

By Email

29 May 2025

Hon Mark Mitchell
Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery
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Tēnā koe Minister

STRENGTHENING OUR PARTNERSHIP FOR FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Thank you for your interest in how we manage flood risk and support communities through complex weather events.

Te Uru Kahika brings together New Zealand's sixteen regional and unitary councils. We champion best practice, foster collaboration, and work with central government to improve outcomes for communities and the environment.

Like you, our priority is to ensure that systems perform well so that communities are safe and supported—and public confidence in the emergency management system is maintained. Achieving this requires organisations to be well connected, with clear roles and responsibilities. During events, there is often pressure and sometimes tension about who makes which decisions. This is not a flaw but a feature of complex responses in high-stakes environments. What matters is that all parties understand their roles, respect the boundaries of decision-making, and act in the interest of public safety.

Regional and unitary councils, with our focus on practical implementation, form part of a wider hazard management system. CDEM Groups are supported by professional staff who work closely with counterparts at territorial authorities before and during emergencies. CDEM Group Managers meet regularly with NEMA officials through the Emergency Management Leadership Group to ensure coordination at all levels. We value these strong, practical relationships.

Equally important is alignment through the full emergency management cycle—from risk reduction to recovery. Catchment management work—such as bar cutting, hydrology, flood asset maintenance, and soil conservation—takes place year-round so that we are prepared when significant weather events occur. Through our role in environmental regulation, regional and unitary councils also work to reduce exposure to hazards and build long-term resilience. This set of functions and expertise mean that regional and unitary councils are also well-placed to manage flood infrastructure, including lake openings and river systems, in the lead-up to major events. Our staff make decisions based on the best information available, always prioritising public safety.

Our work is shaped by the realities of New Zealand's dynamic climate and geomorphology. While it is not possible to protect every location from every eventuality, risks can be managed—and communities better prepared. This includes clear communication about the limits of flood protection and the role of households and communities in an emergency.

We take our responsibilities seriously and are committed to continuous improvement. Councils across New Zealand are sharing lessons, benchmarking progress, and identifying areas for improvement together. We have included some examples as an annex to this letter.



We acknowledge that there are challenges. Individual councils will have specific local insights to share. At a broad level, we believe emergency powers are generally adequate, but see opportunities to strengthen the system through:

- Better weather and flood forecasting;
- Investment in early warning systems;
- Co-investment in flood infrastructure;
- Public education and national messaging.

System architecture also matters. As changes to emergency management, resource management, and climate adaptation legislation unfold, integration and clarity across these frameworks is essential. This includes retaining key emergency powers under new resource management legislation, and attention to liability in relation to hazard-management functions under different statutes.

If concerns exist, please let us know as we are ready to work with you. Regional Chief Executive Officers next meet in Christchurch on 25 July, were you available to attend, we would welcome the opportunity to explore how we can strengthen our partnership with central government to improve public safety, resilience, and trust in our emergency management systems.

Ngā mihi,



DARAN PONTER
for REGIONAL MAYORS AND CHAIRS

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REGIONAL SECTOR INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Regional and unitary authorities play important roles in the emergency management system before, during, and after severe weather events. Coordination of effort through Te Uru Kahika enables us to deliver more consistent results across the country more efficiently.

Some current and recent examples of regional sector initiatives that support emergency management and recovery are outlined below.

- Central and regional government are co-investing in flood protection through the Regional Infrastructure Fund (see image on next page). Forty two projects funded through Tranche 1 are being delivered. Funding for Tranche 2 is currently being confirmed.
- In addition to physical works, proposed Tranche 2 projects include telemetry improvements and a National Flood Risk Investment Prioritisation Tool to provide core data about risk and its management.
- Earlier co-investment accelerated completion of projects that prevented significant losses at Taradale and in the lower Waipaoa catchment during Cyclone Gabrielle. Further improvements have been since been delivered by councils with North Island Weather Event funding.
- The regional sector is working with the Infrastructure Commission to ensure flood-protection assets are considered in the National Infrastructure Pipeline.
- We are working, often with communities and iwi/hapū, to use nature-based solutions to reduce flood risk.
- Through our chief science advisor and Special Interest Groups, we are directly involved in efforts to improve New Zealand's natural hazard science and data systems.
- The National Flood Warning Steering Group supports capability improvements across the sector, including flood modelling and engagement with NIWA / MetService.
- Our hydrology teams work together to train and make best of expertise around the country, providing the best information we can to support emergency response.
- As well as implementing changes in their own regions, CDEM Group managers are working with DPMC and NEMA officials on system improvements to respond to recommendations from the 2023 North Island severe weather event reviews.
- CDEM Group managers also work together to transfer knowledge across regions. This includes an annual stocktake on capability, resourcing, operational systems and response tools. Similarities and differences inform planning and investment decisions and working relationships with stakeholders. Peer review of Group Emergency Management Plans supports practice improvements and helps to address the interface at regional boundaries.
- Trained staff regularly deploy to other regions to support response and recovery efforts, providing additional capacity during protracted and exhausting periods of work for local teams.

We would be glad to provide more detail in any of these areas—and to discuss opportunities to better align effort across the emergency management and recovery system.

An overview of our 80 priority flood protection projects is shown below, with full detail provided in the Appendices. These projects total \$329.35M.

North Island
44 projects
\$165.55m investment

South Island
36 projects
\$163.80m investment

All projects have a duration of three years until completion, except where otherwise indicated:
* = 1 year
** = 2 years

The immediate project needs in Tairāwhiti, Hawke's Bay, and Horizons have been addressed with the help of funding allocated as part of Cyclone Gabrielle recovery programmes.

