

# Cyclone recovery MSD update Month of December 2023

## Context

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This report is an update on the Ministry of Social Development's key monitoring in response to the severe weather events in 2023 (Auckland Flooding in Jan 2023 and Cyclone Gabrielle in Feb 2023).

This includes key updates on how the Ministry is supporting affected regions through income support, employment, and community programmes.

## What's been achieved?

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- MSD in their lead co-ordination role for the Social Sector Recovery Plan have been working with Regional Public Sector Commissioners and Recovery Managers to support the decision making on where investment for priority areas and needs in their Regional Recovery Plans is best allocated.
- Final decisions on funding allocation have been reached in most regions. Procurement processes have been completed and funds have been distributed to agreed partners to progress the social outcomes indicated in the Regional Recovery Plans.
- As at end of December, we have committed \$11.6 million from the \$13.5 million tagged contingency for the Social Sector Recovery Plan.
- In addition to the SSRP funding, MSD is supporting the cyclone recovery efforts through the Community Connectors and Food Secure Communities programmes:
  - 65 Connectors are currently placed in NIWE regions in addition to the nationwide workforce.
  - \$4m of funding has been provided to the community food sector in FY23/24, of which \$1m has been distributed and \$3m still to be allocated.
- We continue to work with Ministry for Ethnic Communities, Ministry for Pacific Peoples, and Whaikaha to agree on the approach to distributing the \$0.5 million for short term communication and translation support.
- We've also engaged with the DPMC Cyclone Recovery Unit on how to best manage AOG communications and coordination response going forward.

## Employment

### East Coast

A Hawke's Bay Enhanced Taskforce Green (ETFG) Cyclone Gabrielle Response Programme ran from April to November 2023 focussed on repair work. ETFG may sometimes lead to full time work opportunities for MSD clients because of gaining valuable work experience, and skills on the job.

One ETFG worker who was able to build on his previous truck driving experience secured fulltime employment after MSD helped to connect him to Civil Construction employers after completing the programme. He had been previously long term unemployed. After completing the ETFG programme, he secured fulltime employment as a hydro vacuuming truck operator to excavate underground services using pressurised water jets, and he was also being trained in site traffic management, currently earning \$34.00 per hour.

A further 12-week ETFG programme in Central Hawke's Bay started on 27th November 2023 with 10 participants. They have been repairing and reinstating farm fencing, clearing debris with chainsaws and removing silt that had been remaining after Cyclone Gabrielle. This has a positive impact on the local economy, wellbeing of communities, and may often help with obtaining further employment opportunities as the Hawke's Bay case study above demonstrates.

### Wairarapa & Central

Priority areas for investment are in roading, fencing and riparian planting using Flexi-wage.

MSD are working with the Ministry for Primary Industries, and the Rural Support Trust, who already have contractors on board to commence the next tranche of work.

### Northland

MSD has made investment across the Northland (Te Tai Tokerau) region with a focus on employment and resilience building, and this also includes:

- Additional youth driver licencing in partnership with police and Iwi,
- Creation of Job Explore Expos that are to be held across Northland in late February 2024,
- And an Employment and Trades contract signed off for 12 roles in the town of Kawakawa.

### Auckland

In the Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland region, programmes to support people affected by the NIWE involve:

- Assisting local jobseekers to undertake the Port Project,
- Pre-employment training with a focus on Māori and Pacific cohorts,
- Training and NZQA unit standards in specialist trades to support workforce projections.

### Waikato

39 people have completed traffic control training as of the end of December 2023. Those that complete training will be profiled to employers in civil construction upon work restarting mid-January 2024. Places that are left on the traffic control program will be recruited for in January to support the return to work on roading, as well as a long-term outlook to support roading infrastructure.

A contract has been signed to assist the restaurant and food industry with training for 40 positions at entry level and 20 additional positions helping to upskill others to increase their capability and skill level across the Peninsula.

MSD Flexi Wage Project in Community funding is being used to support specific recovery projects through Thames-Coromandel District Council.

## Benefit numbers

### Benefit numbers

Table 1: Number of working-age people receiving main benefits in selected regions

Region	Month			Monthly change		Annual change	
	Dec 22	Nov 23	Dec 23	Number	%	Number	%
Tāmaki Makaurau	106,116	112,809	115,833	3,024	2.7%	9,717	9.2%
Bay of Plenty	28,377	29,301	29,946	645	2.2%	1,569	5.5%
Hawke's Bay	14,526	14,964	15,366	402	2.7%	840	5.8%
Manawatū-Whanganui	22,719	23,349	23,898	549	2.4%	1,179	5.2%
Te Tai Tokerau	20,373	20,709	21,225	516	2.5%	852	4.2%
Tairāwhiti	5,841	6,036	6,180	144	2.4%	339	5.8%
Waikato	40,044	41,673	42,810	1,137	2.7%	2,766	6.9%
Wellington	32,142	33,321	34,467	1,146	3.4%	2,325	7.2%
<b>National</b>	<b>353,904</b>	<b>369,045</b>	<b>378,711</b>	<b>9,666</b>	<b>2.6%</b>	<b>24,807</b>	<b>7.0%</b>

In December 2023, all regions impacted by the North Island weather events saw the number of main benefit recipients increase when compared to the previous month and year. These increases are in line with those seen at a national level, and likely reflects usual seasonal trends and current economic conditions.

Usual seasonal trends occurring at this time of the year include:

- some seasonal work wrapping up, with reduced hiring in some industries.
- a high number of students transitioning to Jobseeker Support Student Hardship (JSSH) during the summer months, as they shift from receiving Student Loan Living Costs or the Student Allowance to a main benefit.

Additionally, current benefit trends may indicate that people are finding it harder to find and retain work and are remaining on benefit for longer. This likely reflects slowing economic conditions across the country.

## Next steps

- MSD will continue to work with regions on the remaining regional allocations for the Social Sector Recovery Plan, which includes the NIWE Food Secure Communities Funds, to enable the continued implementation of Regional Plans.