



SocialLink – Tūhono Pāpori is the umbrella peak body for the social and community sector and represents over 1500 organisations and individuals working in the Western Bay of Plenty. Our legal name is Social Sector Innovation Western Bay of Plenty Charitable Trust: Charities registration number CC50192 and we are based at The Kollektive, 145 17<sup>th</sup> Ave Tauranga.

SocialLink provide services to social service providers, community and Māori organisations to strengthen their capability as they deliver services to their communities. We advocate for the sectors' interests, social justice and equity of opportunity for all people living in the WBOP.

[www.sociallink.org.nz](http://www.sociallink.org.nz)

## **Submission on the Emergency Management Bill (No 2) to the Governance and Administration Committee February 2026**

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important bill.

### **1. Context to our submission**

Through our services and community connections in Tauranga and the Western Bay of Plenty, SocialLink has knowledge and insight to offer on community needs, exposure and capability in the event of natural disasters and other emergencies.

#### **1.1 SocialLink Services**

Our services include the following which have direct connections to what the Bill attempts to cover. In outlining them we make some recommendations:

- 1.1.1. Volunteering Services (VS)** for the Western Bay is the key local organisation promoting and developing volunteering in the region, including emergency volunteering. The Bill recognises and includes provision for volunteering (eg Clauses 27 and 28). VS has a Memorandum of Understanding to support with emergency volunteers where required, with both local territorial authorities, Tauranga City Council and Western Bay of Plenty District Council (through their membership of the Bay of Plenty Civil Defence Emergency Management Group)
- 1.1.2 Whakamana Tangata** service which strengthens Kaupapa Māori for purpose organisations to support their communities to grow, connect and thrive. This includes supporting hapū and marae to access funding and other opportunities for development. Marae are often at the forefront of providing safe community hubs in emergencies but

can also be in the path of flooding and other adverse emergency events. They are essential infrastructure and should be recognised and funded as such.

***Recommendation:* That marae are formally recognised as emergency community hubs and are resourced as such.**

**1.1.3. SocialLink works closely with frontline social service and community organisations** throughout the Western Bay of Plenty. Their services and programmes support people, whānau and communities who may have fewer resources to prepare for, be safe during or recover from the impact of natural disasters and other emergencies. These include people who are on poverty line incomes, are homeless, have reduced mobility or other disabilities or health conditions increasing their vulnerability, or are new to Aotearoa New Zealand and may not be aware of or understand risks or emergency warnings.

## **1.2 The fatal landslide on Mauao/Maunganui on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2026**

The recent January 21/22 rainfall of over 275 millimetres in Tauranga and Western Bay of Plenty led to fast, traumatic and deadly impacts including the fatal landslide at Mauao and another causing deaths in Welcome Bay.

Several hours before the landslide, ordinary people saw and acted to do something about the risks to the campground at the foot of Mauao (Maunganui). They raised concerns about the earth movement with neighbouring campers and tried to do so with local emergency management authorities. Efforts were in vain: the landslide at 9.29am killed six people, including at least one of the people who had been raising the alarm.

As a local organisation, SocialLink like many others has been affected by this and makes the following comments and recommendations.

### **1.2.1 Need for improving how and where people raise concerns – a one door approach.**

Given the difficulty people had in having their concerns heard and action taken on the landslide risk at the campground at Mauao/Maunganui early on January 22, we **recommend the content of emergency plans (Clause 91)** should address this.

***Recommendation:* That the content of plans (Clause 91) should include arrangements for how and what mechanisms the public/affected communities can use to raise issues and communicate concerns.**

This should be through a one door/one contact number approach to a central point, staffed 24/7 and with appropriate resourcing and escalation protocols and action. It should adhere to accessibility standards including being accessible to people using languages other than English as their first language and users of sign language or who are vision impaired.

### **1.2.2 Volunteering services –prior readiness, funding and collaboration were essential in responding after the landslides**

The Bill recognises and includes provision for volunteering for example as part of functions of Emergency Management Committees in Clauses 27 and 28. Clause 27 (b) and Clause 28(b) are to **“ensure that suitably trained and competent personnel, including volunteers, are available and that there is an appropriate organisational structure for those personnel for effective emergency management in its area.”**

We offer the following experience with emergency management for the select committee to consider in its deliberations.

Volunteering Services for Tauranga and Western Bay of Plenty was involved in supporting the community care centre He Maimai Aroha, established by Tauranga City Council in Mount Maunganui in the aftermath of the landslide. VS's role was the result of extensive prior management planning and development.

The MOU which VS secured with Tauranga City Council and Western Bay of Plenty District Council included some resourcing for readiness activity and training. As a result of this and additional seed funding from a philanthropic funder, VS was resourced to establish an emergency volunteering database and Volunteer Management System. The system was tailored to support volunteering in an emergency and a team of over 100 standby emergency volunteers were onboarded.

VS is a member of the Local Welfare Committee and was involved in emergency briefings during and after the storm event. In the Recovery phase when the community care centre He Maimai Aroha was set up, volunteers from VS's emergency volunteer team were tasked to support it with hospitality and housekeeping. The Volunteer Management System was activated, and the standby volunteer team was organised quickly into a roster system, covering the opening hours of the community care centre. Spontaneous volunteers were easily onboarded to the Volunteer Management System and commenced volunteering with minimal delay. The success of the emergency volunteer response in Tauranga/WBOP can be attributed to the readiness activity, funded and resourced by TCC and WBOPDC and the strong relationships which were built prior to the storm event.

## **1. Need for prevention funding and other investment in communities and infrastructure**

Whatever the findings of the inquiries into the landslide events on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January, this proposed Bill is only one part of the picture to improve preparation for and recovery from emergencies for communities. Extending the closing date for submissions on the Bill was the right thing to do given what occurred in relation to the fatal event. Thank you to the Committee for this decision.

Ordinary people, neighbours, community organisations, hapū, iwi, marae, emergency personnel will always step up for their communities, irrespective of what local authorities and national government do.

However, 'community resilience' should not be expected or relied on by governments to fill gaps in funding for the management of emergencies. Communities should not have to suffer the consequences of poor policy making, including land use that doesn't take sufficient notice of changing climatic conditions.

It is pleasing to see the Bill is acknowledging the impact of weather and other events, particularly on those with fewer financial resources and those with other specific needs or vulnerabilities.

We note that the Planning Bill and the Natural Environments Bill have been open for submissions. There must be integrated work between these three Bills, particularly the Planning Bill to ensure that the provisions in this Bill do not contribute to future emergencies such as landslips or flooding of homes.

Aotearoa New Zealand needs more resourcing and action to reduce weather related impacts on communities and livelihoods, otherwise we will continue to go down the ‘spending after the fact’ path which is untenable on multiple levels.

We are also concerned that territorial authorities will have huge roles in providing plans, prevention efforts, technical expertise, staff and mop up services, but will be stretched to find the budget to do these adequately. This will be particularly if rate caps are introduced, although it is noted that in the event of an emergency such caps may not apply.

Socialink believes much more funding investment is needed to fulfil the Purpose of the proposed Act (Clause 3) which includes *‘to support the social, economic, cultural, and environmental well-being and safety of the public.’*

Urgent action is required on mitigating and adapting to climate change and impacts and we urge the select committee to advocate for this on behalf of all New Zealanders.

***Recommendation:* We urge the Governance and Administration Select Committee to recommend that the Government invest substantially more funding on:**

- a). Community development and infrastructure to mitigate and reduce vulnerability to hazards and to support the regeneration, restoration and enhancement of communities across the built, natural, social and economic environments, as outlined in *Clause 8(3)(a)*.
- b). Enabling territorial and regional government to build in-house technical and other expertise to better identify and manage weather related and other emergency risks.
- c). Research into and sharing knowledge on living more safely in a warming climate.
- d). Building strong networks within communities, including key stakeholders like Volunteer Centres and other community organisations in planning and readiness activities.

### **3. Recognition of social vulnerability and communities who are disproportionately affected**

We support the inclusion and intention of the Bill to:

- Provide stronger recognition for communities facing greater risks because they have **existing vulnerabilities**, specific needs or live in places more exposed to hazards. The Bill notes ‘these populations may include rural communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, seniors, disabled people, children, and those experiencing socio-economic deprivation or isolation.’ It is important that the Bill acknowledges the impact on many low-income people and communities struggling to meet necessities and daily costs.
- Require the Director General of Emergency Management and Emergency Management Committees to identify communities that may be disproportionately affected.

***Recommendation:* Emergency Management Committees use social vulnerability indicators to identify communities that may be disproportionately affected in their area.**

The ten indicators are: exposure to hazards; children; older adults; health and disability status; money to cope with crises/losses; social connectedness; knowledge, skills and awareness of

natural hazards; safe, secure and health housing; food and water to cope with shortage; and decision making and participation.<sup>1 2</sup>

#### 4). Other Recommendations

##### 4.1 Role of Emergency Management Committees and Emergency Management Coordinating Group (Clauses 27/28)

We endorse the intention to strengthen the role of iwi Māori but believe this should include hapū, strengthen the role of community and clarify responsibilities at national, regional and local levels.

##### 4.2 Appointment of Emergency Management Co-ordinating Executive Group (Clause 39)

**Clause 39 Subclause (2) (a) to (h)** outlines which representatives should be included on the Group. This includes the CEO of local/regional authority(s) (known as Emergency Management Committee in the Bill) police, FENZ, ambulance, providers of health and disability services.

**We recommend other representatives and perspectives be strengthened as below.**

###### 4.2.1 Mātauranga Māori perspectives required.

Subsection 2 (f) states

*(f) 1 or more persons with local perspectives of Māori, Māori communities, and their interests and values, including mātauranga Māori (Māori traditional knowledge) and tikanga Māori (Māori protocol and culture), iwi, and hapū in the area;*

Only one or more persons seems insufficient. Mātauranga Māori is vital to disaster resilience and managing emergencies for everyone and for organisations charged with responsibilities. Iwi and hapū have long term knowledge and understanding of whenua and potential hazards in territorial authority areas as well as connections to marae communities which are vital community emergency centres.

***Recommendation:*** For clause (f): **We recommend two or more persons be appointed under (f), but would be guided by tangata whenua perspectives on this.**

###### 4.2.2 Rural community representation be strengthened

Subclause 2(g) states *‘(g) 1 or more persons with knowledge, experience, or expertise regarding the interests and needs of rural communities in the area;*

***Recommendation*** for clause (g) **we recommend 2 or more people be appointed who know rural communities to help with adequate representation of different rural areas, especially in remote, diverse or large local authority areas.**

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<sup>1</sup> Mason, K., Lindberg, K., Haenfling, C., Schori, A., Marsters, H., Read, D., & Borman, B. (2021). Social vulnerability indicators for flooding in Aotearoa New Zealand. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(8), 3952

<sup>2</sup> Environmental Health Intelligence New Zealand. About social vulnerability to natural hazards and climate-related hazards. Massey University. <https://ehinz.ac.nz/social-vulnerability/about-social-vulnerability-to-natural-hazards-and-climate-change/>

#### 4.2.3 Need for Volunteering Services/Centres and Social Service and Community Service representation

*Subclause 2(h) any other persons co-opted by the Emergency Management Committee (EMC).*

**Recommendation** for sub clause (h). we recommend Instead of ‘any other persons’ the membership of Emergency Management Co-ordinating Groups should include:

- a). **Local Volunteer Centres or Services** who promote and coordinate volunteers
- b). **A well networked representative from social and community service providers** who have knowledge of communities and groups who are vulnerable or at risk and good connections with other social service providers.

#### 4.3 Role of Emergency Management Coordinating Group (Clause 40) -

Roles include providing advice to the Emergency Management Committee (EMC) implementing decisions of the EMC and in **Subclause (c)** *overseeing the implementation, development, maintenance, monitoring, and evaluation of the regional emergency management plan.*

**Clause 40 Implementation and evaluation roles need to be separated out to better ensure independent review.**

Our view is these functions are very important, however we are concerned the implementation and evaluation functions are vested in the same entity.

We think it would be helpful to separate them out to ensure the evaluation has some level of independence, otherwise it may become a matter of ‘*marking their own homework.*’<sup>3</sup>.

Reports on emergency related events in the last few years indicate there is a need for regular independent review of local emergency management planning and implementation.

Ineffective responses have been attributed to lack of funding, resources, information and expertise; complacency; blind spots/cognitive bias; communication breakdowns; high turnover of staff in emergency management; fear of speaking out or raising issues; lack of proper liaison; weak interpersonal relationships; inadequate training; limited community engagement and exclusion of vulnerable groups.<sup>4</sup>Overly complex reporting structures, fragmented information systems restricting effective data sharing; and interoperability challenges further disrupt the seamless flow of information across disaster response agencies.

#### **Recommendation**

- **that the Bill provide for a separate review mechanism(s) or audit of local/regional emergency planning, functioning and implementation. This could come under the Auditor General role or be more regionally resourced, for example a review process which could include mechanisms such as a reference group/citizens assembly/expert input or a national body to do this.**

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<sup>3</sup> Lianne Dalziel (2026) why I’m compelled to write to PM after Mount tragedy, Newsroom, 11 February. <https://newsroom.co.nz/2026/02/11/why-ive-made-a-submission-to-the-emergency-management-bill/>

<sup>4</sup> Abbas R, Miller T (2025) Exploring communication inefficiencies in disaster response: Perspectives of emergency managers and health professionals. International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, Vol 120, 1 April.

#### 4.4 Clause 91 Content of Regional emergency plan - arrangements

Clause 91 Subclause (1) (k) and (l) includes that each plan must state and provide for:

*(k) the arrangements for the needs of any community in the Committee's area that the Committee considers may be disproportionately affected community in an emergency:*

*(l) the arrangements for how offers of assistance with emergency management from individuals and groups will be managed during an emergency.*

Anecdotally, rather than facilitating and empowering communities to help with recovery, Emergency Management often get in the way of people wanting to help, perhaps due to risk averseness and health and safety concerns. The community is a powerful asset that will engage in recovery work, regardless of Emergency Management edicts.

Indeed, the Student Volunteer Army ignored instructions from Civil Defence to not help following the Christchurch earthquake and at their peak ended up coordinating work welfare and catering for 1800 volunteers<sup>5</sup>. Locally in the coastal Tauranga Western Bay of Plenty area this occurred following the fuel oil pollution disaster when the *Rena* container ship struck the Astrolabe Reef in October 2011 and volunteers got out to clean up beaches and rescue wildlife.

Environment Hubs Aotearoa has recently published research which has documented the actions, needs, and recommendations of communities stepping up in the face of Cyclone Gabrielle and the Auckland Anniversary Floods.<sup>6</sup> We hope this is used as a major source of insight.

Most parts of the country have a Volunteer Centre or Service that are eager to help but are often not utilised by Emergency Management. However, these clauses indicate the need for good representation and funding to support readiness from Volunteer Centres/Services to assist with the management of volunteers and social and community service providers as per our recommendation on the **Emergency Management Co-ordinating Group (Clause39)**.

***Recommendation:* Content of plans includes seeking information and knowledge about local conditions, strengths and needs from communities, and inclusion of Volunteer Services/Centres as key players.**

#### 4.5 Emergency powers of Emergency Management Committee (Clause125)

Sub-clause (1) states that An Emergency Management Committee may, under the heading of Rescue and Relief, in (d)

*Undertake emergency measures for the disposal of dead persons or animals if it is satisfied that the measures are urgently necessary in the interests of public health.*

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<sup>5</sup> G Nowland-Foreman (2016) "Crushed or just bruised? Voluntary organisations 25 years under the bear hug of government contracting in Aotearoa New Zealand" *Third Sector Review*, Vol, 22, No.2: 53-69.

<sup>6</sup> Pannell, J., Bland, L., Morrison, G., Kerr, A., Els, S., Berandi, R., Hytten, K.F. (2026). Community is Climate Resilience: Lessons from Cyclone Gabrielle & the Auckland Anniversary Floods. Pahiatua: Environment Hubs Aotearoa.

We consider the use of the word 'disposal' in relation to dead persons is disrespectful and compounded by it being in the same clause as dead animals. We acknowledge the public health risk to the living from mass casualties in a catastrophic event and the possible need for mass graves. However, people should be referred to and treated with dignity and respect whether living or deceased.

**Recommendation: That Clause 125 (1) be separated into two. The first should refer to emergency measures to prepare for the burial of people in the event of mass casualties and the second clause refer to the burial/disposal of dead animals.**

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**Western Bay of Plenty**