

Chatham Islands Climate Resilience Wānanga Report

27 July 2025

Background

Pou Take Āhuarangi, the Climate Change Pou of the National Iwi Chairs Forum (NICF), hosted a one day climate resilience and adaptation workshop on the Chatham Islands on 27 July 2025 at the Chatham Island Council. Pou Take Āhuarangi engaged with [Ngāti Mūtunga ki Wharekauri](#), [Hokotehi Moriori Trust](#), and the [Chatham Islands Council](#) in advance of the workshop to identify the key climate change issues Islanders were faced with.



Pictured: Emergency Kits at Ngāti Mūtunga ki Wharekauri Offices

Climate Resilience Wānanga Summary

The wānanga brought together hapori members, local leaders and experts from across Wharekauri/Rēkohu and Pitt Island. The discussions were focussed on climate challenges that the mouere encounter and advance climate adaptation strategies.

Session 1: He Huringa Taiao - What is Climate Change?

“Climate change and coastal hazards are a serious threat to people and communities. These hazards can undermine physical, social, economic, and environmental wellbeing. The coastal community of the Chatham Islands is highly vulnerable to climate change and disaster risks as it is highly exposed to hazards

including tsunamis, storms, storm surges, floods, coastal erosion, and landslides, all of which may become more severe with climate change.” - Coastal Community Resilience Guide, Tonkin & Taylor, 2023.

The session focussed on providing an overview of climate change impacts on Aotearoa generally and the Chatham Islands specifically. The Chatham Islands economy centres on fisheries, agriculture and tourism. Given that context, the session also focussed on the specific impacts of climate change on coastal marine environments and the primary industries.

Session 2: Local Climate Realities

This session explored the local impacts of climate change in the Chathams. The discussion identified climate impacts including coastal erosion, flooding, storms and storm surges, saltwater intrusion, wildfire, increased frequency of severe weather events and changing weather patterns. Further discussions highlighted how natural wetlands and sponge-like peat landscapes are changing with increased rainfall, particularly over the last five years.

Participants discussed observed shifts in prevailing winds, drought frequency, marine species migration, and the energy split between diesel-based and off-grid solar households. Participants also noted wetlands retaining water resulting in surface flooding, as well as failing roading access - e.g. Ōwenga. Economic concerns were raised over farming and fisheries viability, and what transitions into resilient economies may look like.

Local initiatives include carbon farming on the Islands, fencing waterways, conservation efforts including replanting natives, installing wind turbines and exploring solar farm options.

Session 3: Data and Decision-Making

This session identified urgent data gaps for climate-informed decision-making for Chatham Islands. The data gaps include: no LiDAR coverage, no coastal erosion overlays, no current information on wind trends and projected weather changes and limited data on taonga/endemic species. Participants discussed the potential for a climate-ecosystem data stocktake and economic risk overlay to support future planning. There is a current project through Kahu Mana Taiko (KMT) to update Chatham's economic profile using infometrics, and another project through the Conservation Trust working on ecosystem mapping.

Examples of iwi led climate adaptation projects were discussed including nature based responses such as wetland planting, iwi led solar micro grids, the installation of hard infrastructure including a seawall on an island to protect a marae and Ngāti Toa Rangatira's [‘Te Ara o Raukawa Moana’](#) project that explored climate risks and data across Ngāti Toa Rangatira's coastal area of interest.

An action point from this discussion was that KMT would undertake a stocktake of the data resources available and identify data gaps to assist with climate change adaptation planning.

Session 4: Marae Risk Assessments

This session focussed on the marae risk assessments that had been prepared for the two marae on the islands developed by Pou Take Āhuarangi. The risk assessments are developed from publicly sourced

information and used as a catalyst for discussions on the risk profiles of marae and to identify any adaptation measures that need to be undertaken. Participants applied local matauranga to expand on the marae risk assessments.

Key issues identified were: sewage overflow, dune erosion, and flooding near marae sites. Water is pooling at the bottom of Whakamaharatanga Marae. However Ngāti Mūtunga ki Wharekauri have committed to building a new marae. A key consideration raised by attendees was ensuring that the marae would be built in the right location based on the location's risk profile.

Kopinga Marae is a designated Civil Defence Centre (CDC) and requires an emergency kit. There are also opportunities to explore solar and water storage to support Kopinga's resilience.

Session 5: Practical Planning (Hapori-opoly) and Adaptation Project

Participants were separated into two groups to undertake a gamified scenario of decision making to climate adaptation planning. The activity required each group to operate with a budget and make decisions to enhance resilience for the Islands.

Group one focussed on water resilience. Their project focussed on delivering tanks to all residential builds to support potable water storage as well as microdesalination grids.

Group two focused on renewable energy and carbon-based farming. The session prompted in-depth discussion about local capability, long-term planning, and project resilience planning. Their project focused on supporting energy resilience for 30 homes of Port Hutt and Kaingaroa Key via solar farms and utilising carbon farming to fund the solar builds.

Participants reflected that climate adaptation planning could not occur in absence of community collaboration.

The discussions then identified viable adaptation projects including: Water storage/tanks, solar Farms, petrol storage, connectivity (discussed engaging Tū Ātea for assistance), transport/freight infrastructure and emergency response hubs.

Priority projects identified included:

- Residential water storage for potable water across all of island
- Ensuring Kōpinga Marae is fit for purposes as a CDC
- Solar farm at Kaingaroa and explored tripartite co-funding approach to establish the farm (Central government, private sector, imi).

Session 6: Visioning a Resilient Motu

"If significant changes aren't made, [the Chathams] can't continue living the way they are".

The final session focussed on a resilient Wharekauri/Rēkohu in 2050, 2100, and 2500. Themes included on-island self-sufficiency, food resilience, future - focused planning, climate adaptation measures that enable island tino rangatiratanga and build a national model for remote climate resilience.

Pou Take Āhuarangi challenged all attendees to incorporate climate change and climate adaptation into governance discussions e.g. Marae Committee Hui, Council discussions etc.

Closing Reflections

Participants identified that the Chathams are at a turning point. As one participant noted, "We have between 7 and 10 years to change it, or lose it."

The wānanga confirmed deep and committed community insight, strong leadership, and a desire to act now. Challenges are acute, but so too is the opportunity to pilot climate solutions that support self-determination/tino rangatiratanga, intergenerational future-proofing, and Wharekauri/Rēkohu identity.

Prepared by: Kiri Allan, Anahera Nin - Pou Take Āhuarangi - National Iwi Chairs Forum

APPENDIX A

Priority Planning, Projects and Actions

Water Resilience

- **Proposal:** Island-wide rollout of household water tanks and improved septic systems.
- **Issues Addressed:** Drinking water security, hygiene, drought resilience.
- **Next Steps:** Prepare proposal for MCP and other Crown funds; assess number of rateable/residential dwellings.

Renewable Energy Transition

- **Proposal:** Off-grid solar installation for isolated homes (potentially funded by carbon farming offsets)
- **Issues Addressed:** Diesel reliance, energy equity, climate mitigation
- **Next Steps:** Develop community-led investment model, prepare joint funding applications

Emergency and Lifeline Infrastructure

- **Proposal:** Investment in resilient transport, port, and fuel storage infrastructure
- **Issues Addressed:** Access during disasters, energy security, freight reliability
- **Next Steps:** Align with statutory hazard and adaptation planning reforms

Climate Data and Science

- **Proposal:** Chatham Islands climate and ecosystem data stocktake and gap analysis
- **Issues Addressed:** Lack of decision-making evidence, ecological vulnerability, funding rationale
- **Next Steps:** Apply to NHARP for science partnership project

Governance and Coordination

- **Proposal:** Establish Climate Change Working Group for the Chathams
- **Issues Addressed:** Coordination, capability, community buy-in, funding alignment
- **Next Steps:** Identify members and develop ToR for working group