

New Zealand Country Report 1999

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Ministry for Emergency Management

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Abstract:

New Zealand is in the process of reforming its emergency management structures and frameworks. The aim of the reforms is to re-direct the focus from a response orientation to managing the risks each community is subject to, and thereby creating resilient communities. The Ministry for Emergency Management aims to link together existing processes involved in land-use management, risk (hazard) reduction, and sustainable development, in a way that supports economic and social development, on the one hand, and reduces social and economic risk on the other. In doing so, a comprehensive approach is being taken to address the legislative framework; local government structures; training, education and research sectors available to emergency management practitioners. This paper outlines the process being pursued, placing it within the wider reform of most sectors of the New Zealand economy since the 1980s.

I. Reforming emergency management

New Zealand's emergency management reforms are based on sound emergency management principles and international best practice. However, they are specifically tailored to New Zealand's risks, and the social, political, economic and cultural conditions in the nation. For this reason, they need to be viewed within the context of wider social and economic reforms that have taken place in New Zealand since the early 1980s. Most sectors of the economy have been substantially deregulated, while social policy has changed to remove a perceived dependency on the State by many, towards a needs based welfare system. Alongside these and other significant changes, many functions of the Government have been significantly devolved and commercialised. This has been described by some observers as an attempt to 'get government out of business while bringing business into government'.

Local government was also extensively reformed. The intention of these specific reforms was to ensure that local government is:

- More efficient and effective.
- More attentive and responsive to the community's needs.
- More autonomous, with increased flexibility.
- More accountable, including politicians being accountable to the electorate for overall performance.

A key outcome of New Zealand's reforms is the transfer of much of the responsibility and power for decision-making from central government to local government and others. This transfer has been accompanied by an increased attention to risk management frameworks within the public sector. This is evident both in terms of the central government (for example, designing enabling policy frameworks for decision-making that ensure the risks of those decisions are managed) and in other sectors such as local government (such as implementing those frameworks).

II. A more integrated approach to managing natural hazards risks

Government made four fundamental decisions following the submission of the Task Force Report and the comments from the Officials Committee:

- In 1996 it approved a set of principles as the basis for an overarching emergency management framework.
- It also re-defined its responsibility to be one of establishing the emergency management framework and identifying the principles, roles and responsibilities of all agencies in the sector.
- In 1997 it approved the establishment of a new Ministry (subsequently called the Ministry for Emergency Management, which came into being in July 1999).
- In 1998 it approved the concept of local emergency management consortia (referred to as Emergency Management Groups) based on the emergency management framework principles

These decisions are all designed to modernise the emergency management approach, and in particular to improve the capability of the emergency services and the communities they serve to understand and hence deal with risk more effectively; and to promote community continuity and resilience by institutionalising risk management practices and processes. The cornerstone of the new emergency management framework, however, is the set of principles:

- Comprehensive and integrated emergency management systems
- An all-hazards approach
- Structures are underpinned with appropriate technical information and expertise
- Recognition and involvement of volunteer organisations
- Declarations (of emergency) are made at the most appropriate level of government by elected representatives
- Individual and community responsibility and self-reliance
- The owner of any property be responsible for its reconstruction
- Routine events and emergencies are best handled at the local level wherever possible.

III. Specific Programs

The New Zealand approach is a deliberate attempt to link land-use management, risk (hazard) reduction, and sustainable development. It requires effort to understand how the natural and created environments produce risk, and how to keep people and property out of the way of hazards in a way that supports economic and social development, on the one hand, and reduces social and economic risk on the other. Providing frameworks that will assist this are some of the tasks the Ministry has before it. Some specific programs the Ministry is undertaking are listed below.

1. Preparing new legislation

New emergency management legislation, to replace the current Civil Defence Act 1983, is currently under preparation. Based on the agreed Government principles, the proposed Emergency Management Bill will ensure a framework exists within which decision-making that is relevant to emergency management can be made consistently, while allowing flexibility for differing circumstances. The aim of the proposed Bill is to improve and to promote community resilience and continuity through comprehensive, integrated and risk-based emergency management.

With reference to the principles of individual and community responsibility and self-reliance, the Bill prescribes that resilience be achieved through planning endeavours that will lessen the likelihood of hazard events, reduce the community's vulnerability and otherwise minimise adverse effects by managing risks generally (rather than just responding to risk). This will be assisted by partnerships between locally and nationally co-ordinated stakeholders; informed decision-making, planning and development decisions incorporating risk-based emergency management goals, objectives and targets; and inter-disciplinary approaches to decision-making.

To co-ordinate emergency action across government, a National Emergency Management Strategy is proposed which will outline goals, objectives and measurable targets to guide emergency management action; and provide the vision and values, criteria for determining priorities for action, and themes for strengthening emergency management action. This Strategy will be linked to EMG planning programmes that must not be inconsistent with the wider framework. In order to achieve another agreed principle that structures are underpinned with appropriate technical information and expertise, the Bill provides for the establishment and maintenance of information systems. The Bill also stipulates that relevant agencies will have competent staff.

2. Local government structures

Consistent with its role of establishing and maintaining the emergency management framework for New Zealand, central government also approved a model for the delivery of emergency management at the local level. The model has been developed in consultation and collaboration with local government, to ensure it has practical application and is flexible enough to be implemented in a wide number of different contexts.

The approved model is for Emergency Management Groups (EMGs) throughout the country. EMGs are consortia of existing local authorities (working with emergency services and lifeline utilities) that are tasked with overseeing risk-based emergency management for their area. Working within legislative frameworks and the National Emergency Management Strategy, and using national guidelines prepared by the Ministry, they are to define local structures, processes and direction. They will undertake periodic hazard analyses, vulnerability assessments (including trend and consequence analysis), and will apply appropriate risk assessment tools, and a risk-based emergency management process. Three advantages of this approach are:

- They will enable a consistent approach to a particular issue from the different local authorities represented on the EMG.
- They will provide for the co-ordination of resources and help ensure that emergency management considerations are integrated into the many relevant local authority activities and responsibilities.
- They ensure wide involvement of the community in understanding their hazards and making choices about their management.

3. Risk management approach

New Zealand has recently adopted a non-mandatory risk management standard, AS/NZS 4360 – 1999, produced by a Joint Technical Committee of Standards Australia and Standards New Zealand. A senior officer of the Ministry for Emergency Management has been a member of the Committee since 1993. The standard articulates a process that can 'be applied to any situation where an undesired or unexpected outcome could be significant or where opportunities are identified'. The process outlined within AS/NZS 4360 - 1999 includes the following elements:

- Establish the context
- Identify risks
- Analyse risks
- Evaluate risks
- Treat risks
- Monitor and review
- Communicate and consult.

The process provides a robust checklist to ensure that a systematic approach to the management of risks can be undertaken. In many situations the process can be applied 'as-is', without significant problems. This standard has been adopted by the Ministry as the vehicle for developing its risk management approach to emergency management.

However, in the context of communities managing risks arising from natural hazards, it is clear that there is not one risk management process, but many processes within which the management of risks must be considered.

These include public sector processes (such as those involved in land-use management) as well as private sector processes (such as asset management and business continuity management of private sector utilities). It is important that all of these processes are strategically aligned. For instance, the range of treatment options for risks include aspects of reduction and of response. In order to make the most effective and efficient decisions about how to manage risks, the processes for determining the types and levels of reduction and response activities a community might utilise with respect to a particular risk, must be undertaken within the same overall framework. While the process is largely in place in New Zealand, there is a need for better integration.

Much recent legislation has implicitly, and often explicitly, put in place frameworks that require a risk management approach. Notable examples are:

- The Resource Management Act 1991, which includes requirements to identify hazards, assess the implications, and identify options for addressing the risks they pose
- The Biosecurity Act 1993, covering unwanted organisms, border control and pest management
- A 1996 amendment to the Local Government Act 1974 which requires local authorities to adopt a long-term financial strategy for at least ten years (it should include risks to assets, environmental liability and the like)
- The Hazardous Substances and New Organisms Act 1996, covers the importation and production of hazardous substances and new organisms and created the Environmental Risk Management Authority.

4. Providing comprehensive training and education

New Zealand's revised approach to emergency management is in line with international trends. It recognises that tomorrow's emergency managers will be required to tackle problems they have not confronted before and be required to act as a broker to work out solutions. This obligates them to understand complex physical and social systems, conduct sophisticated cost-benefit analyses, and broker long-term solutions relating to land-use management and resource allocation. Education in hazard management and emergency preparedness therefore needs to complement skills-based training and be expanded to include inter-disciplinary and integrated programmes.

The Ministry is tasked to identify and promote new professional development initiatives, oversee and assist in establishing new initiatives, and monitor the overall efficacy of professional development programmes in achieving Government's outcomes for emergency management. Themes that are influencing the New Zealand programme are:

- Greater emphasis on pre-disaster mitigation requiring multi-disciplinary knowledge and broad policy development skills.
- Higher levels of inter-agency co-ordination (across public and private sectors) requiring inter-personal and business planning skills.
- Making the most of the latest research and technology necessitating the continual updating of research knowledge, information technology and data analysis skills.
- Maintaining a response capability in the face of more widely spread and highly committed resources requiring contract management and logistical planning skills.

The New Zealand training programme also recognises that a broad range of individuals across a number of organisations require education and training to effectively carry out relevant emergency management tasks. The need for flexibility and diversity in training programmes is therefore paramount.

5. Developing a research strategy

The reform of the emergency management sector necessitates a review of the provision of research to the sector. This is due in part to the fact that the sector has, in effect, been widened from traditional response functions to include activities that are relevant to a comprehensive emergency management and a risk management framework. Research is now needed to underpin these activity-sets. Moreover, the creation of the Ministry for Emergency Management, and in particular its focus on developing a strategic direction for professional development in the emergency management sector, provides a sound basis upon which a number of historical gaps in relevant research can be addressed. When put into the wider context of the Foresight Project (a Government strategy to set priorities for its investment in science and research), sponsored by the Ministry for Research, Science and Technology and managed by the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology, the following issues can be considered:

- Developing a comprehensive coverage of research on all aspects relevant to risk-based emergency management.
- Establishing a national perspective on hazards, risks and their consequences, thus making it possible for policy-makers to gauge the risks the nation is subject to, and to measure progress on the management of those risks.
- Nurturing linkages between different relevant research sectors – for example between those involved in social/behavioural sciences and public policy and those involved in physical processes or engineering.
- Focusing research on end-users:
- Research driven by end-users, not only curiosity-driven.
- Presentation of research findings attuned to practitioners and not only scientific colleagues.

IV. Conclusion

Once implemented, the Government's decisions will go a long way to addressing the issue of integrated risk management processes. Perhaps most importantly, they ensure that all of the different treatment options (within the categories of reduction, readiness, response and recovery) can be assessed against each other, so that optimal resources are applied, given the level of risk the community is willing to live with. A key advantage of this approach is that it allows an integrated approach to managing the risks from natural hazards, by utilising existing tools and processes. It ensures risk-based emergency management is given effect within all relevant processes, and avoids the creation of a separate emergency management process (which would prove unsuccessful, as it would fail to influence key decisions that affect the risks from natural hazard events).

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