



2 February 2024

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Tēnā koe John

## REPORT BACK ON THE CO-ORDINATION OF THE ALL-OF-GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN 2020 REPORT

We are writing to provide you an update on progress from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to address recommendations made in your December 2022 report, *Co-Ordination of the All-Of-Government Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic in 2020*. As it has been one year after your report was released, we wanted to provide assurance that we have considered how the recommendations relate to our work and provide you with a high-level overview on implementation progress. Please note that below is an update from DPMC and NEMA only, and we have not sought an update from Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission (PSC), the Ministry of Health, or other relevant organisations.

### PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS

DPMC's National Security Group was recently disestablished, and two new groups have been formed: the Risk and System Governance Group (RSGG), and the new National Security Group (NSG). RSGG provides leadership of DPMC's risk and system governance accountabilities, and by separating from the NSG, will allow for an increased focus on risk and governance. RSGG will drive the national risk approach; provide strategic and administrative governance support to the Chief Executive-level boards (National Security Board (previously Security Intelligence Board), and the Hazard Risk Board); and provide stewardship and leadership to the country's all-of-government strategic crisis management arrangements. RSGG remains all hazards, all risks focused, and will work collaboratively with agencies across the sector.

As stewards of the Officials' Committee for Domestic and External Co-ordination (ODESC) system, New Zealand's strategic crisis coordination and governance mechanism, DPMC has increased its focus on readiness to enhance the understanding of agencies who may play a part in the ODESC system. Readiness activities include regular engagement with key stakeholders; presenting on what the ODESC system including what an agency's roles and responsibilities are; working with agencies to help them identify strategic risks as part of their national planning process; and delivering the Security Sector Professional Development Programme<sup>1</sup> with Victoria University of Wellington.

The Emergency Management Bill, currently in front of select committee, addresses issues and gaps identified through past responses to emergency events. This includes changes to address confusion

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<sup>1</sup> The aim of this programme is to enhance officials' effectiveness with respect to the provision of national security advice and collaboration within the ODESC System (previously referred to as the National Security System).

about the respective roles and responsibilities of Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Groups and the individual local authorities, and changes to enable strong national direction to ensure a more consistent approach to preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies.

NEMA has begun scoping an assurance capability. This function will require further resource. At full maturity, the Assurance Framework will examine the CDEM Sector, government agencies, critical infrastructure, and a system view of the wider Emergency Management System, such as the ability to share information and monitor improvement.

Public and non-Public Service agencies, as well as some Crown entities, are progressing activities to enhance collective readiness for a catastrophic event<sup>2</sup>. This includes development of operational plans; revision of business disruption arrangements including alternative agency leadership and support for Executive Government and Parliament; Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) training for staff and a train the trainer programme to accelerate building this foundational knowledge; and an ODESC contingency response plan.

The National Exercise Programme has been shifted back from NEMA to be chaired by DPMC's Strategic Crisis Management Unit, to ensure strong connectivity and coordination between the national security and hazard risk agencies. A refresh of the National Exercise Programme will occur in 2024 which will involve a review of the objectives, terms of reference, and membership. The national Exercise Rū Whenua is scheduled for June/July 2024 and will be led by NEMA<sup>3</sup> with strategic, national agency, CDEM and NEMA exercise objectives. The intent is to incorporate some of the North Island Severe Weather Events Government Inquiry and NEMA's After Action Review actions into this exercise.

Additional networks such as LessoNZ (lessons management community of practice) co-chaired by Fire and Emergency New Zealand and NEMA continue to meet while the National Emergency Management Capability Development Group chaired by NEMA has significantly increased its membership including more agencies and CDEM.

NEMA has progressed development of the New Zealand Lessons Management Framework and System. A project stakeholder group with representatives from across the ODESC system has formed and an appropriate strategic governance mechanism for this project will be established in 2024. Success is a system which collects, analyses, and monitors implementation of lessons from across the ODESC system.

Since 2021, NEMA's Continuous Improvement Unit has progressively developed a function to systematically collect observations and identify lessons to support improvement during a response. Interventions put in place by the National Controller and National Coordination Centre / National Crisis Management Centre function managers are then monitored. The tools, processes and techniques NEMA use to do this are actively shared with other agencies.

Resourcing, including sustainability and staff wellbeing, are topics discussed more deliberately at ODESC system meetings. Additionally, the Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission workforce mobility hub is utilised to obtain specialist and/or additional resources during a response such as the Ukraine/Russia conflict, and during the North Island Severe Weather events of January and February 2023.

DPMC now conducts an annual National Security Public Survey, which contributes to improving the transparency of and engagement with the public on risk to inform strategic policy, planning, investment, and resourcing decisions. Beginning in 2022, the survey seeks New Zealanders' attitudes and opinions relating to national security risks, challenges and opportunities, exploring what national security means to people living in New Zealand, understand which hazards and threats are of most concern to them, and

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<sup>2</sup> A catastrophic disaster is an extreme event that overwhelms the capability and / or capacity of the local, regional and national emergency management system, delivering widespread devastating impacts to Aotearoa New Zealand and/or its dependencies.

<sup>3</sup> Exercise Rū Whenua will test New Zealand's arrangements for responding to and recovering from a significant Alpine fault earthquake event.

how we can better share information and engage with the public on these topics. Findings from the 2022 survey informed development of the National Security Long-term Insights Briefing, the National Security Strategy and National Security Sector Reforms. The 2024 survey round will also include significant hazards, and the survey itself will now be referred to as the National Risks Public Survey.

I hope that this update provides you with assurance that progress is being made to enhance the public sector's readiness for major disruptive events. In addition to your recommendations, the findings and recommendations from the *Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events*<sup>4</sup>, and the *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Lessons Learned from Aotearoa New Zealand's Response to COVID-19 That Should Be Applied in Preparation for a Future Pandemic*<sup>5</sup> will also guide us to enhance New Zealand's wider readiness for emergencies and crisis.

Yours sincerely



Rebecca Kitteridge  
Chief Executive  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet



Dave Gawn  
Chief Executive  
National Emergency Management Agency

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<sup>4</sup> Report must be delivered by 26 March 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Report must be delivered by 30 September 2024.



28 March 2024

Ms Leeanne McAviney  
Assistant Auditor-General, Sector Performance  
Office of the Auditor-General

Tēnā koe Leeanne

**National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) response to request on actions taken to address recommendations in the Performance Audit Of The Co-Ordination Of The All-Of-Government Response To The Covid-19 Pandemic In 2020**

This letter, together with the Appendix A, is in response to your request for information dated 26 February 2024.

We have prepared our response for each recommendation in accordance with your request (see the attached Appendix A). Please note that the findings and recommendations from the *Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events*, and the *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Lessons Learned from Aotearoa New Zealand's Response to COVID-19 That Should Be Applied in Preparation for a Future Pandemic* will also guide us to enhance New Zealand's wider readiness for emergencies and crisis. As such, the actions noted in our response may be amended in future.

Please note, NEMA requests that the contents of paragraph 1.3 are held on an 'IN-CONFIDENCE' basis until Ministerial announcements have been made. NEMA will keep your office updated on this.

Please do not hesitate to let us know if our scoping of your request was not as anticipated. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have regarding the information.

Ngā mihi

Rebecca Kitteridge  
Chief Executive  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Dave Gawn  
Chief Executive  
National Emergency Management Agency

**Appendix A: Actions taken to address recommendations made by the Office of the Auditor General, in the Performance Audit of the Coordination of the all-of-government response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.**

This table outlines the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) response to the request from the Assistant Auditor-General on 26 February 2024. **Note that this content is in addition to our letter to the Controller and Auditor-General dated 2 February 2024.**

<p>We recommended that the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, National Emergency Management Agency, Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission, the Ministry of Health, and other relevant organisations continue to work together to:</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 1</b> Ensure that there is central co-ordination and clear roles and responsibilities for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• government agencies to keep emergency management plans up to date and consistent with agreed standards, current guidance, and other best practice;</li> <li>• implementing improvements from regular emergency management exercises and other evaluations of emergency readiness; and</li> <li>• monitoring progress in implementing those improvements;</li> </ul>
<p><b>Question for DPMC:</b> Has outdated guidance and legislation been updated, i.e. National Security System Handbook (2016)?</p> <p>1.1. The National Security Systems Handbook is currently being refreshed and will be finalised within the 2024/2025 financial year. The handbook will be updated to reflect current terminology related to the Officials’ Committee for Domestic and External Security Co-ordination (ODESC) system of crisis response in the wider context of national resilience, and will include updated practices and processes, as well as providing clarity around roles and responsibilities related to ODESC system activations.</p> <p>In a similar vein, the professional development course we deliver in conjunction with Victoria University (currently known as the New Zealand Security Sector Professional Development Programme) is also being updated to reflect the current ODESC system crisis response practices and processes in the context of terminology, and to reflect changes following the narrowing of New Zealand’s definition of national security and the subsequent National Security Strategy. This work is currently underway and is expected to be completed in May 2024. Changing the name of the programme, to more accurately reflect the programme’s content, will also be considered later in 2024.</p> <p>Relevant sections on the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet’s public-facing website is being updated reflecting the new structural arrangements within DPMC, which separated the National Security Group into two separate business groups (Risk and Systems Governance Group and National Security Group).</p> <p><b>Question for NEMA:</b> Has outdated guidance and legislation been updated?</p> <p><i>Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Plan and Guides</i></p> <p>1.2. In 2023 a new Emergency Management Bill (EM Bill) was <a href="#">introduced</a> (replacing the Civil Defence Emergency Management Act 2002). The EM Bill proposed a range of changes to the emergency management framework, including those relating to the National CDEM Plan.</p>

1.3. **[In-confidence]** In late March 2024, Cabinet agreed that recent emergency events have made it clear that there needs to be a more fundamental review of New Zealand's emergency management policy and legislative settings, to address risk reduction, readiness, response and recovery. As a result, it was agreed that the Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery would work with the Leader of the House to have the EM Bill discharged from the House. It is understood that the Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery intends to introduce a new bill during the current term of government.

1.4. Any updates to the National CDEM Plan and Guidelines will be considered alongside that work programme.

#### *Conducting Debriefs*

1.5. While NEMA's guidance on Conducting Debriefs is still considered sound, this guidance will be updated as part of the New Zealand Lessons' Management Project in 2025. The New Zealand Lessons Project aims to strengthen the processes to collect, analyse and monitor the implementation of lessons from across the ODESC system.

#### *Action to cover absence of system level, centralised continuous improvement function and lessons management guidance, including evaluation*

1.6. Actions on the New Zealand Lessons Management Project are contained in our letter to the Office of the Auditor-General dated 2 February 2024.

#### *Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) guidance on lessons management and continuous improvement*

1.7. NEMA and DPMC will propose content on lessons management and continuous improvement guidance for the next iteration of CIMS. The CIMS review will be sequenced to take account of any recommendations made by the Government Inquiry into the 2023 North Island Severe Weather Events. NEMA will lead the CIMS review.

#### **Actions planned or underway and their anticipated impacts and timeframes**

1.8. NEMA is leading catastrophic<sup>1</sup> emergency management planning (hazard agonistic). This work will bring together agencies to plan for a coordinated response, building on what has been learned from the COVID-19 experience. In 2024, NEMA will work with more than 50 agencies to deliver an all-of-government catastrophic planning handbook. This is expected to enable a more effective operational response.

1.9. NEMA is conducting a review of selected reviews into the 2023 North Island Severe Weather Events. This work will help understand system strengths, as well as areas for improvement, as the Government considers next steps following receipt of the report from the Government Inquiry into the 2023 North Island Severe Weather Events.

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<sup>1</sup> A catastrophic event is an extreme event that overwhelms the capability and / or capacity of the local, regional and national emergency management system, delivering widespread devastating impacts to Aotearoa New Zealand and/or its dependencies.

**Recommendation 2**

Ensure that key staff maintain a good understanding of all-of-government strategic crisis management, hazard risk management, and emergency management frameworks, including relevant legislation and guidance on lessons management;

**Question for DPMC and NEMA: Are emergency management arrangements (including key frameworks and the national system better understood by key staff?)**

- 2.1. The work outlined below is intended to build greater understanding of all-of-government strategic crisis management, hazard risk management, and emergency management frameworks, as well as strengthen capability. Please also see paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 regarding the National Risk Framework as this is also relevant.
- 2.2. New Zealand's National Exercise Programme (NEP) builds capability across government through a coordinated series of inter-agency readiness activities that underpin the resilience of New Zealand's strategic crisis response arrangements. NEP exercises test government preparedness for New Zealand's identified hazards, threats, and risks. A review and refresh of the NEP's Terms of Reference, and the NEP objectives has been tasked with a completion date being end of 2024. A more deliberate incorporation of continuous improvement practises will be included as part of these reviews. The NEP is complemented by agencies' own readiness programmes, including internal exercising, and exercising with international partners.

**Question for NEMA: Has there been improvement in emergency management capabilities and clarification of roles and responsibilities?**

- 2.3. Actions that were proposed as part of the Emergency Management Bill are contained in our letter, dated 2 February 2024 and paragraph 1.3 above.
- 2.4. NEMA has continued to evolve its internal response and recovery preparedness programme to ensure staff understand NEMA roles and responsibilities, frameworks and procedures. Consolidation exercises are held to test that learning translates into practice.
- 2.5. As noted in our response dated 2 February 2024, NEMA is leading [Exercise Rū Whenua \(a national earthquake exercise\)](#) scheduled for later this year. The intent is to incorporate lessons identified from previous events.
- 2.6. New Zealand's Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) establishes a framework of consistent principles, structures, functions, processes and terminology for response and the transition to recovery. NEMA has delivered Knowledge of CIMS courses in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch to increase the pool of people across the country who can work in emergency coordination centres. In 2023, a virtual course was developed and tested with 25 participants. In addition, staff from seven agencies have been involved in a Train the Trainer programme which will result in the availability of more courses annually. Since February 2023, NEMA has trained 531 staff from 36 national agencies in CIMS, and has supported 389 people to achieve unit standards. An improved understanding of CIMS is expected to enhance performance in a response.
- 2.7. In addition to incident management development, NEMA provides ongoing specialised development for those on deployable teams. These include: the New Zealand Emergency Management Assistance Team (drawn from 26 organisations); NEMA's Regional Emergency Management Advisors; and NEMA's Rapid Response Team. NEMA works with [Response](#)

[and Recovery Aotearoa New Zealand](#) which provides leadership development for response and recovery leaders. These training and development programmes have raised emergency management capability.

2.8. NEMA manages the Tertiary Education Commission fund, distributing funding to the sixteen regional Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) Groups who then enable volunteers to access response team training and council staff to gain training to work in local and regional emergency coordination centres. Over 5000 people undertook training utilising this fund in 2023, with similar numbers expected in 2024 and subsequent years. NEMA also supports CDEM Groups by running two-day Emergency Management Orientation (EMO) courses for people new to emergency management. As with the other training, this has raised emergency management capability.

2.9. In 2023, NEMA and the Auckland Policy Office established a network for delegated Chief Executives – the people designated to act as their agency’s Chief Executive should a sudden, destructive event (eg earthquake) occur that renders Wellington-based Chief Executives unable to perform their role. The programme includes increasing understanding of all-of-government strategic crisis management, and roles and responsibilities.

### **Recommendation 3**

Develop and maintain workforce plans for sustainably staffing long-term emergency responses (which should include appropriate mechanisms for recruitment, redeployment, training, and supporting staff well-being);

**Question for DPMC:** How is longer-term workforce planning and the related budget implications being managed?

3.1. Actions on resourcing are contained in our letter, dated 2 February 2024.

#### **Actions taken and their known or anticipated impact**

3.2. Both DPMC and NEMA utilise Te Kawa Mataaho Public Service Commission workforce mobility hub to obtain specialist and/or additional resources during a response. Examples include the Ukraine/Russia conflict and the North Island Severe Weather Events of January and February 2023.

3.3. NEMA has strengthened its approach to wellbeing, building on lessons from COVID-19. This has been a focus in subsequent emergency responses, including the response the Delta Resurgence in 2021, and the North Island Severe Weather Events of 2023. This enabled a more effective transition back to business-as-usual activities.

#### **Actions planned or underway and their anticipated impacts and timeframes**

3.4. NEMA has established a National Controllers Working Group. This is identifying and developing people who have the requisite skills and leadership to fulfil the National Controller role. The intention is to have a sustainable, fit for purpose and agile pool of National Controllers to respond to a national catastrophic event.



**Recommendation 4**

Demonstrate how they are making improvements during an ongoing response by:

- systematically identifying lessons, taking action, and monitoring progress;
- seeking independent expertise and acting on that advice, as appropriate; and
- reporting the findings of reviews publicly in a timely and accessible way, including whether they have implemented recommendations;

**Question for DPMC and NEMA:** Has there been collaboration with other agencies to share good practice and give consideration to regular review of response activities occurs during an emergency crisis, for example during the North Island Severe Weather events of January and February 2023?

4.1. Since 2021, NEMA has progressively developed a continuous improvement function to systematically collect observations and identify lessons to support improvement during a response. Interventions put in place by the National Controller and National Coordination Centre / National Crisis Management Centre function managers are then monitored. The tools, processes and techniques NEMA use to do this are actively shared with other agencies. This approach was taken during the 2023 North Island Severe Weather Events although capacity to maintain this function was a challenge given the scale and pace of that event. NEMA's culture of continuous improvement, along with support from stakeholders did mitigate this and enabled improvements to continue to be made throughout the response. NEMA will continue to mature its lessons management capability.

4.2. In mid-2021, many agencies did not have dedicated personnel to establish/strengthen and deliver their lesson management processes. NEMA, along with other agencies, have encouraged agencies to refer to the Australian Lessons Management Handbook<sup>2</sup>, until New Zealand guidance is created. Since 2021, NEMA has directly supported agencies or organisations to strengthen their lessons management processes, as the agencies have developed their own capacity. Where appropriate, NEMA shares documents or tools NEMA applies to its own lessons management approach and encourages others to share theirs also. This approach is expected to benefit the development of New Zealand's Lessons Management guidance, as it will be able to draw on a wider pool of experience and expertise.

**Recommendation 5**

Improve the transparency of, and engagement with the public on, risk, readiness, and response arrangements to inform strategic policy, planning, investment, and resourcing decisions; and

**Question for DPMC and NEMA:** Has there been collaboration with other agencies to build enough capability and capacity to carry out effective risk reduction and readiness activities?

5.1. As noted in our letter dated 2 February 2024, the Risk and Systems Governance Group (RSGG) has recently been established within DPMC to ensure there is effective and proactive management and governance of National Risks and crises across government, and that effort is focused on building and strengthening New Zealand's long-term prosperity and resilience. This includes a focus on making sure government has the right systems and structures in place, and that these are working effectively to tackle increasingly complex challenges for the greatest long-term impact.

RSGG provides leadership of the National Risk Framework, designed to help government anticipate and improve the management of National Risks – those uncertain, yet conceivable, events or conditions that could have serious, long-term effects on New

<sup>2</sup> <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/lessons-management-handbook/>

Zealand's security and prosperity, requiring significant government intervention to manage. Work is currently underway by DPMC, in collaboration with NEMA and other agencies, to review and strengthen (where necessary) the National Risk Framework. This includes:

- Reviewing the National Risk Register and methodology, to ensure we capture and assess risks in an effective and consistent way
- Options for improving governance, monitoring and oversight of National Risks, and strategic risk and resilience issues
- Options for driving more informed and proactive prioritisation of resourcing and investment for building resilience.

These key work streams will help ensure the National Risk Framework is fit for purpose and provides value to decision makers, in order to advance New Zealand's long-term prosperity and strengthen our resilience to the most significant hazards and threats we face. Work across all these areas is underway now. We anticipate completing the review of the National Risk Register and methodology in the next six months, and to have made significant progress in relation to the other options by the end of the year.

In December 2022, DPMC published the full list and description of risks on the National Risk Register on the [DPMC website](#).

5.2. As noted in our letter dated 2 February 2024, DPMC has conducted a public survey exploring New Zealanders' attitudes and opinions relating to risks, challenges and opportunities, exploring attitudes and awareness towards hazards and threats, and how we can better share information and engage with the public on these topics. Findings from the 2022 and 2023 survey informed development of the National Security Long-term Insights Briefing and the National Security Strategy. These documents were publicly released and cover the challenges we face, and what government is doing to protect New Zealanders:

- [DPMC, MFAT and NSB agencies National Security Long-term Insights Briefing](#)
- [DPMC Secure Together - New Zealand's National Security Strategy \(2023-2028\)](#)

The 2024 survey round will also include more hazards, and the survey itself will now be referred to as the National Risks Public Survey.

5.3. NEMA's [Aotearoa New Zealand's National Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 Report](#) was published in November 2022. This report is a stocktake of the implementation of the Sendai Framework to date, assessing progress made and challenges experienced in preventing and reducing disaster risk, identifying new and emerging issues, as well as changes in context since 2015. This report contains many examples of collaboration with other agencies.

5.4. Climate change is an exacerbator of existing risk. The Ministry for Environment leads the Government's work programme on climate change. NEMA supports this work through involvement in interagency groups, including at Chief Executive level. NEMA leads a number of actions in the National Adaptation Plan across legislative, recovery and capability work programmes.

5.5. The better enabled science has informed the Hazard Risk Board of the probabilities of catastrophic events occurring and has strengthened strategic foresight in recent years.

NEMA has continued to build on its engagement with the science sector including most recently the establishment of an Earthquake Science Advisory Panel.

**Actions taken and their known or anticipated impact**

5.6. In 2022 NEMA published the [Risk Assessment for Civil Defence Emergency Management \(CDEM\) Group Planning Director's Guideline](#). This guideline provides context, methodology and tools for CDEM Groups and their partner agencies, to assess and evaluate hazard risks. The risk assessment process supports the development of CDEM Group Plans and aids decision making related to risk management within Group areas.

5.7. NEMA has commissioned an annual emergency preparedness survey since 2006. This survey measures New Zealand residents' emergency preparedness. The insights informs the National Public Education Programme and provides understanding of the usefulness of public education resources. The 2024 annual survey is currently being prepared. The 2023 results reinforce that New Zealand's preparedness must continue to improve. The survey reports are public and can be found [here](#).

**Actions planned or underway and their anticipated impacts and timeframes**

5.8. NEMA is facilitating the establishment of an all-of-government planning forum in 2024. This is expected to assist central government agencies to coordinate planning across their respective complex problems.

**Recommendation 6**

Provide regular assurance to Parliament about the public sector's readiness for major disruptive events, including how they have implemented our recommendations.

**Question for DPMC and NEMA:** Has there been collaboration with other agencies to provide regular assurance to the public and Parliament?

6.1. Actions on assurance are contained in our letter dated 2 February 2024.