

MEDIA RELEASE

19 JUNE 2026

Gisborne District Council wins digital innovation and members' choice awards

Te Kaunihera o Te Tairāwhiti – Gisborne District Council has won both the Datascape Award for Excellence in Digital Local Government and the 2026 Taituarā Members' Choice Award for its project Turning the Tide: Large Woody Debris AI-assisted Removal.

The Excellence in Digital Local Government category recognises innovative use of digital and technology solutions that transform services, strengthen democratic participation and improve outcomes for communities. This includes initiatives that enhance accessibility, streamline processes or enable better decision-making through data and technology.

The project was also recognised by local government professionals across Aotearoa through the Taituarā Members' Choice Award, reflecting the impact and relevance of the initiative across the sector.

Following Cyclone Gabrielle, Gisborne District Council faced the challenge of managing large woody debris across rivers and coastlines throughout Tairāwhiti.

In response, the council developed an innovative digital solution that combined AI-assisted aerial imagery, advanced mapping and a bespoke risk assessment framework to identify, prioritise and target areas of greatest risk.

The data-driven approach transformed recovery efforts, enabling faster, safer and more transparent decision-making while supporting the removal of more than 600,000 cubic metres of debris across seven major catchments.

By harnessing technology to protect communities, infrastructure and the environment, the project established a new benchmark for digital innovation in environmental recovery and resilience planning.

The judges praised the project's use of technology and evidence-based decision-making.

“Turning the tide on woody debris brings together a cutting-edge application of artificial intelligence and drone technology, and a robust evidence-based decision-making process,” the judges said.



“The transformation from a site-based, reactive process to transparent, risk-based one provided us with one of the most compelling ‘before’ and ‘after’ stories this year.”

It was a night of celebration for Gisborne District Council with Anita Reedy-Holthausen, Director Engagement and Māori Partnerships announced as the recipient of the AskYourTeam Overseas Manager Exchange to New South Wales, Australia.

About the LGFA Taituarā Local Government Excellence Awards

The LGFA Taituarā Local Government Excellence Awards showcase and celebrate outstanding programmes, projects, partnerships and initiatives from across New Zealand’s local government sector. The awards recognise excellence, innovation and leadership that deliver positive outcomes for communities and create learnings that can be shared across the sector. The awards are hosted annually by Taituarā – Local Government Professionals Aotearoa.

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