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Committee CDEM Group
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Executive Group

Representative on Working Group for the Development of a National Public Tsunami Alerting System

1. Purpose

To inform the Wellington Region Civil Defence Emergency Management Group (CDEM Group) about the development of a national public tsunami alerting system and to seek approval for the recommended representative on the working group.

2. Background

The Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management is investigating how best to provide an affordable and effective public alerting system for New Zealand.

A Working Group is to be established comprising 'practitioner' representatives from CDEM Groups and from central government.

The CDEM Groups of Auckland, Northland, Gisborne, Hawke's Bay, Wellington and Christchurch have each been invited to each nominate an emergency management practitioner to serve on this group.

At their meeting of 26 February 2007, emergency managers in the Wellington region agreed that Adrian Glen, Emergency Manager, Wellington City Council to be the representative for the Wellington CDEM Group. This nomination was ratified by the Co-ordinating Executive Group (CEG) at its meeting of 2 April 2007.

3. Objective of the Working Group

The objective of the work to be undertaken is to develop a public tsunami alerting system for New Zealand that provides the means by which an authenticated alert or warning is distributed to the public throughout an affected area in order to initiate response plans and responses at the local level.

The alerting system is expected to make provision for the rapid distribution of standard alerts to the public throughout New Zealand, across a wide spectrum of means. It is expected to have a high level of coverage in at-risk areas and provide reliability and robustness that matches the risk presented by tsunamis. An improved alerting system is expected to feature a mix of technologies and allow for some tailoring of the alerts to the situation, hazards and assets that are at risk. One technological solution is unlikely to suit all areas and there should be scope for some flexibility for consideration of options within a standardised framework.

The goal is not to simply install an alerting mechanism. The ultimate goal is to ensure that members of the public react to an alert in a manner that reduces the risk they face. Experience overseas suggests strongly that public responses to alerts are improved significantly when they are associated with an awareness and education programme and widespread use of signs and public information explaining the threat and the response expected.

4. Proposed Approach

An approach to the problem of providing a responsive, reliable and effective tsunami alerting system is to commence at the user end of the system and consider the behaviours that are expected of the public in the face of a tsunami threat. Having described those behaviours, it should be possible to detail the actions or procedures that would be needed to ensure the public exhibit the appropriate behaviours when faced with an alert.

This approach will produce not only an end-to-end system but will also prevent the Working Group from concentrating on only one aspect (such as the technological means of distributing or generating an alert) and ignoring the importance of other elements such as evacuation plans or education.

Importantly, the end-to-end approach should identify some elements or proposals that could be implemented quickly as part of the total system. But again it has to be emphasised that the objective is to implement the whole system in the longer term and that concentrating on any one element will not necessarily produce behaviours in the public that are appropriate and necessary to reduce risk.

A complete end-to-end tsunami alerting system would comprise the following elements (as a minimum):

- Public education programme
- Signage
- Public information
- Local evacuation plans
- Alerts
- The National Warning System

5. The Way Ahead

The Working Group is led by Mr Harry Orr, a Ministry of CDEM Emergency Management Advisor and member of the Ministry's Operations Team. Three principles have been adopted as the basis for devising the composition of the Working Group.

- The regions that are most exposed to the risk of tsunami should be well represented.
- Groups that have already commenced research and trials with various forms of alerts should have the opportunity to bring that experience to the discussions.
- The size of the Working Group should be kept as small as practicable in an effort to improve its management and to make it highly productive.

The intention is to share progress in the project with all Groups as the goal is to develop a system that is applicable nationwide.

6. Recommendation

That the CDEM Group:

1. *receive the report;*
2. *note the contents; and*
3. *approve the appointment of Adrian Glen, Wellington City Council, to be the Wellington CDEM Group representative on the National Tsunami Working Group.*

Report prepared by:

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