

ŌTAKI TODAY

Ngā kōrero o Ōtaki

PĒPUERE/FEBRUARY 2026



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Signs up for bitterns

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Police still short of staff

By Ian Carson

Ōtaki police remain three officers short of their allocation, currently with one sergeant, four constables and one non-sworn staff member.

It should have a sergeant and seven constables, along with the non-sworn staff member.

Sergeant Simon Middleton says recruiting staff to smaller rural stations like Ōtaki remains difficult, with officers often preferring to work in larger centres or areas with which they are familiar. Unlike the military, they are not assigned to certain areas, and as part of the police retention and recruitment strategy, officers can choose where they want to work.

"When a vacancy is advertised, someone has to actually apply for it and want to come here," Simon says. "People often want to work where they grew up or where they have connections."

Residents who have family or friends in the police elsewhere are being encouraged to talk to them about moving to the area.

The staffing shortfall means police have to prioritise officer safety, particularly when responding to incidents that require paired patrols.

"In an ideal world you'd have three pairs of officers working across shifts. Right now, we're effectively running with two pairs and a gap. Rather than spreading ourselves too thin, we accept that gap."

When Ōtaki police are unavailable, calls are assessed by Levin or Foxton officers as part of the wider Horowhenua policing area, which also remains under-strength. Levin and Ōtaki combined are estimated to be about 15 officers below allocation.

Despite the challenges, Simon says urgent incidents are prioritised, and lower-level matters dealt with when staff become available.

Meanwhile, police are also dealing with a recent spike in burglaries, with Riverbank Road identified as a particular hotspot.



Businesses are being urged to upgrade their CCTV cameras to provide better quality images so police have a better chance of identifying offenders.

"That area is being targeted," Simon says. "There are always going to be sporadic burglaries, but this is different. There's a clear pattern there."

He spoke about the spate of burglaries at a recent Ōtaki-Te Horo Business Association meeting, where he emphasised the need for basic security.

He says most businesses have CCTV, but often the image quality – especially at night – is so poor it has no real use for identifying offenders.

"The better the camera resolution the better the image."

But CCTV alone doesn't prevent crime and he urges businesses to consider alarms, strong

lighting and physical security measures.

"A camera records what happens, but it doesn't stop someone," he says. "An audible alarm, motion sensors and good lighting make places uncomfortable for offenders and are far more effective as deterrents."

Police are also reminding residents and businesses to take simple precautions, such as locking vehicles, removing keys, securing containers properly and not leaving equipment accessible.

"It sounds basic, but we still come across unlocked vehicles with keys inside."

Family violence continues to consume a significant amount of police time and resources across the Horowhenua policing area, further

limiting capacity to respond to other crime.

"That reduces what we can put into things like burglary investigations."

Police are also warning the community about online marketplace scams and urging people not to transfer money for items they have not seen in person.

"If it's too good to be true, it usually is," Simon says.

Ōtaki residents are encouraged to report all crime – emergencies by phoning 111, and non-urgent to 105 or online. Anonymous information can be provided through Crime Stoppers.

"Even low-level offending should be reported. It all helps build the bigger picture."

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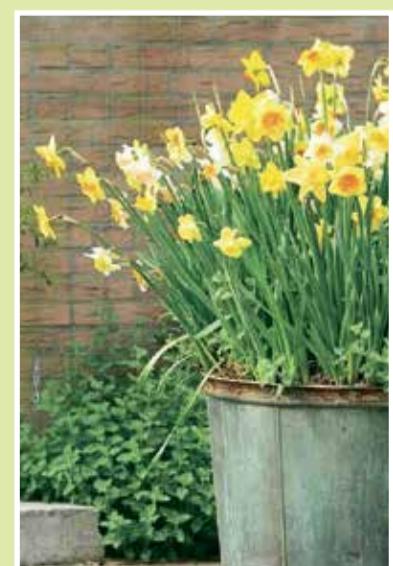
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Such a welcome sight at the end of Winter.



PGA GOLF New Zealand PGA Championship, Paraparaumu Beach Golf Club, February 19-22.

TOTE MODERN ARTIST Graeme Hitchcock is Tote Modern Gallery's guest artist during February (see page 4). Tote Modern Gallery, Ōtaki Race Course, Te Roto Rd, Ōtaki. Open 10am-3pm Friday-Sunday.

JOWETT RALLY The Jowett Car Club has its national rally in Kapiti on March 6-8, with a coffee and cars day on Sunday, March 8 at Southwards Museum (9am-midday). See jowett.net.nz



ŌTAKI KITE FESTIVAL Saturday-Sunday, March 14-15, Ōtaki Beach. International and New Zealand flyers, including the return of the Phoenix Collective, the stunt kite flyers from Queensland. On-stage entertainment, food trucks, craft stalls, Kelly&Co Big Dig – and lots of kites. See pages 12-13.

MĀORILAND FILM FESTIVAL March 24-28, celebrating storytelling with screenings, art, and talks for its 13th annual event. Now the world's biggest Indigenous film festival – right here in Ōtaki. See maorilandfilm.co.nz

ŌTAKI MUSEUM 49 Main St. 06 364-6886. Mai i te Kāinga Tāone Iti – Wāhanga 1:1843-1920 (From Kāinga to Village – Part 1: 1843-1920). This is the third in a series of exhibitions focusing on the township of Ōtaki, and its development over the past 200 years. Visitors can also play the old theatre pianola while at the museum. The Anne Thorpe Reading Room is open at the same times as the museum. Museum open 10am-2pm Thursday to Saturday, except public holidays.

ŌTAKI MARKET 58 Main Highway, Ōtaki. Open every week in summer. 10am-2pm.

TOI MATARAU GALLERY Māoriland Hub, Main St, Ōtaki. Open Monday to Saturday 11am-4pm. Toi Matarau is a summit for multidisciplinary arts where Māori and indigenous artists gather, collaborate, are inspired and supported. See toi.maorilandfilm.co.nz

OLD COURTHOUSE GALLERY 239 Main Highway, Ōtaki. Open Thurs-Sunday: 10am-4pm. Closed Public Holidays. 027 435 0408.

TOI MAHARA Mahara Place, Waikanae. The Kapiti Coast's public art gallery.

POETRY IN ŌTAKI Third Friday of each month, 10.30-11.30am, Library Supper Room, Aotaki St. All welcome. Call 021 050 1904 for details.

ŌTAKI GARAGE SALE: Third Saturday of the month, 9am-11.30am, Presbyterian Church, 249 Mill Rd. 06 364-6449. Rev Peter Jackson 021 207 9455, owpresb@xtra.co.nz

ŌTAKI STROKE SUPPORT GROUP &

WELLNESS CENTRE: Meets for Sit and Be Fit classes, 10am Friday mornings at Senior Citizens' Hall, Rangitira Street. All welcome.

ŌTAKI LIBRARY – ALL SESSIONS FREE:

JP service every Monday 10.30am-12.30pm; Age Concern every 2nd Thursday 10am-noon

Greypower 1st & 3rd Thursday 10.30am-1.30pm.

CHOIRS Let's Sing Ōtaki, Tuesdays 2-3pm, Hadfield Hall. Kapiti Women's Choir, Mondays 1.30-3pm, Baptist Church, Te Moana Rd, Waikanae. New members welcome. Enquiries to Ann-Marie Stapp 021 492 127.

KĀPITI HOMEOPATHY FOR CHILDREN

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WAIKANAE BEACH INDOOR SPRING MARKET: Second Sunday of the month, 10am-1pm, at the Waikanae Beach Community Hall, 22 Rauparaha St, Waikanae Beach.

To list an event, contact debbi@idmedia.co.nz

Politics stymies India trade deal

IT IS TEMPTING to declare that only in New Zealand – a country dependent for its quality of living on money received for products sold overseas – could a majority of its national Parliament hang back from rapid approval of a free trade agreement (FTA) with 1.4 billion people at a time when the structured international trading environment is under threat.

One by one the country's leading export organisations lined up to support the arrangement with India – predicted to be the world's third largest economy by 2030 – made in December. They included Export New Zealand, The NZ Forest Owners' Association, the Meat Industry Association, Beef and Lamb NZ, Horticulture NZ, the NZ Timber Industry Federation and Wools of New Zealand. The Dairy Companies Association recognised the deal as good for New Zealand, but not for dairy.

Yet more than a month later only two of the major parties in government – National and Act – are on record supporting the arrangement, and they don't make up a majority.

New Zealand First plays minority politics to swing votes from Kiwis who worry about too many Indians entering the country. Labour frets that more Indians entering the country might come at the expense of jobs and better wages for New Zealand employees. The Greens and TPM are opposed.

In the end Labour might, and probably will, swing behind National and support the arrangement. It knows the agreement has limits around migration levels. Labour trade spokesman Damien O'Connor is a well-known free trade exponent and former successful trade minister. Defending his party's stance on Radio NZ he did his best to follow the party line and swallow "a dead rat" that more detail is needed.

There are other mechanisms for addressing the concerns they voice. Immigration controls

allow for curbs on numbers of people entering the country. Trade unions and professional bodies representing groups of workers have the power to contest wage and salary levels.

By contrast with New Zealand's show of political filibustering, the Indian government is united on the deal. Thus, the passage of legislation to enable introduction of the arrangement is straightforward in New Delhi but problematical in New Zealand while National seeks out an arrangement with Labour for support. NZ First has invoked over the FTA the "agree to disagree" clause within its coalition arrangement with National.

Total two-way trade between New Zealand and India was valued at \$3.68 billion in the 12 months to June 2025. New Zealand's exports of goods and services to India were worth \$1.79 billion and Indian exports to New Zealand are in excess of \$620 million annually.

It is a damning feature of today's Kiwi political environment that even when basic planks of economic progress are ready for implementation, sectional and self-interest represented in the Parliament, whether of left or right origins, uses peripheral elements to provoke delay and dissension.

When the dairy association declares the FTA is good for the country despite the absence of any major breakthroughs for its products, and other export groups are enthusiastic about the benefits they predict, voters are entitled to question the commitment of their so-called representatives to the national interest.

The significance of the FTA can be summed up by the views of two of the country's more mature commentators – Fran O'Sullivan, NZ Herald: "This could reshape our exports, and our politics;" Luke Malpass, Stuff political editor: "1.4 billion reasons to cheer."

This political gamesmanship helps to obscure another growing problem of governance in the country. It is the growing divide between Wellington as the city of government, and the

remainder of the nation.

It has for decades been accepted that Auckland gives little attention to the thoughts of the capital on anything but basic financial and economic administration. But over the past decade as Auckland business, at least, has become more conscious of the role Wellington plays in determining its prosperity, the divide between the two cities has become increasingly apparent.

Auckland Mayor Wayne Brown finds fertile political ground in beating back Wellington initiatives. The northern city has not yet cottoned on to the pragmatism of provinces such as Taranaki where a frequent phrase is: "You make the laws in Wellington, and we keep busy finding ways around them."

The underlying problem is a growing tendency of the public service in middle management, and even senior management roles, to fully understand the operational needs and methodologies of industries, businesses, and local governments around the country.

The issue is mirrored in an approach by local government officials that passage of a law or regulation in Wellington is sufficient to ensure that councils follow a policy of government. That councils may have a mind of their own, and through their elected members and local community activists defy the central directive, or determine means of weakening its impact, seems not to occur to them. TLC (tender loving care) expressed through careful personalised political attention to local needs and trends often has more impact on councillors and their advisers than the cold type of government.

Equally in the building industry, development of an understanding of methodologies and needs among those responsible for regulating construction is a vital component for obtaining public confidence in the housing market. This is particularly important now that local bodies have a lesser role in the consenting process, especially for so-called "wet areas" like bathrooms, kitchens, and exterior fittings..

■ Bruce has been an economics and business editor, and a foreign correspondent in Washington, London and Hong Kong.

POLITICS



BRUCE KOHN

CARTOON OF THE MONTH



By Jared Carson

Waiting for the sun to go down.

ŌTAKI TODAY *Ngā Kōrero o Ōtaki*

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ERA dismisses workers' claims

By Ian Carson

Claims of unpaid wages, unlawful premiums and unjustified dismissal brought by four migrant workers against a Wellington-based pizza business and its owners have been dismissed by the Employment Relations Authority (ERA).

The ERA found their allegations were not supported by the evidence. Some of the migrants had worked at the business's Pizza Land store in Ōtaki.

The case involved Dharma Services Ltd, which operates fast-food restaurants in the Wellington region, and its director and owner-operator, Anil Kumar Lakra, along with his wife, Deepika Lakra. The applicants – Anand Singh, Parveen Kumar, Deepak, and Jatin Saroha – all worked for the company during 2023 and alleged they were underpaid, forced to work excessive hours, and required to pay large sums of money to secure their jobs in New Zealand.

In a detailed determination released on January 27, 2026, ERA member Claire English rejected all major claims.

Mr Kumar told *Ōtaki Today* that despite the legal outcome, the case had taken its toll.

"Financially, I lost everything I had saved over 18 years of clean work history," he said. "I was forced to sell my Porirua store at a fraction of its value just to fund my legal defence. I am still in debt."

"My Ōtaki store's revenue dropped by nearly 70 percent due to community boycott and reputational damage. Twice, potential buyers pulled out of purchasing the business because of the allegations."

He also said he had been verbally abused



and physically threatened in Ōtaki by a local resident who called him a "leech" and told him to deport himself.

"I chose not to run away. I stayed. I fought through every legal channel to prove my innocence. In doing so, I lost my savings, my peace of mind, and years of stability, but I now have the truth on record."

The applicants in the ERA case argued they routinely worked between 60 and 70 hours a week but were paid for only 30, relying heavily on Google location data from their mobile phones to show they were present at the restaurant for extended periods. They also alleged they were required to return to the workplace late at night to refrigerate pizza dough and that some were charged unlawful "premiums" of up to \$40,000 for their jobs.

However, the authority found the location data unreliable as proof of work. While it showed phones were near the restaurant, it did

not establish that the workers were actually working, or even carrying their phones at the time.

"The data cannot show what the person was doing," English said, noting evidence that the applicants often visited the restaurant socially, to eat, rest, or accompany colleagues on deliveries. In some cases, location data also showed the workers at beaches and scenic lookouts during claimed work hours.

The ERA found the rosters and payslips produced by the employer – which showed 30-hour work weeks – were more credible than the applicants' reconstructions based on phone data. As a result, all claims for unpaid wages were dismissed.

Claims that workers were required to return to the restaurant in the middle of the night were also rejected. English accepted evidence from Mr Lakra that dough was meant to be refrigerated at closing time and that any

late-night visits were voluntary, brief, and not directed by management.

The applicants also sought compensation for unjustified dismissal, arguing they were effectively forced to resign. However, the ERA found no personal grievance claims for unjustified dismissal had ever been properly raised.

While the applicants' "statements of problem" listed numerous alleged statutory breaches, none referred to dismissal or termination. English declined to "read in" such claims, particularly given the detailed legal drafting used elsewhere in the documents.

Serious allegations of unlawful premium payments – sums allegedly paid in India to secure jobs – were also rejected. While some payments were proven, the authority found they were consistent with legitimate costs such as airfares, visa fees, and immigration advice. Larger alleged cash payments were unsupported by independent evidence and relied largely on handwritten notes and recollections.

"I am not prepared to make such an order under these circumstances," English said, noting the lack of corroboration and the fact that some payments occurred outside New Zealand's jurisdiction.

The ERA also took note of evidence that the applicants had been encouraged by a former flatmate – who had previously acted as Mr Lakra's lawyer – to lodge claims and apply for migrant exploitation visas. All four applicants ultimately left their jobs within a short period after securing alternative employment elsewhere.

With all substantive claims dismissed, no compensation, wage arrears, or penalties were awarded against Dharma Services or the Lakras.

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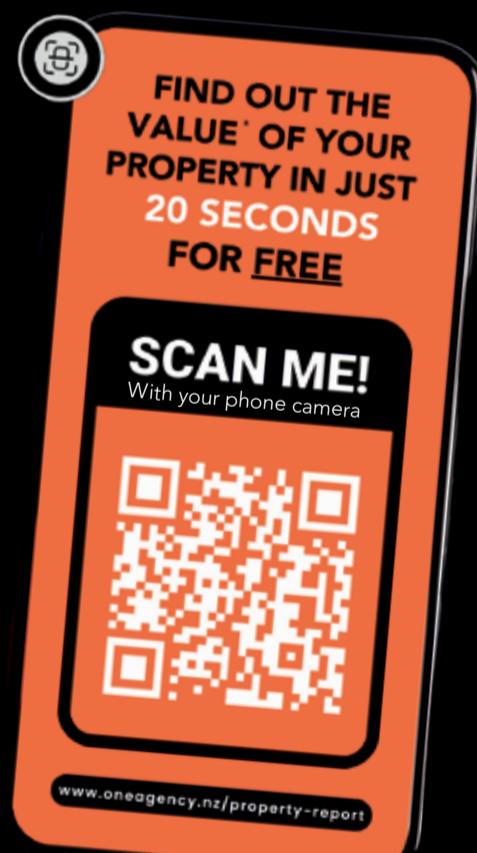
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LETTERS

Clip-on safer than bridge

The article in your January 2026 paper describing the cycle-walkway clip-on as unsafe and unusable is totally off the mark. As a user of the clip-on multiple times a week (including crossings on my skinny-tyred, single-speed bike in wet conditions), negotiation of the metal joins requires a minimal amount of bike skill. I suggest anyone having trouble crossing those would be a danger to themselves on the road anywhere. Taking a 90 degree approach to each join at a comfortable speed should be safe for any competent cyclist. It is certainly safer than crossing the bridge in the traffic lane or using the narrow old footpath. I celebrate any efforts to provide cycling infrastructure and off-the-mark unnecessary criticism does not help the cause. If anyone wants to criticise unsafe cycling, try riding through central Ulaanbaatar, or London, or Addis Ababa, or Cairo. . . .

Lindsay Gault, Ōtaki

Thanks for the clip-on

As an ex-pat in New Zealand for more than 20 years and a frequent user of the recently installed Ōtaki clip-on bridge both as a cyclist and runner, I would like to comment on the recent article regarding the dissatisfaction Mr Zwartjes finds with the design of the pathway. Considering how dangerous it was for pedestrians to cross

the river in the past I find this construction very suitable, safe and pleasant compared to nothing. This path is a shared space with pedestrians with or without animals, scooters, women with babies in pushchairs, disabled people, etc, and not a velodrome. If necessary according to the weather conditions – rain, wind, etc – or number of users, cyclists have to be aware, consider dismounting and walk. At no time is the clip-on dangerous for cyclists as long as they control their speed, just as drivers have to on the road. Be positive and thank NZTA for providing this project.

Jean-Louis, Ōtaki

Joiners uncomfortable

I don't often feel moved to comment on an article but will do this time, just in case it is worth taking the story a step (pedal) further. When I read about Gerard Zwartjes' opinion of the clip-on (*Ōtaki Today*, January 2026), when he was cycling over it on a road bike, it reminded me that I had the

same reaction a year ago when I first rode it. Those joiners are seriously uncomfortable on a non-suspension road bike. It seems all very well for NZTA to say it was subject to a safety audit and that this was signed off by a chartered engineer, but has that engineer ever ridden over those types of joiners on a non-suspension bike with narrow tyres? I imagine not. They also say a wide range of stakeholders were consulted, including cycling advocates, but were any of them presented with an example of these joiners and given the opportunity to hammer their butt while cycling over them without the cushioning of suspension, padded seats or padded pants? I suspect not. Could you invite Jetesh Bhula to come down to the bridge with a road bike and ask them to cycle over the joiners at a reasonable speed. Perhaps we could invite the chartered engineer down, too, and make a party of it. Most bruised bum gets an ice pack.

Peter Davis, Ōtaki

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

If you have something to say, write to us. Please include your full name, address and contact phone number to verify that the letter is valid – only the name and town will be published, unless there is good reason to withhold those details. Please keep the word count to 200. Your letter may be edited, and the editor may reject any letter.

Write to *Ōtaki Today*, 13 Te Manau Rd, Ōtaki or email ian@idmedia.co.nz or use the 'Contact' link at otakitoday.com

**From canvas to glass**

Graeme Hitchcock is the featured artist during February in a solo exhibition at Ōtaki Pottery Club's Tote Modern Gallery.

In 2004 he began working on glass sculptures, which might seem a major diversion from the paintings for which he originally became well known, but he says his work "always had a sculptural feel".

"I had tried pottery some years earlier and thought 'way too messy,' the Waikanae artist says. "It just so happened there were cast glass workshops being held at the Art Station on Ponsonby Road, Auckland, and I enrolled.

"Thus my journey started – instantly loved all facets of the project, from modelling in wax to displaying the finished item."

Since 2005, Graeme has been a full-time artist working mainly in glass, with periods of self-expression in paintings. Both media are in the Tote exhibition.

■ **Tote Modern Gallery, Ōtaki Race Course, Te Roto Rd, Ōtaki.**
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Waikawa signs up for rare bitterns

A new Waikawa Beach signage project is aimed at making people aware that critically endangered Australasian bitterns are present in the area.

The Waikawa Beach Environment Group (WBEG) has erected distinctive signs around key wetland zones in a project that began with Horizons Regional Council. WBEG then picked up the work locally and with permission from Horowhenua District Council, erected signs on council land.

Group deputy chair Michele Walls says bitterns are extremely sensitive to disturbance.

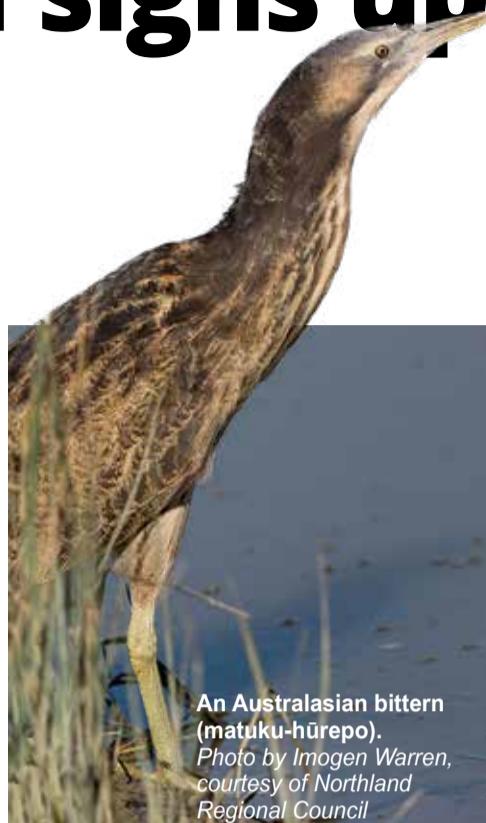
"Everyday activities – including unleashed dogs, vehicles entering wetland margins, and people unknowingly walking through habitat – can have real impacts," she says. "Bitterns are also not street smart, so people should take extra care when driving near wetland areas, especially at dusk and overnight when birds might be moving about."

The Australasian bittern (matuku-hūrepo) is one of the country's most elusive wetland birds, and one of the most threatened. Once common throughout New Zealand, bittern numbers have declined dramatically as wetlands have been drained, fragmented, or degraded.

Today, they are classified as nationally critical, meaning the species faces an extremely high risk of extinction in New Zealand. Estimates suggest only a few hundred birds remain nationwide, making every local sighting and every protected wetland area vitally important.

Despite this, bitterns are still present in and around Waikawa Beach.

They rely on quiet wetland areas with dense vegetation such as raupō, sedges, and long grasses, where they hunt for fish, frogs, insects, and small eels. More often, people hear them



An Australasian bittern (matuku-hūrepo).
Photo by Imogen Warren, courtesy of Northland Regional Council

before they see them, especially during breeding season, when males make their distinctive low booming call at dusk and overnight. They have remarkable camouflage – often freezing in place with their beak pointed skyward to blend into surrounding reeds.

That imagery has been incorporated into the signs made and donated by local resident Will Abel as a personal passion project. They depict the three typical stances of a bittern, helping people recognise how easily these birds can blend into their surroundings.

Michele says the signs gently remind people



Steve Bailey and Michele Walls of the Waikawa Beach Environment Group with one of the signs near the beach footbridge.
Photo Ōtaki Today

that bitterns may be present, encourage respectful behaviour such as keeping dogs on leads and avoiding sensitive wetland areas. She invites the community to report any bittern sightings.

"If you're lucky enough to see or hear a bittern at Waikawa Beach, please email [see below right], ideally with a photo or location details, or record sightings through Inaturalist, which helps build a picture of where wildlife is present."

Michele says bitterns don't ask for much – just quiet spaces, healthy wetlands, and a bit of care from the people who share their environment.

"By being mindful of where we walk, how we manage our pets, and by reporting sightings when we're lucky enough to spot one, we can all help ensure that matuku-hūrepo continue to have a home here at Waikawa Beach."

The bittern signage forms part of wider community-led restoration work at Waikawa Beach, including pest plant removal, native planting, predator control, and ongoing advocacy to improve habitat for birds and other wildlife.

■ For more on how the community is helping restore Waikawa's natural environment, visit wbeg.net; for sightings, email huritini@xtra.co.nz or inaturalist.org

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REALTY



Who was our first knight?

By Ian Carson

When Colin Davies contacted me to say Sir Christopher Parkin was not Ōtaki's first person to be knighted, I thought I'd been caught out.

In our January issue, we said Sir Christopher was believed to be the first person raised in Ōtaki to be a knight or dame. We still believe we're right, but there's a caveat.

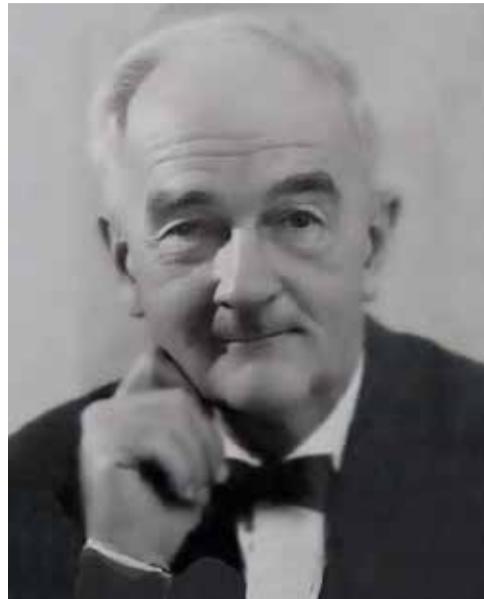
Colin pointed out Sir Guy Powles was born in Ōtaki – or as the book *Changing Faces of Te Horo* (Ōtaki Heritage, 2009) notes more precisely, in Te Horo – on April 5, 1905. His parents, sawmiller Charles Guy Powles and wife Jessie Mary (nee Richardson), lived in Te Horo at the time.

That would make him technically Ōtaki's first knight because of his birthplace connection, but there is no evidence the young Guy attended school in the area. Biographies note he went to Island Bay School and Thorndon School before going on to Wellington College. So while upping Sir Christopher in the birthplace stakes – Sir Christopher was born in England – Sir Guy's life was not shaped by an upbringing in Ōtaki. From the age of 4, Chris became part of the local community.

As Sir Christopher told *Ōtaki Today*'s Bruce Kohn: "It's a long time since I've been a student, but the character you form in a small town stays with you and moulds the rest of your life."

Sir Guy Powles was a man of his times, shaped by the era and a father who was a First World War veteran, serving with distinction in Palestine and France. Charles was appointed chief of staff of the New Zealand Army in 1923, the same year Sir Guy joined the Territorials.

After studying law at Victoria University, Sir Guy was admitted as a barrister and solicitor



Sir Guy Powles.

of the Supreme Court. After the Second World War began in 1939, he joined the New Zealand Artillery and was in 1943 posted to command the 144th Independent Battery of the 3rd New Zealand Division. He spent time in New Caledonia and Guadalcanal, and as a major, led an Allied assault on Nissan Island. He retired with the rank of colonel in 1946.

He later had various diplomatic roles, including as New Zealand's first high commissioner to Samoa, which led to the establishment of Western Samoa in 1961. He was also high commissioner for Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and ambassador to Nepal.

Sir Guy will, however, be best remembered as New Zealand's first ombudsman, a position (including as chief ombudsman) he held from



Sir Christopher Parkin

1962 to 1977.

As Colin Aikman wrote in the *Dictionary of New Zealand Biography*, the public service and politicians were initially suspicious of Sir Guy.

"However, the methods he evolved for handling complaints, which were investigative and consultative rather than adversarial, combined with his independence and concern for 'fairness, reason and fair play, with not a little compassion' – won acceptance for the office," Aikman wrote.

Sir Guy was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE) in the 1961 New Year Honours for his services as high commissioner to Western Samoa.

He died in Wellington on October 24, 1994, six months short of his 90th birthday.

New name for Ō2NL expressway

The Ōtaki to north of Levin expressway project has a new name, Te Pae o Tararua.

The name – which acknowledges the horizon and the enduring Tararua Range – has gifted by project iwi partners Muaūpoko and Ngāti Raukawa te au ki te Tonga.

NZTA Waka Kotahi says the name is a powerful symbol of strength and resilience that sustains the region. It will be added to the current name, creating a new full name for the expressway project – Te Pae o Tararua: Ōtaki to north of Levin.

Meanwhile, a significant milestone has been achieved on with the first permanent works now complete after the project's first structural concrete pour at the new overbridge across the North Island Main Trunk rail line. It's the northern-most structure on the project, which includes 11 structures overall.

The initial pour formed the levelling pad for the abutment mechanically stabilised earth (MSE) wall, marking the first major step in construction of the structure.

When complete, the 25-metre-long, single-span overbridge will carry two lanes of State Highway 1 traffic and a shared use path over the rail corridor.

In total, construction of the bridge will require about 1000 cubic metres of concrete and about 500 tonnes of reinforcing steel.

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Buyer confidence coming back

By Ian Carson

After three years firmly in buyers' market territory, the Ōtaki residential property market is beginning to show cautious signs of renewed confidence, driven largely by lower interest rates and the return of first-home buyers.

Local real estate agents say the market has been offering buyers strong opportunities for some time, but momentum appears to shifting – if only tentatively.

"Really, there's never been a better time to buy than the last three years," says Kelly&Co's Derek Kelly. "We were saying that all of last year, and things started to turn around about November.

"Nothing dramatic has happened, but multiple interest rate cuts have been enough to stimulate confidence."

Brendon Heenan of One Agency's Team Heenan says properties in the \$500,000 to \$650,000 range are attracting the most interest, reflecting the purchasing power of first-time buyers. By contrast, homes priced from about \$750,000 to \$1 million and above are taking longer to sell, with fewer buyers actively looking in that range.

"Many potential purchasers at that level need to sell an existing home before buying, which can slow the process," Brendon says. "In some cases, properties are staying on the market for weeks or months, giving buyers more time to compare options and negotiate."

He says the market is also being shaped by changing patterns among investors. In recent years, several rental properties have been sold, often to first-home buyers rather than to other investors or people trading up. Because those



vendors are not necessarily buying again, the usual "chain" of transactions that helps keep the market moving has been less evident.

Derek says multiple-offer situations have reappeared over the past few months – something largely absent during the downturn.

"Over the past few years you'd be lucky to have one or two people interested in a property, and sometimes none at all," he says. "Now we're seeing multiple parties again, particularly at that first-home level."

At the height of the slowdown, the average time it took to sell across the district climbed to about 70 days. That figure is slowly coming down, especially for well-priced homes in Ōtaki.

When the property market was booming, houses were sometimes on the market for a few days only. Buyers in recent years have been able to take their time with some properties attracting only one offer, if that.

The prolonged nature of the downturn

reflects the sharp inflation in property values during the Covid-era boom, followed by a slow correction, Derek says. While larger centres such as Wellington and Auckland experienced steeper falls, Ōtaki has been more resilient.

He says investor activity, which largely disappeared during the slump, is beginning to return alongside first-home buyers, a development he describes as a key indicator of a stabilising market.

At the same time, buyers remain cautious as the banks and insurers put more scrutiny on property locations and risks.

"If you can't insure a house and you need finance, you can't buy it."

Brendon says interest rates continue to influence affordability. While mortgage rates have eased from the peaks of recent years, loan servicing costs remain significant, and banks still apply conservative lending criteria. This has limited how much buyers can borrow,

reinforcing demand at the lower end of the market.

Despite these constraints, he's cautiously optimistic about the year ahead.

"Activity typically begins to pick up from late summer as homeowners return from holidays, consider selling, and begin the appraisal and financing process," he says. "What we see later this month will be interesting."

Brendon also points to longer-term factors likely to support the market, including recent infrastructure investment in the region – especially the new expressway – and steady demand from Wellington buyers seeking more affordable housing on the Kāpiti Coast.

Both agents say Ōtaki continues to offer comparatively affordable housing. Tidy three-bedroom homes are still available from about \$550,000, with good quality, higher-end homes selling in the \$600,000 to \$650,000 range. Two-bedroom units have recently sold for about \$400,000.

"That kind of value is getting harder to find elsewhere on the Kāpiti Coast," Derek says.

Lifestyle properties, however, which were in high demand in the areas on the edges of urban Ōtaki, remain slower to sell.

Looking ahead, Derek expects modest growth rather than a rapid rebound.

"I can't see us moving forward more than a few percent this year," Derek says. "We're not heading back to boom times, but it does feel like we're edging slightly forward."

It's a sentiment shared by Brendon, who says the market has stabilised after a difficult period and is now improving slowly. He says that rather than a rapid boom, he expects a gradual, steady recovery, with realistic pricing remaining the key to achieving a timely sale.

Tim Costley MP for Ōtaki

Contact details for our offices in Levin and Paraparaumu are below.



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horowhenua@parliament.govt.nz

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Wed: 10am - 3pm
Thurs: 10am - 3pm
Fri: 10am - 3pm

Paraparaumu Office Hours

Corner of Te Roto Drive and Kāpiti Road

Phone: 021 851 206
kapiti@parliament.govt.nz

Opening Hours:

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Tues: 10am - 3pm
Wed: Closed
Thurs: 10am - 2pm
Fri: 10am - 3pm

*Outside these hours by appointment.

✉ Tim.CostleyMP@parliament.govt.nz
I look forward to meeting with you soon.





Mill Road / Rahui Road roundabout

Pushing ahead with infrastructure projects

It's full steam ahead with our capital works programme this year as we continue to invest in our district's growth. Improving important water supply, wastewater, stormwater and roading projects in Ōtaki that will improve our community's resilience and future-proof our town.

This year we'll be progressing the following major infrastructure projects in Ōtaki as agreed in our Long-term Plan 2024-34.

- Major growth wastewater upgrades in Ōtaki
- Ōtaki Reservoir 2 supply network
- Ōtaki Theatre earthquake strengthening
- Upgrades to our roading, walking and cycling network.

Thank you for your patience while we deliver for Kāpiti.

► [Find out more at: kapiticoast.govt.nz/otakiprojects](http://kapiticoast.govt.nz/otakiprojects)



Your voice matters!

Community feedback really matters to us. Throughout the year, there'll be plenty of chances — both formal and informal — for you to get involved in our mahi and share your thoughts.

Things to look out for this year include:

- delivering on your future vision for Kāpiti
- our draft Health, Creative and Culture, and Environment strategies
- updates to bylaws and policies
- and all our other services, events, and updates.

Your voice matters and we want you to have your say.

► [Visit: haveyoursay.kapiticoast.govt.nz](http://haveyoursay.kapiticoast.govt.nz)
for more information.

Grab a cuppa and host an event with your neighbours

We're encouraging community-minded people to host Over the Fence Cuppa events with their neighbours this March.

Getting to know your neighbours is a great way to strengthen community wellbeing and will help you be more prepared in emergencies. The people you live nearest to will be your most immediate and ongoing source of support.

Get at least four households together and register to organise an event on your street. We will support you with resources, guidance or guest speakers to help you run the day so you can focus on bonding with your neighbours.

Register before Wednesday 25 February.

► [Visit: kapiticoast.govt.nz/neighbours](http://kapiticoast.govt.nz/neighbours)
for more information.

Experience our events

From Council-run to Council-supported, there's a number of events to help you be inspired, entertained, and achieve your athletic greatness this summer. Check out the list below:

- 19-22 February - NZ PGA Championship, Paraparaumu Beach Golf Club
- 21 February - Movies in the Park, Waikanae Park
- 22 February - Kāpiti Women's Triathlon, Raumati Beach
- 28 February - XTERRA Wellington Triathlon Festival
- 14/15 March - Ōtaki Kite Festival, Ōtaki Beach
- 24-28 March - Māoriland Film Festival, Ōtaki
- 18/19 April - Ōtaki Boating Club Kāpiti Big Fish Competition

► [Check out: kapitisummer.nz](http://kapitisummer.nz)
for a full calendar of events and activities.



OBITUARY

Common sense Jim Kebbell

JIM KEBBELL
13.03.1938-13.01.2026

Organic farming pioneer Jim Kebbell was a man who made common sense – in more ways than one.

He was practical in his advice and application, and was a co-founder of Common Property in Te Horo, a catalyst for the Commonsense stores. The property was founded as a collective with wife Marion Wood and others in 1975, and was one of the first Biogro certified farms in New Zealand.

Marion's mother, Frances, insisted the land be farmed organically. Jim had grown up on a farm in Ashhurst and was initially sceptical, but changed his mind when he learned about the effect of chemicals on the soil and food chain.

Within 10 years the farm was producing more vegetables than the collective of families could eat, so they looked at selling to supermarkets. The supermarkets in those days, however, balked at Common Property's less than perfect-looking vegetables.

So Jim and Marion took their pioneering produce to the people of Wellington. They opened the first Commonsense Organics store in Wakefield Street on November 7, 1991. More than 30 years later there are five stores – four in Wellington and one in Mt Eden, Auckland.

Organics Aotearoa New Zealand said Jim and Marion helped shape the foundations of organic farming in New Zealand.

In a statement after Jim's death, Commonsense said Jim's life was "one of colour, vigour and service, underpinned by an intrinsic belief in fairness.



Photo: Commonsense

"He applied this conviction to Aotearoa's food production systems. Jim argued that us locals should have sovereignty over the food that we eat, and that growers should be reasonably remunerated for producing food that honoured the land it was grown on, and the communities it was grown for."

Writing in Substack (michaelf27.substack.com) close friend Michael Field said Jim "lived a rich life in service to others, while leading an imaginative, unruly, and never dull life of his own".

"He could have become a pope or a prime minister, perhaps even rather wealthy. Instead, he did something far better. Though he was a global citizen, he also showed – by example rather than rhetoric – what it means to be

tangata whenua, and what it means to be a decent man."

While he grew up on the land, his first job was in the priesthood. He quickly attracted the Vatican's attention and found himself on the staff of Pope John XXIII.

"It was a potential path to Catholic stardom, but Jim had doctrinal concerns, and political ones, too," Field wrote.

"Back in New Zealand, he served as chaplain to students during the Vietnam War, a time of intense protest."

Jim and Marion were awarded the New Zealand Order of Merit (NZOM) for services to sustainable business in 2021. Jim died at his home in Island Bay on January 13, 2026, aged 87.

BRIEFS

Works on Ōtaki Gorge Rd

Contractors will be working on a section of Ōtaki Gorge Road – between Harper Road and the Ōtaki airstrip – up until early April. The work involves traffic management, road widening and a pavement overlay, sealing of private vehicle accessways, new surfacing, drainage improvements, and updated road markings and signage. It is part of Kāpiti Coast District Council's ongoing road renewal programme.

Twenty-five call-outs

Ōtaki Volunteer Fire Brigade started the year with 25 call-out in January. Five were for rubbish, grass or scrub fires, and there were four property fires – including three car fires – and four call-outs to private fire alarms. The Levin and Waikanae brigades sought assistance three times, and there were three "good intent" call-outs, two of which were at the local BP station when a fog cannon was activated, looking like smoke. There were also two motor vehicle crashes to attend to, one medical emergency, and one "special service" – to help after flooding from heavy rain.

Youth Council applications open

Anyone aged 14-24 who wants to help shape the future of the district can apply to join the 2026 Kāpiti Coast Youth Council/Ngā Rangatahi o Kāpiti. It's an opportunity for rangatahi to have a say on local issues, and get involved in positive change. Apply by February 22 – search 'Youth Council' at kapiticoast.govt.nz

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HUATAU/Opinion

HE TIROHANGA HOU: HENITI BUCK

January a time for reconnecting, listening, and preparing

January often feels like a month of transition – a gentle reset after the pace of the previous year.

For many, it's a time to return home, reconnect with whānau, and slowly find our rhythm again. That was certainly the case for me as we moved out of the summer break and began preparing for the year ahead.

While council formally resumed late in the month, January is still a valuable time for groundwork. Planning for the Annual Plan is already under way, and early thinking is around priorities and establishment of new governance committees. At this stage, it's about understanding where things sit, listening carefully, and making sure we are well prepared for the decisions that will come as the year unfolds.

CAM'S CORNER: CAM BUTLER

Works around for a while yet

Roadworks are less but continuing.

Is this the last month for the wastewater pipe work? Well, yes and no.

The work at the start of Rāhui Road and the final form of the roundabout is taking place. However the pipe still has to head under the expressway and along Rāhui Road up to Freemans Road, so while further work will be out of sight for most of us, it will still impact Rāhui Road residents, racing club patrons etc.

The Old SH1 revocation has restarted with work outside the Yard area, plus more to come near Hunting & Fishing at the southern end. The revocation work has an end date in June so there is still a fair bit of work to come in that area to turn it into a shopper/pedestrian-friendly area with nice footpaths, multiple pedestrian crossings and an overall friendly environment.

We just need a few more businesses to come to Ōtaki.

First community board meeting of 2026

The Ōtaki Community Board has had its first meeting of 2026 and it was largely administrative, with acceptance of standing orders and the swearing in of community board member Jackie Elliott, yay!

However, we were happy to support the Ōtaki RSA and the Ōtaki Golf Club with community funding. We also had a presentation from council staff regarding the plan to construct an accessibility ramp near the surf club. This will be a great asset to allow mobility-impaired people



to get safely down to the beach.

Ōtaki and Te Horo Business Association (OTHBA)

OTHBA recently held an evening meeting where the problems of police staffing and break-ins in the industrial area, plus crime prevention, were discussed with Sgt Simon Middleton of Ōtaki police present. The full Ōtaki Community Board was also present, with deputy chair Simon Black speaking about the CCTV plans the community board is working on with help from the Horowhenua Community Camera Trust. While there are no quick fixes to the crime issue, there are a number of ways to combat it and a number of community groups are working on it.

Pest free Ōtaki sets up

A pest free group has been set up to cover the Ōtaki area roughly from Forest Lakes down to the Ōtaki awa. South of the awa is covered by Predator Free Te Horo.

The Ōtaki group aims to provide traps and record catches in the residential area mainly, but expanding to the rural areas as soon as they can depending on people and funding. If you are keen to participate you can check out their Facebook page or you can email them on otakipestfree@gmail.com

- Like our Ōtaki Community Board Facebook page.
- Next Ōtaki Community Board meeting is 7pm on Tuesday, March 10.

■ Cam is chair of the Ōtaki Community Board



January was also filled with community commitments beyond council. I spent time away at Māori Basketball in Rotorua and Māori Touch Nationals in Hamilton, both tamariki competitions. These tournaments are a huge effort for families, volunteers, and coaches, and it's always inspiring to see our young people supporting each other, building confidence, and representing their communities with pride. Sport continues to be a powerful connector for our rangatahi and whānau, and it was a privilege to be part of that space.

Back in Ōtaki, I attended the Ōtaki & Te Horo Business Association meeting and appreciated

the openness and collaboration in the room. Local businesses are navigating shared challenges and celebrating shared wins, and those conversations are important. One issue raised was business security, particularly the impact of repeat burglaries.

These concerns are real and unsettling, and while there are no simple solutions, continuing to work together, share information, and support one another remains vital.

I also joined a Friends of the Ōtaki River (Fotor) meeting, where planning is under way for the annual planting calendar. Hearing from the Greater Wellington Regional Council river ranger and all our incredible Fotor volunteers

reinforced how much care and expertise goes into protecting our river. Excitement is also building toward Fotor celebrations on March 21 – a reminder of the long-term commitment our community has to its environment.

At Te Puna Oranga o Ōtaki, we are about to see the return of our school lunch programme. The team is back on board and ready to deliver over 1000 meals every school day. With the school year starting, it's been great to see tamariki back with their mates and settling into routine, supported by something as simple – and important – as a nutritious meal.

January was about reconnecting, listening, and preparing. As we move further into the year, that foundation will guide the work ahead for Ōtaki.

■ Heniti is the Ōtaki Ward councillor

TE HORO OUTLOOK: MICHAEL MOORE

Hall more than an old building

There are evenings when a community remembers who it is, and a recent weekend at Te Horo Hall was one of them.



The sold-out show by Graeme James didn't just fill the hall with music – it filled it with laughter, dance, and that unmistakable hum of shared joy that lingers long after the final note fades.

Te Horo Hall is no ordinary venue. Built in 1914 by young local farmers, it stands as a quiet monument to optimism and resolve. Many of those who raised its walls would soon leave for the First World War, carrying with them the same sense of duty and community spirit that brought the hall into being.

More than a century on, it still gathers people together – not for farewells, but for celebration.

Graeme James proved to be the perfect artist for such a space. A critically acclaimed musician rooted firmly in folk's rich storytelling traditions, he carries that lineage forward with imagination and care.

On stage, he builds intricate, multi-instrumental soundscapes layer by layer, crafting textures that feel both intimate and expansive. It's music that invites you to listen closely and, judging by the spontaneous dancing and conga lines that broke out, to move when the feeling takes hold.

The hall itself rose beautifully to the occasion. After substantial renovations and earthquake-strengthening work over the past two years, Te Horo Hall feels refreshed yet unchanged in character.

During the past few years, I was delighted to advocate and gain financial support for the new air pumps, curtains, the resurfacing of the matai flooring and capital support for the earthquake works.

The timber still speaks, the acoustics still embrace, and the sense of history remains palpable. It is now safer, stronger, and more welcoming – a rare balance that many heritage buildings struggle to achieve.

Events like this remind us why such work matters. A community hall is not just a structure; it is a living space where stories continue to be made. The hope is that Graeme's sell-out show is only the beginning, inspiring more performances, gatherings, and celebrations that draw people from across the Kāpiti Coast and beyond.

Practical improvements are also on the horizon. With the energy and determination of the hall committee and the support of Kāpiti Coast District Council, the adjoining section of land is finally set to become a permanent car park later this year, after 30 years of delays. This will greatly ease the pressure on the narrow and often precarious School Road, particularly during large events.

On the recent Saturday night, history, music, and community came together in the best possible way. Te Horo Hall once again did what it was built to do – bring people together – and the result was pure joy.

- For activities and news about the hall, see tehorohall.org.nz
- Michael is a member of the Waikanae Community Board and a Te Horo resident.

THE ELECTORATE: TIM COSTLEY

Plenty to be positive about as the new year gets under way

School holidays are over and sunny Ōtaki has one again been one of the better places to be this summer, but the weather has been pretty average. I'm hoping for a great February!

I want to acknowledge the really sad events recently: the awful landslides that have taken lives in the Bay of Plenty, a flood taking one dad, and then sadly in our region a tragic helicopter crash near Paekākāriki costing two more lives.

That all sets a sad tone to the start of the year, but there is much to be positive about. The kite festival and Māoriland are just around the corner, and there have been many great summer events – from the AP&I show in Levin to summer markets, garden tours, beach events

and more. Ōtaki is a fantastic place to be in the summer and I'm proud to represent our whole region as the local MP.

There is also plenty to be positive about in our town and our region. Schools have just gone back and just before Christmas, I got to contact Matua Rauru at Ōtaki School to let him know that when the school's new property budget rolls over in July, we are increasing it by an 50%. This follows a one-off cash injection last year to enable some extra projects to be completed that otherwise wouldn't get funded.

This is significant for our town. It gives the school staff and board the chance to get work



done that might have been lingering for many years. It can mean warmer or dryer classrooms, better space for tamariki to learn and grow, and better working conditions for our amazing teachers and support staff. How that extra funding gets used is up to the school, not driven by Wellington.

It's really important to me that towns like Ōtaki get the same level of treatment that big cities get. I spend a lot of my time in Wellington knocking on the doors of ministers in the Beehive, and I'm really proud that we have delivered this for Ōtaki School.

The same funding increase is coming for

Te Horo School this year, and as each school rolls over their five-year property budget they will get the same thing. All schools will also have a learning support coordinator this year (something schools have long-asked for), teachers get their compulsory registration paid for the first time, and we've already seen the first results of our structured approach to reading and maths, and they show the amazing progress our children have made already, even in the first year.

We've made great progress in education, but as the year begins I want to acknowledge the amazing work that all staff in our schools do for our children. Good luck for term 1!

■ Tim is the Ōtaki electorate MP

Blood on the streets of Minneapolis

FOR ANYONE following news out of the US over summer, Trump is dominating all media channels, while riding in the gutter in all polled approval ratings.

This has been the trend since he was re-elected to the presidency in 2024, but recent events involving Immigration and Customs

Enforcement (Ice) in Minneapolis have been particularly disruptive for the city and catastrophic to the whole republic.

Several major developments in Minneapolis stand out, all tied to the federal

government's large-scale enforcement initiative known as Operation Metro Surge, which began in December 2025.

The Trump government has gone to war with its own citizens in the name of rooting out illegal immigrants. The truth is that he has decided to terrorise targeted communities with para-military type goons – think of Germany in the late 1930s. For example, federal agents have made over 3000 arrests in Minnesota since Operation Metro Surge began, according to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Nearly 150 US citizens have been arrested for “assault or obstructing law enforcement”, highlighting how confrontations have escalated beyond immigration enforcement.

In Minneapolis, a federal officer shot a person



Pixabay photo

on January 15 after a traffic stop escalated into an alleged attack on the officer.

Days earlier, Ice officers fatally shot Renee Good in her car, a 37-year-old mother. DHS claims she attempted to run over officers; local officials dispute this account, and citizens were able to view many online videos of the incident, clearly indicating the unprovoked killing of an innocent citizen. The incident has become a flashpoint for escalating protests and political tension.

Many Minneapolis residents – especially legal immigrants – report living in constant fear, avoiding leaving their homes for weeks. One long-time resident described being too afraid to step outside for five weeks, worried about being seized by federal agents, while church and community leaders have been delivering food and supplies to people too frightened to leave their homes.

A few days after the Good killing, a similar thing happened to Alex Petti, another US

citizen, who is not an undocumented immigrant or violent offender. He was in fact a 37-year-old, law-abiding veterans hospital nurse who happened to be on the street protesting the Ice outrage.

Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and other officials immediately said Petti was “brandishing” a handgun and attacking officers.

Once again, the video evidence and accounts from onlookers showed a completely different picture. Petti was holding a cell phone, directing traffic, and helping a woman who had been pushed to the ground by agents. There was no footage of him approaching agents with a gun, albeit he had a firearm in his belt, something he was legally entitled to do under local laws.

The mismatch between the facts and the official narrative created a massive backlash from civil rights advocates, local officials, and even pro-gun groups, calling it a “murder” and making the incident a significant

embarrassment for the Trump administration, if such a thing as embarrassment is possible?

What should we feel about all this happening, so far away?

The first obvious thing is that authoritarian behaviour, by any leader, must be seen and resisted at every turn, right from the first hints.

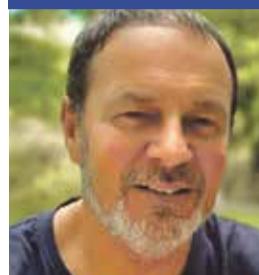
Second, it is not merely something that can happen in North Korea, Sudan or Eritrea. It can happen anywhere.

And lastly, communities and groups can empower themselves against all this, as Minneapolis is showing. Protest, just through citizens bearing witness to aggressive behaviour and videoing incidents, is clearly pushing back against a tone-deaf US government.

The fight is not over for these people, and more people will be traumatised and die before it's at an end. But it must be done if the bully is to be resisted, for the good of everyone.

■ Fraser is founder of the community-building websites flightdec.com, redoor.net and inhub.org.nz

JUST A THOUGHT



FRASER CARSON

government's large-scale enforcement initiative known as Operation Metro Surge, which began in December 2025.

The Trump government has gone to war with its own citizens in the name of rooting out illegal immigrants. The truth is that he has decided to terrorise targeted communities with para-military type goons – think of Germany in the late 1930s. For example, federal agents have made over 3000 arrests in Minnesota since Operation Metro Surge began, according to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Nearly 150 US citizens have been arrested for “assault or obstructing law enforcement”, highlighting how confrontations have escalated beyond immigration enforcement.

In Minneapolis, a federal officer shot a person

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ŌTAKI KITE FESTIVAL March 14-15, 2026

Peter Lynn Kites feature of festival magic

Peter Lynn Kites, New Zealand's best-known kite manufacturer, will again be a major attraction at the Ōtaki Kite Festival when the popular event returns to Ōtaki Beach on March 14-15.

Founded in 1973, the kite maker has grown from a small local enterprise into a world leader in the design and manufacture of large inflatable show kites. Its product range spans everything from small children's kites to giant display kites, including the eye-catching maxi octopus, which stretches to 25 metres in length.

Design work at the Ashburton plant is carried out by Peter Lynn and Simon Chisnall. Simon and wife Lyndal are regulars to the Ōtaki festival, usually flying the big kites at the southern end of the kite arena.

Peter Lynn Kites has produced many custom designs, including an 18-metre-long dragon named Toothless for 20th Century Fox, which was flown at locations across the United States and even towed along the River Thames in England,

passing through Tower Bridge.

The company has earned international recognition for building some of the largest kites ever flown. In 1997, the company set a Guinness World Record with the "Mega Ray" and "Mega Bite", kites with a lifting area of 635 square metres. A second record followed in 2005 with a 1000sq m Kuwait flag kite, and the company continues to push the limits of scale and design.

Spectators at this year's Ōtaki festival can expect to see some of these giant inflatable creations in the air, flown by Simon and Lyndal, and members of the Kite Flyers Association.

The annual Ōtaki Kite Festival, first held in 2013, has become the largest event of its kind in New Zealand, drawing thousands of visitors each



The big Peter Lynn kites are always a popular feature of the Ōtaki Kite Festival.

Photo Ōtaki Today

year for two days of colourful displays and family entertainment. The free event runs from 10am to 4pm on both days and is staged along the wide expanse of Ōtaki Beach, with the ocean and Kāpiti Island providing a dramatic natural backdrop.

Festival director Kirsty Doyle says the combination of local and international talent is a key part of the event's appeal.

"It's exciting to be able to bring such quality kite flyers to New

Zealand to showcase their awe-inspiring kites," she says. "The skies will be full of spectacular kites, from huge inflatable whales and dragons to artistic designs of all kinds."

More than 50 kite flyers are expected to take part again this year, including special international guests the Phoenix Kite Collective, an Australian stunt-kite team known for their synchronised performances and interactive approach with spectators (see opposite page).

But the festival offers more than kite flying alone. Live music, including performances by local musicians and the popular Taiko drummers, will add to the atmosphere, alongside food trucks, market stalls and family-friendly attractions such as the Kelly and Co Big Dig, a perennial favourite with children.

Kirsty says the event would not be possible without the efforts of a huge number of local volunteers.



March
14-15
2026
10am-4pm

Organised by

Ōtaki
Promotions Group

With support from

Kāpiti Coast
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Me Huri Whakamuri, Ka Titiro Whakamua



Fun-loving Phoenix back with Aussie stunts

INTERNATIONAL kite flyers from Australia will return to Ōtaki later this year, bringing high-energy aerial displays and a passion for sharing their skills with the public.

The Phoenix Kite Collective, a four-person team made up of Craig Stevens, Bazzer Poulter, Sean Dix and Neil McFadzean, last performed in Ōtaki in 2018 and say they are looking forward to coming back after several years away.

Craig told *Ōtaki Today* the invitation to return was immediately accepted.

"We got the message asking if we'd like to come over and it was an immediate yes," he says. "We have wonderful memories of Ōtaki. It's a beautiful coastal town and the people are so welcoming and generous."

The team are experienced quad-line kite flyers who perform choreographed displays to music, although Craig says their routines are deliberately flexible.

"Some teams practise set routines, but we prefer to be more organic," he says. "As long as we know the music and when it starts and finishes, we go with the flow in between."

Members of the team have been flying together for about 10 years



Members of the Phoenix Kite Collective, who will be performing with their four-string stunt kites at the Ōtaki Kite Festival on the weekend of March 14-15.

and say enjoyment is central to their performances.

"The main thing about flying in a team is having fun," Craig says. "If we make a mistake, we laugh, and the public laughs with us.

"That connection is really important

to us – people feel like they're flying with us."

That sense of connection extends beyond performances. The group regularly spends time talking with spectators and helping other kite enthusiasts improve their skills.

"We love sharing knowledge. When you see someone improve and the smile on their face, that's what keeps people interested in kite flying."

The Phoenix Kite Collective travels with a range of specialised kites so they can adapt to the changing wind

– from ultra-light models for gentle breezes to heavily vented sails capable of flying in winds of 30km/h or more, or in the rain.

"Wind conditions can change quickly, especially at the beach," Craig says. "We remember that from the last time we were in Ōtaki, so we'll bring multiple sails."

Audiences can also expect to see some of the team's signature manoeuvres, including one that's become one of their "go-to" moves.

"The last time we were in Ōtaki we came up with what we called the 'Ōtaki Roll'. It's one of our favourite moves."

Festival organisers say visiting teams such as the Phoenix Kite Collective help inspire the next generation of kite flyers at a time when many enthusiasts are ageing.

Craig says encouraging newcomers is vital, and that kite flying offers benefits beyond recreation.

"It's wonderful for mental health," he says. "You're outside, feeling the wind, connected with nature, and just enjoying the moment. The wind is free – you just have to go out and enjoy it."

The team say they are happy to meet spectators and talk about kite flying when they are not performing, and even give beginners a chance to try flying a kite for themselves.

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With solid qualifications, a supportive employer, and the drive to keep learning, these two brothers truly are building a bright future together.



Nothing motivates us more than catching up with past students and hearing how their career plans have unfolded. For brothers Kae and Wahia, everything is tracking just as they'd hoped, and they're buzzing about what lies ahead.

Kae and Wahia both completed the year-long New Zealand Certificate in Trades (Carpentry) Level 3 at Te Puna Whai Mātauranga. Kae finished in 2020 and is now a fully qualified carpenter, while Wahia is on the home stretch of his apprenticeship after starting after his study in 2021.

Today you'll find them side-by-side at Greenaway's Building Ltd. in Ōtaki. They're quick to credit owner-operator Luke Greenaway for his ongoing guidance. With 17 years of building experience and another decade leading teams in the military, Luke models professionalism and continuous learning, qualities he expects from his hand-picked crew.

The brothers also point to their tutor Manu as a key factor in their success.

"Manu made the effort to know us individually," Kae and Wahia says. "His support was tailored to what each of us needed. He was approachable and down-to-earth, no question was ever a dumb one. Of course, that didn't mean we could slack off; we still had to do the work."

Manu remembers them just as fondly. "Both Kae and Wahia stood out from day one," he says. "Their attitude, determination, and work ethic were exceptional. I've never doubted they'll achieve whatever goals they set."

When invited to share their advice for future students, they offered this insight:

"Put your head down, do the mahi, and the rewards will follow."

From Left
Whakaue Winiata (Kae)
Manu Miller, Trades Tutor
Te Rangiwawahia Winiata (Wahia)

MAHI MĀRA/Gardening

Dealing with the dreaded brown rot

BROWN ROT (*monilinia fructicola*) is a fungal disease that affects mostly peaches and nectarines, but apricots too. It's a mean old disease because it shows up at the end, right before harvest, just when fruits look fat and juicy and promising.

The rotten spots advance at the speed of light, and within a short matter of 48 hours can cover a whole fruit. Brown rot, like most fungal pathogens, begins in spring with wet weather at flowering. The spores get into the blossom – dried flowers are an early warning sign, nip them out! Twig blight and canker carry the flag – rot is the end game. Don't take fungi personally, the environment is ripe for it, that's all.

Prevention is possible with the right variety planted in the right spot and a garden that hums with beneficial fungi. Outcompeting the pathogens is the name of the game.

The right variety in the right spot

Two peaches resist brown rot. Sanguine, or blood peach (formerly known as Black Boy), and the locally famous River peach,

the little white sweet one. Seedling trees are the hardiest of all, especially when grown from locally sourced seed. They're easy to grow.

Choose the location well. Give them loads of sun from spring blossom to ripening, and be sure of free drainage – put your plums and pears in the valleys, and your peaches on the slope. Awesome airflow is key, a bit windy even – peaches handle it.

A diversity of groundcovers around and beneath your

fruit trees drives a diversity of soil microbes, including fungi, which in the long run, creates just the right fertility for fruit trees. The world's your oyster as far as plant choice goes – be sure to include lots of tap roots like comfrey, dandelion, chicory, and pollen and nectar-producing flowers to span the growing season. Include food like leafy greens, pumpkins, herbs, and your fav flowers, too.

Feed and prune

Fruit trees don't need lots of feeding. Overfeed tree with nitrogen or artificial fertilisers and you tip the balance of beneficial soil fungi, making trees vulnerable to pathogenic fungi such as brown rot, and incidentally, pests as well.

The time to feed is in the early years, so as to develop a strong frame and root system. And even then all they need is homemade compost and/or vermicastings. If you live and garden in the fertile strip of Ōtaki or Horowhenua near SH1, chances are you don't need even that! Either way, a mixed ramial woodchip (from small, young tree branches) is the way to go to boost fungal allies.

Prune on a dry day in summer, immediately after harvest, not in winter.

Biological fungicide

Copper kills beneficial fungi on the tree and in the soil – don't do it! If you must grow a brown rot vulnerable peach or nectarine use Botry-Zen, a biological fungicide that enhances, not destroys, the fungal kingdom. Buy some in now, ready to use at bud swell in spring.

■ *Kath has been growing food for her family for 21 years. Spray-free, natural, low-input food gardens are her thing. Kath offers organic gardening advice through her articles, books, workshops, and garden consultations.*



Brown rot ruining fruit on a peach tree.



The locally famous River peach is rot resistant.

Photos Kath Irvine

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John Bertrand Collectables Are Buying in Otaki & Kapiti Coast 26th and 27th February

Once again, the gold and collectables buyers from Wellington company John Bertrand Collectables are visiting Otaki and Kapiti Coast on 26th and 27th February. Mr. Kevin George from the company says, "If you are downsizing or wanting to dispose of things because they no longer serve any purpose to you or your family bring them in". "26th and 27th February will be a great opportunity to have any items you want to sell assessed by our buyers" said Mr. George. Particularly wanted are Gold and Silver (in any of its forms) and Collectables such as Coins, Banknotes, War Medals, Old Wind-up Watches and other interesting Small Collectables.

"We are keen buyers, especially of the items in the list below" said Mr. George. "Nothing is too small for our consideration. We are just as happy buying 1 item as we are buying 1,000 items" he said. The buyers will be in Otaki and Kapiti Coast on 26th and 27th February. (see details below). As Kevin George points out "If you are in doubt about any items you may wish to sell, bring them along for an instant appraisal."



Mr Kevin George
Senior Buyer
John Bertrand (Collectables) Ltd

Gold & Silver At Historically High Prices

During these uncertain times we have seen a sharp increase in the price of precious metals. The gold price in New Zealand is at near record levels so gather up all your unwanted items and take them along to the buyers. Kevin George says "We can buy gold items in all forms, including Jewellery (Rings, Chains, Brooches etc), Coins (Sovereigns and the like), Alluvial (River Gold), virtually anything, even Gold Teeth! We also need all Sterling Silver including Cups, Tea Services, Cutlery and Old Coins" he said.



Some Big Dollars in Early Banknotes

Early New Zealand Banknotes dated before 1932 are currently fetching big money! This is according to Mr. Kevin George, Senior Buyer. Mr. George is in Otaki and Kapiti Coast on 26th and 27th February on a buying trip for John Bertrand (Collectables) Ltd and would be very keen to see any of these issues. "We will pay at least \$300 for any undamaged Ten Shilling or One Pound banknote from a New Zealand

Interesting Small Collectables Wanted

The buyers from John Bertrand (Collectables) Ltd, visiting Otaki and Kapiti Coast on 26th and 27th February, are happy to look at any interesting items, for example vintage pocket and wristwatches such as Rolex, Men's Omega, Breitling and gold watches etc. Also wanted, pre 1920's picture postcards, Maori and Pacific artefacts, old fountain pens and other small antique or historical items.

"If you have something unusual which you would like to sell, please bring it into one of our venues, we would like the chance to at least have a look at it" said Kevin George, buyer for the Company. "We will consider anything which may be of interest to a collector" he said.

Collectors Need War Medals

Currently, throughout NZ and the world there is a big demand by collectors for war medals. These cover all wars right through from the New Zealand Land Wars and the Boer War, to the First and Second World Wars and the later Korea and Vietnam conflicts. New Zealand Servicemen and Women first served overseas in the Boer War in South Africa around 1900 and the war medals awarded for this service are needed by the buyers, as are any other Medals from early New Zealand and the New Zealand Wars.

General service medals from both the First and Second World Wars will also be purchased, but as can be imagined these were awarded in fairly large numbers. "If a group of medals has any special award for bravery such as the Military Medal, Military or Flying Cross or other medals for Distinguished Conduct or Meritorious Service, these can add great value to a group" stated Mr. Kevin George, buyer for John Bertrand (Collectables) Ltd. "Many families have old medals, some dating back to early Imperial days, that they are not sure what to do with. These are better off in the hands of collectors who will look after them. We will be happy to look at any war medals whatsoever, just bring them in to venues" he said.

Old Coins Can Toss Up a Rarity

Do you have a bunch of old coins sitting around in your drawers and cupboards? You just never know what rarities may be lurking there. The advice from Kevin George from John Bertrand (Collectables) Limited is to "bring them in and let us have a look". "No need to sort anything out just bring them in 'as is' and please don't clean them! We can go through coin accumulations and collections fairly quickly" he said. The buyers are particularly keen to buy pre 1946 New Zealand Silver Coins and World Silver Coins. "In any event we will buy All Coins," said Mr. George.

JOHN BERTRAND (COLLECTABLES) ARE BUYING NOW!!

OLD GOLD

- Unwanted Jewellery or Broken Rings
- Gold Chains
- Gold Watch Cases
- Alluvial (River) Gold
- Dental Gold
- Gold Coins
- Gold Racing & Trophy Cups



COINS

- All Gold & Silver Coins
- Gold Sovereigns
- Gold Half Sovereigns
- NZ Silver Coins 1946 & Before
- Also wanted NZ & World Coins after 1946
- Australian Silver Coins to 1963
- English Silver Coins to 1946
- NZ 1935 "Waitangi Crown"
- USA Coins up to 1964
- Old Collections & Accumulations of World Coins
- Modern Collector's Coins & Sets
- NZ Reserve Bank Sets
- *No Pennies or Halfpennies Please*



BANKNOTES

- NZ & Australian "Trading Bank" Notes pre 1932 (e.g. Bank of New South Wales, Bank of NZ etc)
- Reserve Bank of NZ Pre-Decimal Notes
- Any £20, £50 or £100 Notes
- Hong Kong & Malayan Banknotes
- Australian Pre Decimal Notes
- Australian "Star" Notes
- Early Fijian and Samoan Banknotes
- NZ Traders Promissary Notes (1840s)
- NZ Government Debentures
- NZ Banknotes overprinted for use in Fiji, Cook Islands etc
- Postal Notes
- All other World Banknotes



GOLD & SILVER

- Racing Cups
- A&P Show Cups
- Sports Cups
- Presentation Keys & Trowels
- Show Pieces
- Sterling Silver Tea Sets
- Sterling Silver Cutlery
- Scrap Gold & Silver

No EPNS or Silver Plated items Please

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- Gold & Silver Pocket Watches
- Any Rolex Watches
- Omega Gents Watches
- Any Breitling, Jaeger Le Coultre, Vacheron & Constantin, Patek Philippe, or IWC Watches
- Moon Phase Watches
- Chiming or Alarm Watches (Pocket or Wrist)
- Military Watches
- Divers Watches
- All other pre 1950s wind up watches (parts value only)

No Quartz or Battery Operated Watches Please

COLLECTABLES

TOKENS

- NZ & Australian "Tradesmen's" Tokens
- NZ Transportation Tokens
- Railway Passes
- Tram Tokens (not Dunedin Tramways)
- Presbyterian Church Communion Tokens
- Bread Tokens
- Theatre, Cafe, Discount Tokens etc
- Any other tokens relating to early New Zealand

COLLECTABLES

- Albums & Accumulations of Pre 1920s Postcards (used or unused)
- Old Fountain Pens
- Maori & Pacific Artefacts

No item too small for our consideration

WAR MEDALS ETC

- The New Zealand Wars & Boer War Medals
- 1st World War Medals
- 2nd World War Medals, Stars etc
- Orders and Decorations
- Korea & Vietnam Medals
- Antarctic or other Polar Medals
- Fire Brigade Medals
- Lodge Medals
- Shooting Medals
- Military Badges and all other Military Medals
- Gold returning Fob Medals or "Tokens of Honour" from residents of small town New Zealand



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- Prize Medals (Gold & Silver)
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- Coronation Medals
- etc, etc, etc

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Thurs 26 Feb

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3 pm to 4 pm

PARAPARAUMU BEACH

Fri 27 Feb

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45 Ocean Road

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HAUORA/Health

Mixed messages with RFK's 'new' food pyramid

THE TRUMP administration and Robert F Kennedy Jr have released updated dietary guidelines accompanied by a new visual food pyramid, with Kennedy describing the changes as "the most significant reset of federal nutrition policy in history" and a pivotal step that promises to "Make America Healthy Again".

New Zealand's food recommendations are

HEALTH SCIENCE



DR STEVE HUMPHRIES

routinely shaped by US research and policy, so how does the science behind the new proposals hold up?

Despite Kennedy's "ground-breaking" rhetoric, many of the new recommendations simply continue earlier policy and remain consistent with long-standing dietary science.

"My message is clear: eat real food," Kennedy says, emphasising nutrient-dense whole foods and limiting ultra-processed products, refined carbohydrates and sugar. It's a message nutrition scientists have championed for years – for example, through Mediterranean-style eating patterns – though whether people follow that advice is another matter.

But many elements of the new "inverted" food pyramid diverge sharply from the prevailing

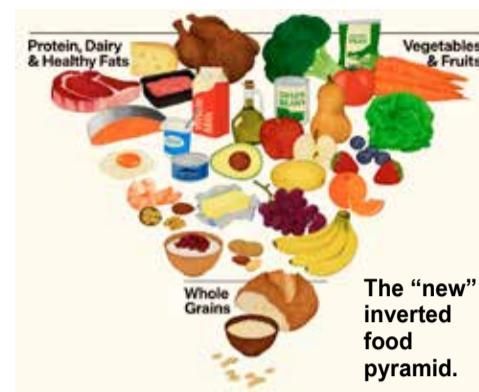
body of evidence-based nutritional research..

It gives visual priority to animal foods and fats, featuring a turkey, full-fat milk, cheese, and an inch-thick ribeye steak at the top in the "eat most" zone – with Kennedy framing the shift as "ending the war on saturated fats". While it's true that, in moderation, foods like whole milk can fit within a balanced, healthy diet, Kennedy's portrayal runs counter to decades of cardiovascular research showing that intake of animal-derived saturated fats should be limited.

Yet in the text of the new food guidelines report, the long-standing recommendation that saturated fat should make up less than 10% of daily calories is retained. In effect, Kennedy's "new" recommendation is entirely consistent with the existing World Health Organization guidance, falls within the range typical of a Mediterranean-style diet, and is identical to the previous US Dietary Guidelines (2020–2025). The guideline report says one thing, the visual food pyramid implies another – a confusing mixed message.

Nutrition experts worry, however, that many people will not read the fine print. Instead, they may be swayed by the visual message of the pyramid, which elevates animal foods and saturated fats to a position of prominence, and which could encourage excessive consumption.

Kennedy has also advised increasing protein intake, particularly animal protein – in some cases up to double previous recommendations. Yet population-level surveys show that in both the US and New Zealand, protein intake is already adequate, with higher intakes needed only for some older adults or for people building muscle through strength or resistance training.



The "new" inverted food pyramid.

Encouraging people to eat more animal protein risks giving them even more saturated fat and protein, neither of which they actually need. And an unnecessary focus on boosting protein consumption could divert attention from New Zealand's real nutritional challenges: low fibre intake, insufficient fruit and vegetables, high consumption of sodium, sugar, and saturated fat, and the widespread use of ultra-processed foods.

Protein is already overmarketed, driven by "protein washing" where manufacturers use high-protein claims to capitalise on wellness trends to boost sales.

Another anomaly in the new food pyramid is that whole grains are pushed into the smallest group at the bottom. Yet substantial research shows a clear distinction: while refined grains are linked to poorer health outcomes, whole grains are consistently associated with better health. There is concern that the pyramid's imagery could mislead people into cutting back on high-fibre staples such as whole-wheat

products, oats, and brown rice – foods that also provide a steady, sustained release of energy.

Again, in its oddly contradictory fashion, the guideline report actually recommends two to four servings of fibre-rich whole grains a day despite the pyramid's visual message implying they belong in the "eat least" category.

So how did animal saturated fat and protein come to occupy such a prominent position in the new food pyramid, while whole grains were pushed to the margins and treated as low priority? Critics argue the answer is less about science and more about industry influence. Although the food-guideline report claims the review scientists were selected for their expertise and lack of conflicts of interest, that assurance doesn't hold up to inspection: six of the nine reviewers commissioned by Kennedy had direct financial ties to beef and dairy trade groups (including Fonterra) and protein-supplement companies.

The new food pyramid closely mirrors Kennedy's long-standing personal preference for steak-heavy, animal protein meals, and it aligns with the commercial interests of the meat and dairy industries. A graphic that visually elevates meat and dairy – while the fine print quietly preserves the old recommendations – advances those interests without having to change or challenge the underlying science.

When visuals contradict text, the visuals almost always shape public perception. That's why the contradiction matters. Kennedy's new food pyramid isn't science; it's an ideological statement and a marketing tool.

■ *Dr Steve Humphries is a director at Hebe Botanicals in Ōtaki. He was a lecturer at Massey University and director of the Health Science Programme.*

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Pets and rental property

HAVE the kids been bugging you for a pet over the school holidays, but you rent your house so you're not sure if you can have one?

New rules make it easier for tenants to have pets. So what can you do?

First, look at your tenancy agreement and have a chat to your landlord – you need their agreement whether you're thinking about getting a goldfish or a great dane. Get their agreement in writing and they can let you know of any reasonable conditions or rules around having pets.

If your landlord agrees, they can charge you a pet bond – up to two weeks' rent. It can be charged only once, even if you have more than one pet, and it must be lodged with Tenancy Services. If your pet dies or is no longer at the property, you can ask for the pet bond to be refunded – you don't have to wait for the end of your tenancy.

If you get the bond refunded and then decide to get a new pet, you might need to pay another bond. Otherwise, your pet bond should be refunded in full at the end of your tenancy, as long as your pet has caused no damage.

Your landlord can refuse your request for having a pet only if they have good reason. This might be:

- if the pet you are considering is inappropriate for the property, like a large dog in a small property
- if the pet is known to have caused damage or disruption before or has attacked people or animals
- if a new pet means there would be more pets on the property than is suitable

CITIZENS ADVICE



MARIA FYVIE

- if you have previously kept pets without permission or if you don't comply with local animal bylaws and are seen as an irresponsible pet owner.

Landlords can't stop you having a disability assistance dog in a rented property. Disability assistance dogs are certified under law and include guide dogs and hearing dogs. If you have one, you don't need consent or to pay a pet bond. Note an emotional

support animal is not the same as a disability assistance dog.

Having a pet means you're responsible for repairing any damage the pet or pet-related activity does to the property, for example, if a leaking fishtank damages carpet. If repairing the damage costs more than the pet bond you've paid, you're likely to be responsible for the full cost of repair.

This all might sound like too much hassle, but don't take the risk of getting the pet and hoping the landlord won't find out. Your landlord has the power to ask you to remove your pet within 14 days. If you refuse, your landlord can take you to the Tenancy Tribunal. That's way more stressful than having a chat and getting everything agreed to up front!

• *If you'd like to find out more about your rights and obligations around having a pet in a rental property, pop in to see our Citizens Advice Bureau volunteers at 65a Main Street between 10am and 1pm, Monday-Friday, call us on 06 364 8664 or go to cab.org.nz and search 'pet rules' in the Ask Us box.*

■ Maria is secretary of Kāpiti CAB

'Pre-nup' agreements

TALKING about money and property isn't always romantic, but it's a crucial conversation for modern couples.

You've probably heard of "pre-nups" from American films, but in New Zealand we have our own version called a contracting out agreement. This legal document is a powerful tool for couples to decide for themselves how their property will be managed if their relationship ends.

Under the Property (Relationships) Act 1976 (PRA), the starting point is that after three years together, a couple's "relationship property" is divided equally upon separation. A contracting out agreement allows you and your partner to "contract out" of this rule. You can make your own arrangements for the status, ownership, and division of your current and future property.

This is particularly useful if:

- one partner enters the relationship with significantly more assets, like a house or a business
- you want to protect an expected inheritance or gifts from family
- it's a second relationship and you want to preserve assets for children from a previous marriage.
- you simply want certainty about your financial futures, no matter what happens.

For a contracting out agreement to be legally binding, it must meet strict requirements set out in section 21F of the PRA. If these aren't followed, the agreement is void.

- It must be in writing and signed by both partners
- each partner must receive independent legal advice from their own lawyer before signing.

- each signature must be witnessed by a lawyer.
- the witnessing lawyer must certify that they explained the agreement's effects and implications to their client before they signed.

It's common for one partner, often the one with more assets, to be the driving force behind an agreement. This can create pressure, with an explicit or implicit understanding that the relationship might not continue

without it.

The courts recognise this reality. As long as the strict legal requirements – especially independent legal advice – are met, the agreement is unlikely to be set aside simply because one person felt pressured to sign. The legal advice requirement is the key safeguard to ensure both parties understand what they are agreeing to.

Even a perfectly executed agreement can be challenged. Under section 21J of the PRA, the Family Court can set an agreement aside if giving effect to it would cause "serious injustice". The court will consider all circumstances, including the length of the relationship and whether the agreement has become unfair over time due to changed circumstances. This provides a final, but high, threshold for fairness.

Ultimately, a contracting out agreement offers couples clarity and control. By having an open conversation and following the correct legal process, you can create a fair plan that protects you both.

■ Corinna is a solicitor at Wakefields Lawyers – 04 9780 3600 or info@wakefieldslaw.com

Ngā Taonga shares treasured glimpse of Waitangi

Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision, the audiovisual archive of Aotearoa New Zealand, is sharing a special compilation of archival film in recognition of Waitangi Day 2026.

Two very different, yet equally significant commemorations at Waitangi Treaty Grounds are highlighted in *He Tiroiro Whakamuri*. Remarkable footage from 1934 shows the huge crowds gathered to officially mark the

coming together of two nations under the mana of Te Tiriti o Waitangi for the first time. About 10,000 visitors attended the historic event full of ceremony and cultural performances.

Then, 150 years after the signing of Te Tiriti, Waitangi Treaty Grounds were again inundated with thousands of people attending the commemorations on February 6, 1990. Bishop Whakahuihui Vercoe gave his powerful address before an audience including Queen Elizabeth II, then Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer, and Sir Graham Latimer of the New Zealand Māori Council.

■ Go to www.ngataonga.org.nz to watch the compilation.



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GOT A GOOD NEWS STORY? Seen something we should know about?

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This series of profiles on local businesses is supported by Land Matters and Pritchard Civil

Big bids, small town – the Mowbray way

MOWBRAY COLLECTABLES has been part of Ōtaki's business landscape for more than half a century, and the long-established auction house shows no sign of slowing down – or moving anywhere else.

Specialising in stamps, coins, banknotes and sports memorabilia, Mowbray has grown from a small-town enterprise into New Zealand's leading collectibles auction house, with a global client base and a string of record-setting sales to its name.

Last year the company achieved a world record price for a New Zealand stamp, selling a rare example featuring an inverted Taupō scene for \$263,250. Now it's preparing for what is shaping up to be another record-breaking auction.

The centrepiece of Mowbray's March 20-21 international auction is a New Zealand Cross awarded to Dr Isaac Earl Featherston for bravery during the West Coast campaigns of 1865-66 in the New Zealand Wars. Featherston later became the first superintendent of Wellington Province and was one of the most influential figures in colonial New Zealand.

The medal is expected to fetch about \$200,000, although Mowbray chief executive David Galt says strong interest could push the final price higher. Only 23 New Zealand Crosses were struck, and most are held in museums.

"After about 150 years, this is the first time one has come to market," David says. "It's incredibly rare and historically significant. It's one of the most iconic Wellington-related objects you could own."

The Featherston medal is part of a catalogue valued at \$750,000 – another record for the company. Across stamps and coins combined, the March auction will offer about \$1.85 million worth of material.

While interest has already been signalled from within New Zealand, overseas buyers are also expected to compete.

Mowbray founder John Mowbray says more than half of the stamps the company sells each month are exported, underscoring the international reach of the business.

"From the very beginning we had to look



Mowbray Collectables founder John Mowbray, left, with chief executive David Galt, who is holding the rare New Zealand Cross due to be auctioned in March. Behind them is an image of the "inverted Taupō" stamp that sold last year for a world record \$263,250.

Photo Ōtaki Today

beyond our immediate area," he says. "The wider we looked, the easier it became to deal with the world. Fifty years later, that's still as relevant as ever."

Founded in the mid-1960s, John initially focused on coins before expanding into stamps and later banknotes and medals. The company's reputation for expertise in New Zealand material has drawn collectors from around the world, even though the firm handles significant overseas items as well.

People now regularly travel from Auckland, Wellington and further afield to visit the Ōtaki

premises, a trend helped by improved transport links, but driven mainly by the company's standing in the collectibles market.

Despite its traditional focus on physical objects, Mowbray has embraced technological change where it adds value.

AI tools are already being used behind the scenes for cataloguing and written material, and online platforms now play a major role in marketing and bidding.

"The principles of what we do are solid," David says. "But the way we do it has to evolve if we're to continue thriving."

The company currently employs about 18 staff, mostly based in Ōtaki, and is in the process of hiring more. This year is shaping up to be a record for turnover, reinforcing John's view that Ōtaki remains a good place to do business.

"I've never thought we'd leave Ōtaki," he says. "We might expand out of here, but this will always be our base."

As Mowbray Collectables prepares to host another large auction, the business stands as an example of how a specialist enterprise can thrive internationally while remaining firmly rooted in a small New Zealand town.



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HĪTORIA/History

Following the stream of our heritage

OVER the past couple of months, four of us from Ōtaki Heritage have been working on the next exhibition for the Ōtaki Museum.

Planned to open in mid-May, the exhibition will be centred around stories of Ōtaki from 1921, when it was formed as an independent borough, to 1989 when, as part of local

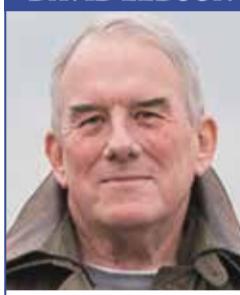
government reorganisation, it was incorporated into the new Kāpiti Coast District. The town changed over those years, so too did the museum building and the street on which it was located.

This exhibition, which will be the fourth to cover Ōtaki, follows ones on The Railway,

The Beach, and The Township (from 1843 to 1921). Currently our thinking is that the next exhibition will be one that draws on material from all four exhibitions to showcase the town's journey from 1843 to the place we know today.

Our work to date has allowed us to develop a basic framework for the exhibition – much as an author would develop chapters for a book. The main areas we have settled on include hard and prosperous times of the 1930s to 1960s,

DAVID LEDSON



ŌTAKI HERITAGE



Waitohu Stream in the vicinity of the water intake, January 2026. Photo David Ledson

the development of commerce and industry, providing community services through churches, hospitals and schools, establishing community connections through clubs, groups, and associations, and the town's connection with war through the various war memorials.

We are keen, too, to record the revitalisation of te reo through the establishment of the wānanga and kura.

Also included are stories from the first decade of Ōtaki Borough Council's existence, characterised as the good and bad years.

In those years, the council was determined to provide the infrastructure that many of the townspeople believed were vital to the town's standing. The sentiment was captured in a March 14, 1928, edition of *Otaki Mail*: *"The march of civilisation demands that proper improvements consistent with the increasing standard of living of the people be made from time to time."*

The councillors wanted to provide electricity, underground drainage and sewerage systems, and a high-pressure freshwater system. I

started researching the freshwater system, and while I found quite a bit of narrative in newspapers of the time, and in past copies of the *Ōtaki Historical Journal*, I couldn't find any photographs. This was disappointing because our exhibition designs require both narrative and image.

Then, I found an article in a June 21, 1922, issue of *Otaki Mail* that mentioned: *"Otaki is on the verge of spending several thousands of pounds ... installing much needed water-works ... The locality is (on the Waitohu Stream) about 4½ miles [7km] from the Otaki Post Office."*

I seized on this clue, went to Google maps, measured the distance and identified a location near the eastern boundary of the Waitohu Quarry. A couple of days later I drove to the area, and, following local guidance I trudged along a track for about 30 minutes and found nothing of interest.

Trudging back, shoulders sagging and head bowed, I called into a neighbouring property. The water intake site was known and, thankfully, I was driven within a short stroll of it. At the stream I could see the remains of the retaining tank and other equipment from the 1920s.

Photographs taken, I reflected that until then, I had only ever thought of the Waitohu Stream in the context of its passage through dunes at the beach, and never of it as free flowing in a bush setting. The character of the stream at the end of its journey is quite different from that at its beginning – like many journeys we take in life.

■ David is chair of Ōtaki Heritage.

TE WHAKAMINENGA O KĀPITI

KIA HIWA RĀ! Māori Economic Development Fund

Applications for Council's Māori Economic Development Fund are now open. There is \$80,000 available for projects that align with the Māori Economic Development Strategy.

The fund assists whānau, hapū, iwi, mātāwaka and Māori in Kāpiti with the ongoing costs of developing Māori business.

Applications close Sunday, 22 March 2026.

This is a contestable fund. Amounts awarded will be based on the strength of each application's alignment to the strategy.

Find criteria and apply at
www.kapiticoast.govt.nz/maoriedgrant

Information sessions will be held on request. If you'd like to discuss a possible application get in touch now to arrange a meeting.

For further information contact:

Advisor Iwi Projects
Kāpiti Coast District Council
Ph: 04 296 4700 or 0800 486 486
Email: kapiti.council@kapiticoast.govt.nz

ŌTAKI SCHOOL 1966



GOT OLD PHOTOS?

If you have old school photos – or any photos of old Ōtaki – please get in touch. We're building our archive so we can keep publishing snapshots of life when the town and district were younger.

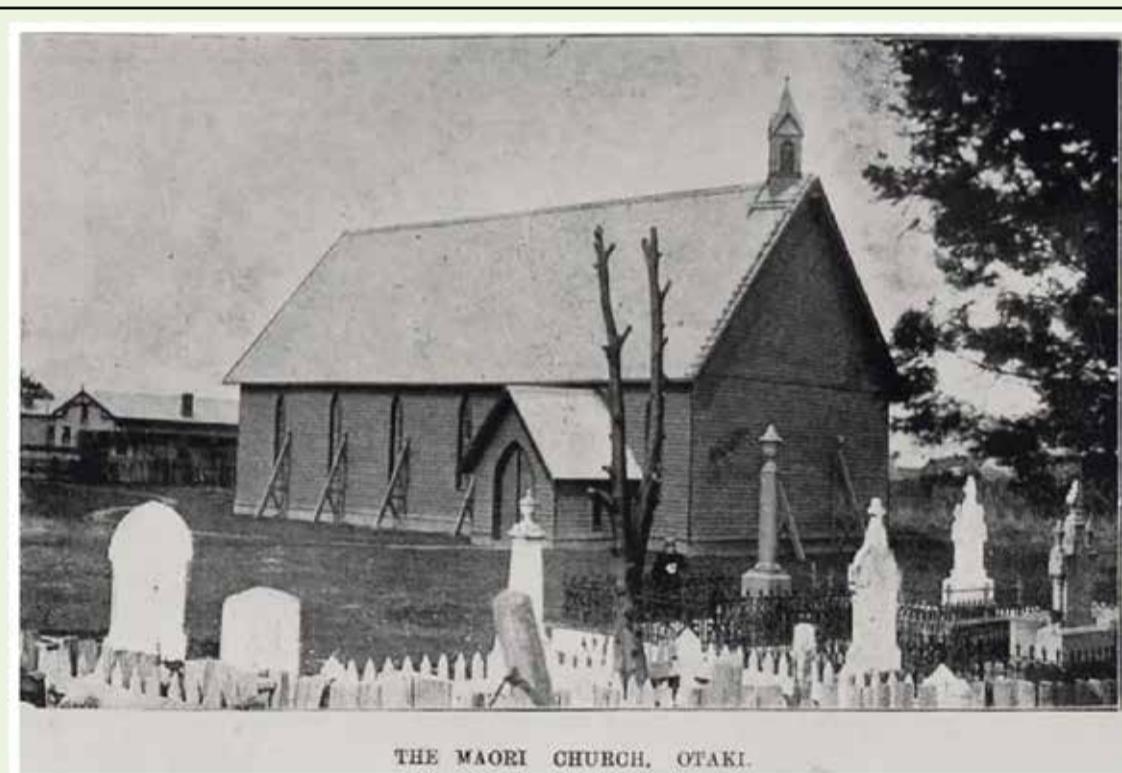
Email us, including names and other information if you can. Contact debbi@idmedia.co.nz with additions or corrections to captions.

ŌTAKI PRIMARY SCHOOL 1966:
This group of 5 and 6-year-olds will be in their mid 60s now. Are you in this class? Email us names of those we don't know, or any corrections to debbi@idmedia.co.nz

Back row: Dawson Wilson, Simon Winterburn, Owen Larson, Alan Turner, Russell Growcott, unknown, Philip Hosie.

Middle row: Teacher Miss Carter, Meihana Edwards, Jamie MacDonald, Raymond Shields, Noel Wells, Pete Housiaux, Kevin Bird, unknown.

Front row: Lorraine Winiata, unknown, Mary Heney, Megan Jones, Christine Windley, Theresa Ludlam, Lesley Carpenter, Lesley Ferretti, Diane Edhouse, unknown (Seng), unknown.



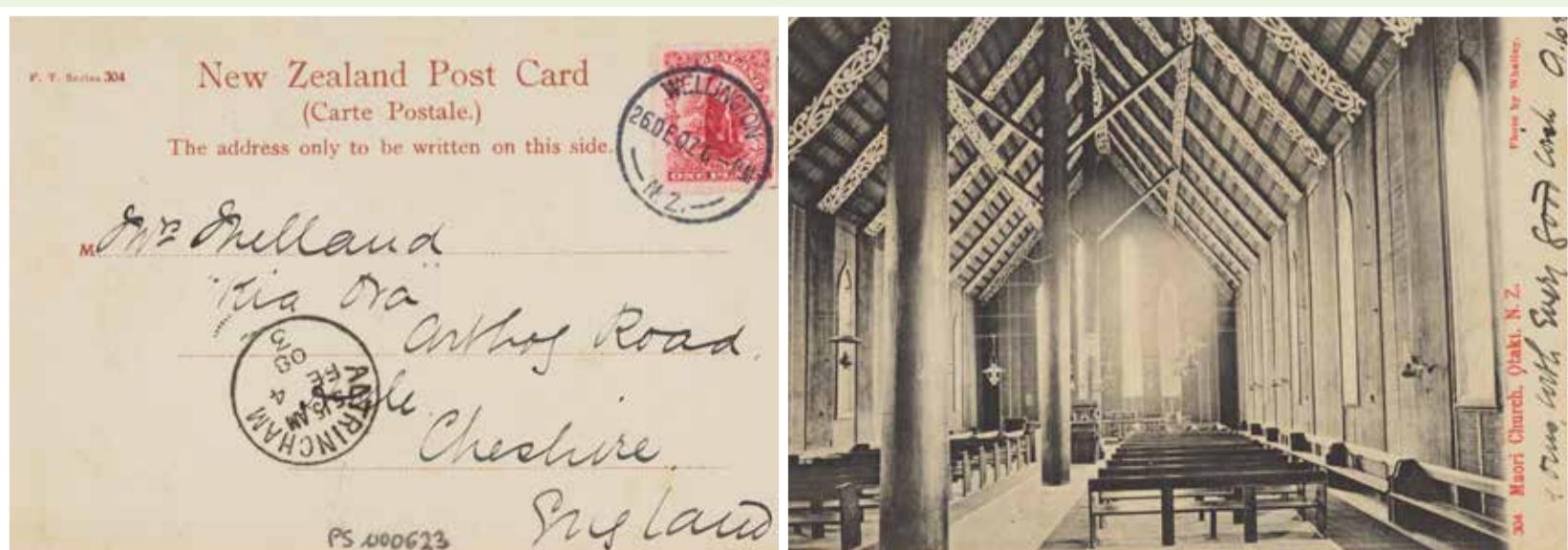
EARLY RANGIĀTEA

The image at left of Ōtaki's historic Rangiātea Church was taken in 1901 and is part of the Auckland Libraries Collection. It was originally published in the *Auckland Weekly News*.

The image above is part of the Manawatū Heritage collection. The photograph appears to be from about the same time as the photo at left.

COLLECTIBLE OLD POSTCARDS

Old New Zealand postcards from the early 1900s to 1960s featuring scenic views, Māori portraits, and town scenes are popular collectibles. They are often high contrast black-and-white or sepia-toned cards. Early 1900s cards usually depicted images of towns, shipping, and landmarks. Māori portraits and culture postcards were often uncredited, sometimes with limited context.



The postcard above depicting the interior of Rangiātea Church, held by Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, was posted from Wellington to Cheshire, England, in 1901.

Images credit: Māori Church, Ōtaki, N.Z., circa 1908, Wellington, by Whalley & Co. Gift of Patricia M. Mitchell, 1989. Te Papa (PS.000623)



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Rentokil
Rural & Environmental Services

Southern Tararua & Project Kaka Aerial Pest Control Operations

Rentokil Rural & Environmental Services wishes to advise the public of its intention to aerially apply the toxin Sodium Fluoroacetate (1080) for the purpose of controlling pests in the Southern Tararua ranges.

The Southern Tararua operation is being undertaken as part of OSPRI New Zealand's TBfree programme to protect local farms from tuberculosis infection. The Project Kaka operation is at the Northern end of OSPRI's TB Management Area in Southern Tararua, OSPRI NZ is managing the Project Kaka operation on behalf of the Department of Conservation (DOC).

Control Area:

The Southern Tararua Ranges north of the Remutaka Hill Road (SH2), east of Akatarawa Road, south of Tarn Ridge Hut, west of Greytown. A map of the treatment area may be viewed on the OSPRI website: <https://www.ospri.co.nz/tb-and-pest-control/aerial-operations>

Commencement Date:

The operation will commence with the application of non-toxic cereal pre-feed pellets beginning on the first day of favourable weather from early February 2026. At least 5 days following the completion of pre-feeding, in the next suitable weather window, the application of cereal pellets containing 1080 will commence.

Southern Tararua Bait Description:

Pre-feed: Cereal based pellet, approximately 16mm in diameter, brown in colour.

Toxic bait (Sodium Fluoroacetate (1080): Cereal based pellet, approximately 20mm in diameter & dyed green).

Project Kaka Bait Description:

Pre-feed: Cereal based pellet, approximately 16mm in diameter, brown in colour.

Toxic bait (Sodium Fluoroacetate (1080): Cereal based pellet, approximately 16mm in diameter & dyed green).

Managing risk

1080 is poisonous to humans, domestic and game animals. In areas where the toxin has been applied, dogs are highly at risk until poisoned carcasses have disintegrated. This takes four-to-eight months or longer.

There will be warning signs placed at entrances to the treatment area immediately prior to the operation.

Risks can be eliminated by following these rules:

- **DO NOT touch bait**
- **WATCH children at all times**
- **DO NOT EAT animals from this area** or within the buffer zone outside the treatment boundary. The buffer zone is 2 km for deer and pigs, 200 m for rabbits, and 1 km for hares and possums.
- **Poison baits or carcasses are DEADLY to DOGS**

Observe these rules whenever you see warning signs about pesticides. These signs indicate pesticide residues may be still present in baits and poisoned carcasses. When signs are removed, normal activities can resume. If in doubt, check with your local OSPRI office. Please report suspected vandalism or unauthorised removal of signs.

Further Information:

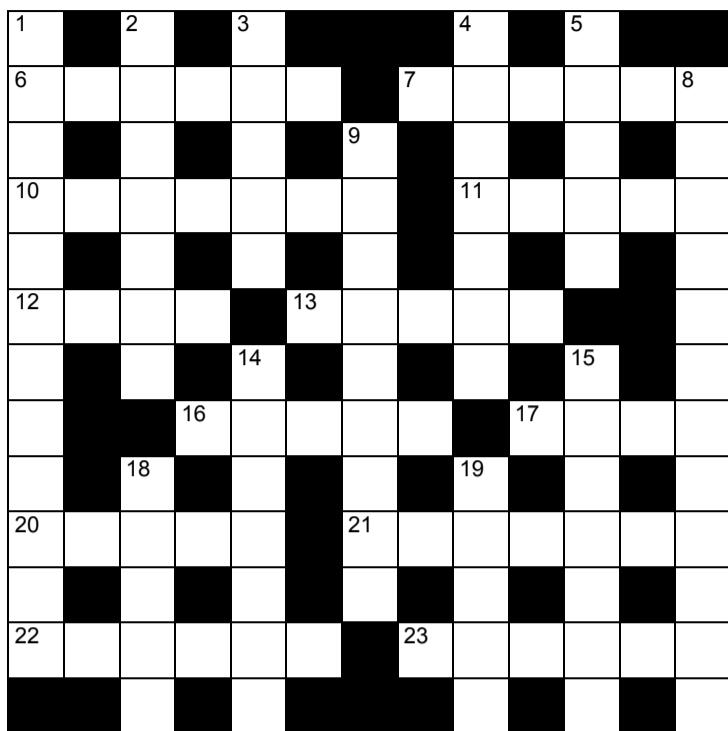
Southern Tararua & Project Kaka Aerial Operation, Rentokil Rural, PO Box 248, Otorohanga, telephone 07 873 8130, north-island@rentokilruralenvironmental.co.nz.



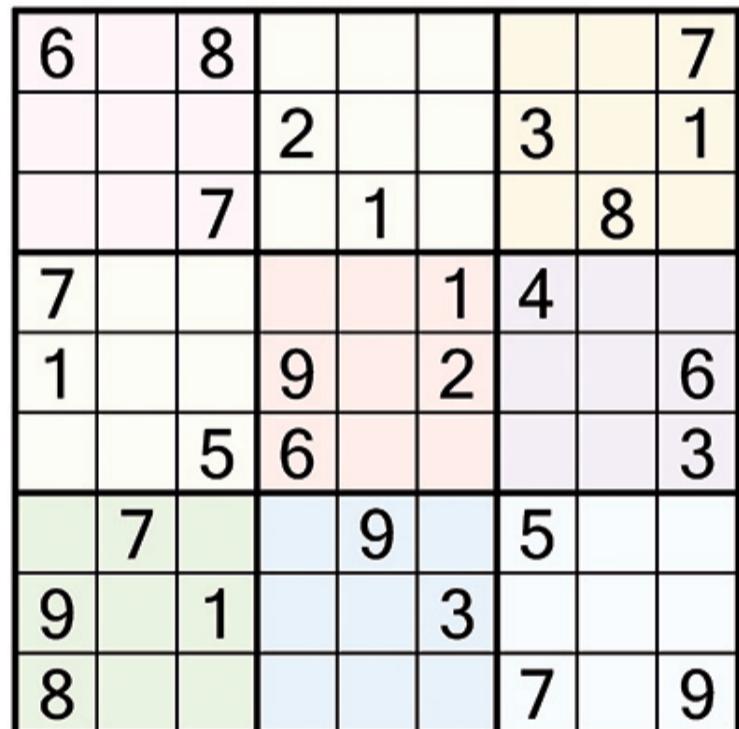

Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

For further information on the TBfree New Zealand programme visit
www.ospri.co.nz/tb-and-pest-control/aerial-operations

THE CROSSWORD #NZ1956H (answers below)

SUDOKU PUZZLES thepuzzlecompany.co.nz

HARD #96H Use logic and process of elimination to fill in the blank cells using the numbers 1 through 9. Each number can appear only once in each row, column and 3x3 block.



SUDOKU SOLUTION #96H



“
Listen to advice and accept discipline, and at the end you will be counted among the wise.
”

PROVERBS 19:20

ACROSS

6. Tree-lined road (6)
7. Bird found at Cape Kidnappers (6)
10. Māori expression meaning 'be strong' (3,4)
11. Wallop (5)
12. Probability (4)
13. Proposal (5)
16. Store away (5)
17. Berserk (4)
20. Province that features the popular rail trail (5)
21. Designate (7)
22. Native spider (6)
23. Ford car model 1952-1972 (6)

DOWN

1. Gold medallist at 1936 Olympics who died after falling under a

train in New York 1949 (4,8)

2. Common feature on NZ villas (7)
3. Common sight in Katikati (5)
4. New Zealand food company founded in 1934 (7)
5. Treaty signed with US in 1952 (5)
8. Ministry of Māori Development (2,4,6)
9. All Blacks coach who had 32 wins in 46 matches while he was in charge (3,6)
14. Argumentative (7)
15. Fellow feeling (7)
18. Trousers (5)
19. Maliciously unkind (5)

TEST YOUR GRAMMAR QUIZ

How well do you know your grammar? Answers bottom of page.



- The first letter of the first word in a sentence should be: a. a large letter b. a capital letter.
- The order of a basic positive sentence is: a. Subject-Verb-Object b: Verb-Object-Subject.
- Every sentence must have a subject and: a. a verb b. an object.
- A plural subject needs: a. a singular verb b. a plural verb.
- When two singular subjects are connected by or, use: a. a singular verb b. a plural verb.
- Adjectives usually come: a. before a noun b. after a noun.
- If an opinion-adjective and a fact-adjective are used before a noun, which comes first? a. a fact-adjective b. an opinion-adjective.
- In American English, a collective noun is more often treated as: a. singular, or b. plural.
- The terms "its" and "it's" have: a. the same meaning b. different meanings.
- Which is correct? a. You're looking good, or b. Your looking good.

THE LUXURIES IN 2026

We are taught that luxury looks like more money, more status, more things. But the older we get, the clearer it becomes: real luxury is not loud – it's quiet. In 2026, the richest people won't be the busiest ones. They'll be the ones who have time, health, and inner peace.

CALM MORNINGS Waking up without rushing, without a phone stealing your breath before your first sip of tea. Silence in the morning is a form of wealth. A STRONG BODY Not for showing off, but for carrying you through life without pain. Strength means independence, dignity, and energy to live fully. A FEW REAL FRIENDS Not many. Just enough. People who don't drain you, compete with you, or disappear when life gets hard. QUALITY SLEEP Deep, undisturbed rest. The kind that heals your nervous system and restores your soul. Sleep is no longer a habit – it's a privilege. THE ABILITY TO EXPERIENCE SUNSETS To pause. To feel grateful instead of rushed. A life so busy that you can't watch the sky is already too expensive. TIME TO HAVE FUN AND RECHARGE Time that isn't productive. Time that doesn't need to be explained. Time that makes you feel human again. WALKS Slow ones. Without destination or urgency. Just the present moment. TIME FOR READING To nourish the mind instead of constantly feeding it noise. HEALTHY MEALS Food that supports your body, not just your cravings. Eating with awareness is an act of self-respect. PEACE OF MIND Not the absence of problems, but the ability to face them without losing yourself. TIME FOR THE OUTDOORS Sunlight, fresh air, nature. Things money can't replace once your health is gone. THE ABILITY TO DO SOMETHING YOU LOVE Even for a few minutes a day. A life without joy slowly becomes survival. In 2026, don't chase luxury. Create it – in your routines, your boundaries, and your choices. Because the greatest wealth is not what you own ... it's how gently you get to live.



Ōtaki River entrance tides February 11-March 13

<https://www.metservice.com/marine/regions/kapiti-wellington/tides/locations/otaki-river-entrance>

The actual timing of high and low tide might differ from below – times are extrapolated from the nearest primary port for this location, so please take care.

	HIGH	LOW	HIGH	LOW	HIGH
WED 11 FEB	05:28	11:49	17:59	-	-
THU 12 FEB	-	00:18	06:51	13:12	19:17
FRI 13 FEB	-	01:39	08:10	14:22	20:29
SAT 14 FEB	-	02:45	09:07	15:15	21:25
SUN 15 FEB	-	03:34	09:50	15:57	22:09
MON 16 FEB	-	04:14	10:27	16:35	22:47
TUE 17 FEB	-	04:50	11:01	17:10	23:22
WED 18 FEB	-	05:25	11:35	17:46	23:57
THU 19 FEB	-	05:59	12:09	18:22	-
FRI 20 FEB	00:32	06:36	12:45	18:59	-
SAT 21 FEB	01:08	07:14	13:23	19:39	-
SUN 22 FEB	01:47	07:55	14:05	20:21	-
MON 23 FEB	02:30	08:41	14:52	21:08	-
TUE 24 FEB	03:21	09:36	15:47	22:04	-
WED 25 FEB	04:24	10:44	16:55	23:13	-
THU 26 FEB	05:45	12:06	18:16	-	-
FRI 27 FEB	-	00:38	07:16	13:30	19:43
SAT 28 FEB	-	02:02	08:32	14:40	20:56
SUN 1 MAR	-	03:07	09:29	15:36	21:53
MON 2 MAR	-	03:59	10:17	16:23	22:39
TUE 3 MAR	-	04:43	10:58	17:05	23:19
WED 4 MAR	-	05:23	11:36	17:44	23:56
THU 5 MAR	-	06:00	12:11	18:21	-
FRI 6 MAR	00:30	06:35	12:45	18:55	-
SAT 7 MAR	01:02	07:08	13:18	19:29	-
SUN 8 MAR	01:34	07:42	13:51	20:03	-
MON 9 MAR	02:08	08:18	14:28	20:39	-
TUE 10 MAR	02:46	08:59	15:11	21:21	-
WED 11 MAR	03:34	09:52	16:05	22:16	-
THU 12 MAR	04:39	11:04	17:16	23:29	-
FRI 13 MAR	06:05	12:29	18:38	-	-

CROSSWORD #1956H ANSWERS Across: 1. a. capital letter, 2. a. Subject-Verb-Object, 3. a. a verb. 4. b. a plural verb. 5. a. a singular verb. 6. a. before a noun. 7. b. an opinion-adjective. 8. a. singular. 9. b. different meanings. 10. a. You're looking good.

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TAKĀRO/Sport

NZ honour for pool player Greg

Parasport player of the year keeps racking up titles

By Ian Carson

Greg Creighton is proof that winning in sport is always possible, even with physical disabilities.

Greg was named as New Zealand Parasport pool player of the year for his prowess after a recent parasport national pool competition in Auckland. He won the 8-ball tournament and was runner-up in both the 9-ball and 10-ball competitions.

He plays all forms of the cue sport, not letting the fact he's got a prosthetic leg deter him from reaching high levels of skill that have even taken him to international competitions.

Greg lives in Levin, but he has a long association with the Ōtaki RSA – in fact he's captain of the local RSA's business house team that won the most recent competition contested by teams from Horowhenua and Kāpiti. It's a competition that runs over 20 weeks at the Cossie Club in Levin.

Greg enjoys the relaxed environment at Ōtaki, and the fact the RSA has snooker tables.

"We used to have them in Levin, but they were at the Levin Club, which closed down last year," he says.

"The Cossie Club doesn't have them, so it's



Parasport pool player of the year Greg Creighton, who captains the Ōtaki RSA business house pool team.

Photo supplied

great to play at Ōtaki. Their tables are especially good to play on."

Greg played pool for a New Zealand parasport team in the international competition in Brisbane last year, and in June will be off to a competition in Norway. He's also an advocate for Parasport New Zealand, helping people with

disabilities take up sports – especially pool.

It was a motorcycle accident in 1995 that severely injured Greg's leg. He was able to keep it for the next 18 years, courtesy of 28 operations. However, it was always troublesome and "thankfully", he says, was eventually removed below the knee.

"To be honest, I'm better off without it," he says. "Most people don't notice, and it's not stopped me doing what I always love doing."

From a life-changing accident to national titles and international competition, Greg has turned adversity into achievement – and he's still lining up his next shot.

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