New Zealand House of Representatives
Te Whare Māngai o Aotearoa

Environment Committee
Komiti Whiriwhiri Take Taiao

54th Parliament
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Ministry for the Environment and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Long-term Insights Briefing 2025

Presented to the House of Representatives
by Catherine Wedd, Chairperson

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Long-term insights briefing: *Building New Zealand's Long-term Resilience to Hazards*

Recommendation

The Environment Committee has considered the long-term insights briefing from the Ministry for the Environment and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for 2025, titled *Building New Zealand's Long-term Resilience to Hazards*, and recommends that the House take note of its report.

About long-term insights briefings

The Public Service Act 2020 requires government departments to develop and publish long-term insights briefings (LTIBs) at least once every three years. LTIBs are independently developed by an agency in consultation with the public.

LTIBs are intended to provide information to the public about medium- and long-term trends, and potential future risks and opportunities that could affect New Zealand. They should provide impartial information, analysis, and possible policy responses to the issues identified by the LTIB.

About this briefing on building long-term resilience

The Ministry for the Environment (MfE) and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) worked together to produce this LTIB. The briefing does not make recommendations, but seeks to spark discussion about current and future challenges relating to hazard resilience. The LTIB was published in November 2025, and we held a hearing with MfE and DPMC in February 2026.

At our hearing, the two agencies explained their rationale for choosing this topic. They explained that New Zealand currently spends on average 0.6 percent of its annual GDP (gross domestic product) on responding to natural hazards. This is nearly twice as much as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) country average. Since 2010, New Zealand has spent $64 billion on hazard-related costs. Of that, 97 percent was spent on response and recovery and only 3 percent on reducing risk.

Resilience means being ready for hazards before they happen, responding effectively when they do, and learning from each experience to make future improvements. The briefing encourages New Zealand to take a more long-term, proactive approach to resilience.

Hazards in New Zealand

In the last three years, over half of all New Zealanders have been affected by natural hazards. In the weeks before our hearing, the North Island was hit by intense storms. These had catastrophic effects for many, including wide-scale flooding, and a landslide at the Beachside Holiday Park in Mount Maunganui that caused the deaths of six people. We, along with DPMC and MfE, acknowledge those who lost their lives and express our heartfelt condolences to their families.

The chief executive of MfE said it is “not a matter of if, just a matter of when” New Zealand experiences a severe natural hazard. For example, we heard that earthquakes are the biggest threat to New Zealand, with a 75 percent chance of the Alpine Fault rupturing in the next 50 years. If that happens, there is an 80 percent probability that the magnitude of the resulting earthquake would be greater than 8.0. We also heard that Mount Taranaki is likely to erupt this century.

Key topics in the LTIB

The LTIB is split into five sections:

1. **Understanding the hazard landscape**—Sets out the types of hazard New Zealand faces: earthquakes, volcanic activity, severe weather, and flooding. It explains how population growth and climate change exacerbate the challenge of mitigating, adapting to, and recovering from hazards.
2. **Forces that shape risk and resilience**—Outlines the global and domestic factors affecting New Zealand’s resilience, such as location and assets, and climate change and environment stress, and how these can interact.
3. **Choice in building resilience**—Explores how decisions are made around building resilience, including principles of best practice and suggested frameworks to aid decision makers.
4. **Opportunities to build resilience**—Promotes New Zealand proactively managing risk, and explores ways this could be improved. We discuss this topic in more detail below.
5. **Closing remarks**—Concludes by reiterating that resilience requires long-term planning and investment, and contribution from all New Zealanders.

Action under way to improve resilience

The LTIB describes some of the work that is under way to increase resilience. We heard that together these actions will provide “a single national channel for consistent and assured hazard information”:

- **National Risk and Resilience Framework[1]**—The Framework is a cross-government strategic approach to risk management. It aims to have governance in one place so that the Government can take effective action before, during, and after crises. Throughout 2026, the Framework will focus on three priorities: planning and preparing for catastrophic risks, reducing risk through cost-effective interventions, and strengthening accountabilities. We heard that DPMC has increased the number of staff working on the framework from 3 to 13 FTEs.[2]
- **National Adaptation Plan and National Adaptation Framework[3]**—The Plan outlines how the country will respond to climate risks across infrastructure, communities, the

1 Details of the National Risk and Resilience Framework are available on DPMC’s website.

2 Full-time equivalent.

3 Details of the National Adaptation Plan and National Adaptation Framework are available on MfE’s website.

economy, and the environment. The Framework was announced in October 2025 and provides more detail about the long-term approach to adaptation.

- **Emergency Management System**—Reform of this system is under way following recommendations from the 2023-24 *Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events*.[4]
- **Changes to the planning and resource management system**—In December 2025, the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill were introduced to the House. We are currently considering the bills and are due to report back to the House on 26 June 2026.
- **Pandemic preparedness**—A programme of work informed by the *Royal Commission of Inquiry into COVID-19 Lessons Learned* is under way to prepare for future pandemic threats.

In addition to central government initiatives, the report includes examples of local councils building their communities' resilience. Critical to this are Civil Defence and Emergency Management Groups[5] which link high-level strategies to on-the-ground outcomes. Iwi are also taking action, such as the Waikato-Tainui *Iwi Resilience Plan* and the *Maketu Climate Plan*.[6] MfE and DPMC said:

> So we're standing at a rare moment where the resource management reforms, the climate adaptation, the emergency management reforms, digital enablement, and the science reforms are all actually converging together. They give us the chance to design a risk and planning system that's fit for the future.

Opportunities for building future resilience

Funding for resilience

Funding for long-term investment in resilience is a key issue, as is funding to respond to disasters. MfE and DPMC highlighted the role of insurance, and emphasised concerns about "insurance retreat" (where insurers withdraw coverage in specific locations). The LTIB predicts that:

- by 2050, 10,000 homes in main coastal centres may be uninsurable
- even minor sea-level rise could result in partial or complete insurance retreat for 99 percent of homes in high-risk coastal zones by 2034
- where insurers continue to cover locations, premiums may rise
- where insurance is unavailable or unaffordable, homeowners would face negative effects on the value of their property and their ability to secure a mortgage.

The briefing suggests that insurance retreat would likely have cumulative effects on New Zealand's financial system, housing market, and intergenerational equity. Therefore, it concludes that financial responsibility falls to a balance of individuals, local councils, and national government.

4 The inquiry report is available on the Department of Internal Affairs' website.

5 Group Plans are available on the National Emergency Management Agency's website.

6 These are available here: Waikato-Tainui Iwi Resilience Plan and Maketu Climate Plan.

We asked what capability local authorities have to fund emergency responses to natural hazards, especially smaller councils or those in areas with frequent natural disasters. MfE told us that local councils receive support from central government; responding to events is not left entirely for local authorities. MfE also spoke about the need to strike a balance between private and public expenditure.

As Parliamentarians, we would find it useful to better understand how public money is being spent for emergency management, both proactively (on risk reduction) and reactively (on recovery). We mentioned the report that the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment produces annually to track environmental expenditure across government departments.[7] We consider it important that central government is able to track the resources going towards resilience. MfE provided a written submission responding to our comments in this area.

Some of us are concerned that the Government closed the Climate Emergency Response Fund (CERF) in Budget 2024. MfE and DPMC told us that, although the CERF was no longer operating, the Government is still investing in flood management and other infrastructure to build resilience.

Promoting community solutions and risk awareness

The LTIB outlines the important role that individuals play in risk management. It said that the first step is to ensure that everyone understand potential hazards and what action to take should they eventuate. The LTIB pointed out how risks may present differently for different people, and how it is important to invest in the community. It provided examples of other countries involving communities in building resilience.

MfE and DPMC told us that campaigns raising awareness about property risk tend to focus on flood risk. We heard that work is under way on a National Flood Map to inform future work and decision-making. MfE informed us it is not aware of any housing retreat occurring due to tsunami threat, only where there is the risk of flooding or coastal inundation. Risk tolerance for building in areas of volcanic or tsunami threat is currently the responsibility of local government. We heard that the current planning system reforms aim to create consistent standards for risk tolerances around the country.

We asked how homeowners get information about risks other than flooding. MfE and DPMC said that, under the Local Government Act 2002 and the Resource Management Act 1991, local councils are responsible for hazard management, including public awareness and education. Civil defence groups also play an important role. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has funded this work historically. For example, NEMA funded subduction zone work to better understand tsunami risks on New Zealand's east coast.

Science, data, and modelling

The LTIB states that "without a clear picture of the hazards we face, it is difficult to plan, prioritise or act effectively." MfE and DPMC expressed concern about hazard modelling and data being sparse, inconclusive, or inaccessible. Datasets used to inform decisions, such as

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7 The PCE's reports on estimates of environmental expenditure can be found on the Parliament website.

landslide susceptibility, stormwater capacity, soil stability, and flood extents, are fragmented and ageing.[8] MfE told us that information is inconsistently maintained and funded.

The agencies told us that this information should be regarded as national infrastructure. The need to improve data collection and collation is something that has emerged in much of our work. For example, the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment consistently emphasises this need.[9] We asked MfE and DPMC how this could be improved, what political support is needed, and where information should be housed. They highlighted work that the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment is leading to reform New Zealand's science sector, which aims to provider greater stability of funding for core national data sets and science infrastructure. For example, Earth Sciences New Zealand was created to bring together the hazard information capabilities of the Meteorological Service of New Zealand (MetService), the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA), and the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences (GNS). We heard that "bringing those organisations together has been the first step at creating a national capability". We consider this a potential improvement, but are still concerned that there is disparate data collection across regional councils.

We heard that MfE is conducting a gap-analysis to provide Ministers with advice about existing capability and what data is outdated or missing. DPMC and MfE offered to brief us later in 2026 about this work. We intend to follow up with them on this offer.

Nature-based solutions

The LTIB discusses two examples of resilient infrastructure: nature-based solutions and battery storage. We were particularly interested in how nature-based solutions might support hazard resilience. "Nature-based solutions" refers to infrastructure that blends natural systems with green technology to reduce risk, restore ecosystems, and strengthen community resilience. Examples include engineering wetlands to manage stormwater, afforestation to stabilise landscapes, or urban features like green roofs and rain gardens.

We asked about the incentives for implementing nature-based solutions. MfE explained that part of the LTIB's purpose is to consider how to encourage local and central government to think about and invest in the longer term. They told us that nature-based solutions are often more cost effective over the long term. We note that MfE does not currently have resource focused on nature-based solutions.

In our hearing, MfE mentioned the work of the private organisation, The Aotearoa Circle, on nature-based solutions, so we asked it to provide a written submission. In this it argues how natural infrastructure (wetlands, forests, rivers, dunes, and soil) should be considered in infrastructure planning and investment. It referred to the Kaipara Moana Remediation Programme at Kaipara Harbour as an example of how natural infrastructure can improve environmental, economic, and social outcomes.

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8 We requested more information about New Zealand's recording of severe weather events. MfE's response can be found on the Parliament website.

9 For example, in the PCE's report *Reviewing the use of the Land Use Capability system in a regulatory context*.

Ensuring building resilience remains a focus

Noting the long-term nature of this work, we asked whether MfE and DPMC had any suggestions about ways to keep a focus on resilience across governments over time. They said it is crucial to keep information about resilience-building available in the public domain. A range of tools are doing this, the key one being DPMC's National Risk and Resilience Framework. It considers this an important resource for communities to understand how to ready themselves. DPMC did not support the idea of an independent commissioner for nationwide resilience.

We noted that this work overlaps with the Finance and Expenditure Committee's *Inquiry into climate adaptation*.[10] That inquiry made several recommendations to the Government. We heard that the Minister for Climate Change is considering FEC's recommendations and intends to introduce a bill to the House to address them. We look forward to seeing the Minister's proposals.

Our response

This long-term insights briefing is timely; it feeds into much of our ongoing work. Topics we discussed relate closely to our scrutiny priorities for this Parliament, namely environmental information and reporting, cross-agency collaboration, and climate change adaptation (including hazard management).

Building long-term resilience may be easy to deprioritise, especially when it does not realise immediate visible benefits. However, we consider it vital to New Zealand's future to promote and progress this work. DPMC's National Risk and Resilience Framework is an important part of monitoring Government action. We understand that our colleagues on the Governance and Administration Committee scrutinise DPMC's annual performance, including DPMC's reporting on the Framework.

We will continue to scrutinise MfE's work in this area, particularly the results of its gap analysis and how these gaps will be addressed. The science reforms hold promise for improving the datasets for central government agencies. However, local councils also collect data and we consider that more work is needed to integrate and interrogate the information they hold.

We consider it critical to understand expenditure on long-term resilience; without this it is difficult to plan and prioritise effectively. Flood management has seen a lot of investment in recent years, and we are interested in how the next priority will be identified. We consider it important that this is done strategically, and not reactively.

These topics are very much forefront in our thinking, especially after severe weather events in the past few years. The briefing has further emphasised the pressing need to future-proof New Zealand against natural hazards, and to have systems that promote long-term resilience. It is something we will be keeping in mind as we consider the Planning Bill and the Natural Environment Bill.

[10] The Finance and Expenditure Committee's report can be read on the Parliament website.

Appendix

Committee procedure

We met between 18 December 2025 and 16 April 2026 to consider this briefing. We heard evidence from the Ministry for the Environment and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. We also received written evidence from the Ministry for the Environment and The Aotearoa Circle.

Committee members

Catherine Wedd (Chairperson)
Hon Rachel Brooking
Hon Marama Davidson (until 11 February 2026)
Hon Julie Anne Genter (from 11 February 2026)
Ryan Hamilton
Cameron Luxton
David MacLeod
Grant McCallum
Lan Pham
Hon Priyanca Radhakrishnan

Cameron Brewer also participated in our consideration of this briefing.

Related resources

The long-term insights briefing is available on the Parliament website. The documents we received as evidence are available on the Parliament website, along with a recording of our hearing on 19 February 2026.