

# Submission on the Emergency Management Bill To the Governance and Administration Committee

**Submitted by Volunteering New Zealand Inc | Tūao Aotearoa**  
**Date 12 February 2026**

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## Introduction & Background

1. Volunteering New Zealand Inc | Tūao Aotearoa (Volunteering New Zealand) welcomes the opportunity to submit on the Emergency Management Bill (No 2).
2. Volunteering New Zealand supports the intent of the Bill and the approach taken to update and replace the existing Act with a newly formed Bill. And that it retains our existing philosophies of the CDEM Act; considering all hazards, taking an end-to-end risk management approach, and that all parts of society play a role, with risks managed by those who are best placed to do so, and by those closest to them.
3. Our submission is informed by our work with our network of member organisations including regional volunteer centres. It is also informed by our experiences of leading emergency level response and sector leadership during Covid-19 lockdowns, and more recently our experiences supporting member organisations in the Auckland Anniversary Floods, and Cyclone Gabrielle.
4. We support the Bill's intent to build on the existing legislative framework and the intent of the reform. We particularly support changes to enable the emergency management system to:
  - Strengthen the role of communities and iwi Māori, in emergency management
  - Provide clearer responsibilities at national, regional and local levels
  - Ensure that agencies have the tools to do their jobs effectively when an emergency happens.
5. Our submission includes commentary and formulates some key recommendations that should be considered when government enacts this bill.
6. Established volunteer groups include local and regional community organisations, Iwi, Hapu, marae and diverse communities across Aotearoa New Zealand. They are key contributors to the recovery phases that follow a response, drawing on significant community infrastructure and volunteers.
7. Events like the Christchurch earthquakes, and Cyclone Gabrielle highlight the exceptionally long tail of the recovery phases that volunteers and communities, iwi and hapu are supporting and enabling long after the initial emergency response has been conducted.

## Collaboration and support of other submissions

8. Volunteering New Zealand is a member of the Community Constellation, a collaborative group of peak bodies and infrastructure organisations across Aotearoa. In addition to this submission, we have added our name in support of the submission that Community Constellation is making on behalf of its members.
9. Volunteering New Zealand also supports the submissions made by the following organisations:
  - Te Pai Ora o Aotearoa, Social Service Providers
  - New Zealand Council for Social Services
  - SociaLink and Volunteering Services Bay of Plenty.
  - Land Search and Rescue
  - Coastguard New Zealand
  - Volunteer Centre Network Association, and
  - The United Fire Brigade Association.
10. We acknowledge and are grateful for the decision by the Governance and Administration Committee to extend the submission deadline for the Bill. We hope this will allow other affected stakeholders to put together submissions.

## About Volunteering New Zealand

11. Volunteering New Zealand is a membership-based national organisation, comprising over 100 community-based volunteering service organisations working alongside and within communities across Aotearoa New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> Our organisational membership includes local and national service providers, large national care providers, Kaupapa Māori and Iwi social service organisations and Pacific providers.
12. Volunteering New Zealand's purpose is to be a kaitiaki of volunteering and Mahi Aroha, empowering volunteers to enrich Aotearoa New Zealand. Our aspiration for Aotearoa New Zealand is that volunteering is valued as part of who we are as a nation. That we thrive and are enriched by the goodwill of volunteers in every community.
13. Volunteering New Zealand was established in 2001, to coincide with the International Year of the Volunteer. Large national voluntary organisations, regional Volunteer Centres and the Department of Internal Affairs were all part of our creation, reflecting our founding purpose as a national voice for volunteering.
14. Today, VNZ continues its role as the peak body organisation for the community and voluntary sector, influencing policy, producing sector-relevant research, best practice guidelines, tools and resources and supporting the sector through its capability development and advisory services, and acting as an advocate for volunteering and volunteers more generally.
15. We are an incorporated society, a registered charity and an organisation committed to a shared Te Tiriti-led future.
16. Emergency management is becoming more relevant to our sector every year. Many of our member organisations have been directly impacted by recent severe weather events including Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023 and the events across the North Island last month. Our network of stakeholders stretches well beyond our 100 national members. Our members connect with nearly 10,000 community organisations through across the motu.

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<sup>1</sup> Find out more about Volunteering New Zealand at [www.volunteeringnz.org.nz/](http://www.volunteeringnz.org.nz/). Our strategic plan 2025-2028 can be found [here](#)

## **Volunteering New Zealand's experiences in emergencies**

17. Volunteering New Zealand has experience delivering and supporting a range of different stages of emergency response, and across multiple declared emergency events.
18. We have a significant sector leadership with a focus on communications that meets the needs of the sector and also ensured that information was clear, accessible and timely.
19. During the Covid Pandemic lockdowns and National State of Emergency (March-July 2020) Volunteering New Zealand provided support services directly to the National Emergency Management Agency's Crisis Management Centre. Drawing on our significant network connections, communications capabilities, and connections to volunteer centres and member organisation. Key activities delivered to support NEMA and our communities included:
  - Co-ordinate, support development, and provide national guidance to community organisations and the volunteer workforce in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (from 14/04/20 to 22/06/20).
  - Sit rep reporting based on member and stakeholder experiences, research to support NEMA decision making.
20. During the Cyclone Gabrielle and Auckland Anniversary 2023 adverse weather events, we supported regional volunteer centres in Hawkes Bay and Auckland. This included:
  - Accessing and applying for grant funding.
  - Human resource support – diverting staffing to support their response work.
  - Communications and strategic support.
  - Sit Rep reporting from our membership and stakeholders into key contacts within in DIA and NEMA.

### **General reflections and conclusions from our experience**

21. Based on our experiences from this wide level of experience and work we note the following conclusions and recommendations outlined below.
22. There is great volunteering sector expertise within the Volunteer Centre network with active communities and relationships in 17 regions. Greater investment into this network is important.
23. Volunteering New Zealand's unique position as a membership organisation and community peak body means we are uniquely placed to collaborate and share information quickly to our membership and wider stakeholders.
24. Community Organisations, Hapu and Iwi, and Marae disproportionately contribute to our shared wellbeing and collective recoveries. These groups need the capacity and opportunity to come together and build strength in 'peace time'.
25. We believe there is significant opportunity to enable community organisations such as these to be prepared now so that that they are more resilient and able to enable, lead, awhi, and manaaki their communities in the recovery phases of events.
26. We note that as there is an increase in emergency events, there is an increase in recovery needs, and that these are where volunteers are often most effective.
27. Capacity to scale in an emergency or after an emergency is extremely limited. We believe it is critical for there to be more resourcing now for community organisations so that they can be:
  - More prepared for emergencies within their communities.

- Prepared for their own emergent response needs
- Prepared and well-resourced for an event, during an event and after an event to enable them to continue to work effectively with volunteers and their communities.

## International Year of the Volunteer 2026 - global perspectives

28. The International Volunteer Year 2026 highlights the essential role volunteers play in advancing global goals, fostering resilience, and driving collective progress. Governments, organisations, and communities are encouraged to recognise and support volunteers by creating safe, inclusive environments and integrating volunteering into policies.
29. Volunteers hold deep cultural and social significance. Volunteering has long been a part of human society – from mutual aid traditions to organised movements – and is embedded in traditions and values across cultures. It fosters solidarity, civic engagement, and a sense of belonging.
30. Volunteers are resilient and adaptable. They often work in challenging conditions, bringing creativity, empathy, and endurance to their missions.

### IVY 2026 is an opportunity to provide guidance to governments

31. Volunteering New Zealand highlights the vital importance of volunteerism and volunteers, given the significant contribution gifted by volunteers and tūao in emergencies, and their aftermath. We particularly highlight the following guidance issued globally to governments with regards to volunteers<sup>2</sup>:
32. **“Integrate volunteerism into national development plans, legal frameworks and sectoral policies.** Ensure these reflect the diversity and value of volunteer efforts and promote safe, fair and supportive conditions for participation.
33. **“Remove legal, social and economic barriers to volunteering.** Remove inequalities and risks to volunteering by guaranteeing that everyone, regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion and lived experiences can volunteer.
34. **“Collect and share data on volunteer contributions.** Establish or strengthen systems to measure the impact of volunteerism across sectors. Use evidence to inform policies, promote innovation and highlight the contributions of volunteers across sectors.
35. **“Allocate financial, institutional and technical resources to support volunteer initiatives.** Invest in building and strengthening volunteer infrastructure.
36. **“Foster innovation in volunteering.** Encourage flexible, adaptive models that respond to evolving needs, such as digital, corporate, intergenerational and skill-based volunteering”.

## Volunteers and volunteering in Aotearoa New Zealand

37. In Aotearoa New Zealand volunteers are giving more time informally than to organisations. This reflects worldwide trends. Approximately 14.3% of the global population engages in

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<sup>2</sup> [https://knowledge.unv.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/IVY%202026\\_Communications%20Guide\\_2.pdf](https://knowledge.unv.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/IVY%202026_Communications%20Guide_2.pdf) pg 9.

informal volunteering (direct help), while 6.5% engage in formal volunteering through organisations.

38. Over half of New Zealanders (53.0%) volunteered over the previous four weeks (General Social Survey March 2025 update). For those that volunteered, 27.6% volunteered through an organisation and 40.8% volunteered directly.
39. 11.6% of those who volunteer do so with social service organisations, including civil defence and emergency services.
40. Volunteers can be found across the full spectrum of emergency management framework, from risk reduction and resilience building within communities, to emergency response, through to recovery.
41. We note that Emergency Management volunteers include:
  - EM Specific Volunteers – ones that EM essentially recruit, support and manage prior and during an emergency eg Response Teams, Welfare teams and some EOC staff.
  - “Formal” emergency response volunteers from other organisations that can provide significant workforce to help during a response eg Coastguard, Land SAR, Surf Lifesaving.
  - Established volunteer groups who pivot during an event to provide support to communities – church groups, service clubs etc.
  - Spontaneous volunteers – those who are part of communities and volunteer to help during an event.
42. These all need a different approach and considerations before, during and after an event for their significant potential value to be fully realised.

## **Existing community and volunteering infrastructure support**

43. Volunteering New Zealand highlights and acknowledges the breadth of community-based response support infrastructure already operating across Aotearoa New Zealand. As noted above, communities, community organisations, iwi, hapu and marae, civic groups, spontaneous volunteers significantly underwrite our collective emergency response.
44. We acknowledge that mana whenua are taking the lead in response to emergencies, as a part of their communities, not separate from them, and supported by a national network of community workers. We have seen this in recent weeks with marae opening their doors to provide shelter, food and care to people affected by January’s severe weather. Effective regional efforts are collaborative, especially in situations where responses from central government are slow, ineffective, under-resourced and disconnected from community efforts.
45. Regionally there are 17 Volunteer Centres from Northland to Southland. They are member organisations of Volunteering New Zealand but are separate regional entities that have relationships with between 200-500 community organisations in their regions.
46. A key role they play is to support the volunteering capability of these organisations including being a conduit to connecting them with volunteers looking to support community organisations in an emergency.
47. Volunteer Centres are experts in recruiting, onboarding, deploying, and coordinating volunteers – it is what they do in the community every day.
48. Volunteer Centres have capacity to have staff and volunteers who are trained in emergency management and prepared to continue to develop this knowledge. Centre staff in most

centres are already engaged at a local level with CDEM teams, and some are already working at a regional level with CDEM.

49. Volunteering Services supports Tauranga City Council and Western Bay of Plenty District Council with emergency volunteers. Volunteering Services Bay of Plenty activated in the Mount Maunganui landslide emergency.
50. Their team of 90+ emergency volunteers was ready, and volunteers were tasked to help with the recovery. In particular, volunteers supported the Community Care Centre with hospitality and housekeeping. They have developed solid relationships, agreed ways of working and a volunteer management system that could be activated at short notice. Volunteering Services also collaborates with Student Volunteer Army (Waikato).
47. Established volunteer groups include local and regional community organisations, Iwi, Hapu, marae and diverse communities across Aotearoa New Zealand. They are key contributors to the recovery phases that follow a response, drawing on significant community infrastructure and volunteers.
48. Events like the Christchurch Earthquakes, and Cyclone Gabrielle highlight the exceptionally long tail of the recovery phases that volunteers and communities, iwi and hapu are supporting and enabling long after the initial emergency response has been conducted.

## **Volunteering New Zealand's comments on the Bill**

49. We support the Bill's intent to build on the existing legislative framework and the intent of the reform. We particularly support changes to:
  - Strengthen the role of communities and iwi Māori in emergency management
  - Provide clearer responsibilities at national, regional and local levels.
  - Ensure that **agencies** have the tools to do their jobs effectively when an emergency happens.
50. Volunteering New Zealand supports the Bill's stated purposes of "strengthening role of iwi Māori" and "strengthening role of community," two objectives that we see as inextricably linked.
51. We note that there is no definition within the bill for the term "Agencies". We contend that communities and iwi Māori should also be resourced to enable volunteers and tūao to underwrite our emergency response system.
52. A key part of communities being prepared and able to participate in emergencies that affect them is successful coordination of existing and spontaneous volunteers to ensure that the right support is provided at the right time for the right cause. Volunteer Coordination is a key part of the operations role and Volunteer Centres have the expertise to provide this coordination.
53. Volunteering infrastructure such as the Volunteer Centre network should be maintained and resourced so that it is always able to quickly scale up to support regionally and nationally in times of emergency.
54. More funding for volunteer infrastructure (such as database management) would enable greater community preparedness and participation.
55. Volunteer expense reimbursement is an issue. We believe that costs to volunteer can create barriers to equitable participation in voluntary giving. For example, volunteer's wetsuits, or other gear may be ruined in a flood clean-up. We believe that a volunteer should not be out-of-pocket for using their own equipment and that there should be a

consistent approach to volunteer reimbursement for reasonable expenses incurred while volunteering.

56. We support that the Bill requires the Director-General of Emergency Management and Emergency Management Committees to identify communities that may be disproportionately affected by emergencies and engage with representatives of those communities during the development of emergency management plans.
57. There are many community organisations who work with disproportionately affected communities, supported by peak bodies such as Social Service Providers Aotearoa, Hui E! Community Aotearoa, the Community Constellation Network and ourselves. They would contribute valuable insights in the development of emergency management plans and should be consulted.
58. We support the requirement for regional emergency management plans to state how they will manage offers of resources from the public.
59. We consider that this would promote ongoing planning, preparation, and relationship building between CDEM groups and local organisations and individuals before national emergencies occur. This should result in improved coordination and use of local emergency responses when required – in particular from volunteers, volunteer organisations and their partners.
60. We support protection from civil liability. We would like to include reimbursement for expenses incurred by volunteers during/ after an emergency. We recognise that people, businesses and communities are often the first to respond in an emergency. They may not be directed by a person under the Act, but it is important they are protected from civil liability.
61. However, we also note the importance of keeping everybody, including all volunteers, safe.
62. We acknowledge that Emergency Management Co-ordinating Executive Groups will need to include members “with knowledge, experience, or expertise” of the physical environment in the Group’s area.
63. We note there is an option to co-opt people to this group. We recommend this membership could include search and rescue organisations (eg LandSAR, Coastguard), and people from the community and voluntary sector.
64. We recommend that the clause covering appointment of Emergency Management Co-ordinating Executive Group members (currently 39) is amended to specify that peak bodies should have a role in identifying members from their networks.
65. National Peak bodies (like Te Pai Ora Social Services Aotearoa and Volunteering New Zealand), and regional infrastructure organisations like regional volunteer centres frequently and effectively work as a conduit between member organisations and central and local government. We are uniquely positioned to offer perspectives that are both systemic and regionally specific. This means we can:
  - Ensure community voice in emergency management planning.
  - Connect Emergency Management Committees with community organisations.
  - Facilitate community participation and engagement; and
  - Represent community interests and knowledge.
66. The policy statement accompanying the Bill acknowledges that some populations may face greater risk including “rural communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, seniors, disabled people, children, and those experiencing socio-economic deprivation or isolation.” However, the Bill’s definition of ‘disproportionately affected community’ does not

include a definition or elaborate on the way that factors like age and disability can exacerbate vulnerabilities.

67. The Bill currently requires Emergency Management Committees to engage with representatives of disproportionately affected communities when developing proposals for emergency management plans. However, it does not specify what this engagement should look like. Local and regional emergency management plans should be developed with the active involvement of disproportionately affected communities, up to and including representation on Emergency Management Co-ordinating Executive Groups.

## Recommendations and conclusion

68. We believe that a fit-for-purpose approach to emergency management needs to be one where communities, community organisations, volunteers and tūao are empowered *and adequately resourced* and prepared for both emergency events themselves, and for the prolonged and increasingly repeated recovery periods.

69. We recommend more investment into the wider community organisation and volunteering infrastructure where it supports or enables the spectrum of emergency community response, resilience or recovery. This should include the following:

- Community organisations resilience and preparedness for recovery phases is funded immediately.
- Volunteer Centre organisations should be funded on an annual and ongoing basis, to enable them to scale up in, and particularly after, emergencies into recovery.
- Investment into sector peak bodies supporting community resilience, volunteering infrastructure and volunteers to enable greater preparedness to support communities.

70. With regards to volunteers, note that Emergency Management volunteers are varied and a range of different responses and considerations arise for each of these categories:

- EM Specific Volunteers – ones that EM essentially recruit, support and manage prior and during an emergency eg Response Teams, Welfare teams and some EOC staff.
- “Formal” emergency response volunteers from other organisations that can provide significant workforce to help during a response eg Coastguard, Land SAR, Surf Lifesaving.
- Established volunteer groups who pivot during an event to provide support to communities – church groups, service clubs etc.
- Spontaneous volunteers – those who are part of communities and volunteer to help during an event.

Ensure distinction and clarity between these types of volunteers in the legislation to optimise their incorporation into planning and use during responses. They all have a potential role to play but this is hugely varied and there needs to be a more nuanced approach to volunteers.

71. We also recommend that decision makers particularly consider the following:

- Ensuring legislative settings enable all recognised participants in emergency management responses to be reimbursed for their incurred costs where there is no other tagged funding for those expenses.
- Including volunteering and volunteers in crisis management pre-planning, including protocols for mobilisation.

- Acknowledgment of the complexities of volunteer involvement, with a particular focus on volunteer safety and those around volunteering and paid roles and blurring of these that can occur.
- Reflect on the role for peak bodies in identifying members for Emergency Management Co-ordinating Executive Groups from within their networks;
- Acknowledge and reflect on the important role of volunteer centres in scaling up community response particularly in recovery.
- Recognition of the importance of investing in community organisations in advance of emergencies so that they are sufficiently able to be prepared for emergencies, and for prolonged recovery periods.

72. Thank you for considering Volunteering New Zealand's submission.