

MEDIA RELEASE

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Northland Regional Council recognised for excellence in community engagement

Northland Regional Council has won the Eagle Technology Award for Excellence in Community Engagement at the 2026 LGFA Taituarā Local Government Excellence Awards for the Whirinaki Managed Retreat project.

The award celebrates initiatives that go beyond expectations to genuinely engage and empower communities, delivering meaningful and lasting results. This includes approaches that build trust, encourage participation and support inclusive decision-making.

In Whirinaki, Te Hikutū Hapū and Northland Regional Council worked together to address significant flood risk and the realities of climate change through a partnership model that moved beyond consultation to genuine shared leadership.

Combining mātauranga Māori, technical expertise and a long-term vision for community wellbeing, the project has developed a managed retreat programme that prioritises safety, strengthens cultural connections to ancestral whenua and creates opportunities for future generations.

The judges said the project stood out for the way it empowered the community to lead decisions about its future.

“This climate adaptation planning process stood out as a project that was community initiated and then jointly led as a partnership between the council and Te Hikutū Hapū in an area that has faced longstanding social and economic inequities,” the judges said.

“The approach is scalable, and for this reason, and the partnership aspects, we see this as one of the exemplars from across this year’s field of entries.”

The judges also awarded a Highly Commended recognition to Christchurch City Council for its Coastal Hazards Adaptation Planning with Communities programme.



Through the programme, Christchurch City Council worked alongside residents, mana whenua, technical experts and elected members to develop a community-led adaptation plan for Whakaraupō Lyttelton Harbour and Koukourarata Port Levy.

This year, the Excellence in Community Engagement category attracted 18 entries, making it the largest category in the 2026 LGFA Taituarā Local Government Excellence Awards.

Alongside the category win Northland Regional Council also celebrated staff member Auriole Ruka, Group Manager – Strategic Partnerships and Engagement, who was named as the recipient of the Hononga Indigenous Overseas Manager Exchange to Victoria, 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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