



NZIF – Conference Emerging Stronger

What I learnt in handling a crisis

26 June 2025

2023 started off like any other year:

SafeStart event – 9 January

- ~250 staff and contractors.

Guest Speaker : Nigel Latta

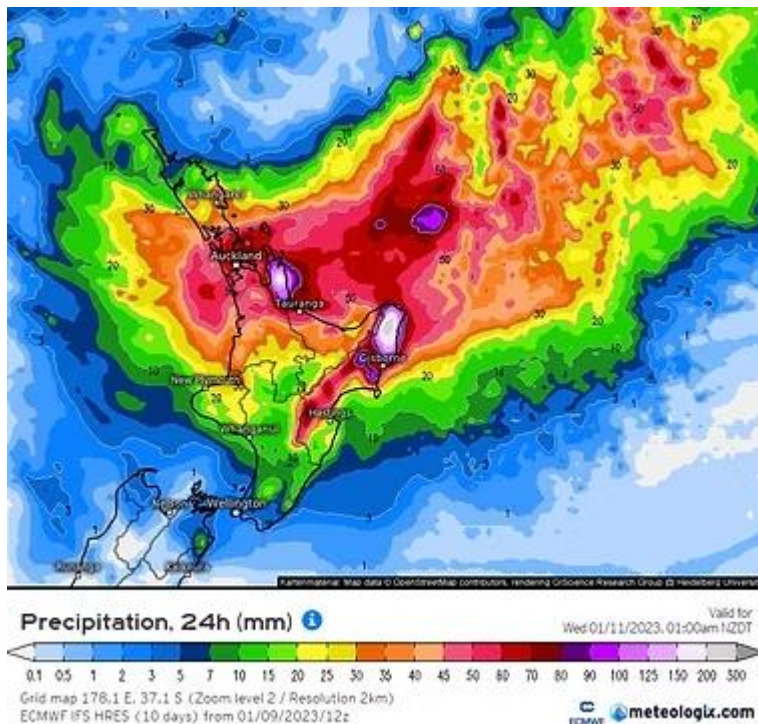
Topic : STWIFYU

Crisis simulation planned.

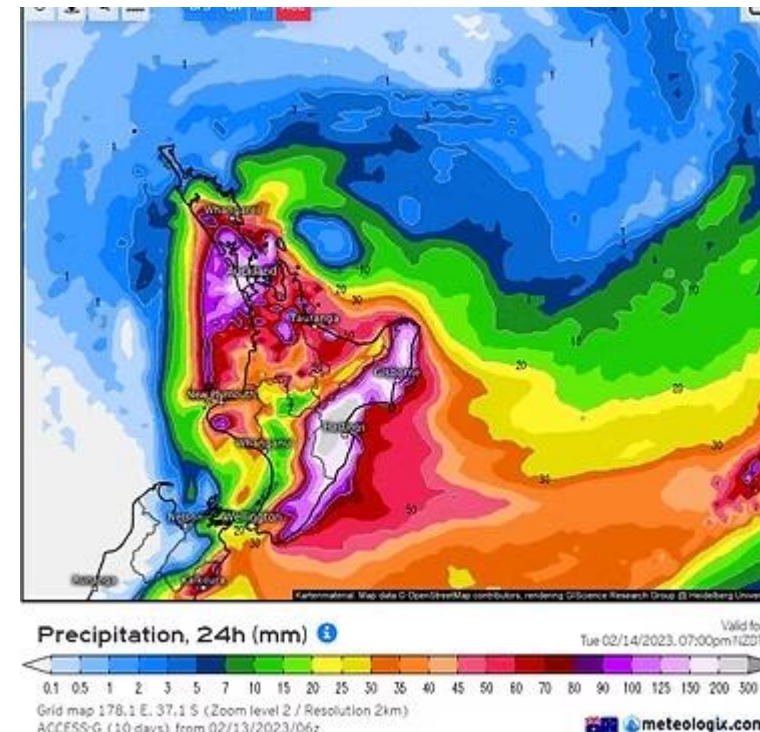


In 24 hours our world changed dramatically

Cyclone Hale 10 January



Cyclone Gabrielle 14 February



Rainfall: Gisborne Average - ~1100mm/year

2022 - 1939MM – 9 days State of Emergency

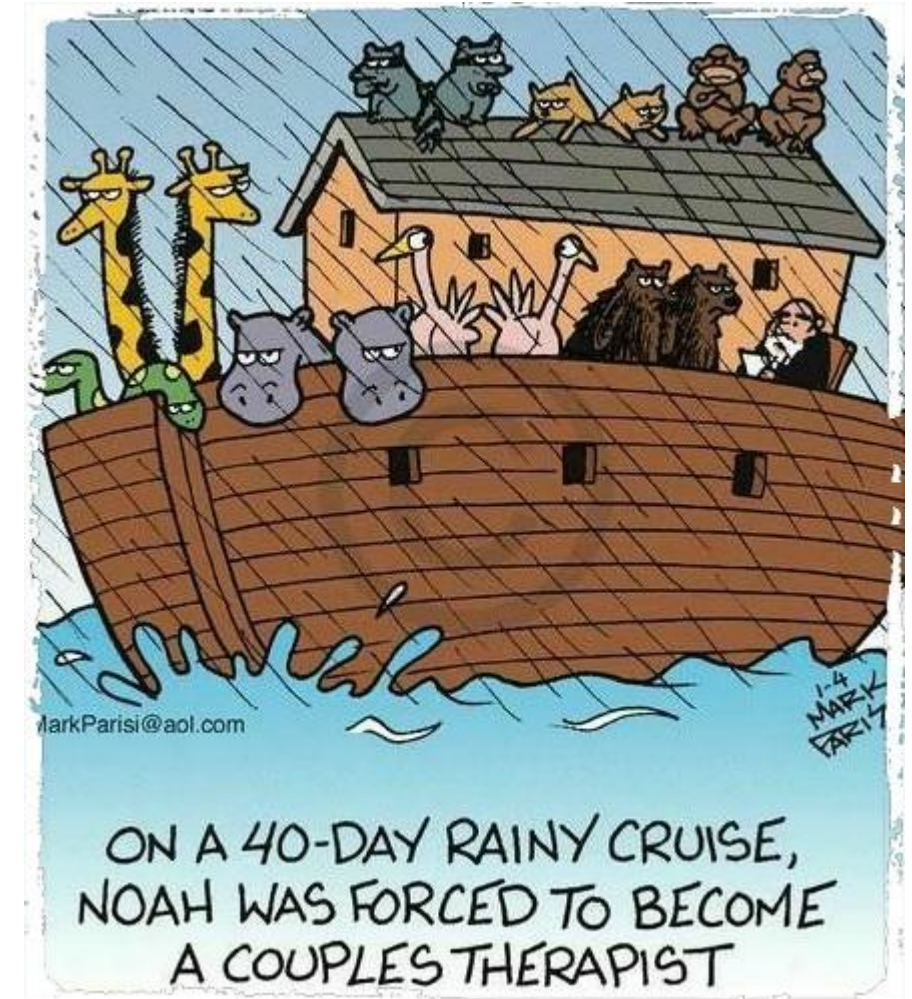
2023 - 3134MM (Jan 433, Feb 600, June 720) – 40 days State of Emergency

2024 - 1556mm – 0 days state of emergency

What did we have to cope with?

Hale was bad enough but then Gabrielle was an apocalypse: but without an ARK

- Extreme rainfall – flooding, damage to houses roads, etc.
- Earthquake
- Power outage
- No town water
- Internet outage - no Eftpos, ATM's
- Cell phone outage
- No inbound supplies of food / fuel rationed to \$40 cash.
- Restricted access to helicopters and forests
- Restart recovery/cleanup from Hale.
- Rethink business priorities



What did we have to cope with?

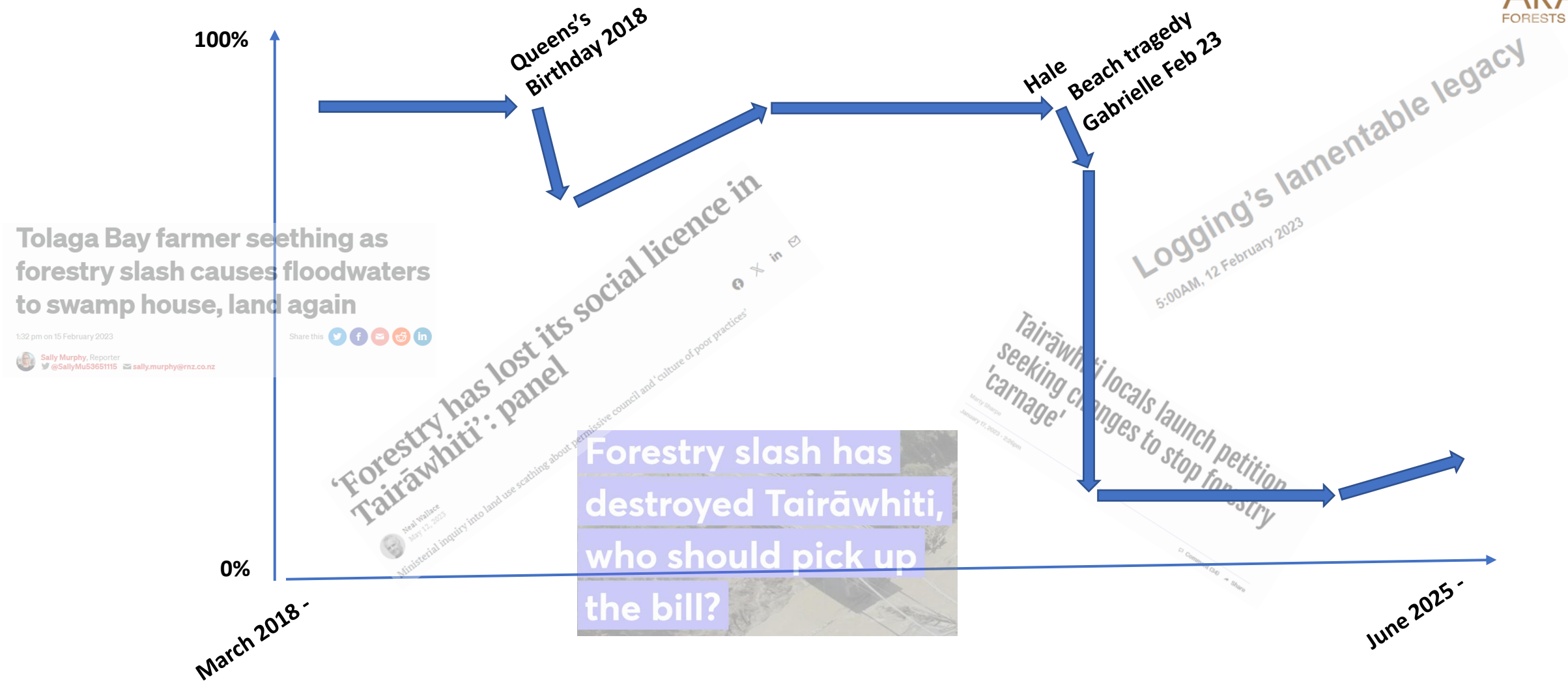
Significant crop damage and wood where it wasn't wanted.



Complete loss of our license to operate in the region.

Learning #1

You can never have enough social capital : it erodes rapidly and is slow to rebuild.



Learning #2

Having confidence of the Board and Shareholders is critical

- Can only be built ahead of a crisis or during previous ones.
- Knowledge of the business including its people and assets is useful.
- Trust in Management.
- Provides flexibility to react as conditions dictate.
- Supportive of spend to remediate, and do the right thing.

Learning #2b

Be prepared for getting little recognition for “doing the right thing”.

- Focus on all affected parties, but some will never be happy.
- Getting resolution with key parties is key.



Learning #3

Keeping Staff and Contractors safe, informed, busy and valued is vitally important

How did we do this?

- Volunteer Community work.
- Liaised with Civil Defence.
- Utilised VHF network - calls with contractors.
- By week two had StarLink setup.
 - Ensured contractors were paid.
 - Made office facilities available if needed.
- Forest inspections and contractor restarts.
- Staff Wellbeing was a strong a focus:
 - EAP – on site.
 - Wellbeing allowance.
 - Out of town.
 - Don't force staff into situations.



Learning #4

The Wood Councils and NZFOA and Communications professionals are a vital tools in times of crisis



Learning #5

Keep your insurer informed

- Before engaging on spend inform them of plans and ongoing issues;
 - the scale of the event.
 - the remediation journey.
 - understand their needs for data to help any potential claim progress and any areas they wont pay for i.e. silt.
- Expect to significant time before any insurance proceeds become available.
- Any activity conducted past the date of any regulatory action is uninsured.

Learning #6

Good record keeping is essential

- Document everything:
 - Visits to neighbours.
 - Discussions with stakeholders – commitments made / or not.
 - Utilisation of resources.
- Attempt to get signoff of “*full and final*” on works undertaken from affected party.
- But:
 - realise all materials may be discoverable in any subsequent legal process.

Learning #7

It is a marathon not a sprint.

- Crisis management structures similar to Fire Management proved useful given the extent of the crisis.
 - Staff morale and resilience ebbs and flows and not always in sync.
 - Adopt flexible management approaches to accommodate needs of staff over the long term.
 - Having an environment where asking “**are you ok**” is ok was beneficial.
 - Whilst unusual in effect we are still dealing with the aftermath:
 - Public perception of the industry.
 - Regulatory change.
 - Enforcement approach by Regulator.
 - Perception of Gisborne forest management.
- but we have embedded some good resilience tools.

