

Strengthening NZ's Emergency Management Legislation



New Zealand Council Of
Christian Social Services

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Tirohanga Whānui | Overview

The New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services (NZCCSS) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on strengthening New Zealand's emergency management legislation. We support the kaupapa to strengthen and modernise how New Zealand manages the risk of emergencies. NZCCSS members play an important role within the community response in times of emergency and offer the following insights and recommendations based on previous experience during the extreme weather events of 2023.

Taunakitanga | Recommendations

Issue 1: Meeting the diverse needs of people and communities

Are there other reasons that may cause some people and groups to be disproportionately affected by emergencies?

Social isolation is an additional reason (to those identified in the consultation document) why people may be disproportionately impacted during an emergency. This includes people living in urban areas who do not have family or people they know or trust in their lives, for example, elderly people living alone.

Those who are providing care to others may also be disproportionately affected. For example, for those caring for tamariki who are not their own, loss of property may jeopardise their ability to maintain care.

One member also commented on the distress experienced by those caring for animals and/or forced to abandon animals.

Do you have any comments about the likely impacts (benefits, costs, or risks) of the initial options we have identified? Do you have any preferred options? Are there any other options that should be considered?

Our members expressed a preference for a legislative response such as *Option 3: Require CDEM Group plans to include how people and communities that may be disproportionately affected will be planned for*, noting that local CDEM groups are best placed to carry out planning for emergency management within a community. However they recommended that there be accountability at Director level (Option 4) to ensure that the requirement to include in plans how people and communities that may be disproportionately affected will be planned for is enforceable.

What would planning look like (at the local and national levels) if it was better informed by the needs of groups that may be disproportionately affected by emergencies?

Planning would encompass a focus on building social cohesion when there isn't an emergency. This could be achieved by funding CDEM related activities as part of local or central government contracts. One member reflected on a CDEM event which occurred years prior to the 2023 cyclones, where a wide and diverse group from the community were brought together to carry out scenario planning together. Making this type of activity a regular, rather than one-off, part of the planning process in communities could support the identification of specific people or groups that may be disproportionately affected and improve preparedness in relation to their needs.

Feedback noted the impact that staff turnover can have on preparedness where community engagement is not regularly included in the planning process. This occurs within local and national government roles and within community, highlighting the need to ensure that expertise is being developed and maintained within each of these sectors.

The planning process should also include greater awareness of relevant expertise that might be needed during an emergency and identification of key resources that are stood up nationally. Trauma clinicians, for example, are an essential part of emergency response. There should be awareness during the planning stage of who has appropriate expertise across Aotearoa and can be made available promptly to provide psychological support during an emergency. Members noted that during the cyclones they had more ready access to this type of support due to existing connections and were prepared to fund it, but found that the CDEM system prevented this expertise being made easily accessible to those who needed it within their community.

Effective planning would ensure that:

- Everybody was prepared within their own context
- That people knew how to get help if/when they needed it
- That people knew how to offer help when they could
- That people were clear about where the gaps could be e.g. messaging around checking on neighbours etc.

Issue 2: Strengthening and enabling iwi Māori participation in emergency management

Do you have any comments about the likely impacts (benefits, costs, or risks) of the initial options we have identified? Do you have any preferred options? Are there any other options that should be considered?

Members expressed support for options encompassing a legislative requirement for iwi Māori participation in emergency management. They recommended that this take a partnership approach to ensure that responsibility and risk are shared by government, Māori and community rather than responsibility being shifted to Māori without access to the resources needed to enable appropriate emergency response. While iwi Māori are likely to have a greater understanding of their community's needs than officials, they are not legislatively privy or connected to the resources that CDEM have available to them. One member noted also that non-Māori may perceive Māori-led activities as not being available to them, and while this hasn't been the reality in their experience, a visible partnership makes it clear that government, Māori and community partners are all working together for all.

One member described the work undertaken by iwi in their area to ensure greater preparedness for any future emergency. This has included setting up an evacuation centre and accumulating supplies for emergency response. They expressed concern for the lack of legislative provision for iwi to be part of the response, despite the investments they are making in preparedness.

Issue 3: Strengthening and enabling community participation in emergency management

Do you have any comments about the likely impacts (benefits, costs, or risks) of the initial options we have identified? Do you have any preferred options? Are there any other options we should consider?

NZCCSS supports Option C which proposes a legislative requirement that CDEM Group plans state how the Group will manage offers of resources from the public/community.

Members noted the need for consistency in these processes across local and national government levels, and recognition that an overly bureaucratic approach to managing resources creates barriers to support being readily available during times of emergency.

Members reflected that in situations of emergency, CDEM had not appeared to act on anything that isn't legislated and therefore it is important that there is a legislative requirement and clear guidelines for how community response is managed and resourced. They also shared situations where reimbursement of response costs were inconsistent and highlighted the potential for the CDEM system to be taken advantage of without greater guidance in this area. Lastly there was concern about the potential for discrimination occurring when people were attempting to access supports, with judgements being made about whether people were deserving. Greater input from those leading in communities could help to ensure avenues for support are safe and non-discriminatory.

Should we consider any other problems relating to community and Māori participation?

Accessibility of the CDEM system

Members' experience of the emergency management system is that it is reliant on local volunteers in communities but does not invest in identifying, equipping, or maintaining a relationship with those volunteers.

A frustration with the system is that supports are not granted unless volunteers follow CDEM processes, yet trainings in CDEM processes have been targeted at local and central government employees, who may not take an active lead in the response during an emergency, and are not accessible to local volunteers who play a significant role in response. A lack of investment in the right people within local government was also noted, meaning that those taking a lead during the response were inexperienced and those with more expertise had to be brought in from other areas. This was thought to impact the timeliness of response.

Members recommend greater investment in providing support and guidance for those in communities to understand the CDEM system. Without this understanding those responding found that the system was not accessible to them, they were unable to access resources to enable response, and they had to work around the system using their own networks and engaging at a national, rather than local level, to be able to provide support when it was needed. The system was found to lack the agility and flexibility needed to enable timely response. In contrast those in the

community were able to respond quickly to need, but felt isolated from the CDEM system while doing so.

An example of this was the expectation that voluntary groups who are not resourced must provide written assessments in CDEM's format in order to get help with food, water or shelter. This required them in an emergency to find a printer, print and complete forms. Then as the situation escalated to a national state of emergency, the process had to be recommenced to fit national procedures.

Members express frustration with the lack of communication from CDEM before, during and following the weather events of 2023. Despite the learnings of multiple reviews of the response to Cyclone Gabrielle, there has been no improvement in regular consultation or communication with those members who played a role in the response and are well placed to be responders in future.

Issue 4: Essential infrastructure

If you think other essential services should be included in the list in Appendix C, what kinds of infrastructure would they cover?

We recommend greater recognition of the essential nature of social infrastructure within the Emergency Management Bill. Members noted the need for support across the spectrum of mental health care, placing a specific emphasis on counselling and the availability of trauma clinicians, such as psychologists who have expertise in how to support during natural disasters. In the wake of the cyclone, those working in one member organisation benefited from this type of immediate support, noting that this strengthened their ability to then support others in the community.

One member observed that the psychological impacts of an event such as Cyclone Gabrielle are far more impactful and long-lasting than any physical impact. Adults, such as parents and teachers, require support for themselves, but also to be equipped to support tamariki and rangatahi in their care. Their experience was that support was fragmented with gaps and inconsistency in the level of support provided meaning that some missed out.

Ko wai tātou | Who we are

NZCCSS has six foundation members; the Anglican Care Network, Baptist Churches of New Zealand, Catholic Social Services, Presbyterian Support and the Methodist and Salvation Army Churches.

Through this membership, NZCCSS represents over 100 organisations providing a range of social support services across Aotearoa. Our mission is to call forth a just and compassionate society for Aotearoa, through our commitment to our faith and Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Further details on NZCCSS can be found on our website - www.nzccss.org.nz.

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