

SPECIAL REPORT

Floods' scars take time to recede

One year after the April floods which devastated Richmond, **Sasha Borissenko** looks at what has been happening since.

One year after helpers were having to stand on chairs to sweep the rain water out of the building, the Richmond Hospice shop is looking better than ever.

The Queen St building may have been out of action for seven weeks as a result of the widespread flooding on April 21 but one year on, it is all "business as usual", Nelson Region Hospice Shop general manager Karen Mackenzie-Howe said.

While the cost of the damage could not be determined, the shop's "supportive landlord" was responsible for all the insurance claims, she said.

Mackenzie-Howe said it was absolutely devastating to come to the shop at 9pm on the Sunday evening to find the building under 10 centimetres of water.

"It was horrible. On a Sunday you would think you would be able to enjoy a glass of wine, rather than having to sweep the floors with a kayak paddle and a squeegee."

"I was so fearful I just cried. Then you somehow find your resolve and decide, how am I going to deal with this?"

To get herself in a positive mood before other people arrived, she made videos of herself singing *Michael Rowed the Boat Ashore* using a plastic container and the paddle.

Everyone chipped in, standing on chairs and other materials to clear the water from the shop.

"I was like a deserted rat but



On high: Nelson Region Hospice Shop general manager Karen Mackenzie-Howe replays perching on a chair during last year's Richmond floods.
Photo: SASHA BORISSENKO/FAIRFAX NZ

you have to find your humour because there is always someone more unfortunate. Just think of the people who did not have any insurance, for example.

"No-one was hurt or injured. It was just bad luck. Even if we had sandbags at the door, they wouldn't have stopped it."

While it was a random act of God, Mackenzie-Howe said she would always be a bit worried if there was news of any rain.

"Cyclone Luci certainly made me nervous this year."

But if anything worrying happened in the future, she was sure the community would get on board.

The community's generosity with the cleanup and donating new infrastructure was overwhelming, she said.

Residents urge councils unite to fix flooding

Champion Rd resident Richard Griffin is calling for the Tasman District Council and Nelson City Council to come together to create an "effective and efficient" flood prevention scheme.

Following last year's April floods, the Tasman District Council proposed improving the culvert system for Champion Rd residents by constructing a culvert that could withstand 20 cubic metres of water.

However, because that would potentially result in more water going on to the Nelson City Council side, it decided it would block off the culvert so that it would only allow 10 cubic metres worth of rain, Griffin said.

"This is not a sensible outcome, a culvert that is blocked off is not going to be able to handle anything."

Griffin was particularly angry that the council had failed to notify the Champion Rd residents of the plans.

The council was going to grant itself resource consent which was "self serving", he said.

As a result, those "downstream" kicked up a fuss and now the council has "gone back to the drawing board".

It was a long and painful process, he said, taking it up with both chief executives of the Nelson and Tasman councils and staff.

Griffin said the issue highlighted the "ludicrousness of having two city councils to cover a macro level province".

This was a classic example of administration and bureaucracy going wrong, he said.

"You think either council would have done something after the December 2011 floods."

"The fact of the matter is nothing has changed in 2½ years."



Flashback: Police and motorists drive through flood water at the Champion Rd roundabout in April 2013 after heavy rain caused flooding in Richmond.
Photo: MARTIN DE RUYTER/FAIRFAX NZ

The 2013 flooding had been just waiting to happen, he said.

He was sick of all the talk and no action and as a result he had a digger at the ready.

Tasman District Council communications manager Chris Choat said 10 cubic metres allowed a lot of water.

The current culvert only withstood 3 cubic metres, he said.

There was no public notification

because it was an infrastructure matter.

The council was waiting until Saxton Creek was developed further to withstand 20 cubic metres of rain.

It was not a case of going back to the drawing board, it was about working with the Nelson City Council.

Resource consent with a finalised design was currently

undergoing assessment. "We have to look at the wider ramifications of any design."

"For the meantime, we are aware of the concern and conditions up there, that is why we have a digger and other tools such as sandbags ready just in case something does occur."

"We do ensure that the creek is cleared regularly of gravel to ensure that there is an adequate flow

path in an event."

Nelson City Council infrastructure group manager Alec Louverdis said the council was working on a plan for flood protection for Saxton Creek on its side of the boundary of Champion Rd.

"Our plans are progressing as scheduled," he said. As for efficiency, both councils were working closely on a range of issues around Champion Rd, he said.

Battered businesses battling on

A gourmet butchery owner says he cannot bear another disaster after fleeing Christchurch because of the 2011 earthquakes and then bearing the brunt of last year's April floods.

Despite losing thousands of dollars as a result of the quakes and the floods, Heck German Smallgoods owner and operator Ulrich Heck says there is only one way forward, and that is up.

With Kotua Place being situated between two streams that overflowed, the Wakatu Industrial Estate was badly hit by the 2013 flooding, with water and mud pouring through businesses. Some, such as Heck German Smallgoods and Skippers Choice, were waist-deep in water.

Heck said he was horrified to come to work on the Monday morning after the floods to find his business completely submerged. All the machinery, stock, ingredients and other supplies had to be repaired or replaced.

He declined to mention how much money he lost as a result but said it was in the high thousands.

The floods came just two years after his Christchurch business was lost as a result of the



How it was: Viridian Glass staff Joel Collier, left, and Malcolm Borgfeldt clear mud and water from the Wakatu Industrial Estate business one year ago.
Photo: MARTIN DE RUYTER/FAIRFAX NZ

earthquakes. His central city shop was gone in 25 seconds and red-stickered later that day.

"It was all over so quickly. Thankfully, no-one was hurt," he recalled.

"Everyone was driving mad, running around with no-one knowing what was going on. It was like a really bad movie."

The father and businessman commuted for a year and a half before he was finally able to make

the move to Nelson in 2012. Then, a year later, the floods happened.

"New Zealand is not exactly making it easy for me."

"I have definitely not been happy or lucky, but you have to decide to do something, and there is only one way forward, and that is upwards."

He said he was finally finding success, with his products now available at most supermarkets around the country.



Rebuilding: Skipper's Choice managing director Clint Jones says it has been a long road back to "square one".
Photo: SASHA BORISSENKO/FAIRFAX NZ

"I spent 40 years of my life in Germany. If I can spend the last 40 years here in New Zealand, I would have had a very happy life."

Meanwhile, Skippers Choice managing director Clint Jones said it had taken him a year to get his business back to square one.

He arrived on the Sunday night of the floods to find his business half a metre deep in water. With most of the stock at ground level, most of it was ruined. The lino,

carpets, and files and other business records were also lost.

The place was an absolute bomb site, he said. Repairs took months of work by builders, electricians and contractors, as well as having to go through the processes of getting everything replaced and accounted for.

Jones said he did not lose any customers but the business had to do the bare minimum. It was a very difficult time.



Double blow: Ulrich Heck, owner and operator of gourmet butchery Heck German Smallgoods.
Photo: SASHA BORISSENKO/FAIRFAX NZ

With the restoration and Christmas out of the way, it was only now that he was starting to think about growing the business.

"The office is still not fully functional but some of the niceties of having a pretty office are on the back burner for the meantime."

It was not really a council matter because it was a freak incident, he said.

Property manager Phil Gardiner, who owns three buildings at

the badly affected southern end of the estate, said his main concern was for his tenants.

"You can't really imagine how huge these floods were for the region. I was fine, I had insurance, but the tenants, their businesses and livelihoods were interrupted for long periods."

He wanted the tenants to be able to get back to business as soon as possible, so he had tried to help where he could, he said.

Life's a puzzle in pensioner's flat

A once-displaced retiree is happy to get back to her puzzles in her "nice new-looking flat".

Five Richmond pensioners were displaced for 14 weeks while the council refurbished the council-owned cottages that were damaged as a result of the 2013 April floods.

Maling flat resident Margaret Lankshear could recall seeing the water coming up through her shower at 5pm that dreadful Sunday evening, she said.

The water came down the road like Niagara Falls, she said.

Most of Lankshear's furniture had to be replaced, including her "beloved" lounge suite that her mother gave her before she died.

"It was the last thing she bought me before she had a stroke."

Dry cleaners tried to salvage it but the damage was too great.

But having a "nice new-looking flat" with a new kitchen and bathroom was a nice compensation.

One of her prized possessions, a giant 2 x 3 metre 18,000-piece puzzle that hangs on the wall, managed to survive the flooding.

"It took me hours and hours to create. The water just hit the bottom

of it. The trouble was getting it out of the house but the council managed it."

The real tragedy was not being able to work on a puzzle for 14 weeks, which was always good for the arthritis in her hands.

But now, she was working on a 3000-piece puzzle of a horse and scenery for the winter.

Everything was finally back to usual, she said, but for two residents who moved as a result of the flooding. One sadly died shortly after, she said.

Tasman District Council spokesman Chris Choat said the refurbishments cost more than \$100,000.

"Because of the severity of the impact we thought do we refurbish what's been damaged or do we take this as an opportunity to revitalise the flats altogether?"

The council decided on the latter and it was a "very cost effective way of revitalising our community housing in the area".

Everyone seemed happy with the results.

Most of the residents stayed with family for 14 weeks, otherwise the council paid for accommodation.



Back home: Maling flat resident Margaret Lankshear with one of her prized puzzles.
Photo: SASHA BORISSENKO/FAIRFAX NZ

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