



03 November 2023

Governance and Administration Committee
Parliament Buildings
Wellington
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Supplementary to the submission by Community Networks Aotearoa on the Emergency Management Bill

Introduction

CAB provides a free, confidential, and independent service of information, advice, and advocacy. We help people know and understand their rights and responsibilities, feel empowered to act on them, and find the community services they need. When we see that policies or laws aren't working well for people, we act as a voice for positive social change.

Our service is provided from over eighty locations around the motu by our 2,000 trained CAB volunteers. In the past financial year, the CAB assisted with 326,328 client interactions across the range of issues that affect people in their daily lives. Every time a person seeks the CAB's help, we record what they sought help with and what we did in response; this gives us unique information about the issues affecting people in communities nationwide.

The role of Citizens Advice Bureau in civil emergencies

Our CABS are an important source of help for people in the lead-up to, during, and in the wake of civil emergencies. They help to keep people informed about their regions' civil defence status and official advice to the public, they connect people with emergency and relief services - and also with opportunities to contribute to local relief efforts - and they help people to address ongoing issues in the aftermath of emergency events.

CABs help people access emergency accommodation, food assistance, Civil Defence support payments, and advice about damage to property, blocked drains, and trees - as well as advice about ongoing related issues such as those involving insurance, and tenancy rights. Our volunteers also provide support and care to people in times of emergency through words of reassurance for stressed and fearful clients and through phoning to check in on vulnerable clients who want that kind of contact and support.

Reflecting the whakataukī (proverb) Taku pou whakawhirinaki i ngā wā o te porotaika, from which our name in te reo Māori - Ngā Pou Whakawhirinaki o Aotearoa - is derived, our CABs are a source of strength for people in these moments of adversity.

Here are some examples of client enquiries our CABs received during the severe weather events in the northern and eastern parts of the North Island in February 2023:

Chris was worried that his house may flood and called to ask if there was an emergency shelter in his area, and what to take with him if he had to evacuate. We located the information for Chris, talked it through, and emailed him a summary of the key information, as requested. He accepted our offer to call him back later in the day, to check in and see how he was being affected.

Harvey's house was extensively damaged by the recent floods, as were many of his neighbours' properties - some of which were red-stickered. Harvey called to find out if the Council was going to provide waste collection for flood contaminated items. After referring to information from Emergency Management we were able to advise that skips bins would be provided free of charge to areas badly affected by the flooding. We gave Harvey the contact details for Emergency Management so he could call them to confirm that his street would be covered by the service.

Beth was concerned that the large tree on her neighbour's property posed a safety risk, in light of the recent flooding and imminent cyclone. She had trimmed back the branches she could reach, but her neighbour refused to have the tree trimmed to lower its height. Beth was anxious about the situation, so we took the time she needed to talk through her concerns. We located information for Beth about who is responsible for tree trimming and the options for seeking resolution when neighbours disagree.

We note the observation within the Bill's General Policy Statement that "Emergencies can amplify existing inequalities within society and disproportionately impact some population groups during emergency events. These populations may include rural communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, seniors, disabled people, children, and those experiencing socio-economic deprivation or isolation."

The nature of our service means that we are an accessible and trusted place where people can seek help, including in times of crisis, when they don't know who to ask or they can't otherwise reach the help they need. The ability to get assistance from us for any question or issue, the fact that people can visit, phone, email, or web chat with a CAB, and our independence from government means we don't have the barriers to being able to help people that government organisations have. It gives us a greater reach into the community, especially to vulnerable groups. This is a key reason why our role is so vital and is an important one during times of emergency.

Also, through our ongoing presence and service delivery within communities, we are part of the social infrastructure that supports community wellbeing and resilience. As such, our work

strengthens the ability of communities to 'get through' and recover.

Need for inclusion of the community sector within the Bill

In its current form, we do not see sufficient recognition within the Bill of the important role of community organisations in civil emergencies, nor proper inclusion of community organisations within the bodies and processes that fall under this Bill for ensuring good communication and coordination between - and support for - those with key roles to play in response and recovery.

Our position is that this is a significant oversight which needs to be addressed if this legislation is to be effective and achieve its purpose.

One of the crucial oversights is the lack of provision for inclusion of community organisation representation within Emergency Management Committees. We acknowledge the requirement within the Bill for "each Emergency Management Committee to identify and engage with communities within its area that may be disproportionately impacted by emergencies, and to engage with them about how to address their needs in emergency management committee plans." However, as we do not see this as sufficient to ensure the voice of community sector organisations - with all of our community knowledge, experience and connections - to be heard within these bodies, and we believe this will be to detriment of communities, and vulnerable populations.

In terms of more detailed recommendations, we would like to state our support for the 12 recommendations that Community Networks Aotearoa have put forward in their submission to this Bill. They relate to:

- Identifying and Mapping Community Organisations
- Establishing Communication Channels
- Holding Networking Events
- Engaging Community Liaison Officers
- Sharing Information and Resources
- Cultural Competence Training
- Joint Initiatives and Projects
- Regular Meetings and Workgroups
- Feedback Mechanisms
- Public Awareness Campaigns
- Data Sharing and Analysis
- Inclusivity and Representation:

Conclusion

We would appreciate the opportunity to speak with the Select Committee on this Bill, and can be contacted as per the details below.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the Emergency Management Bill, and we look forward to further opportunities to help shape this Bill so that it achieves its potential for helping New Zealanders during times of emergency.

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