"This is a passion - it's 24/7. I enjoy 3D printing things. If I can make something overnight and show somebody that it will change their business model, then great."

In other words: the farm kid from Pātoka is still doing what he's always done - designing and making things that solve real problems. The tools might have changed. The ambition has not. ●





AHEAD OF THE WEATHER

From a handshake deal, Mark Bart has built Metris into a market-leading forecasting platform and range of tools that set businesses up for success.

Mark Bart is animated. He's excitedly painting a picture of the time he crewed a converted passenger aeroplane, stripped of its seats and fitted with intricate scientific instruments, through the ash cloud of an Icelandic volcano.

It was 2010, and the Eyjafjallajökull eruption had grounded air travel across Europe for weeks. Well, most air travel. Mark held a research position in atmospheric science at the University of Leeds and, as he describes it, "got to boost around in our converted BAe146 whisper jet, measuring air quality. I learned so much."

Mark is obsessed with weather, with climate, with the particles in the air, and with measuring all of it. He is the brains (and the Berocca-in-human-form) behind Metris, a Havelock North-based weather measurement and forecasting company that operates around 350 weather stations with over 5,000 individual sensors across New Zealand.

From a weather jet flying into Chile and the Sahara, he's come down to earth somewhat and the bulk of his business, now, is focused on horticulture, with a promising side-hustle in construction.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Chris, Pilar and Mark.
Photo: Florence Charvin

Way beyond MetService

This is no MetService, Mark explains – the weather stations planted in the orchards and fields of their 250 customers are building out an interpretation layer on top of raw data that delivers time-critical information to growers.

"MetService might tell you it's windy or sunny or rainy, but it can't send an alarm to your mobile to get you out of bed ahead of a frost, or drill down to the nitty gritty detail. Metris can advise on whether it's a good day to spray, at what time spraying should start and when to stop. And it can code this by specific zones, hour by hour and right down to individual sites."

Each night, information from the sensors dotted across New Zealand (but primarily within the key horticulture regions of Hawke's Bay and Bay of Plenty) is plugged into a supercomputer in the United States, generating around 15 gigabytes of data that feeds into forecasts tailored to Metris customers. Mark jiggles the mouse on his PC and a screen springs to life showing a spray forecast for Elwood Road, colour-coded for clarity.

When applying chemicals, explains Mark, growers need to know they're not going to be blown around or washed away within minutes. If they're going to get the frost fans out or call up the helicopters, they need to be certain they can justify the cost. And 1,500 individual users agree – Metris has accumulated a legion of

fans who rely on their sensors and this platform and consider it key grower infrastructure. "Many of our new customers will come to us when an orchard manager has moved to a role in a different company and it's not running Metris. They want the information and level of detail they used to get each morning in order to do their job well, so that's when we often get a call for a new installation."

Origin story

The business is Mark's baby now, but he didn't birth it. After completing a PhD in chemistry at the University of Canterbury, but with a strong physics thread running through it, Mark spent time at the Measurement Standards Laboratory in Lower Hutt, doing precision temperature work for industrial clients including steel mills and the Methanex plant in Taranaki. The travel bug took him overseas, riding a motorcycle across Russia with his partner, Jane, and to the job in Leeds.

Back in New Zealand, Mark found himself doing air quality monitoring work with clients that included the Huntly power station, but restless and underutilised, he yearned for a challenge.

In 2016, he got a call from his school friend Paul Heaps asking if he could build a frost alarm for an orchardist, which led him to Howard Staines – a Hawke's Bay horticulture stalwart who had spent more than 20 years running



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"MetService might tell you it's windy or sunny or rainy, but it can't send an alarm to your mobile to get you out of bed ahead of a frost, or drill down to the nitty gritty detail."
Mark Bart

a one-man weather forecasting and pest modelling operation. He was ready to retire - and Mark had an appetite for something new.

"He said, 'I want to sell the business' and I said 'Sweet! I'm keen to get into this!'", Mark recalls. "We shook hands, he stayed on until 2022, and I paid him out over four years."

Paul, who became a shareholder and partner in Metris, was instrumental in those early days, getting the weather station network started and making sales. He's stepped away from the daily grind but today's team remains lean and high-performing. Mark works alongside technician Chris Arts - "what shall we call you? Service Manager?" asks Mark, glancing at his colleague. He explains that Chris - who enjoyed a 38-year career in aircraft maintenance - handles everything from routine servicing to weather station builds to emergency callouts. "When you hire a weather station, you get Chris with it."

Justin Courtney, based in Dunedin, is the founding chair and leads the South Island side of the business while Pilar Ortega-Hamal, an environmental management graduate, handles everything else - mainly customer service and operations.

Alongside granular weather forecasting, Metris runs pest and disease models that flag bacterial and fungal infection risk based on weather conditions, taking into account impacting factors like heat and leaf wetness "because a read-out of data alone isn't enough - it needs interpretation". There's also a soil moisture monitoring system that calculates how long growers should run their irrigation to keep trees in the optimal range. The client list includes household names across apples, kiwi-fruit, grapes and a range of other crops.

Pricing is accessible, beginning at \$72 per month, which covers the hardware, the platform, and Chris. The gear is leased rather than sold, meaning maintenance, upgrades, and repairs are all included. Chris says he's seen far too

many growers buy a weather station off the shelf, which degrades over time without the requisite attention and then starts spitting out unreliable data.

It's a wonderful role in a growing industry with work that is perpetually varied and exciting. "One day is never the same as the next," he says. "Mark is constantly coming up with amazing new ideas, which I then need to build something for!"

New products

Right now, there are a handful of new products and solutions commanding Mark and Chris's attention. Metris is in the midst of developing a dust forecasting product aimed at the construction sector and with trials underway in Australia. "You want to predict dust risk before it becomes a problem, which gives site managers time to run water trucks before breaching their resource consent limits," says Mark. "If you're measuring dust, it's already too late."

The product has already won an innovation award, so the next step is scaling and utilising AI models to help with the time and labour-intensive customer on-boarding journey. "As it stands currently, it's about a week of work for me. We'd like to get to the point where it's a self-service platform and users can enter their location, link their local data, and get a dust forecast without my input."

Closer to home, the next major development in the horticultural space is closing what Mark calls "the water loop" - moving from measuring and predicting soil moisture to actually controlling irrigation systems automatically. "We're playing with a prototype right now which can measure the weather, predict the weather, measure the soil moisture, then turn on the pump and the irrigation system for exactly the right amount of time to keep everything optimised."

Then, there's the beetle sensor. Ants and other crawlies love Metris's rain gauges, says Mark, because they are warm, dry and cosy. So he's in trouble-shooting mode, finding new ways to deter orchard critters from eroding their valuable infrastructure.

Their business tagline is 'ahead of the weather' but it's safe to say Mark, Chris and the team are staying well ahead of the future too. "What we do is personalised," Mark offers. "But there are other innovations ahead for us, for sure, and I think the business will look completely different in five years' time." ●



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The dangerous illusion of food security

The proposed Heinz Wattie's cuts have hit many people hard, and rightly so. Heinz Wattie's has proposed closing manufacturing facilities in Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin, ending the sale and production of frozen vegetables and some other lines, and stopping frozen packing at one Hastings site, with about 350 roles affected nationally.

This is not only Wattie's.

In March, McCain Foods announced it will close its Hastings vegetable processing plant on Omahu Road in Twyford at the end of the current processing season, by 31 January 2027. The site takes more than 50,000 tonnes of peas, beans, sweetcorn and carrots a year. In its letter to growers, McCain said it could not identify a sustainable pathway under the current model. The Hastings Mayor called the closure devastating.

Two announcements. Same district. Same season.

That is not coincidence. That is a pattern.

- For some, this is about jobs.
- For others, it is about a Hawke's Bay icon.
- For many growers, workers, contractors and families, it is something more unsettling again: the feeling that another piece of New Zealand's productive backbone is being quietly weakened while the country talks about resilience as though words can replace capability.

I have a personal connection to Wattie's. It runs through Golden Queen peaches and family history in Hastings, including some of the first pea vinters. So yes, there is a human and emotional layer to this for me. But nostalgia is not the point here. The point is far bigger than one company, one district, or one brand.

The real issue is food security, food sovereignty, and whether New Zea-

Too often, food security is spoken about as if it is some abstract policy phrase. It is not. It is practical. It is the ability of a country to grow, process and supply enough real food for its own people. It is the ability to withstand shocks. It is the difference between genuine resilience and dependence dressed up as efficiency.

land still takes seriously the industries that feed us.

Too often, food security is spoken about as if it is some abstract policy phrase. It is not. It is practical. It is the ability of a country to grow, process and supply enough real food for its own people. It is the ability to withstand shocks. It is the difference between genuine resilience and dependence dressed up as efficiency.

And that is where this issue gets serious.

Because processed vegetable crops are not just about a contract or a factory line. They are part of how farming systems work. Crops grown for processors such as Wattie's and McCain help make rotations possible. Those rotations matter. They help break disease cycles. They help manage weeds. They help spread risk. They help keep vegetable land functioning as vegetable land.

Pull enough of that processing demand out of the system and you do not just lose one market. You weaken

the rotation logic that underpins wider growing systems. That matters for agronomy. It matters for soil. It matters for pest and disease pressure. And over time, it matters for what can viably be grown at all.

That point is not well understood outside the sector. But it should be.

New Zealand also needs to stop kidding itself about the role of frozen vegetables. Fresh is excellent, of course. But snap-frozen vegetables are still very good food. They are not ultra-processed junk. They are not part of the long, sad march toward diets dominated by synthetic convenience and shelf-stable nonsense. They are real vegetables, preserved in a form that gives families access to practical, nutritious food year-round.

- Are they quite as good as fresh? In my opinion, no.
- Are they close enough to matter? Absolutely.

That matters for household budgets. It matters for working families. And it matters for public health.

If New Zealand keeps weakening the ability to grow and process real food locally, what exactly does it think fills the gap? More imported product. More dependence. More highly processed alternatives. More distance between the grower and the plate. That is not some sophisticated future. It is a failure of seriousness.

We also need to be careful not to let this debate collapse into lazy slogans about food miles. That argument misses the point. Distance is only one variable. Production efficiency, storage, shipping mode, standards, inputs and waste all matter. New Zealand has long shown that food grown well and shipped efficiently can compare strongly on total emissions, and research has warned for years that "food miles" alone are a poor measure of environmental impact.



But that does not rescue the deeper problem.

A country becomes fragile when it outsources too much of the real capacity to feed itself. Efficiency is not the same thing as sovereignty.

And this is where the national hypocrisy starts to bite.

We are constantly lectured about climate change, carbon, sustainability and net zero by people who appear to have no issue at all with food being grown offshore, shipped vast distances, then sold back to New Zealanders as though this is somehow enlightened. That is a mind bender.

Apparently local resilience matters right up until someone offshore undercuts local growers. Apparently sovereignty matters right up until the country has to decide whether producing things here is worth defending. Apparently sustainability matters right up until the numbers on a supermarket shelf point somewhere else.

That contradiction is everywhere.

I keep thinking about the absurdity of how New Zealand talks about fuel security. Fuel on a ship heading here, or fuel sitting in tanks in Singapore, is deemed part of New Zealand's fuel security. Seriously. Get real. A ship can be delayed. Diverted. Blocked. In the worst case, it can sink. You do not own true resilience just because something exists somewhere in the supply chain and might arrive.

Food security is not identical, but the logic is similar.

A country is not food secure because global trade exists. A country is not food secure because supermarket shelves are full in normal times. A country is food-secure when it retains enough domestic productive capacity to feed itself properly when conditions turn ugly.

That means land. That means growers. That means processing. That means energy. That means logistics. That means policy settings that do not slowly suffocate the productive economy while pretending to support it.

And that is the harder truth sitting underneath the Hawke's Bay closures.

For years, New Zealand has talked a big game about value-add, regional resilience, and backing local production. But in practice, we keep making it harder to do business here. Energy costs are high. Compliance keeps growing. Red tape stacks up. Input costs remain stubborn. Decisions are slow. Uncertainty is constant. Then we act surprised when manufacturing shrinks, growers lose markets, and productive capacity begins to slip away.

This is what decline looks like in the real world. Not one dramatic collapse. A slow grinding down. One line, one crop, one site, one decision at a time.

And once the processing muscle goes, it is not easy to rebuild.

That is why this matters beyond

Hastings. Beyond Wattie's and McCain. Beyond any single announcement.

Because if New Zealand loses enough local processing, we do not just lose factories. We lose confidence. We lose optionality. We lose rotation support. We lose a layer of nutritional resilience. We lose part of the living connection between our food and our people.

We also lose something more subtle but no less important: honesty.

We start pretending that "packaged in New Zealand" is the same as grown here. We start pretending that imported food is the same thing as secure food. We start pretending that dependence is efficiency. We start pretending that a country can neglect its own productive base and still remain strong.

It cannot.

A serious country would treat this as a warning. A serious country would ask why local manufacturing and processing keep becoming harder to justify. A serious country would ask whether free trade is still fair trade when local growers are expected to compete against systems carrying subsidies, lower costs, and lower burdens. A serious country would ask what happens to public health when real food gets displaced by imported substitutes and ultra-processed convenience. Most of all, a serious country would understand that food and fibre are not just about exports.

It is about domestic strength. It is about sovereignty in practical form. It is about the quiet dignity of feeding your own people well.

That is why this story matters.

Not because of sentiment alone. Not because Wattie's is iconic. Not because people are resistant to change.

It matters because New Zealand cannot keep weakening the systems that grow, process and supply real food, then pretend it is building a resilient future.

It is not.

New Zealand is not losing productive strength all at once. It is losing it in stages, while telling itself that imported supply, better packaging, and softer language are somehow the same thing as resilience.

They are not. ●

Fenton Hazelwood is an agronomist with more than 30 years experience across the seed, agrichemical, and food sectors.

HB's opportunity: premium food businesses

The looming closure of frozen food manufacturing in Hawke's Bay has become a talking point far beyond the region itself.

In June at Fieldays, where we have maintained a sales site for more than a decade, the issue surfaced repeatedly in conversations with visitors from across New Zealand. Many expressed concern about the loss of a major food-processing operation in a region long regarded as one of the country's food-producing heartlands.

For older Hawke's Bay residents, the announcement evokes memories of previous industrial closures that reshaped the regional economy. The sudden demise of the Whakatu freezing works left around 1,500 people without jobs. Others recalled the closure of Wyona canneries and the impact on growers, while more recently Te Mata Mushrooms disappeared from the local landscape.

Similar stories have unfolded elsewhere: the closure of the Cadbury factory in Dunedin and reductions in seafood processing in Nelson are reminders that food manufacturing in New Zealand has been under pressure for many years.

Behind every closure lies a human story. Employees lose livelihoods, growers lose markets, suppliers lose customers, and regional communities absorb the economic and social consequences. The effects can be significant and, for many families, personally devastating.

The decisions by Heinz Wattie's and McCain Foods are particularly telling. Together, these global food giants generate annual revenues equivalent to a substantial proportion of New Zealand's GDP. If companies of that scale struggle to make frozen vegetable processing profitable in New Zealand, it raises uncomfortable

Behind every closure lies a human story. Employees lose livelihoods, growers lose markets, suppliers lose customers, and regional communities absorb the economic and social consequences.

questions about the economics of manufacturing in this country.

It is certainly not a case of insufficient investment. McCain has invested heavily in its Hastings operation since acquiring the plant in 1996. Yet despite those efforts, the company recently concluded it could not identify a sustainable future for the operation under its current model.

Pressures building

The pressures have been building for decades. Since New Zealand opened its economy in the late 1980s, local manufacturers have faced growing competition from imports. New Zealand is a relatively small market spread across a long, narrow country with significant transport costs. At the same time, Australian producers and increasingly suppliers from Asia have easy access to our market.

The structure of the grocery sector adds another challenge. With only two dominant supermarket chains, suppliers face intense bargaining pressure. Retailers naturally seek the lowest possible cost of supply, often promoting private-label products sourced offshore to support competitive

pricing strategies. Local manufacturers must contend not only with rising labour, energy and transport costs, but also with relentless downward pressure on margins.

Meanwhile, multinational food companies have invested billions in highly automated mega-factories in Australia and elsewhere. These facilities operate at scales impossible to replicate in New Zealand, producing greater volumes, running for longer periods and spreading costs across multiple product lines. The economics are difficult to ignore. If spare capacity exists in larger overseas plants, supplying New Zealand from those facilities often becomes the rational business decision.

A quick walk through the frozen food aisle illustrates the trend. Many branded frozen vegetable products sold in New Zealand are already sourced from Australia, Europe or Asia. Private-label products are frequently imported as well. In some cases, it is cheaper to ship a container from Melbourne to a New Zealand port than it is to move the same container between the North and South Islands. Retailers increasingly benchmark products against the lowest reliable landed cost available globally.

Trade liberalisation has also played a role. The international trade agreements New Zealand has pursued have delivered benefits to exporters, but they have simultaneously exposed domestic manufacturers to global competition.

Consumer behaviour is changing too. Frozen vegetables remain convenient, but they compete with an expanding range of meal solutions. More consumers purchase prepared meals, takeaway food or delivered meals. Food is increasingly consumed in different formats and through different channels than it was a generation ago.



Murray Douglas. Photo: Florence Charvin.

Question now is what comes next

A government-funded report may identify future opportunities, but simply replacing one frozen vegetable processor with another would seem unlikely to succeed unless the underlying economics change. Without significant protectionist measures – which would come with their own

costs and distortions – it is difficult to see how a new operator could compete directly against large Australian processors on commodity products.

Some have raised concerns about food security. While understandable, the argument should be kept in perspective. New Zealand produces enough food to feed many times its

own population, and frozen vegetables represent only a small component of that production. The more important issue is how Hawke's Bay can continue to leverage its land, climate, infrastructure and skilled workforce in ways that create sustainable value.

There may be opportunity in the assets left behind. Rather than attempting to recreate a large-scale commodity processor, the region could explore smaller, more agile businesses focused on premium and specialty products. Competing head-to-head with Australian mega-factories would be difficult. Creating differentiated products with higher margins may offer a more realistic path forward.

Our own experience at Te Mata Figs points in that direction. As a relatively small grower, processor and retailer, we have deliberately built a vertically integrated business model. We do not simply grow figs and minimally process, accepting commodity pricing. Instead, we consciously innovate to position ourselves as a premium Hawke's Bay producer with a distinctive story and a differentiated and continuously evolving product range.

We add value wherever possible, sell directly to consumers as well as wholesaling, and use digital channels to build customer relationships. Our products are marketed online in New Zealand and overseas, supported by agritourism experiences that reinforce our brand and point of difference. By reducing reliance on intermediaries, we retain more of the value created by our products.

This approach will not suit every crop or every business. However, it demonstrates that alternative models are possible. Hawke's Bay has the climate, entrepreneurial talent and food-production expertise to support a more diverse range of niche and premium food businesses.

The closure of major processing facilities is undoubtedly a crisis for many affected families and businesses. But it may also be an opportunity to rethink how we create value from our region's natural advantages. Greater diversity, more innovation and higher-value production per hectare may ultimately prove to be a stronger foundation for the future.

It can be done. In Hawke's Bay, examples already exist. ●

Murray Douglas is proprietor of The Figgery in Havelock North.



WWIII has begun ... get to work on your garden

WWIII has started and the fuse is lit for GFC2.

I don't think it's outrageous to say these things. They say you can't see what's coming, but you can see what's possible today and probable in the near future. They will significantly impact our lives over the next decade

'Cut the prophet of doom stuff,' I hear you say, 'I can't do anything about these issues'. Yes you can. Small things that might make a difference. 'Think global, act local' is decent advice as well as illustrating the distressing decline in the use of adverbs.

WWIII these days probably won't include storming the beaches at Normandy or Operation Barbarossa. This isn't a 'hot war' of ideologies, but of economic (and military) supremacy. Since WWII the American Empire has reigned supreme; more so since the fall of the Berlin Wall. We have spent almost half a century in a unipolar world where USA calls the shots. The 'rules based order' that appears to be in disarray was based to a large extent on the US policing it, but not reliably policing itself.

Now China is on the rise with decisively faster growth and superior infrastructure. Conversely the US is wallowing in deficits and is the greatest debtor nation the world has ever seen. Western financial markets have enjoyed the longest bull marks in history, significantly based on money printing and fiscal largesse. Inflation has been the first of the painful consequences, but one day soon, the debt bubble will burst.

All this is the backdrop in which the world's two great rivals will jostle for

The key components of this conflict are food, energy, minerals and technology. New Zealand needs to get in the game on these things.

position for the next decade or two. Dirty tricks will abound. History suggests the old empire will fight hard to remain dominant, but the new empire will ultimately prevail.

This 'war' will involve each party both advantaging itself and disadvantaging its rival. This principle largely explains US tariffs, which primarily target China, the coup in Venezuela, and the war in Iran. On the Chinese side we have significant government support programmes for tech companies, predatory prices, restraints on trade and a very real interest in annexing Taiwan. Xi Jinping sees this as a key part of his legacy and controlling the best computer chips in the world would be an added bonus.

The key components of this conflict are food, energy, minerals and technology. NZ needs to get in the game on these things.

We've made a mess of energy by banning oil and gas exploration, while underinvesting in electricity generation. The private (and public) sector have been managing scarcity for profit. They talk big about renewable energy generation projects, but take a look at your power bill. Do you

seriously think they want to make that number go down?

In the interim most of the initiatives to electrify our faltering industrial sector will just burn more coal. Gas is the transitional fuel of choice for all developed economies, except silly ol' New Zealand.

Minerals are hot property right now as they drive many of the technological solutions to the world's problems. We have gold, silver, antimony and uranium down the Buller highway and also molybdenum, coal iron sands. You'll see great lumps of copper along the banks of the Mohaka. Despite watching our Aussie friends get rich from mining we are cautious about taking advantage of this sector. We currently produce about \$3 billion in mineral sales but many operators keep a low profile.

Resources are intrinsically linked with technology and the big nations are clinging onto whatever they can. The US secured Venezuelan oil before initiating the Iran conflict. This heavy oil is exactly what their Gulf refineries were built to process. China is restricting the exports of rare earths and silver.

The mineral interconnectedness of the world is moderating the potential for conflict too. The US banned the importation of Russian uranium due to the war in Ukraine, but created an exception if they really needed it: for energy or military purposes. This has resulted in Russia being either the largest or second largest exporter of uranium to the US. NZ has a similar 'exemption' for banned Russian oil. We consider its origin to be the last country in which it was significantly processed. So a chunk of the fuel we



Photo: Florence Charvin

In this world of turmoil, get out there and work on that garden. There are so many good reasons beyond self-sufficiency.

get from those oil titans, South Korea and Singapore, is actually Russian.

Our food production sector is currently the shining light of our economy, but runs on energy – mostly diesel and gas. If we can't run the tractors and can't import fertiliser, the golden goose is a goner. The goal of countries now is to be as self-sufficient as possible.

You should work on that too, and food is a good place to start.

My father tells me there was poverty and scarcity after WWII, in the 1950's when he was a kid. Many men

didn't come home and widows were forced to confront the hard reality of bringing up a family by themselves, on a desperately meagre income. "I don't remember anyone going hungry," he recounts. "At worst there was a fresh loaf of white bread and a big pot of soup." These women had gardens, a jar of beans or pearl barley and bellies were filled.

In this world of turmoil, get out there and work on that garden. There are so many good reasons beyond self-sufficiency. Two of the best things you can do for your mental health are to be in nature and to keep your hands busy. Gardening is a skill that needs to be developed and passed on to the next generation. I've heard so many people speak of one of their favourite childhood memories being the time they spent in the garden with one of their grandparents. It's surprisingly demanding exercise and helps you sleep better. Perhaps most inspiring

of all is the taste of a new potato that was dug from the garden an hour before consumption.

Bigger ideas could be facilitated by regional development agencies. Self-sufficiency is often the opposite of 'think big'. What we need is decentralised energy production. If they build that dam in CHB, could the water that flows from it generate electricity? How could we harness solar power on our sheep farms. This land is often not that productive in our sun-baked summers and a bit of shade can help sustain grass growth. How can we deliver on the biomass opportunity for local industrial users?

Our future hasn't looked this challenging for 80 years, but I'm convinced the best pathways for survival, and ultimately prosperity, are local. ●

Paul Paynter is our resident iconoclast and cider maker. Weather permitting, he grows stuff at Yummyfruit.

Amalgamation essential for Hawke's Bay's future

In a nifty piece of political manoeuvring the Coalition Government's pre-Christmas reform announcement delivered a hammer blow to the eleven regional councils across the country. All elected councillors gone by lunch time, replaced by local mayors, who were given the task of shuttling in the Government's reform agenda.

Government spinners wanted to test the waters with an assault on regional councils, considered the easy beats of local government. Regional councils mostly fly under the wider public radar. What do they do anyway?

The public response was predictably muted. One less bill to pay! Who cares!

Euphoric local mayors saw the reform as a huge opportunity to plunder regional council war chests and finally get rid of pesky resource management act compliance police, residing in regional council corridors.

The excitement was short lived!

The main course

The May reform announcement revealed the Government's true amalgamation agenda. Local council's were given ninety days to come up with a far-reaching amalgamation plan or else.

The reality is that regional councils were just the entrée.

The main course is widespread amalgamation, forcing unwilling and sometimes warring communities to get into bed together. The classic example, of course is our very own generations-long Napier and Hastings sulky and sometimes acrimonious co-existence.

After a number of failed voluntary attempts to rationalise Hawke's Bay's local government functions, the time has finally arrived for a serious and compulsory marriage.

The need for reform is patently obvious to every man and his dog.

After a number of failed voluntary attempts to rationalise Hawke's Bay's local government functions, the time has finally arrived for a serious and compulsory marriage.

Hawke's Bay is over governed. Five councils. Fifty eight councillors. About another hundred unelected people sitting on paid committees. Five chief executives. Over 2000 employees, driving around in 500 cars – spending nearly half a billion dollars of ratepayer dollars, every year.

A good percentage of the spend delivers reasonable value. However, duplication and inefficiencies puts an unnecessary financial drag on the regional economy.

It's about money

Make no mistake. This reform is about the money. Every ratepayer in the region has felt the pain of escalating rate bills, sometimes upwards of 20% increases annually. This cannot carry on. Preliminary work on a five council merger – CHB, Hastings, Napier, Wairoa councils and the regional council – show savings in the vicinity of \$40 to \$50 million of rates annually.

A technology shared service initiative has already yielded \$350,000 in savings in 3 months for the regional council. Across all councils this will save around \$8 million annually.

Merged planning, corporate and regulation services, information systems and other back-office functions, along with slimmed down governance

can produce annual savings of around \$500 for every household in the region.

These savings are only possible with smart and determined leadership over the next two years. It is premised on an assumption that our four mayors and our councils really do have the best interests of ratepayers firmly fixed in making these far reaching local governance changes.

Sadly, the prospect of achieving a peaceful, non-partisan collaborative outcome, in the best interests of the region is most unlikely. Already some of our leaders are postulating two unitary councils – Napier north to Wairoa and Hastings south to CHB.

Two unitary councils ignores the main reform driver which seeks efficiency and rates affordability. Napier and Hastings share the same catchment, river systems, infrastructure and economy. Hastings and Napier people sometimes even talk to each other.

That this nutty proposition actually has momentum speaks volumes about the prospects of achieving a locally driven and endorsed outcome. The Government will take one look at this and ask questions about the mental state of our local leadership. The Local Government minister will make the obvious and rational decision for us.

There will be an outpouring of grief at local communities losing a place around the decision-making table. Every reform looks like this. Those same voices are often heard furiously bemoaning rates increases.

The time has come to front up and, in the words of the iconic Selwyn Toogood, it's "the money or the bag!" Either accept slimmed-down local government or keep paying your rates until it really hurts. ●

Neil Kirton is a soon-to-be extinct
Hawke's Bay Regional Councillor.

Beyond the Benchtop

'A Change for the Better', 'The Sophisticate', 'Olive loves Oak' - these are the names and titles of award-winning kitchens featuring in the Kitchen Studio Look Book for 2026. Available as a magazine or digitally, it is a publication that sparks ideas, highlights craftsmanship and captures the creativity and vision that defines the very best New Zealand kitchens. The book can be used as your personal guide to inspired living.

The annual Kitchen Studio conference and awards are a calendar highlight for our designers and our suppliers. Held recently in Auckland, there is both competition and camaraderie in equal measure. We all want to win Designer of the Year. However, we value feedback from the judges and our peers. This is how we achieve and extend Kitchen Studio's design excellence. Questions are asked and problems are solved with collective minds.

New innovations and trends from the recent European Kitchen & Design Fairs were shared. This year the observations were: kitchens that fully merge with living spaces, warmer more tactile materials, softer forms and curves, sustainability and invisible technology. Colour is back – especially terracotta. Walnut and soft brown tones are replacing natural oak. Natural stone, porcelain, quartz, granite and 'very cool' laminate tops are being used for their beauty and ability to withstand hard wearing. Bullnose edging returns on thinner 20 and 30mm benches. Fine stainless steel benchtops are having a resurgence. Pocket doors and the integration of appliances are big – the joy of having everything hidden.

This year's design awards extended to include our offerings of mudrooms, laundries, wardrobes & interior cabinetry that align with Kitchen Studio's vision to lead New Zealand in creating spaces where Kiwi families live, connect and thrive.

We are renovating our showrooms too with a modern update to our branding that reflects our design lead services – look for our exciting new brand colours, and imagery!

TREND ALERT

Colour is back – especially terracotta. Walnut and soft brown tones are replacing natural oak. Natural stone, porcelain, quartz, granite.

The 2026 edition of 'Beyond the Benchtop' magazine is available from our showroom or digitally by emailing us at hastings@kitchenstudio.co.nz. It is brimming with stunning photography, innovative products and inspiring design. We hope that it will help you take the first step on your renovation journey.

Winning designer Andrea commented: 'I think a lot of clients don't really understand how they use their kitchen. Often, they will go on Pinterest and think 'I want this, I want my kitchen to look like that' but that might not work for their lifestyle. It's about being open to ideas and how we can make things function to suit, while really understanding how you work in your own space'.

— LIZ, KITCHEN STUDIO HASTINGS-NAPIER



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Kitchen Studio

Hawke's Bay: Stronger Together

By any measure, Hawke's Bay faces a defining choice about its future.

Our region needs one local government structure capable of effectively planning for and delivering the priorities that matter most to our communities. The logical solution is a single Regional Unitary Authority – I urge our local elected leaders to plan it well, do it once, and do it right.

Any alternative model risks becoming a costly and time-consuming halfway measure that simply delays the inevitable. The case for a Regional Unitary Authority is compelling, and the direction of travel from central government suggests larger, more efficient local government structures will increasingly be expected.

The current Government has given local leaders a mission and a mandate, presenting a rare opportunity to revisit the structure of local government in Hawke's Bay. Indications are that a Labour-led government would also endorse simplification and consolidation.

The benefits are clear. Councils are under enormous pressure to deliver more services and more infrastructure while ratepayers face rising living costs and growing financial strain. Hawke's Bay has a population of approximately 170,000 people and around 70,000 ratepayers. Yet we support five separate councils and approximately 1,700 council staff across the region.

The reality is that our region is too small to sustain five councils efficiently. Equally, New Zealand is increasingly finding that 78 local authorities serving a population of just over five million people is difficult to justify.

Cyclone Gabrielle demonstrated

Whether in sport, the arts, tourism, or economic development, organisations must navigate five annual plans, prepare submissions for five councils, and seek support from five separate decision-making processes.

what can be achieved when a region comes together behind a common purpose. Recovery and rebuilding only gained momentum once efforts were coordinated through our Regional Recovery Agency, supported by strong government investment, skilled leadership, and a clear strategy. Resources were aligned, duplication was reduced, and attention remained focused on agreed outcomes.

There is an important lesson in that experience.

The fundamental role of local government is to provide quality infrastructure and deliver services effectively and efficiently. A Regional Unitary Authority offers the best model for achieving that objective. One planning and delivery arm. One consenting arm.

In Hawke's Bay we all use the same roads and bridges. We all rely on water infrastructure. We all depend on effective waste management, parks and reserves, public facilities, civil defence systems, senior housing, environmental management ... the list goes on and on.

The opportunities for improvement are substantial. Standardised policies and processes, integrated technology systems, streamlined communications, decentralised local decision-making, clear performance

targets, and stronger accountability would all contribute to better outcomes for communities and ratepayers alike.

Consider the inefficiencies created by multiple councils for our businesses and community groups that function across the Bay. Whether in sport, the arts, tourism, or economic development, organisations must navigate five annual plans, prepare submissions for five councils, and seek support from five separate decision-making processes. The time, money, and effort spent managing these complexities could be far better directed toward delivering services and creating value for the community.

I sense a growing groundswell across Hawke's Bay that recognises local government reform is no longer simply desirable – it is urgently required. If we are serious about setting our region on a path to prosperity, we need a bold and courageous approach to our collective future. Now is the time to build the governance foundation to support that future.

'Patch protection' and engaging in territorial competition has no place in this discussion. The focus must be on 'we' ... 'them and us must be left in the past.

Some will understandably worry that larger structures could weaken local representation. That concern can be addressed through a well-designed system of wards, community boards, and local boards that ensure communities of interest retain a strong voice in decision-making. Regional efficiency and local representation are not mutually exclusive.

Gisborne offers us a working model. Gisborne's unitary authority demonstrates the advantages of having one decision-making table, one environ-



mental authority, and one organisation responsible for major challenges such as climate adaptation, civil defence, transport infrastructure, water services, and regulatory functions.

Our region's economic vitality is generated by its primary industries. The role of local government is to enable that prosperity through reliable infrastructure and consistent planning.

And this requires a mature discussion about debt. There is good debt and bad debt. Borrowing to build critical infrastructure and maintain essential assets over generations is good debt. Across New Zealand we have seen the consequences of deferred maintenance and underinvestment in vital community infrastructure. The costs of neglect invariably exceed the costs of proper stewardship. Investing in timely maintenance and planning for the replacement of ageing assets extends their useful life and saves money over the long term.

The urgency is real. At present, teams within five separate councils are developing plans and strategies that will shape our communities for decades. Too often those plans are developed independently, despite affecting the same region and many of the same people.

While Hawke's Bay councils have made some collective progress through shared back-office services, this represents only the tip of the iceberg. The real opportunity lies in examining the entire regional structure through a genuinely collaborative lens. Failure to do so risks leaving our region behind.

New Zealand has done this before. The 1989 local government reforms consolidated approximately 850 separate authorities into 86 councils, creating a more effective and efficient system of local government. At the time, the reforms were bold and transformative. Looking back, few would argue they were unnecessary.

The question before Hawke's Bay today is whether we have the same courage to think beyond existing boundaries and structures.

As a region, we need to be brave. We need to be bold. We need a plan for the whole of Hawke's Bay, and we need to start building it now.

This is our opportunity to make a lasting difference to the future of our region. We should embrace it. ●

First elected to Hastings Council in 2010, Sandra then served as mayor from 2017-2025.



Is Your Pet Feeling Winter Too?

Winter can be tough on ageing joints. In fact, it's estimated that 40% of dogs and up to 60% of cats are living with arthritis.

Is your pet:

- **stiff** after resting?
- **slowing down** on walks?
- **limping** or struggling with stairs?
- grooming or **licking sore joints** more than usual?

The good news is there are more treatment options available than ever before.

If your pet isn't moving quite like they used to, now is the perfect time to book a winter joint health check with your local Vet Services clinic.

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HAWKE'S BAY / DANNEVIRKE

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No more Ministry for the Environment

Did you know the Ministry for the Environment turns 40 this year? Did you also know it's the last anniversary it will celebrate?

In late May a bill was voted through Parliament to disestablish the ministry and fold it into the new Ministry for Cities, Environment, Regions, and Transport – MCERT for those who prefer acronyms. The new 'mega ministry' structure came into effect on 1 July.

Ministry's impact

Having a stand-alone ministry focussed on the environment, climate action, and waste reduction isn't a unique arrangement in the OECD, but seems fitting, given New Zealand's image on the global stage – both in terms of tourism and our high-quality primary industry products.

MfE began with a single staff member and over its 40 years its knowledgeable and dedicated team helped shape some hugely impactful policy initiatives by various governments.

It even won an award in 2021, taking the Science Communicators Association of New Zealand award for Excellence in Science Communication, alongside Stats NZ. The award was a result of the Our Atmosphere and Climate 2020 report, which was hailed as "an outstanding example of communication of science to a non-science audience."

Waste reduction

The Waste Management Act 2008 is a landmark piece of legislation which enabled improvements across both council and industry and created the

As the importance of taking action on climate change became better understood, MfE took a central role, advising the Government, coordinating strategy across ministries, and creating policy and budgets.

single biggest change in the way the country tackles its poor waste minimisation track record.

This act enables critical initiatives like the waste levy and the associated Waste Minimisation Fund, standardised kerbside recycling, product bans like the single use plastic bag ban, and regulated product stewardship like the Tyrewise scheme.

The waste levy and Waste Minimisation Fund were created to work as a carrot and a stick. The levy was increased and expanded in 2021 and is applied to the majority of the country's landfills. The levy makes up a portion of the cost you pay when disposing of waste at landfill.

Funds from the levy are then split equally between councils and the Waste Minimisation Fund – a contestable fund for waste reduction initiatives. The concept is quite elegant; money paid to dispose of waste is used to prevent waste in the future.

Unfortunately, it's been somewhat watered down as the scope of what councils can use their funding for was recently expanded beyond waste minimisation.

The standardisation of kerbside recycling was another important waste minimisation win for MfE. It means that what we can put out for recycling each week is the same around almost the whole country.

The potentially most impactful, but so far least used part of the Act, is regulated product stewardship – the area we at 3R focus on. In 2020 the then Minister for the Environment set in motion the creation of regulated product stewardship schemes for tyres, e-waste, single-use plastic packaging, refrigerant gases, farm plastic, and agrichemicals and their containers.

So far, only one regulated scheme is operating (Tyrewise), but there is growing momentum for regulated schemes for large batteries, agrichemicals and their containers, and farm plastic to come online in the near future.

Climate change

As the importance of taking action on climate change became better understood, MfE took a central role, advising the Government, coordinating strategy across ministries, and creating policy and budgets.

The Climate Change Response Act 2002 was created to establish a legal framework for New Zealand to meet its international obligations under the Kyoto Protocol and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This was effectively superseded by the Paris Agreement in 2015.

In 2019 the Zero Carbon Act was added as a large amendment to the original Act so the country can meet its obligations under the Paris Agreement.

This Act was a world first in how it



Tyrewise is a major MfE achievement. Pictured is the Awapuni Resource Recovery Park in Palmerston North.

separated short and long-lived greenhouse gases, using what is known as the Two Baskets Approach to set different targets covering primarily biogenic methane and carbon dioxide. The Act works alongside the Emissions Reduction Plan (currently in its second iteration), which sets out the strategy on how to decarbonise every sector of the economy.

It's important to remember that emissions reduction isn't just about tackling climate change. It's also vital for New Zealand's exports as free trade agreements with key markets are conditional on meeting our international commitments.

Resource management

The now much maligned Resource Management Act (RMA) was, at the time, hailed as a game changer by unifying dozens of laws into a single framework with sustainable management at its core. It has since been heavily amended, making it a particularly dense and difficult to navigate piece of legislation with over 400 sections.

Who's responsible for environmental policy now?

The ministry's statutory functions have now been transferred to the Secretary for the Environment. In this case this is MCERT's inaugural chief executive Jeremy Lightfoot – the former Secretary for Corrections and Chief Executive of the Department of Corrections.

The new Ministry is still answerable to the Minister for the Environment Hon Nicola Grigg, for these responsibilities.

We recently hosted the Minister at our Karamu Road office in Hastings – her first ministerial visit in the role. I was impressed with her engagement and eagerness to learn about not only what we (3R Group) do in the product stewardship and circular economy space, but how government plays an important role.

We also gave her an update on Tyrewise, the first national product stewardship scheme for collecting and recycling tyres (which 3R manages) and where the large energy storage battery project is at.

There's an argument to be made

that folding MfE into MCERT can create better coordination across different ministries and levels of government. The Government has asserted this, as well as efficiencies from removing duplication.

On the other hand, the 580 submissions opposed to the bill which scrapped MfE argued it will result in the loss of independent environmental advice and advocacy, decrease the focus on the environment, create potential conflicts of interest, and reduce the capability and capacity of Government to respond to environmental pressures. It's worth noting there were 585 submissions, with just five supporting the bill.

Will this be a good move for the environment, the economy on which it relies, and country as a whole? Only time will tell. ●

[Dominic works at 3R, which designs, implements and manages product stewardship schemes for individual businesses or industry-wide groups. They also help businesses take a fresh look at their waste to first minimise and then recover what would otherwise be wasted.](#)





GET IT FIXED!

Story by Tess Redgrave

Saturday morning, King's Birthday weekend, and I am sitting with a group of people waiting to get something fixed at Napier's monthly Repair Café.

The atmosphere is busy and warm in Asher Hall where the café is held. Volunteers are signing customers in, directing them to tables to wait and enjoy free coffee and homemade baking. A group of children ranging in age from eight to thirteen years old are engrossed at the electronics table using screwdrivers to take apart things like a plastic electric guitar, defunct routers and printers. They attack the objects with gusto and fascination.

At the next table along, a group of women sit at sewing machines, one on an overlocker. They chat over the sound of machines whirring and the buzz of activity in the hall. Two jewellers at the next table are busy too. A bike is wheeled in across the hall to be fixed and there is a grating sound of knives being sharpened. At the

electrical table a registered electrician is testing a treasured antique lamp for any signs of life.

I am sitting next to Celine Harleaux who has driven here from Flaxmere to get her electric jug fixed. "I press the button, but it just doesn't fire," she tells me. "It switches off all the time."

Celine's kettle cost her "maybe \$69 at Kmart two years ago". She could easily go and buy another one but says she wants to "do the right thing and see if it can be repaired. I feel sorry that things like this are not built to last," she says.

Beside Celine, Megan Joyce and her husband have lugged in their two-year-old Breville Inverter Microwave which is constantly showing a Err 1 signal when its buttons are pressed. Now they too wait to see if it can be fixed. Lydia Rynhart is also at the table sipping coffee while one of the regular sewists, Val Thompson, tackles her daughter's frayed mermaid costume.

Napier Repair Café founder Helen Howard circulates around the hall checking everyone, including me, has

"We are pushing back against a disposable mentality. The café is about building awareness around treasuring items you have in your own home, rather than throwing them away into the landfill."
Helen Howard

got what they need. "This is a feel good community event," she says. "It's really satisfying repairing things, and skill sharing too."

Helen, who has a background in conservation and environmental action, launched the Napier Repair Café, which runs on the last Saturday of every month, in 2022. To date the monthly café, with a team of regular, skilled volunteers, has worked on 2,763 items, fixed 2,069 of them, with another 420 considered repairable if the owner could get the right parts. Notably, only 274 items brought to the café over the last three years have been



deemed unrepairable and destined for landfill.

“We are pushing back against a disposable mentality,” says Helen of the café’s larger purpose. “The café is about building awareness around treasuring items you have in your own home, rather than throwing them away into the landfill.”

As well as overseeing the café - “the highlight of my month” - Helen is an enviroschools facilitator with the Hawke’s Bay Regional Council’s Environmental Education team. She is hot on promoting waste minimisation in all its manifestations.

So too is James Taylor. A local medical services technician, James was an early volunteer for the Napier Café. But keen to free up his Saturdays for sport, he soon set up the Hastings Repair Café - now based on the second Sunday of each month at the Hastings Bridge Club, 911 Railway Road.

Like Helen, James is passionate about the repair café. He has a busy job, is a father, and plays sport on Saturdays, but he hosts the café as often as he can and works on “anything with a plug” that comes in for

“Up front the café is about stopping things going to landfill, but I also love having conversations around repairing things and giving people skills and ideas to repair things themselves.”

James Taylor

repair (He holds an electrical appliance service licence - EAS).

“Up front the café is about stopping things going to landfill,” says James, “but I also love having conversations around repairing things and giving people skills and ideas to repair things themselves.” James is quick to praise his team of volunteers but asks me to put in a plug (no pun intended) for more. “We always need more volunteers. The community gets out of this what they put in.”

Both Hawke’s Bay cafés are members of Repair Café Aotearoa New Zealand (RCANZ) which supports around 80 repair cafés scattered across the country, providing resources including a handbook, promotions, advocacy, and “capacity building to

amplify the impact of repair for local communities”.

In October, on International Repair Day, Helen will help host a pop up repair café in conjunction with the Salvage Workshop in Waipukurau, which she hopes may lead to another HB Repair Café opening.

New Zealand’s repair cafés align with the International Repair Café (established in 2009), the Right to Repair movement, and advocacy for mandatory product stewardship in New Zealand. This is lobbying manufacturers to make products repairable and durable by design.

James says his eyes “have been opened to the increasing supply of appliances coming to the café that can’t be repaired. Technology has moved on but there is no gesture by manufacturers towards having parts if something breaks down.”

James and Helen both submitted on the recent, and failed, Consumer Guarantees (Right to Repair) Amendment Bill in NZ, which would have required manufacturers to make repair parts and information available to consumers.



Clockwise from top left: Barry Gardner, John O'Connor. Celine's jug, Val and Lydia and suit.



Jay Hira, Phillip Ferrier and Kiwi-bird owner Margaret Gregory

"I love the fact we're not dumping stuff. It's seen better days, but I'll try and fix it. I love this work and I love being able to do something for people."
Val Thompson

"Essential for waste minimisation, decarbonisation, and climate justice," said the Bill's wording.

Using the website Re-starters (restarters.net), which captures global data for Repair Cafés around the world, Helen calculates that the Napier Café alone has prevented 2,261 kg of waste going to landfill since its inception and prevented 19,268 kgs of CO₂ emissions.

"I love the fact we're not dumping stuff," says Napier Repair Café long-time volunteer Val Thompson when I check in to see how she is going with the mermaid suit. "It's seen better days," she tells me. "But I'll try and fix it. I love this work and I love being able to do something for people."

Over at the Napier Café electrical table, Celine Harleaux is watching as Mr Max uses emery paper to clean the electrical contacts on the bottom landing pad of her jug. He then checks the jug's charge with a multi-meter - all good. The jug is filled with water and

starts to boil, the lights that were flicking off are now firmly on as it does its job. Celine smiles. "I am happy," she says, confirming she is glad she made the effort to cross town to the Repair Café.

Further down the electrics table, Barry Gardener takes the back off Megan Joyce's microwave. Barry is a retired engineer and paramedic and says he enjoys discovering how things work.

The inner workings of the Breville microwave are clean and tidy but Barry soon discovers the Err-1 signal is something to do with the appliance's electronics board. He points the screwdriver down on to the inside end of the microwave. "I am sorry," he says to Megan, "but I can't fix this."

Nonetheless Megan is glad she came to the café anyway and had a cup of tea and chattered to others - but she says she'll probably have to buy a brand new microwave now!

At the sewists' table Val has finished the mermaid suit and Lydia Rynhart is delighted, knowing her daughter will be thrilled!

There is no charge for fixing an item at the repair cafes - just an invitation to give a koha - and that's how both cafes essentially survive, apart from some funding and rental relief when its offered.

Two weeks later, 14 June, I stand next to the koha sign at the Hastings Repair Café. It is just as busy here as the Napier Café was. I sit and watch as a clock radio, an iron, a spray backpack, a vacuum cleaner and a bike come in for repair. By the end of the two and half hour session, 35 items

will have come into the cafe, with 22 repaired there and then. Jay Hira and his wife Manjula for starters, go home smiling after their three-year old Sunbeam sandwich maker is given a new life. Soon Rebekah Sullivan's scooter is fixed by long-time café volunteer John O'Connor who works out why the back wheel is locking up.

The most intriguing item to come into the café today is an attractive kiwi bird with its body made out of a coconut shell and sporting a broken nose and wobbly feet. Phillip Ferrier, a trained art and antiquities restorer, JP, and with many more accolades to his name, is soon on the case. The kiwi nose is smoothed and painted and the feet are taken off and re-screwed and the bird's coconut shell body given a generous oil.

Phillip stands back to admire his work. Recently retired, he is enjoying using a wealth of skills for the community's good.

Kiwi-bird owner Margaret Gregory didn't have any expectation when she came to the café but she's glad she found Phillip, and now she is smiling.

"I've owned this bird for a long time," she says. "I'm very happy." ●

Napier Repair Café
www.sustainablenapier.co.nz

Hastings Repair Café
Facebook: Repair-Cafe-Hastings

Other resources
www.repairnetworkaotearoa.org.nz
www.repaircafe.org/en/



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Passion for Classics

The Hawke's Bay Vintage and Classic Car Club boasts just over 300 members who collectively care for hundreds of treasured vintage and classic vehicles. While their monetary value is difficult to quantify, these beloved machines represent a priceless part of our motoring heritage and hold immense sentimental value for their owners.





Above: Jack Stamper in his 1951 Austin Devon A40 taxi.





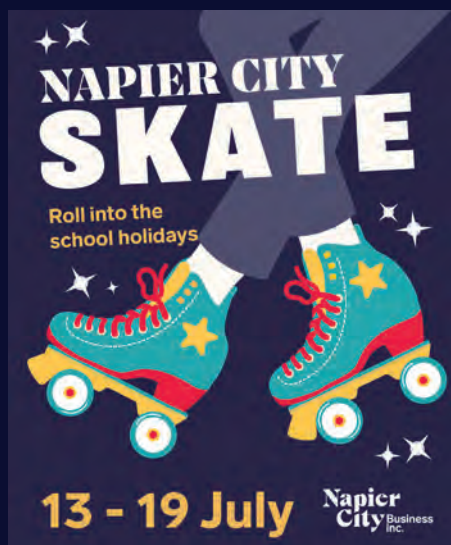
Above and right: Neil O'Leary with his 1971 Falcon XY GT replica. Neil built the car himself.
Below and right: Kevin Baker and his 1958 Jaguar XK150. Imported from America, it was converted to right hand drive in New Zealand.





Napier City

Shop • Dine • Play



Roll back the years (or make some new memories) at Napier City Skate, a pop-up indoor roller skating rink taking over the CBD for one week only this July 13-19. Expect disco lights, great music, family-friendly fun and plenty of nostalgic vibes.

Whether you're a seasoned skater or finding your feet for the first time, this is winter fun on wheels.



Event info & tickets at:
napiercbd.co.nz/skate



Winter Deco Weekend returns to Napier from 17 to 19 July 2026, with vintage fun, jazz, classic cars, 1930s style, dining, dancing, markets and free community events.

This year's programme also includes the new Art Deco Taste Trail, featuring special dishes, drinks and creative pairings from participating Hawke's Bay venues.

Full programme and tickets at
artdecofestival.co.nz.



Taste Trail venues in Napier CBD

The Curve, Scenic Hotel Te Pania

45 Marine Parade, Napier
Fri 17, Sat 18, Sun 19 July
Available: 12.00pm to 4.00pm

Royal High Tea: scones and finger sandwiches served with bubbles and tea

The County Hotel

12 Browning Street, Napier
Thurs 16, Fri 17, Sat 18 July
Available: 5.00pm to 7.00pm

Elderflower Collins with truffle parmesan fries

Vinci's

29A Hastings Street, Napier
Thurs 16, Fri 17, Sat 18, Sun 19 July
Available: 11.00am to close

Oysters Rockefeller and Dirty Martini

Bistronomy & Vinotech

40 Hastings Street, Napier
Fri 17, Sat 18, Sun 19 July
Available: 3.00pm to 9.00pm

Cranachan with Kir Imperial cocktail

The Rose Irish Pub

4 Hastings Street, Napier
Fri 17, Sat 18, Sun 19 July
Available: 12.00pm to 11.00pm

Confit duck leg served with a Boulevardier cocktail or glass of Pinot Noir

Lisbon Artisan Pastry Shop

89 Hastings Street, Napier
Thurs 16, Fri 17, Sat 18 July
Available: 8.00am to 2.30pm

Almond petit four

ROAM

189 Marine Parade, Napier
Thurs 16, Fri 17, Sat 18, Sun 19 July
Available: 10.30am to 2.00pm

White bean and ham hock pressed terrine and a glass of Albariño Brothers

Good Sport

189 Tennyson Street, Napier
Thurs 16, Fri 17, Sat 18 and Sun 19 July
Available: 12.00pm to 9.00pm

Lemon meringue pie and Manhattan

  @napiercity /napiercbd.co.nz



Reflections from migrating
to Queensland, 6 months in
Story by Matt Miller

G'DAY FROM THE SUNSHINE COAST

We'd been talking about moving to Australia for years.

One of those things you say after a bad day, then wake up the next morning and get on with your life. But this year we actually did it. House sold, dog on a plane. Noosa Heads, Queensland. Here we are.

We were in New Zealand recently for a visit, Hawke's Bay included. Sitting in a Heretaunga Street cafe with the door open and a freezing wind blowing in, it hit me - it is cold. I had acclimatised to Queensland faster than I realised.

So beyond the beaches, the surf clubs and the high rises, what is life in Queensland actually like?

I still haven't seen a snake. Before we left Hawke's Bay, most conversations went like this: "Aren't you worried about the spiders? The snakes? The sharks?" Six months in, nothing. Not a single snake, not a funnel web. I don't even check inside my shoes before I put them on any more.

Our gardener mentioned offhandedly that Noosa is full of brown snakes, so maybe we've been lucky. Either way, the wildlife apocalypse we'd been warned about hasn't materialised. Apart from a huntsman the size of my hand that spent a week inside, the most annoying creatures we've dealt with so far are the fruit bats who decided our rental car was a public latrine when I made the mistake of parking it under a tree on our first night here.

The admin was (largely) painless. We had been warned about the perils of navigating Australia's bureaucracy. But I opened a bank account within half an hour with just a New Zealand passport and a prepay Australian mobile number. Driver's licences sorted within minutes with no tests required. Medicare sorted within days of arriving. Setting up our Australian company took a couple of hours online. I also got my boat licence within the first month - Maritime Safety Queensland rules the waves and you don't mess with them, breath testing included.

New Zealand has a special-category visa arrangement that removes most of the immigration complexity, and Australia has clearly done a lot of work making itself accessible to skilled migrants from comparable countries. If you're sitting in Hawke's Bay dreading the paperwork, don't let it put you off. It was all pretty easy. It felt like we'd trained for a marathon and then found out the course was 5km.



The Gold Coast surprised us. We'd always written 'The GC' off as a bit shallow and flashy. We were wrong. We spent a few days in an 88-storey monolith between Surfer's Paradise and Main Beach and found it genuinely enjoyable - it's relaxed, well set up, with excellent public transport on the G-Link tram. And Queensland has a 50-cent cap on all public transport so it's cheap to get around.

Australian food is really good. Coming from Hawke's Bay, we weren't expecting much. But the food here holds up. The produce is good, there are fantastic restaurants (especially in Noosa), and the seafood is superb. Even the butter is excellent.

Australians don't know – or care – much about NZ. The average Australian's mental model of New Zealand is roughly: beautiful mountains, great place for a holiday, and cold. Queensland has an enormous Kiwi population, so you'd think there would be a bit more familiarity, but there's not.

Someone asked if it had started snowing yet – in summer! There is no rivalry and not even much banter. It's just indifference. Nobody here has heard of Winston Peters, most couldn't place Wellington on a map or even tell you what the main islands are called. Queenslanders reserve their opprobrium for the 'Mexicans'. They are the strange people from 'south of the border', i.e. Sydney and Melbourne.

Australians are less exercised about politics than Kiwis. This one took me a while to understand. The political mood here has shifted since we arrived – Pauline Hanson is on a tear, and there is a crackling populist energy in the air. But most Australians I've met don't spend much time on it. I think I understand why now.

The important decisions about daily life – schools, hospitals, roads

– are made at the state level. Even the Covid lockdowns were run by the states. The federal government controls big stuff like tax, immigration, foreign policy, and superannuation. These are large, abstract things that are hard to get your head around, so a lot of people don't try. They go for tribal vibes instead, which sounds like a recipe for instability, but so far it has worked: Australia went through about ten prime ministers in a short space of time and barely slowed down. The states just kept running. It's a resilient system, even when the top looks chaotic.

The business community here is welcoming. We'd expected to spend the first year building the Mogul brand in Australia from scratch - heads down, quietly earning our place. That's not quite how it played out. Within a couple of months, we were attending networking events in Buderim, chamber of commerce gatherings in Noosa and Maroochydore, and getting a real feel for the Sunshine Coast business scene. We have met the mayors of Noosa and the Sunshine Coast, as well as the deputy state premier. It's a community that moves quickly and welcomes people who turn up ready to contribute.

The highlight has been FWD>>>FEST, the Sunshine Coast's annual festival for entrepreneurs and innovators. We'd actually flown over from Hawke's Bay to attend the previous year's event, and left buzzing. Within eight months, we'd sold the house. When FWD>>>FEST 26 came around in May, we went all in, signing on as Ecosystem and Delivery Partners, sponsoring the Day 1 lunch, with me MC-ing a session and George volunteering as a delegate coordinator for the full day. A friend and long-time client flew over from Hawke's Bay to attend. He walked away with a head full of new ideas and connections.

So, would we do it again? Yes. Without hesitation.

Noosa is genuinely beautiful. The people are friendly. The weather is extraordinary, even when that means torrential thundershowers and 32-degree May afternoons. We miss Hawke's Bay. The wine, the people, the landscape. But we came for a change, and we got one. Just not the kind involving snakes. ●

Matt Miller is a digital marketing consultant and Managing Director of Mogul Digital, based in Noosa Heads, Queensland.



A Matariki feast

I first met Te Rangi Huata in 2001 when I was a stall-holder and manager of the Farmers' Market. Te Rangi was instrumental in the national rekindling of the neglected flame of Matariki. He suggested that the Farmers' Market was a good place to celebrate the event.

So with the backing of the stall-holders and financial support from Ngāti Kahungunu Iwi Inc we staged a Matariki festival. As well as the usual market offerings, we sold hot food, as did local iwi food providers. Te Rangi organised cultural performances. The event was fun, wholesome and relevant to Aotearoa/New Zealand. So good in fact that we repeated the festival the following year.

I sat down with Te Rangi recently to discuss the growth of Matariki celebrations over the last 25 years, its five years with national holiday status, and to ask him how I, as a Welsh/Irish, atheist, pakeha, could partake in the festival.

During our discussion he confirmed the core values of the festival and gave examples of how various iwi celebrate in different ways. With his humility, sharp mind and worldliness he has the big picture in view and the patience to let it develop.

He said that traditions evolve according to need. There's an idea that Matariki should or could become the time of year for home-comings, for unveilings, for significant birthdays and milestones to be celebrated over the holiday weekend, thus giving everyone the certainty of dates and time to plan well ahead, to come together and celebrate in their own way.

Matariki meal ... Make your own

Of the nine stars in the tiny eyes constellation about half represent food. From the rivers, the seas, the land, the sky, and the wind. It's a time of year, and now, thanks to the public holiday, a short winter break that lends itself to a shared meal.

On-and-off over the last ten years I have hosted gatherings of family and

friends to mark Matariki. Encouraging people to bring a stew or a curry to share, freshly baked focaccia, herbs and winter greens from their garden, the last of the feijoa chutney to foist on unsuspecting fellow diners. We light the brazier and cook something over charcoal. With warming fare and fire, we are cognisant of the three main themes of Matariki: remembrance, connection and looking forward to the future.

We will do something similar this year with friends, family, fire, food. In recent years we've partially curated the pot-luck in order to reduce awkward duplication and a surfeit of rice salad. We've added to our emerging tradition a quick ringaround to check who's coming, and a messenger thread to keep track of who's bringing what.

Alongside Matariki plans on the homefront, I am cooking a Matariki Feast at Unison Vineyard for paying diners. Menu planning has given me pause for thought: not just about what to cook, where to buy the duck and how to represent the star Pōhutukawa in the dessert, but also whether I have any right to serve a Matariki feast. I did stop to consider whether I could "do the right thing in the right way".

That lack of confidence and trepidation at doing the wrong thing is at the heart of the issue. It's a feeling that is no-doubt shared by many. It's a similar nervousness I would have about unknown etiquette in other social or cultural circumstances (I'm sure that's why Charlie Windsor hasn't invited me for tea).

Bolstered by reconnection to an old friend in Te Rangi Huata, I am throwing my hat into the ring. Unlike dried out turkey and tissue-paper hats, the festivities of Matariki feel right to me. Matariki, Pleiades, Subaru, Seven Sisters, or Messier 45, however it's called it's real. A mere four hundred odd light years away, it has captured the imagination of peoples around the world. Traditions have and will continue to develop. My granddaughters sing about the stars of Matariki to the

tune of the Macarena (complete with actions). Cultural fusion? Whatever it is, adaptation and inclusivity are key.

This year's Matariki theme is Matariki Herenga Waka, an invitation to make it our own. Wherever we come from we're all included. Matariki is for all of us.

That's what I'm embracing. It rings true, it fits well at this time of year, it gives us an opportunity to acknowledge kinship, remembrance and renewal. It provides a little relief from the hibernation of Hawke's Bay.

I encourage you to make Matariki your own too. Engage with the country's unique and authentic festival. Rather than the mid-winter brussel sprout party, make it real and keep it real. Use existing family traditions or develop new ones.

Here's my Unison menu. It will be served family style to honour the season, the festival and the joy of togetherness. I envisage diners passing food to each other, sharing, discussing, having fun, accompanied by moments of contemplation, decent wine and maybe a few songs. ♦

Menu

On toast – smoked eel with horseradish dressing and chicken liver pate with pickled green tomatoes

Greenlip mussel and smoked kahawai in a saffron and fish broth

Roast chicken tacos – all from Hawke's Bay

Slow-roasted lamb meatballs with root vegetable mash – think shepherds pie

Duck ragu, potato and kumara lasagne – from the air (the duck)

Pork belly with a manuka honey crabapple glaze, fennel pollen (from the wind)

Pear and apple tart – Hawke's Bay staples

Ian Thomas is a chef and caterer specialising in paella. He cooks lunches and functions at Unison Vineyard. paellaagogo.com





Strong women build things

Last month I found myself standing in front of two very different audiences. The first was a room full of accomplished women at a Pink Ribbon Breakfast. The second was a hall full of teenage girls and their mums at Iona College.

Different stages of life. Different experiences. Different challenges. But the message was surprisingly similar. The world needs more women who are willing to build things. Businesses. Communities. Opportunities. Solutions. And perhaps most importantly, lives that are designed intentionally rather than lived by default.

Nationally, women now make up around one-third of business owners in New Zealand. That's a number that's steadily growing, but there is still plenty of room for more of us. Fortunately, Hawke's Bay has never struck me as a region that waits around for permission.

As I prepared this column, I asked a handful of local businesswomen what they'd learned through building businesses in our region. Their responses came from industries as varied as real estate, food rescue, insurance, aesthetics, coaching and marketing, but the themes were remarkably consistent.

Relationships matter

The first was relationships. When I asked about the biggest lessons they'd

learned, the answers weren't about marketing funnels, AI, strategic planning or seven-step frameworks. They were about people.

Nic Goodman from Mint Realty put it simply: "Relationships are key." Anna Murphy, a Senior Life Insurance Adviser, echoed the sentiment, saying that in Hawke's Bay, reputation is built through "trust, consistency and doing what you say you'll do." And Jarnah from Aesthetics Collective reminded me that people remember how you make them feel.

I think that's one of the hidden advantages of doing business in Hawke's Bay. You can't hide behind a logo here. Your business eventually becomes an extension of your character. Which is slightly terrifying, but probably good for all of us.

Confidence isn't a prerequisite

The second theme was confidence. Or more accurately, the lack of it. One woman admitted she still feels pressure to downplay her success because she doesn't want to seem "too ambitious". Another spoke about years working in a male-dominated industry where leadership roles seemed reserved for men. Others talked about questioning their pricing, doubting their expertise and wondering whether they were actually qualified to be sitting at the table. If that sounds familiar, congratulations. You're probably a woman.



Janine's talk at Iona College, *Strong, Not Sorry*.

One of the most powerful responses came from Anna Murphy, who said: "Confidence doesn't come from having all the answers. It comes from experience, preparation and backing yourself."

I've found exactly the same thing building The Resistance. Nobody hands you confidence. You earn it through repetition. Through surviving things you were convinced you couldn't.

Through doing the scary thing enough times that it eventually becomes just... Tuesday.

Find your people

Another recurring theme was community. The women I spoke to repeatedly talked about finding their tribe, building networks and surrounding themselves with people who understand what it's like to build something from scratch.

Korrin from Life Unlimited stressed the importance of support networks. The team at Nourished for Nil highlighted the power of partnering with people whose strengths complement your own. And Belinda Williams from Bad Company offered one of my favourite observations: "Don't take advice from people not in the ring."

It's funny because it's true. Your friends and family love you. They're wonderful. But sometimes the most useful advice comes from people who understand exactly what you're trying to build because they're building something too.

"Great lives are built with scissors, not cellotape." I've thought about that sentence a lot. So many of us spend years trying to tape extra things onto already overloaded lives. More commitments. More obligations. More expectations.

The business case for soft skills

The final theme surprised me. When I asked what women bring to business that doesn't get talked about enough, I expected answers about resilience, work ethic or leadership. Those came up. But what came up even more often were qualities traditionally dismissed as 'soft skills'.

Empathy. Compassion. Intuition. Relationship-building. Seeing the bigger picture.

Nic Goodman described women's ability to understand not just the numbers, but also the people, emotions and pressure points that shape outcomes.

Anna Murphy emphasised that empathy and trust-building aren't soft skills at all - they're commercially valuable business skills.

And several women highlighted something else that often goes unnoticed: the sheer amount women juggle behind the scenes. Businesses. Families. Children. Households. Community commitments. All while somehow remembering that it's pyjama day tomorrow and somebody needs cupcakes by 8am.

Scissors, not cellotape

One quote in particular has stayed with me. Belinda said: "Great lives are built with scissors, not cellotape." I've thought about that sentence a lot. So many of us spend years trying to tape extra things onto already overloaded lives. More commitments. More obligations. More expectations.

Perhaps building something meaningful isn't about adding more. Perhaps it's about being brave enough to cut away what no longer fits. To choose. To focus. To make space for the things that matter.

Business ownership has certainly taught me that lesson. As did speaking

to these women. Because while their businesses are all different, they share something important. They saw a problem and decided to do something about it. They built something that didn't exist before. A service. A solution. A community. An opportunity.

That's the thing about strong women. They don't just adapt to the world they're given. They build a better one. ♦



Royston Hospital is pleased to sponsor robust examination of health issues in Hawke's Bay. This reporting is prepared by BayBuzz. Any editorial views expressed are those of the BayBuzz team.

Janine Couchman is a personal trainer and fitness coach specialising in strength training women of all ages and stages. She is founder of The Resistance in Havelock North – a gym designed specifically for women and shaped around real bodies, real lives, real challenges and real aspirations. She can be found at theresistance.co.nz



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Go slow

Shines brighter than a Himalayan salt lamp, hums sweeter than a singing bowl, turns out my new vacuum is the best meditation mechanism my house has ever seen.

It's a Duoflex HX1 Cat & Dog Grab-n-go Stick Vacuum in Obsidian Black with a HEPA filter...bagless, cordless with a powerful 25.2V DC digital efficiency motor that utilises vortex technology.

I've been bragging about it since I bought it. Then, my mate throws me a challenge to level up my vacuuming game by 'Slow Vacuuming'.

I rush home to try it.

This social media trend has you vacuuming at 1 foot per second (that's very slow), then showing off the resulting dust (50% of which is dead skin cells) on TikTok. It's surprisingly effective. Not just at getting the grot out of the carpet but at chilling me out. It's peaceful, covering a 2m x 3m rug in ten minutes. I reach a flow state with my deliberative domesticity. If I can apply that to everything, imagine how zen I'd become.

Italians call it *dolce far niente*, the sweetness of doing nothing. It means enjoying quiet moments, appreciating simple pleasures and doing one thing at a time without feeling bad about *not* multitasking.

Way back to the Romans, *festina lente* was employed, troops encouraged to "make haste slowly", counselled to be patient in the acquisition of new skills and to focus on smooth processes over speedy ones. Modern Italy has inspired a worldwide drive to slow down whole cities with its Cittaslow movement. With an emphasis on heritage, local, human-scale and a "gentle pace", these cities are finding

they have an advantage in attracting visitors. People are hungry to shift down a gear.

Food tastes better when it's cooked slowly and gently. Clothes feel better when made by hand. Essays in magazines that took months to research and write are more satisfying to read than a thin snippet in the shorts on page 5.

The BBC has a whole radio network called Slow Radio that dedicates half-hour episodes to soundscapes promoted as: "Time unravels in this hypnotic audio journey as we tumble inside the delicate mechanism of the clock" and "immerse yourself in the sound-world of honeybees"... aural antidote to the frenzied pace of modern life.

Young children ask us to give them time to just be. They grizzle or tantrum when faced with too much rush-rush, then fall asleep in their car seats. Oldies say, "Don't hurry me", when they mean don't hurry at all.

At midwinter especially, slowing things down is an important way to stay well and last the distance. Soaking in the bath rather than dashing through a shower, setting intentions in a journal instead of adding to a growing to-do list on your notes app, ending your day with a leisurely stroll around the neighbourhood: these things settle the brain, recharge the batteries and top you up enough to face tomorrow.

So many winter traditions from around the world suggest we take things a bit easier at this time of year.

Whether we are getting *hygge* or *gezellig*, we are snuggling up on the couch to binge a show or read the kids a chapter book. Winter wellness retreats and slow stay holidays are inviting us to create space to be still, take time to share a long lunch, play Monopoly right to the very end, or go

At midwinter especially, slowing things down is an important way to stay well and last the distance.

to bed early then sleep in. Rather than sculling a quick cuppa with a friend, we should linger longer to play a game of cards, nut out a problem all the way through to a solution, finish a conversation, play three rounds of rummikub instead of a hasty one.

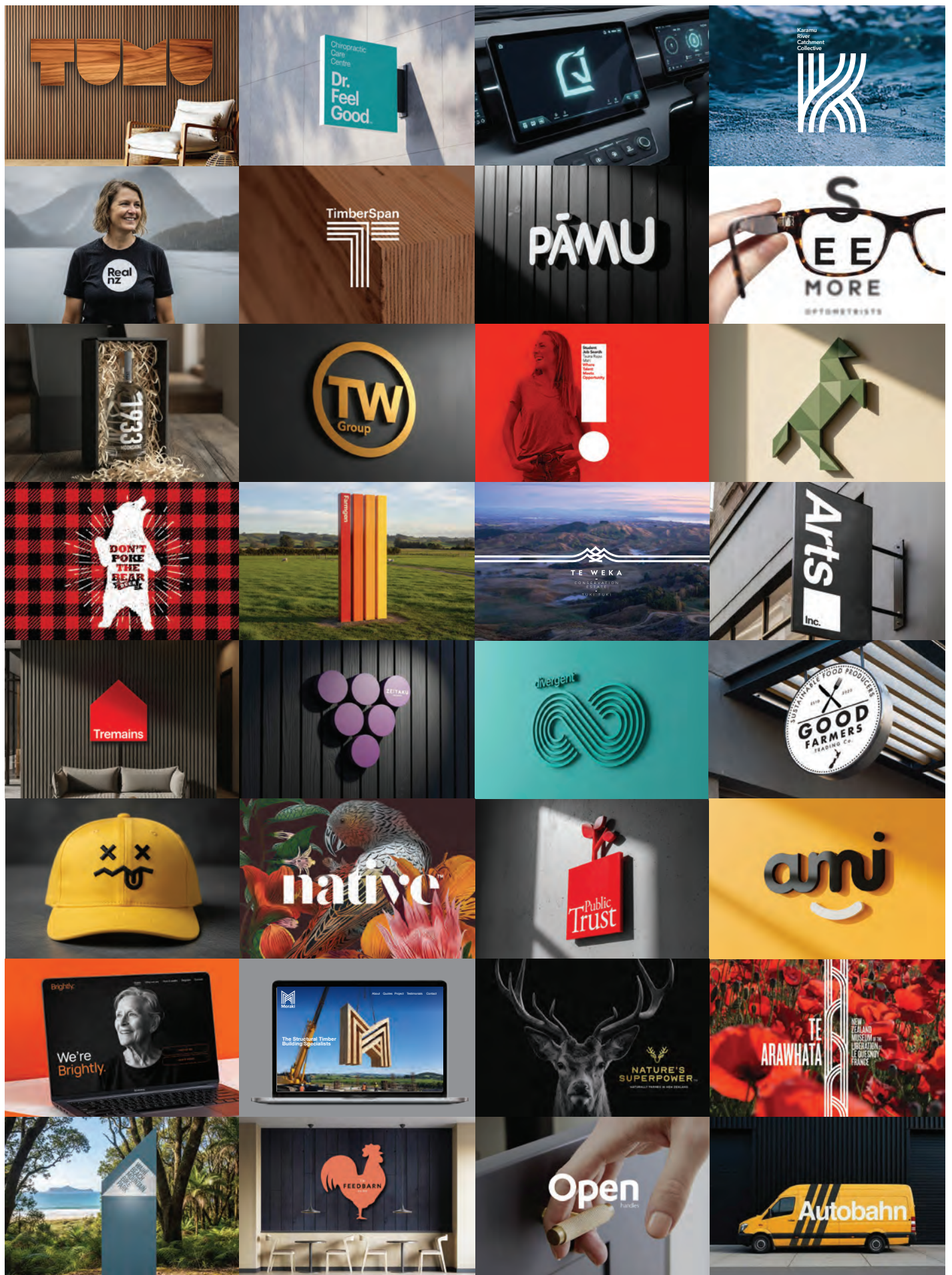
Now look, I know we are all terribly busy. I know we have important things we absolutely must get done before we can spare a minute to sit down and take a breath. But life is not a race to the end. We do not get extra brownie-points for fitting one more thing in between all the other things we feel we must do before the sun sets each day. We need to stop and take a reality check.

And I am talking directly to myself here, moving fast is exciting, when we have so much going on that we can barely think, that protects us from asking pertinent questions about stuff that's happening around us, whether it's personal stuff, political stuff, professional stuff. That "headlong dash of daily life" as Carl Honoré says (*TED Talk: The Power of Slow*) keeps us away from actually living.

So as this year creeps slowly through its darkest days, carve out some time to do more of doing less. Everything can wait, and if it can't, it probably wasn't worth your time anyway. ●



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