

Media Release (Immediate)

Islands for the Future of Humanity (NZ registered charity #CC63160;
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5 May 2026

Hormuz crisis is a symptom, not the story: researchers call for national vulnerability register and democratic risk governance

New Zealand's response to the Hormuz fuel crisis risks repeating a familiar failure: obsessing over the last shock while the next one loads.

That is the warning from global catastrophic risk researchers associated with New Zealand resilience charity **Islands for the Future of Humanity**, who argue that the real lesson of the current crisis is not about fuel alone, it is about the systemic absence of democratic, forward-looking governance of major national risk.

"The fuel vulnerability was identified years ago. We published on it in 2023. MFAT modelled this exact scenario in July 2025," says Dr Matt Boyd of Adapt Research. **"The failure is not a failure of foresight. It is an institutional failure: no living public risk register, no pre-built decision frameworks, no democratic authorisation of preparedness assumptions. We are doing in crisis what should have been done in anticipation."**

New Zealand faces a wide portfolio of serious risks beyond fuel: disruption to undersea cables and satellite infrastructure, sunlight reduction from volcanic or nuclear events devastating food production, extreme pandemics, grid-disabling cyberattacks. Yet the country has no unified, public-facing system for assessing these risks and the resilience options together. Calls for more serious resilience-building have come from researchers and civil society for years, and have repeatedly failed to translate into action by governments.

"What New Zealand needs is a National Vulnerability Register, hazard-agnostic, focused on what our critical systems are actually exposed to, paired with a costed National Mitigation Register so citizens and decision-makers can see what it would take to fix our exposures," says Boyd. **"And it needs a Parliamentary Commissioner for Catastrophic Risk: independent, ongoing oversight of whether we are actually prepared, not just whether we coped with the last crisis."**

Professor Nick Wilson of the University of Otago, Wellington says the stakes are existential. **"We are not talking about inconvenience. In the most serious scenarios, nuclear conflict, volcanic winter, extreme pandemic, resilience is about whether people can grow food, move goods, access medicines or spare parts. New Zealand has the geography and ingenuity to build that resilience. What has been missing is the political will."**

The researchers also argue that genuine public engagement is essential, a structured process drawing on knowledge across New Zealand's research community, civil society, and private

sector, giving citizens a real voice in resilience trade-offs. Their analysis of Covid-19 outcomes found that democracy strongly predicted fewer deaths in island nations.

The new analysis builds on peer-reviewed work in the journals *Risk Analysis*, *Policy Quarterly*, and the 2023 NZCat Project report.

"The Hormuz crisis will likely eventually resolve," says Boyd. "But the next systemic shock will come. The time to build the vulnerability register, the mitigation menu, and the resilience New Zealand actually needs is now, before the next crisis reminds us again that we already knew, or even prevents us from acting. Our 2023 NZCat report awaits robust public deliberation, now more than ever."

Further reading:

Boyd & Wilson (April 30, 2026), "From Technocracy to Democracy: What NZ's National Risk Register Should Actually Do": <https://www.islandfutures.earth/refuge-theory-blog-posts/from-technocracy-to-democracy-what-nzs-national-risk-register-should-actually-do>

Aotearoa NZ, Global Catastrophe, and Resilience Options (NZCat Project Report, 2023): <https://adaptresearchwriting.com/2023/11/16/main-report-aotearoa-nz-global-catastrophe-and-resilience-options/>

Boyd & Wilson (2025), "From Disaster Response to Anticipatory Governance," *Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 21, Issue 4: <https://ojs.victoria.ac.nz/pq/article/view/10337>

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