

Voice of the farmer

*Understanding and measuring the
impacts of 2023 weather events
on Hawke's Bay landowners*



HAWKES BAY
REGIONAL COUNCIL

TE KAUNIHERA Ā-ROHE O TE MATAU-A-MĀUI



“ The best way you can understand what’s happening is to spend an hour sitting around the kitchen table with farming couples and listen to their story. ”

Foreword

The Hawke’s Bay region has been heavily impacted by a series of extreme weather events throughout 2022 and 2023.

By far the most significant, and impactful on human life was the effects of Cyclone Gabrielle on Monday 13 February to Wednesday 15 February 2023. Multiple farms, orchards, vineyards, rural businesses, and homes across the entire region were inundated by flood waters and damaged with silt and wood debris.

Rural and semi-rural areas have been the most affected. While large areas are impacted, the severity of the impact is variable. Silt in some places was 2-3 meters deep, whereas in other areas there was only light deposits on the ground.

Hill country erosion has caused significant farming business disruption with severe impact due to loss of fences, access, and farming infrastructure. Across Hawke’s Bay there are about 3656 properties (pastoral & arable) with 2482 owners. While there is a wide range of impact and recovery needs every rural business will have been impacted either directly, or through association by market access, product supply or business interruption.

Dairy farming businesses were severely impacted with 27 of the 74 Hawke’s Bay dairy farms having to dry off their cow herds due to the inability of Fonterra to collect milk. Several other dairy farms have been impacted through the loss of pastoral grazing land, and supplementary feed reserves.

In April 2023, the Hawke’s Bay Regional Council (HBRC) undertook an Impact Assessment Survey, supported by members of the Rural Advisory Group, to collect an objective assessment of the impact of these weather events. During 2023, government agencies (central and local) worked together to support farmers, growers and landowners to understand the impact and marshal support networks to assist in recovery.

In February 2024, a second impact assessment survey was undertaken to understand progress from April 2023, and the extent of the residual effects of the 2023 weather events. This report is a summary of our latest survey findings.



Iain Maxwell
Integrated Catchment
Management Group Manager
Hawke’s Bay Regional Council

Executive summary

We surveyed 200 landowners/ farmers and based on their feedback, we have measured the impact of the 2023 weather events. These impacts are still being very much felt by landowners and projected to be felt for many years to come.

Fencing damage, track damage and erosion have been experienced by almost all properties and there are a number of other significant impacts that have been felt by over one half of farmers (including water supply, stock water system damage and planting losses).

The vast majority of landowners (94%) still have work or planning to do to address the impacts they have felt and the financial implications of these impacts are significant. More than one half of farmers estimate the financial impact of these events to be over \$100k

For many, the recovery timeframe extends beyond one year and at the moment their focus is on “getting back to normal” or simply on financial survival rather than anything more future focused

While half of farmers have applied and been successful in accessing funding, this has also meant one half haven’t applied or weren’t successful. Many who didn’t apply didn’t feel they would qualify or simply weren’t aware of the funding available.

All of the above, coupled with challenging industry conditions more generally, creates an environment of high stress and pressure that is being felt by farmers, families, staff and communities.

Survey objectives and approach



The core objective of this project was to create an updated and accurate picture of the reality for Hawke’s Bay landowners and the impacts from 2023 weather events.

The scope of this was all significant weather events that took place during 2023 which may have impacted people and property (not exclusively Cyclone Gabrielle).

This updated understanding was needed to inform priorities and additional support needs driven by these weather events and the audience of interest was pastoral farming on properties over 20 hectares.

The questionnaire for this study was designed by FP Insight and signed off by HBRC. It covered a range of key areas including property type/ location/current state, impacts (prevalence and scale) on land, infrastructure, crops, impacts on access to and around properties, funding access, insurance cover and degree of increased preparedness in future

The survey data collection method was an online survey sent out to relevant audience databases via Hawke’s Bay Regional Council and Rural Advisor Group partners and survey completion was open from 16 January - 7 February.

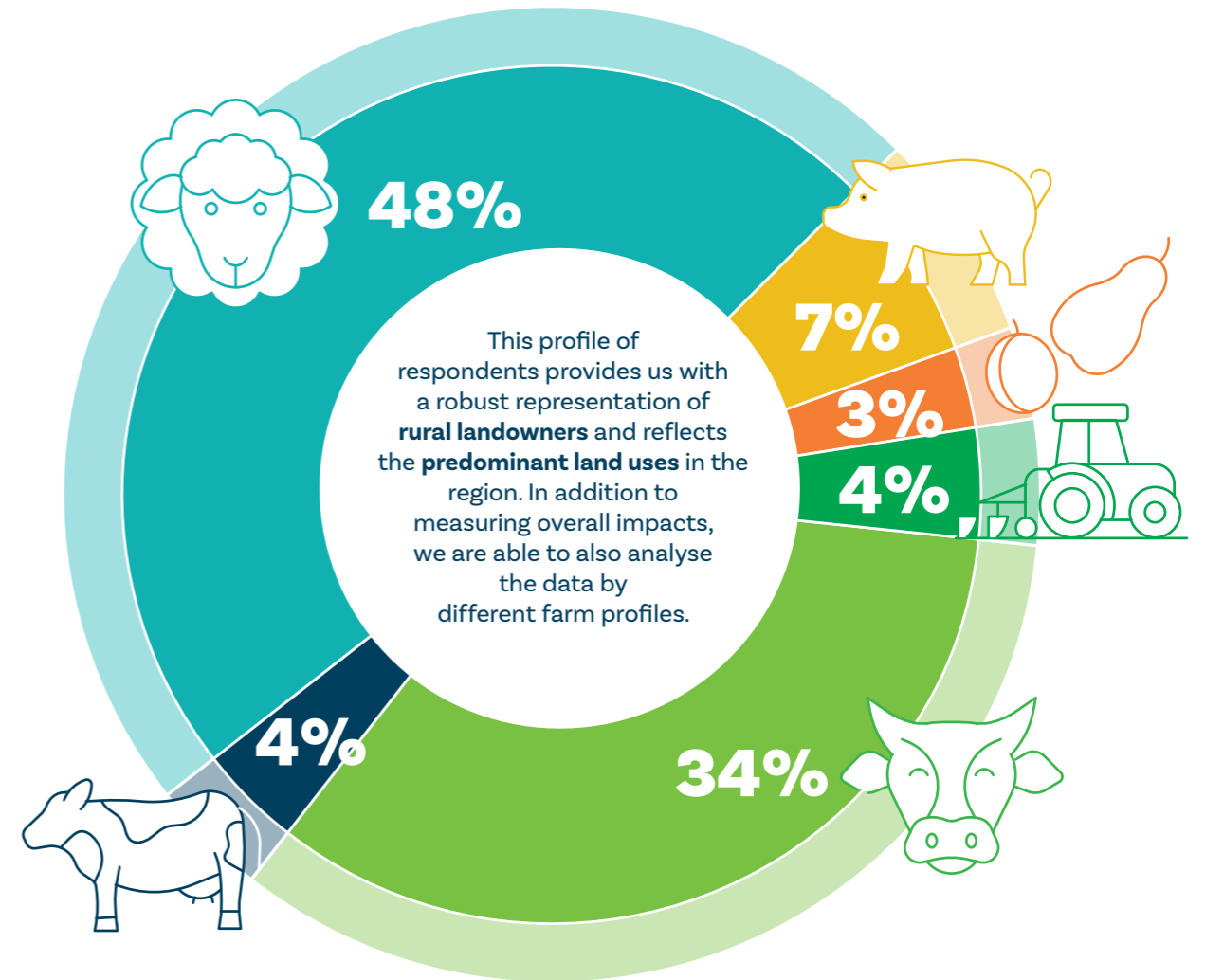
The sample we achieved through this method was 200 individual respondents representing around 250 different properties.

The most common prevalent land uses of these respondents were sheep (48%) and beef (34%).

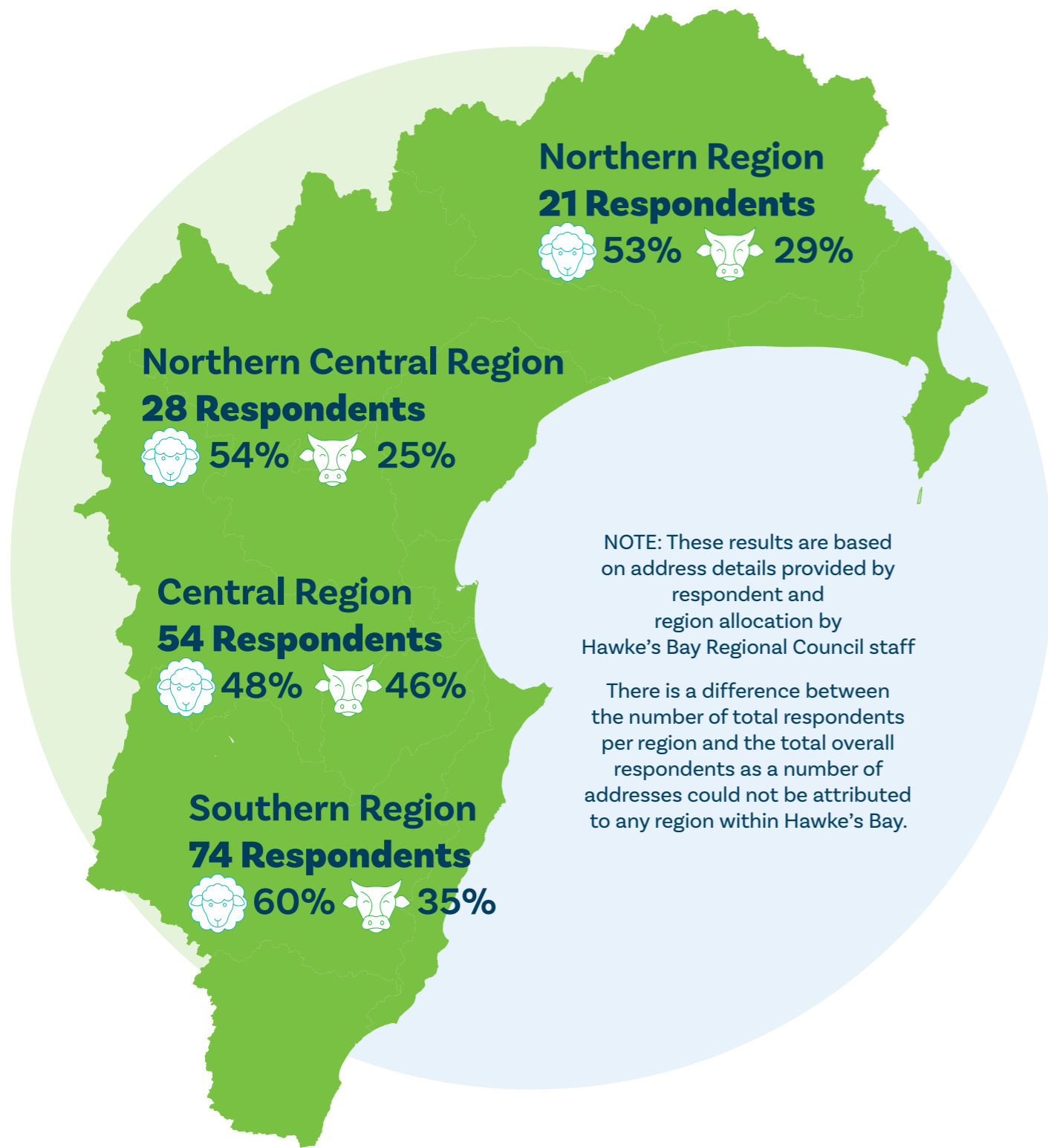
As per the project design, all properties represented were over 20 hectares and the majority of respondents were owner-operators on their farm.

Our sample was predominantly sheep and beef properties – over 250ha.

Property Size	Sheep		Beef		Other		Total	
21-100ha	3	3%	16	24%	18	53%	37	19%
101ha - 250ha	10	10%	15	23%	7	21%	32	16%
251ha +	85	87%	37	53%	9	26%	131	65%
Total	98	100%	68	100%	34	100%	200	100%



We received responses from landowners across the region, and the Southern region was most strongly represented.



Overall picture: Across all farm types and locations, the most common impacts felt were fencing damage, track damage and erosion.

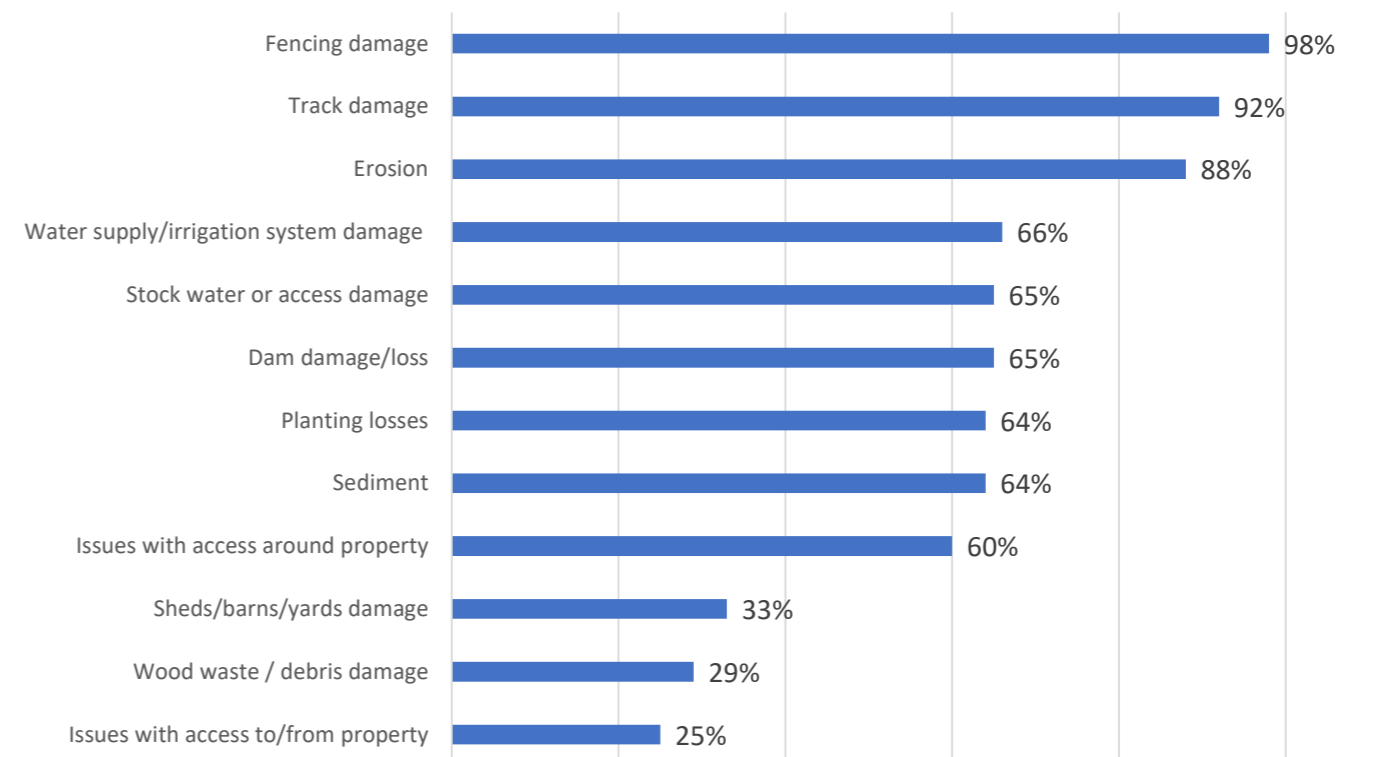
All landowners have experienced fencing damage, and most landowners - track damage and erosion.

On more than half of properties, there is also water supply/irrigation system damage and property access issues.

These two tiers of impacts illustrate the range of impacts that have been felt by the majority of rural properties in the region.



% of survey respondents who experienced each impact type





Amongst our survey respondents, almost **300,000 metres** of conventional fencing is still to be repaired.

Fencing 98% of landowners

74% of those impacted have repaired some – but not all of the impacted fencing

18% have repaired / replaced all damaged fencing

73% of those impacted have changed their block / paddock structure as a result of damage

In total **285,743m** of conventional fencing remains needing repair and replacement for those that responded to the survey.

There is also **125,132m** of electric fencing that remains needing repair and replacement for those that responded to the survey.

“Have only managed to temporarily fix boundary fences and a few close paddock fences near yards and buildings.”



Repairing track damage is still on the ‘to do’ list of most of the farmers who responded.

Track damage 92% of landowners

68% of those impacted have repaired some – but not all of the impacted tracks

20% have repaired / replaced all damaged tracks

11% haven’t been able to do any track repair work yet

In total **200,952 metres** of tracks remain needing repair and replacement.

“Have not had funds available to repair all other tracks and tidy up main access tracks that were made somewhat accessible with digger under wet unsafe conditions.”

NOTE: A summary of the frequency and scale of all impacts types is detailed at the end of this report. This includes ballpark multipliers to estimate the total impact across the whole region.



A significant number of landowners are still waiting to see how their land settles before they address erosion impacts.

Erosion 88% of landowners

In total, survey respondents estimate **5,928ha** of effective land has been lost to erosion

The most common plans for this land are:

- Get some / all of it back to being productive **49%**
- Plant Poplar poles to stabilize land **49%**
- Leave it longer to see how it settles **46%**

“Land was swept away by the Waipawa River. HBRC have tried to put some protection in to help in future events but it really needs poplar trees or similar to help.”

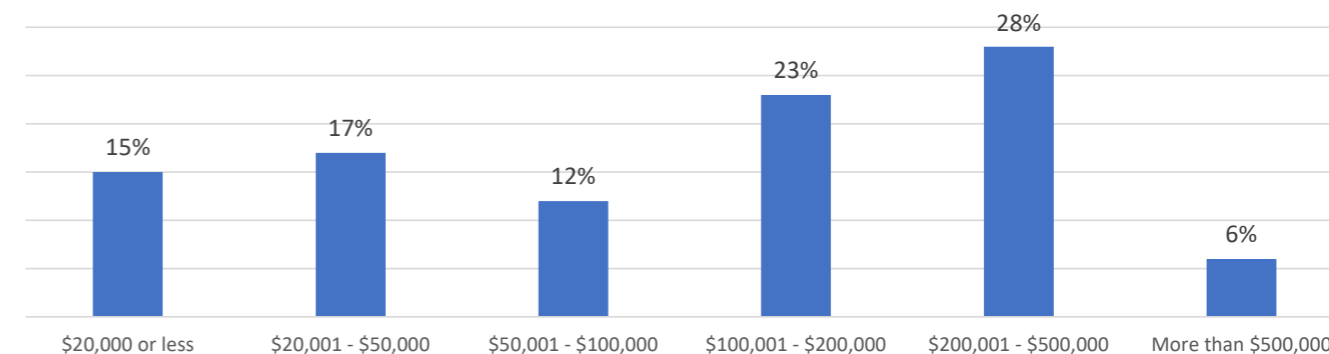
“At an overall level - what would you estimate that 2023 weather events have cost your business in terms of repair costs or lost production?”

More than one half of landowners surveyed, estimate the financial impacts of these events to be over \$100k.

In total, 103 landowners provided us with an estimate of what the 2023 weather events have cost their business in terms of repair costs or lost production (it was an optional question).

Over one half of these (57%) stated the costs totalled more than \$100,000, while for more than a third (34%) these costs exceed \$200,000.

These costs sit alongside the well documented pressures on farming businesses currently in terms of costs of inputs, interest rates, meat and wool prices etc.

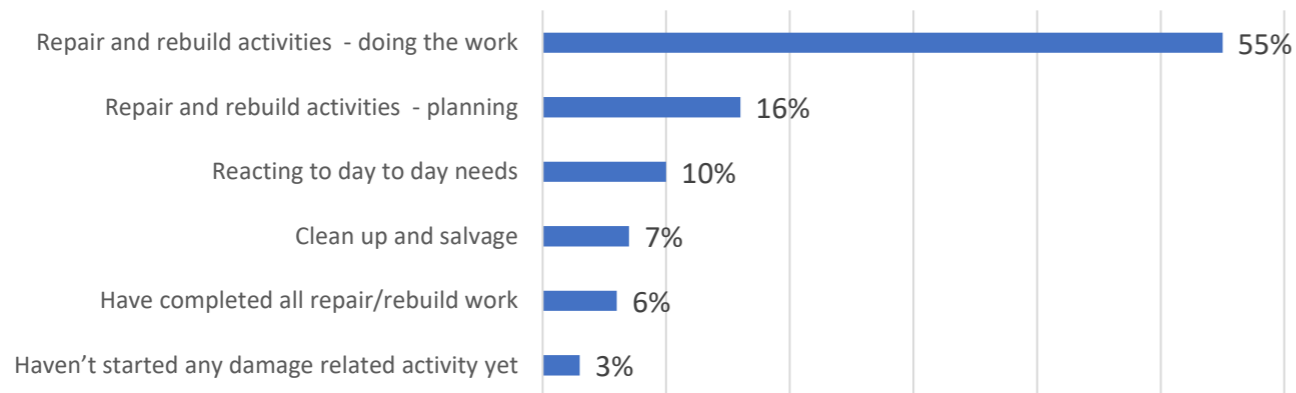
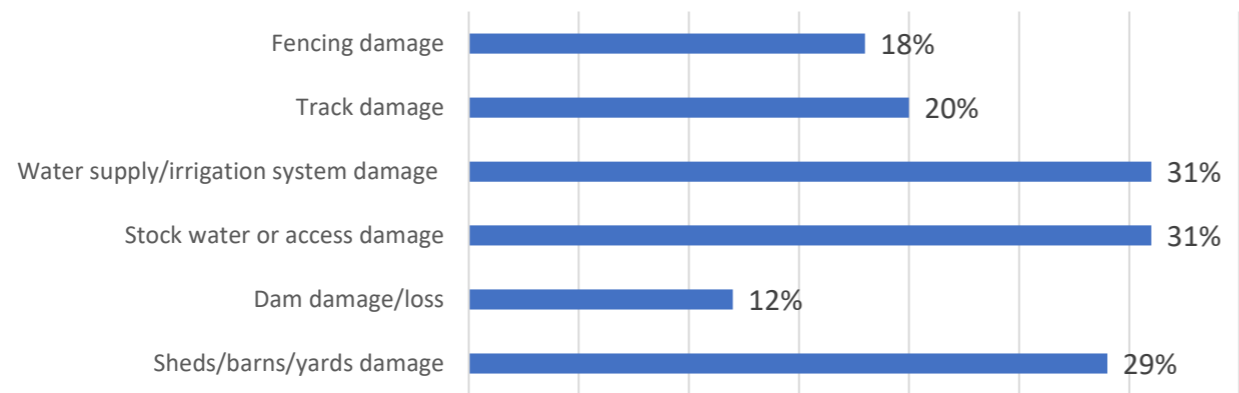


base: 103 landowners

Current state: Of those impacted in key areas – less than one third have ‘completed’ repair or replacement.

For landowners, this means that there is still energy and resources needing to be allocated towards ‘repair’ in these areas. For the high frequency impact areas like fencing and track damage – the proportion of those ‘completed’ is even lower at around one in five.

When we look at the primary focus for landowners currently, this means the majority of farmers are still needing to spend time and resources on repair and rebuild efforts, either in terms of doing the work (55%) or planning the work (16%).



When landowners tell us what their priorities are for the next six months, most are looking to address the impacts on fencing, water supply, tracks and in some cases erosion control. For some – the priority is more simply financial survival.

“Fencing, finishing water supply, grass seeding. Get back to our normal but haven’t done any for 2023. e.g. painting, building repairs, etc.”

“Clearing fence-lines, putting in fences, installing irrigation and stock water system, trackwork and culverts.”

“Fencing and infrastructure repairs and erosion control planning.”

“Economic survival. Minimise all costs.”

“Complete all fencing and stock water repairs and tracks.”

“Making money.”

“Keep my head above water.”

“Trying to stay financially afloat.”

“Continue with repairs on farm, look at erosion control options and options to combine this with carbon farming.”

“Profitability.”

“Financial viability and animal welfare.”

“Hopefully if government can assist we can continue to clear silt from flat paddocks, waterways etc. Financial stress has been huge. We can’t do all the repairs as can’t afford those expenses with farm incomes.”

“The economic climate will dictate future planning. Particularly as prices at gate for wool and meat are at the whim of market forces. We have to be realistic.”

“Get the water system back up and running but until now its been one day at a time, trying to get the fences sorted first.”

“Complete all fencing and stock water repairs and tracks.”

A significant proportion of this repair and rebuild work is taking place in an environment of reduced access.

About one third (31%) of impacted properties currently have issues with gaining access to or from the property/farm, while more than one half of properties (60%) currently have issues or limitations with access and movement within the property/farm.

“Unable to access one half of farm with 4x4 or tractor making infrastructure repair (carting materials to the places that need repairing) difficult. Stock movements are also impaired and animal health related tasks are not able to be completed at the satellite yards.”

“Lower income... poor staff morale ... difficulty sourcing contractors due to access and SH2 problems ... higher costs due to travel delays... problems moving stock etc”

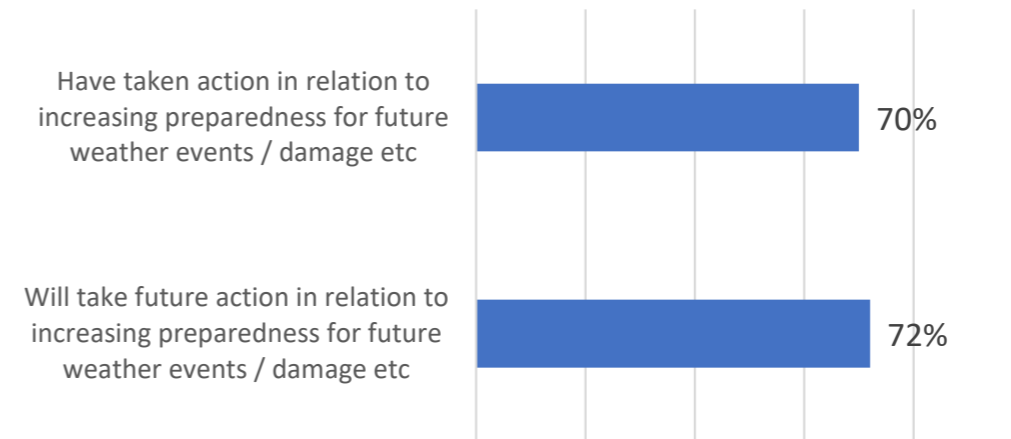
“Moving stock around, keeping stock separated for breeding and maximising feed use. Getting equipment and animal health products out to satellite yards, extended time to complete day-to-day tasks. Poor retention of stock inside allocated paddocks limited normal stock rotational grazing.”

“Ground uneven, dangerous to drive, deep cracks in hillsides, need to stick to repaired tracks, not sure if fertiliser trucks will be able to access, larger paddocks (due to damaged fences) makes mustering more difficult plus uneven terrain means operating vehicles (quads, 2-wheelers) can be perilous. Previous ridges that were safe to access are inaccessible due to slips and washouts.”

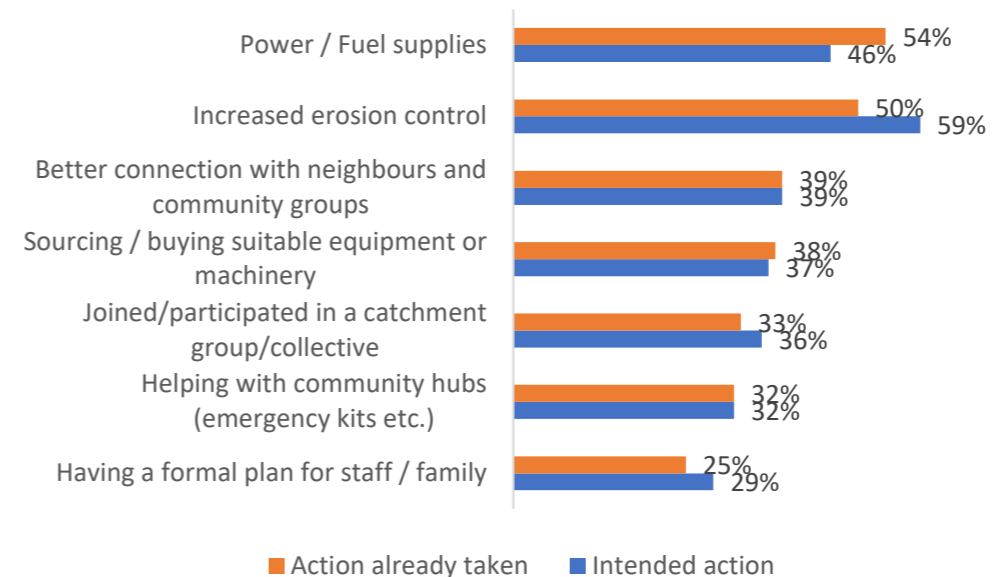
Despite all of these pressures and repair actions required – 70% of farmers have already taken action to develop resilience to future events.

Also, 72% intend to take future action to increase preparedness.

Currently, these actions have focused on power and fuel supplies, and erosion control in areas where this is feasible. There has also been clear increase in ‘community connection’ with farmers prioritising connecting with neighbours or joining groups.



Base: 200 landowners

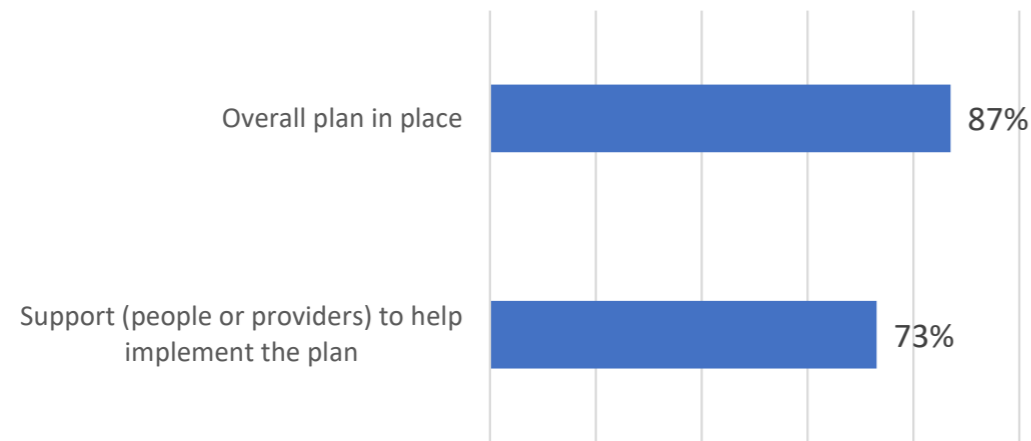


Base: Action already taken (141), Intended action (144)

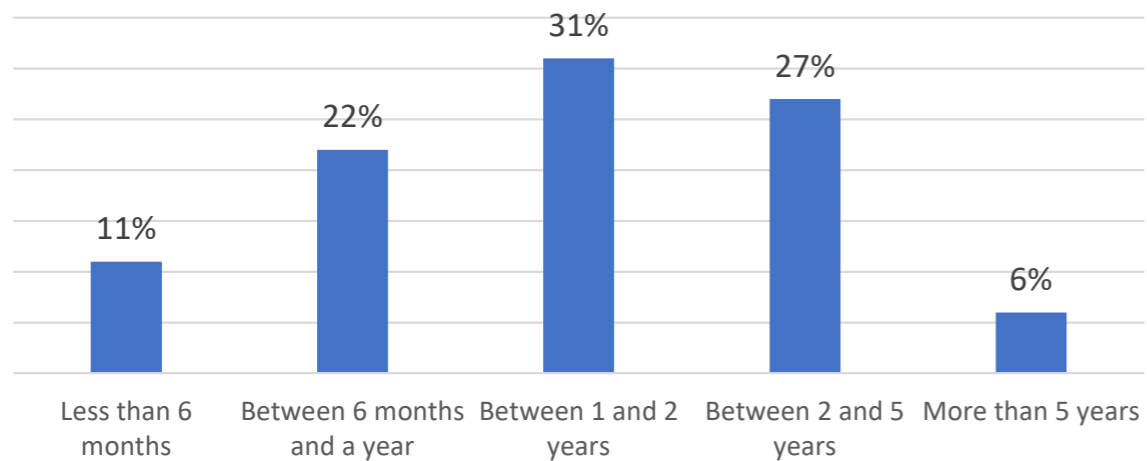
Most farmers have a plan in place to address the impacts they have incurred and generally have the support in place to deliver this plan.

However, there is still a sub-set of landowners (approximately one quarter) who don't feel they have the support in place to deliver their plan.

The timeframe for completion of plans and repairs is generally estimated to be more than 12 months, while for one third of landowners – the repair timeframe is two years or more.



“What do you think is the timeframe for completing this plan?”



Base: 174 landowners

While insurance is in place for around two thirds of respondents, it is likely to cover less than 20% of the damage incurred.

At the time of the survey, 69% of respondents stated that they have insurance for at least some of the damage incurred. Of these, 60% estimate this insurance to cover 20% or less of the damage incurred and only 14% estimate this insurance to cover more than half of the damage incurred.

“Stock proofing paddocks, hope to get an insurance pay out (still haven't received anything) to cover some costs for this.”

“At the moment I'm finalising the insurance payout for lost irrigation infrastructure and planning its replacement.”

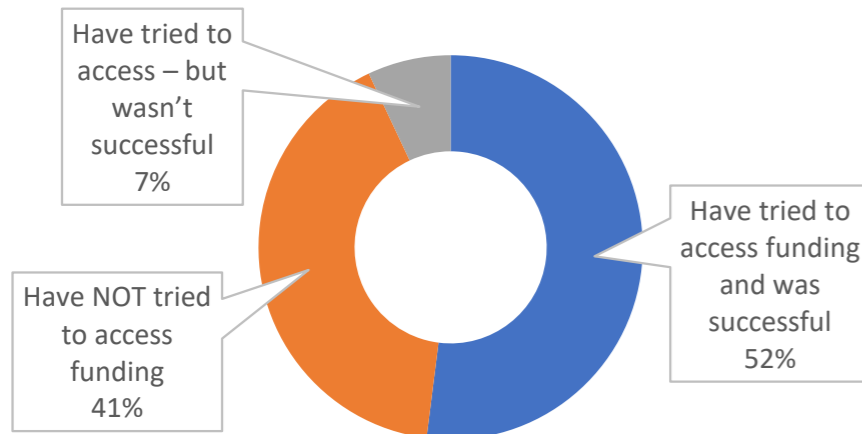
“I've increased my insurance cover since earlier in the year.”

Half of the landowners who responded to the survey have tried and succeeded in accessing funding to help with the cost of addressing erosion/sediment or wood waste/debris impacts.

However, a significant proportion of landowners haven't tried to access funding (41%) and they primarily attribute this to not thinking they wouldn't qualify or a perception that it would cover what they need.

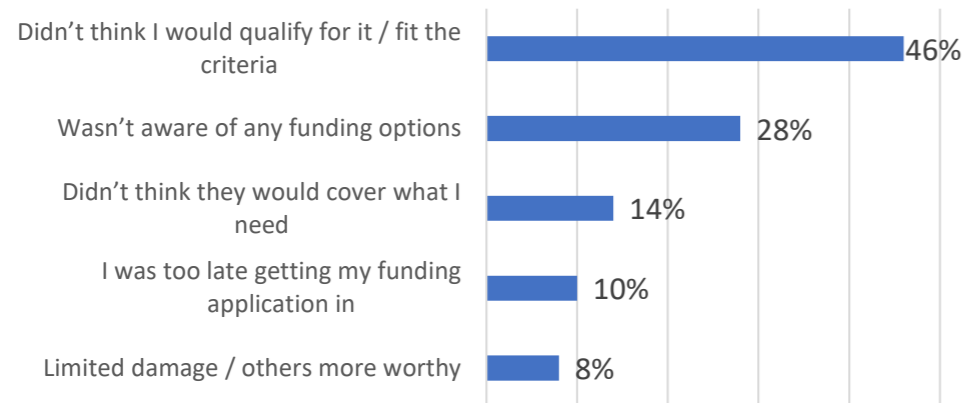
There is also a group that haven't tried to access funding as they weren't aware of the different funding options available to them (28% of those that didn't attempt to access or circa 11% of all respondents).

"Have you tried to access any funding to help you with the cost of addressing erosion/sediment or wood waste/debris impacts?"



Base: 200 landowners

"Why haven't you tried to access any funding to help you with the cost of addressing erosion/sediment or wood waste/debris impacts?"

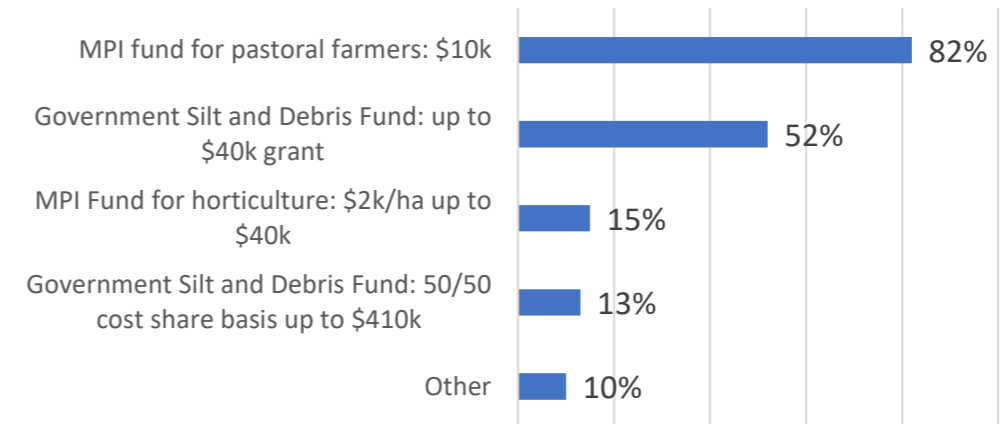


Base: 81 landowners

The most commonly accessed fund was the MPI fund for pastoral farmers.

This fund was accessed by most farmers who accessed some kind of funding. In addition, the specific Silt and Debris fund has also been accessed by more than half who sought and succeeded in getting funding.

"Which fund(s) did you access or try to access?"



Base: 119 landowners

It appears that not all communication or criteria for these funds was clear to landowners, and given they were under stress and pressure, a number feel they 'missed out' or were unfairly excluded.

"Very disappointed that so many farmers missed out as the message that the silt and debris fund was available to them was not clear. Stress for farmers is huge. Rural support is a big factor in communities at the moment, and this is a time when farmers should be helped out. I'm really gutted that the funding was taken so quickly away from farmers when most of them were hard at work and totally unaware of its availability. I don't understand, now that we know there is money left over, why it isn't reallocated back to the farmers who missed out."

"We are pastoral farmers and feel we have been totally neglected regarding the HBRC-Govt funding around sediment removal. We have sent a lot of time and money on clearing tracks, etc."

"We are absolutely gutted that we were not made aware that the silt and debris fund was available to pastoral farmers."

"Was disappointing no help was offered with debris and silt removal unless you could transport it yourself to the gate. We didn't have adequate machinery to implement this. Engaged contractor to remove debris, which was expensive exercise."

"We were not made aware that the silt and debris fund the government provided the HBRC was available to pastoral farmers. I would have used it to pay for digger work that is essential for access for my business to function and be back in production. The severe limitation on recovery on farm is money needed to fix infrastructure. The Government provided this support for us but it was not communicated to us by the HBRC in charge of its distribution. We pay our rates and its unfair that farmers were not communicated the message clearly, so that those in the know benefited and a huge number of hard working farmers missed out."

More than 13 months on from the initial impacts of Cyclone Hale and Gabrielle, these impacts are still contributing to an environment of high stress and pressure.

"Hard to quantify personal and health cost. The timing of the event and recovery is terrible given costs and commodity prices."

"We have felt at times very overwhelmed and have struggled a lot, and have not felt entirely supported during the last year. We lost so many parts of fences and they still kept moving with the land. As a young family starting out we have limited funds and are under constant pressure to rebuild and fix. With current stock prices and pressures its actually just really hard."


"Landowners in impacted areas are struggling to come to terms with situation, what needs doing, the financial impacts, ability to complete the works and how long it is going to take to get back to pre cyclone production."

"The burden of doing all the river fencing - both financially and workload wise all for government ideas and possible legislation has been a massive toll on this business."

"The sound of silence from affected people is dangerous. There are many tired, cyclone affected people out there, who don't want to talk about the problems any more."

"We are operating under considerable pressure ... outside demands need to be minimised ... the internal needs come first day to day. We are going okay, but only just."

"Morale is very low in our area. There are many casual conversations about lack of enjoyment in farming/desire to exit farming."



“ The reality of the time it will take to recover is being realised. Nearly a year of hard work and still such a long way to go. ”

Summary of top impact types:

% impacted					Impact Scale		
	% of survey respondents impacted	# of survey respondents impacted (out of 200)	# of Landowners across region impacted (Low estimate x 2)	# of Landowners across region impacted (High estimate x 4)	Total damage remaining for survey respondents	Total estimated remaining (Low estimate x 2))	Total estimated remaining (High estimate x 4)
Fencing Damage	98%	197	394	788	Conventional (wire) 285,743m Electric 125,132m	571,486m 250,264m	1,142,972m 500,528m
Track Damage	92%	181	362	724	Length of tracks requiring repair / replacement = 200,952m	401,904m	803,808m
Erosion	88%	176	352	704	Effective land impacted = 5,928ha	11,856ha	23,712ha
Water supply/irrigation system damage	66%	132	264	538			
Stock water or access issues	65%	129	258	516			
Dam damage/loss	65%	129	258	516			
Planting losses	64%	128	256	512	Remaining damage to be repaired or replaced: Forestry = 986ha Erosion Control = 1,621ha Riparian Planting = 1,982ha Native Planting = 1,128ha Arable = 864ha	1,972ha 3,242ha 3,964 2,256ha 1,728ha	3,944ha 6,484ha 7,928ha 4,512ha 3,456ha
Sediment	64%	127	254	508	Land impacted/covered/lost by sediment = 4,416ha	8,832ha	17,664ha
Issues with access around the property	60%	119	238	476			
Sheds/barns/yards damage	33%	65	130	260	Estimated remaining replacement or repair value = \$1,863,899	\$3,727,798	\$7,455,596
Wood waste / debris damage	29%	58	116	232	Effective land damaged by wood waste / debris = 3,985ha	7,970ha	15,940ha
Issues with access to/ from the property	25%	49	98	196			



HAWKES BAY
REGIONAL COUNCIL

TE KAUNIHERA Ā-ROHE O TE MATAU-A-MĀUI