

Submission to Governance and Administration Committee on the Emergency Management Bill (No 2)

Introducing Mana Mokopuna – Children's Commissioner

Mana Mokopuna – Children's Commissioner (Mana Mokopuna) is the independent Crown entity with the statutory responsibility to advocate for the rights, interests, participation and well-being of mokopuna¹ (all children and young people) under 18 years old in Aotearoa New Zealand, and young people, under 25 years of age if they are, or have been, in care or custody. The Children's Commissioner is Dr Claire Achmad.

We independently advocate for and with mokopuna within the context of their families, whānau, hapū, iwi and communities, based on evidence, data and research, including the perspectives of mokopuna.

Our work is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Children's Convention), Te Tiriti o Waitangi and other international human rights instruments. We are a National Preventative Mechanism under the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture, meaning we monitor places where mokopuna are deprived of their liberty, including in the care and protection, youth justice, youth mental health and intellectual disability spaces.

We have a statutory mandate to promote the Children's Convention and monitor the Government's implementation of its duties under the Convention, and to work in ways that uphold the rights of mokopuna Māori including under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. We place a focus on advocating for and with mokopuna who are experiencing disadvantage, and we recognise and celebrate the diversity of mokopuna in all its forms.

Our moemoeā (vision) is *Kia kuru pounamu te rongō – All mokopuna live their best lives*, which we see as a collective vision and challenge for Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our independent advocacy for mokopuna rights focuses on four strategic advocacy areas:

- A strong start in life (first 2000 days)
- Growing up safe and well (free of all forms of child maltreatment in all circumstances; thriving mental health and wellbeing)
- Thriving families and whānau (living free of poverty, with resources needed to support mokopuna to thrive), and
- Participating in what matters to me (mokopuna have told us, for example, about the importance of participating in their education, culture and identity, sport and recreation, and caring for the natural environment).

¹ At Mana Mokopuna we have adopted the term 'mokopuna' to describe all children and young people in Aotearoa New Zealand. 'Mokopuna' brings together 'moko' (imprint or tattoo) and 'puna' (spring of water). Mokopuna describes that we are descendants, and or grandchildren, and how we need to think across generations for a better present and future. We acknowledge the special status held by mokopuna in their families, whānau, hapū and iwi and reflect that in all we do. Referring to children and young people we advocate for as mokopuna draws them closer to us and reminds us that who they are, and where they come from, matters for their identity, belonging and well-being at every stage of their lives.



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Summary & Recommendations

1. Given the statutory mandate of Mana Mokopuna, this submission is focussed on the potential impact of the Bill on the rights, interests, participation, and well-being of mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand. In particular, Mana Mokopuna is concerned that:
 - a. while the Bill's Explanatory Note recognises children as a population group who may be disproportionately impacted by emergencies due to their existing vulnerabilities or specific needs, the substantive Bill includes no direct reference to children or their rights
 - b. while the Bill provides that Emergency Management Committees must provide for and engage with communities that may be disproportionately affected by emergencies in the development of emergency management plans, children are not specifically included as a community that must be provided for or engaged with, and
 - c. while the Bill aims to strengthen the role of iwi Māori in emergency management planning and better coordinate the contributions of relevant communities, such as rural communities, the Bill fails to recognise children and young people, including mokopuna Māori, as a key community who can contribute their skills, information, and other resources during and after an emergency.
2. Because of these concerns, Mana Mokopuna recommends the Bill is amended to specify:
 - a. children are a population group who have particular needs, rights and interests due to their age and stage of development, and they may be disproportionately affected by emergencies
 - b. children and their rights under the Children's Convention must be explicitly included and prioritised in the national emergency management strategy and regional emergency management plans, and across all four stages of emergency management planning from risk reduction, readiness, response and recovery
 - c. children must be regarded as key stakeholders and active participants at all four stages of emergency management planning
 - d. any person or group developing an emergency management plan must effectively engage with children and young people at all stages of emergency management planning, and
 - e. all emergency management planning documents, including the national emergency management strategy, related rules and standards, and regional emergency management plans, must be subject to a child rights impact assessment to ensure their compliance with the Children's Convention.
3. Beyond the Bill, Mana Mokopuna calls on the Government scale up efforts to help children and families to better prepare for emergencies and build emotional resilience, including through emergency preparedness education in schools, and ensure mental health support is provided for children and families during and after an emergency.

Acknowledgement of children affected by recent weather events

4. We wish to acknowledge the devastating impacts of recent weather events and extend our deepest condolences to the families who lost their precious mokopuna and to mokopuna who have lost much loved family members or friends. We also acknowledge that recent

weather events have impacted many more mokopuna throughout the country, including those who have experienced previous serious weather events and mokopuna who worry about climate change and natural disasters – for which there are many who share their concerns directly with the Children's Commissioner. He iti hau marangai e tū te pāhokahoka.²

Children's rights in emergencies

5. As recognised in the Explanatory Note of the Bill, children are disproportionately affected by emergencies, which present a significant threat to their health and wellbeing. Due to their stage of physical and emotional development, children are physically more at risk of death, injury, and illness, are at greater risk of experiencing mental health difficulties, and their developmental and educational progress may also be disrupted as a result of disasters.³ Emergencies can also disrupt children's care, with potential increased risk of abuse and neglect, especially if they are displaced or separated from their caregivers.⁴
6. It is also important to acknowledge that children already experiencing family adversity, or those with pre-existing mental health difficulties, disability or a medical condition, will be at greater risk of adverse outcomes during and after a disaster. Children and families already facing systemic or structural inequities may also be at greater risk in a disaster.⁵
7. Due to children's unique vulnerabilities and needs during emergencies, it is essential they are recognised as a distinct group in emergency management planning and their rights to survival, development, protection from harm, access to essential services (health, education, clean water, food and shelter), as protected under the Children's Convention, are prioritised.
8. At the same time, while it is important to recognise children's vulnerabilities in emergencies, they should not only be seen as passive victims. As recognised in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and in line with children's right to be heard under Article 12 of the Children's Convention, children are also active agents in emergencies and should be given the space and ways to express their views and participate in emergency preparedness, planning and response.⁶ For example, after the Christchurch earthquake, children played a role in clearing liquefaction, building shelters and toilets, and generally helping to restore family and community functioning.⁷ In the aftermath of that disaster, 11,000 students also mobilised to help with the clean-up, which marked the beginning of the Student Volunteer Army that has gone on to assist in eight national crisis events, including the Auckland Anniversary floods and Cyclone Gabrielle.⁸

² A whakataukī and blessing meaning, 'Just like a rainbow after the storm, good times follow bad.'

³ [The impact of disasters on children and young people | Deloitte Australia](#); [Understanding the Impacts of Natural Disasters on Children | Society for Research in Child Development SRCD](#); [Children and young people's perspectives on disasters – Mental health, agency and vulnerability: A scoping review - ScienceDirect](#).

⁴ [Protecting children in humanitarian action | UNICEF](#).

⁵ [Disaster preparedness with a focus on children and families - Emerging Minds](#); [Full article: Disaster impact and recovery: what children and young people can tell us](#); [Monitoring wellbeing during recovery from the 2010–2011 Canterbury earthquakes: The CERA wellbeing survey - ScienceDirect](#).

⁶ [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 - 2030](#).

⁷ [Full article: Disaster impact and recovery: what children and young people can tell us](#).

⁸ [Student Volunteer Army New Zealand](#).

9. To ensure children's rights are protected during emergencies, a children's rights-led approach to emergency management planning is required. This means developing emergency management plans with and for children. Ensuring children are consulted as emergency management plans are developed is key - not only does this give effect to their right to be heard on matters that affect them but when children are involved and able to contribute their ideas, emergency management plans are likely to better recognise and incorporate actions and interventions to meet their needs. When done in a safe, developmentally appropriate and sensitive way, involving children in emergency management planning also supports their psychological preparedness.⁹

Mokopuna Māori

 *Without the whenua we are not tangata whenua, so we have got to look after it.*
Te Rōpū Rangatahi Matike Mai Aotearoa¹⁰

10. Emergency management planning needs to specifically consider and provide for the rights of mokopuna Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Under Te Tiriti of Waitangi, the Government is obligated to actively protect mokopuna Māori, their taonga, whenua and culture, and ensure mokopuna Māori are involved in decision-making that affects them.
11. Mokopuna Māori also need to be specifically considered and engaged in emergency management planning due to the disproportionate impacts they are likely to experience.
- Due to the strong cultural and ancestral connection for Māori to the coastal environment, mokopuna Māori are more likely to live in low-lying coastal areas, which are more vulnerable to extreme weather events. Mokopuna Māori who live on Māori land are also more vulnerable to extreme weather events as over 80% of Māori land is hilly or mountainous and susceptible to major erosion events like landslides.¹¹ As a result, mokopuna Māori are more likely to live in places exposed to rising seas, flooding, and slips and so when storms hit Māori communities are at higher risk and are more likely to be cut off from essential services and face a slower recovery.¹²
 - Emergencies can further exacerbate inequities already faced by mokopuna Māori and their whānau, including long-standing socioeconomic deprivation and inequities in relation to health, education and housing.¹³
 - Emergencies can impact the cultural rights of mokopuna Māori due to displacement from their ancestral lands, loss of places of cultural importance including urupā and marae, and loss of relationships with their natural environment. These can lead to losing traditional ways of life and disrupting relationships with family and ancestors, which can affect cultural identity and knowledge systems, resulting in potential harmful effects on health and wellbeing.¹⁴

⁹ [Disaster preparedness with a focus on children and families - Emerging Minds.](#)

¹⁰ [The Report of Matike Mai Aotearoa - The independent Working Group on Constitutional Transformation 2016.](#)

¹¹ [He huringa āhuarangi, he huringa ao: A changing climate, a changing world.](#)

¹² [The Unequal Storm: How Natural Disasters Impact Māori Communities – Waatea News: Māori Radio Station](#)

¹³ [He huringa āhuarangi, he huringa ao: A changing climate, a changing world.](#)

¹⁴ [Children's Rights in a Changing Climate - thematic report to UNCRC 2022.](#)

Children's perspectives on emergencies

“ It is the feeling of myself and many of my peers that the Government of Aotearoa NZ and other worldwide Governments are simply committing token gestures, and not doing anything that will affect real change to halt climate change. We feel that we will be left to pick up what pieces we can of a broken planet. I have even heard adults say things like, 'It's okay, the kids will fix it all.' ”
Child respondent, Mokopuna Voices survey¹⁵

12. Children express their concerns about emergencies and their management mainly in the context of climate change. Climate change and its impacts are a central concern for mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand – this is a clear message that comes through when we engage with mokopuna around the country, including mokopuna Māori and Pacific mokopuna, whose whānau, aiga and communities are often experiencing the inequitable impacts of climate change both here in Aotearoa New Zealand and throughout the Pacific region. Mokopuna are also at the forefront of advocating for action on climate change and were significant participants in the School Strike 4 Climate movement.
13. Climate change and its impacts are also a key source of anxiety for mokopuna. Globally, a recent study of 10,000 children and young people (aged 16-25 years) in 10 countries found that nearly 60% felt “very” or “extremely” worried about climate change, and over 45% said their feelings about climate change negatively affected their daily lives.¹⁶ Mokopuna in Aotearoa New Zealand also report that climate change and the environment are among their most significant concerns.¹⁷ Mokopuna identified extreme weather events, rising temperatures, and environmental degradation as significant stressors that contribute to anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness among youth.¹⁸ For mokopuna who had experienced extreme weather events, two in four reported stress or mental health issues became worse as a result, and one in four reported environmental concerns became worse as a result.¹⁹
14. Mokopuna also express frustration about their limited ability to influence important decisions around climate change, despite being most at risk of the consequences of current policy settings. In their view, the current decision-making powers held by youth do not reflect the future burden of responsibility they will face, and this gives them sense of hopelessness.²⁰
15. In relation to emergency preparedness, planning and management, children and young people have also expressed they want to play a more explicit role in their communities and families. Children and young people affected by the Christchurch earthquake expressed wanting to be informed and consulted, and their perspectives understood. They also showed an understanding of what was effective in local and central government's

¹⁵ [Mokopuna Voices Summary report 2021 | Mana Mokopuna.](#)

¹⁶ [Climate anxiety in children and young people and their beliefs about government responses to climate change: a global survey - The Lancet Planetary Health.](#)

¹⁷ [A summary of literature reflecting the perspectives of young people in Aotearoa on systemic factors affecting their wellbeing.](#)

¹⁸ [State of the Generation Report 2023 - Youthline NZ.](#)

¹⁹ [State of the Generation Report 2023 - Youthline NZ.](#)

²⁰ [A summary of literature reflecting the perspectives of young people in Aotearoa on systemic factors affecting their wellbeing.](#)

emergency responses, what type of assistance was needed, what to prioritise and ways to improve processes and procedures.²¹

16. Young people also express a desire to volunteer or help others during the aftermath of an emergency. Young people who volunteered during the recovery phase of the Christchurch earthquake identified the importance of giving young people the opportunity to volunteer as it gave them a sense of purpose or control, gave them some perspective, and helped with their own personal recovery.²²
17. Children and young people also recognise how being actively involved in emergency planning and response can be a cathartic process, help them cope better and build resilience.²³ A study with children and young people affected by the Christchurch Earthquake found that assisting with local community efforts post-disaster helped their own recovery by improving their mental wellbeing and giving them a sense of purpose and control.²⁴

Feedback on the Bill

 *A lot of the young ones didn't understand what a disaster is like and the impacts of the disaster until they actually were there, hands on...for them it was like an eye opener, and their talk was like I don't want this to happen to me in the long-term, what can we do to prevent this from happening again? They all wanted to make plans about how to prevent this from happening.* Adult male, Māori²⁵

18. We welcome the explicit recognition in the Bill's Explanatory Note that children are a population group who may be disproportionately affected by emergencies due to their existing vulnerabilities or specific age-related needs. We emphasise that children may also be disproportionately affected as members of other groups recognised in the Bill's Explanatory Note, including rural communities, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, disabled people, and those experiencing socio-economic deprivation or isolation.
19. We also welcome that the Bill:
 - a. 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, and
 - b. strengthens the role of iwi Māori in emergency management and role of communities relevant to emergency management (particularly rural communities).
20. We are concerned, however, that children are not specifically referred to in the substantive text of the Bill as a group that may be disproportionately affected by emergencies or specifically listed as a group that the Director-General of Emergency Management and

²¹ [Full article: Disaster impact and recovery: what children and young people can tell us.](#)

²² [Teenagers-Perceptions-of-Volunteering-Following-the-2010-2011-Canterbury-Earthquakes-New-Zealand.pdf](#)

²³ [From victims to actors: The role of children and young people in flood recovery and resilience.](#)

²⁴ [Full article: Rolling with the shakes: an insight into teenagers' perceptions of recovery after the Canterbury earthquakes.](#)

²⁵ [te-tairawhiti-qualitative-report-fa-online-june-2024.pdf.](#)

Emergency Management Committees must engage with during the development of emergency management plans.

21. We acknowledge that clause 80(2)(c) of the Bill requires the person developing emergency management plans to have regard to "New Zealand's international obligations (to the extent relevant)," which would include New Zealand's obligations as a States Party to the Children's Convention. We do not think the Bill is sufficiently clear, however, that this requires children's rights to be taken into account and we recommend the Bill is amended to explicitly state that persons must have regard to the Children's Convention when developing emergency manage plans.
22. We also acknowledge that clause 91(1)(k) of the Bill provides that regional emergency management plans must state and provide for "arrangements for the needs of any community in the Committee's area that the Committee considers may be a disproportionately affected community in an emergency." Again, we do not think it is sufficiently clear that regional emergency management plans must provide arrangements for the specific needs of children in an emergency.
23. We note the Bill provides that the content of regional emergency management plans must be consistent with the national emergency management strategy, which is set by the Minister for Emergency Management. The Minister will also have the power to create emergency management standards, which set mandatory requirements for the structure, format, or content of regional emergency management plans, and make rules prescribing technical, operational, procedural, or operational matters. To ensure there is a clear direction from the national level that children must be explicitly provided for in emergency developments plans, we recommend the Bill is amended to require the Minister to clearly state in the national strategy, and any standards or rules, children and their rights must be prioritised in the development and implementation of emergency plans and they must be engaged with as a group who may be disproportionately affected by emergencies.
24. In relation to the Bill's proposals to strengthen the role of iwi Māori, we emphasise the Government also has Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations to mokopuna Māori and how their role in emergency management planning will be strengthened should also be discussed with mokopuna Māori, and their whānau, hapū and iwi.
25. In relation to the Bill's proposal to strengthen the role of communities relevant to emergency management, we recommend the role of children as a community is also recognised and strengthened considering their wish to contribute their knowledge, skills, information, and other resources during and after an emergency and the positive impact this type of involvement can have on their mental wellbeing and recovery, and on their whole community.
26. We also recommend all emergency management documents, including the national emergency management strategy, related rules and standards, and regional emergency management plans, are subject to a child rights impact assessment, such as MSD's Child Impact Assessment Tool,²⁶ to ensure their consistency with the Children's Convention.

²⁶ [Child Impact Assessment Tool - Ministry of Social Development](#).

Children's rights must be prioritised at every stage of emergency planning

27. For the avoidance of doubt, we wish to emphasise children's rights, including their right to participation, must be prioritised at all stages of emergency management planning, including the risk reduction, readiness and recovery stages and not just the response stage.
28. We also emphasise that, while it is essential emergency management plans ensure that children's rights to life and survival are prioritised during emergencies, it is equally important these plans also articulate how all children's rights will be protected and upheld during an emergency.
29. For example, children must be supported to continue their education during the early and longer-term phases of an emergency. The severe weather in January 2026 caused significant disruptions to the start of the school year in regions like Northland and Gisborne. The Ministry of Education has rolled out support for schools in affected areas to help minimise potential disruptions to children's learning,²⁷ but some schools have been unable to reopen for several weeks.²⁸ While being back in school ensures children can continue learning, which is essential for their development, it also provides them with stability and structure during emergencies. Children can also access life-saving services and information while they are in school and receive mental health support.²⁹
30. Evidence supports the importance of education for children in the aftermath of an emergency. In a study with children affected by the Christchurch earthquake, participants indicated the normality and routine of school contributed towards recovery.³⁰ Studies have also found positive peer relationships, particularly in the school context, are an important protective factor for children and young people as they navigate the emergency and recovery phases of a disaster³¹ and children with positive peer support have higher levels of resilience.³²

 *I think that was the best thing, [school] just tried to keep a normal structure, just trying to bring it all back to normal and stuff, get back into routine and that kind of helped people."* Mokopuna, Years 11-13, affected by Christchurch earthquake³³

31. Ensuring children and young people have a place to come together when schools and other recreational spaces and activities are disrupted is also key. Emergency management plans should provide for initiatives, such as child-friendly spaces,³⁴ to be established soon after a disaster hits, to support children's sense of normalcy and routine and their psychosocial wellbeing.

²⁷ [Support for schools and families affected by weather event | Beehive.govt.nz.](#)

²⁸ [State of emergency in Tai Rāwhiti extended | RNZ News.](#)

²⁹ [Education in Emergencies | INEE.](#)

³⁰ [Full article: Rolling with the shakes: an insight into teenagers' perceptions of recovery after the Canterbury earthquakes.](#)

³¹ [From victims to actors: The role of children and young people in flood recovery and resilience.](#)

³² [Social-Ecological Factors Associated with Higher Levels of Resilience in Children and Youth After Disaster: The Importance of Caregiver and Peer Support.](#)

³³ [Full article: Rolling with the shakes: an insight into teenagers' perceptions of recovery after the Canterbury earthquakes.](#)

³⁴ [Full Article : Child Friendly Spaces: protecting and supporting children in emergency response and recovery.](#)

32. Engaging with children post-emergency is also key to better understand the specific issues they faced during the emergency, whether their needs were met, and how emergency management plans can be improved for the future.
33. Children's need assessments should also be undertaken as part of pre-emergency planning to better understand where vulnerable groups of children live, what their needs might be and what plans need to be put in place to ensure targeted assistance is provided to them in the event of an emergency. This is particularly important for children with disabilities, children who live in more disaster-prone areas or housing, including mokopuna Māori, rural children and children from low-income families.
34. It is also important to provide for child-centred and family-focused preparedness planning that involves building the capacity and skills of children and parents in advance of a disaster. Children and young people affected by the Christchurch earthquake reported that being prepared and knowledgeable about earthquakes lessened their fears and, over time, contributed to their recovery through providing greater understanding, comfort, reassurance and self-confidence.³⁵

“ After the earthquake drill...I came home and packed an emergency kit, and Mum and Dad they laughed at me...and they were always taking stuff out of the emergency kit, they were like, 'Oh the dog. We don't have any dog food. Okay, we will just go get some from there.' And I always told them not to, so I probably should have a lock on it. And after the earthquake they all went to get things out of it, they got the candles and torches and everything from there.” 13-year-old affected by Christchurch earthquake³⁶

35. From a recovery perspective, it is also important to identify what support children and young people may need in the longer term. For example, children affected by an emergency may need access to mental health support long after a disaster ends or dedicated support to catch up on missed learning. With disasters being more frequent and intense, supporting children to build their emotional resilience before and after an emergency is also key.

Conclusion

36. Children have unique vulnerabilities in emergency situations. Emergencies can also significantly impact on children's rights, including their rights to life, survival and development. Children should therefore be recognised as a distinct vulnerable group in emergency management plans with their rights, interests and wellbeing prioritised at all stages of emergency planning.
37. Children and young people should also be seen as active participants in emergency responses. They have important perspectives, knowledge and experiences to share and must be engaged at all stages of emergency management planning to ensure emergency management plans reflect their needs and priorities. Children and young people's desire to assist during emergency responses and help their peers and communities should also be recognised and provided for in emergency management planning.

³⁵ [Full article: Rolling with the shakes: an insight into teenagers' perceptions of recovery after the Canterbury earthquakes.](#)

³⁶ [Full article: Disaster impact and recovery: what children and young people can tell us.](#)

38. In the face of more frequent and intense emergencies and natural disasters and the increasing impact these have on children and young people's rights and mental health, Aotearoa's New Zealand emergency management system must prioritise children's rights, interests and wellbeing, and emergency management plans must be developed for and with children and young people.