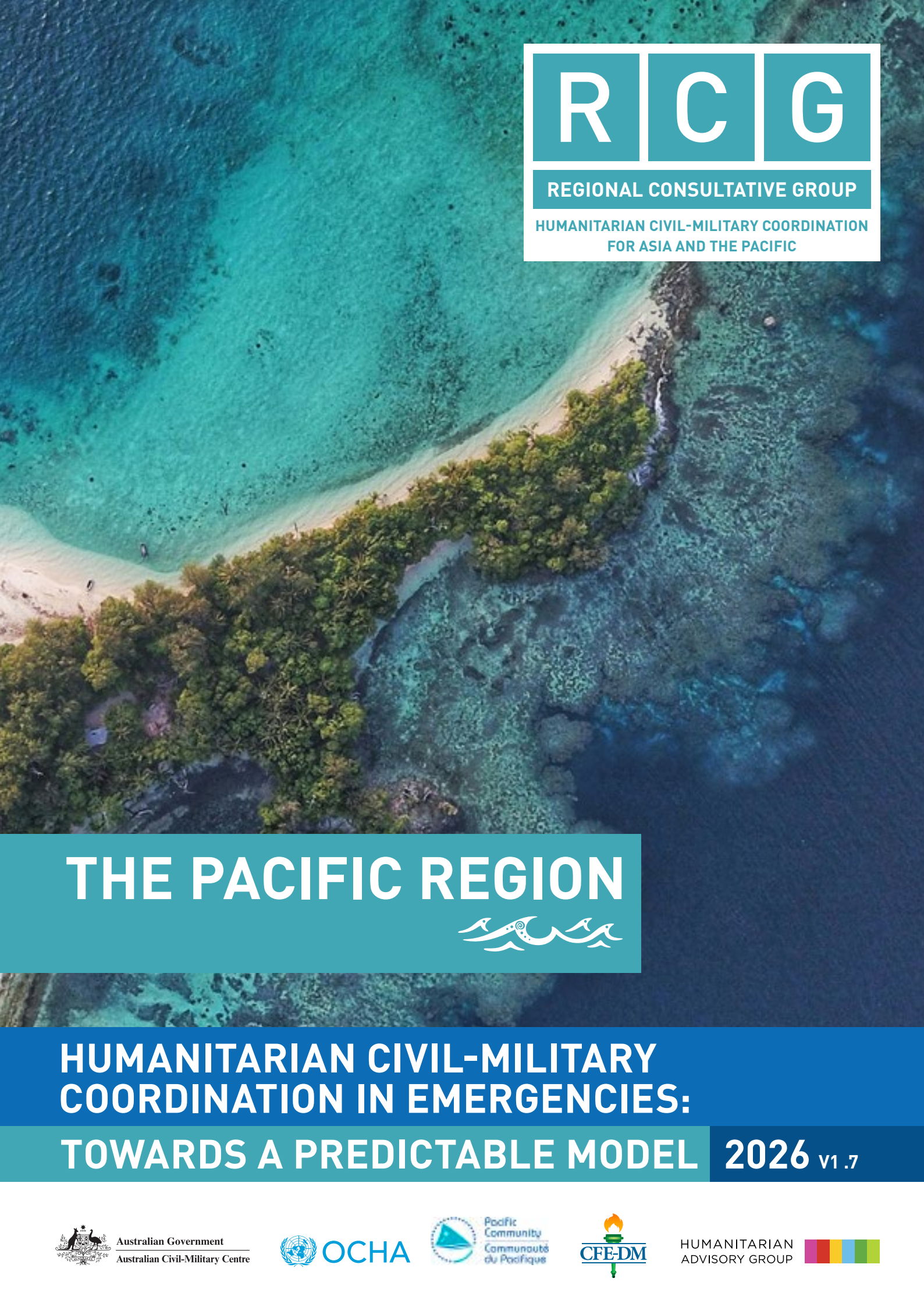




R C G

REGIONAL CONSULTATIVE GROUP

HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION
FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

THE PACIFIC REGION



HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN EMERGENCIES:

TOWARDS A PREDICTABLE MODEL

2026 v1.7



Australian Government
Australian Civil-Military Centre



OCHA



Pacific Community
Communauté du Pacifique



HUMANITARIAN
ADVISORY GROUP



FOREWORD

This publication presents the Pacific Edition of *Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination in Emergencies: Towards a Predictable Model*, developed under the guidance of the Regional Consultative Group (RCG) on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination for Asia and the Pacific. As co-secretariat members of the RCG, the Australian Civil-Military Centre (ACMC), the Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM), and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) offer this document as a practical resource to strengthen predictable, effective and appropriate disaster response in the Pacific.

Grounded in the experience of five highly disaster-exposed countries: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, this Pacific Edition maps key civil-military coordination mechanisms at regional and national levels. It complements earlier guidance developed for Asia, while responding to calls from Pacific partners for a context-specific resource that reflects the region's geography, governance arrangements, and deep traditions of community-led response.

The publication is intended for civilian and military actors engaged in preparedness, response and early recovery across international, regional and national spheres. This includes governments, security actors, regional bodies, UN agencies, Red Cross and Red Crescent partners, non-governmental and civil society organisations, donors, academia and the private sector who support or operate in Pacific Island Countries and Territories. By presenting existing mechanisms, good practice, lessons from recent emergencies and emerging regional initiatives, it aims to promote a shared understanding of roles, responsibilities and coordination approaches before, during and after crises.

In a region on the frontline of the climate crisis, where the impact of cyclones, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, floods, droughts and health emergencies are frequent and intensifying, the way civilian and military actors work together has direct consequences for the safety, dignity and recovery of affected communities. This publication seeks to inform timely, principled and locally led responses by clarifying how regional and national systems connect, how foreign assistance can best support national authorities, and how new mechanisms such as PResCoM, the Pacific Response Group and other regional capabilities can be leveraged in a coherent way.

Above all, the co-secretariat hopes this resource will support Pacific-led decision-making and partnerships that respect humanitarian principles, reinforce national and local systems, and place communities at the centre of disaster response. By offering a predictable model for humanitarian civil-military coordination tailored to Pacific realities, the publication is intended to help all actors operate in solidarity and complementarity when the next disaster strikes.

Co-Secretariat of the RCG



Australian Government
Australian Civil-Military Centre



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Front cover photo: Top-down shot of a small island in the Solomon Islands. There are boat tracks in the shallow waters of the reef surrounding the island.

Vicki Garside (@maketimetoseetheworld.com) / Unsplash

The Regional Consultative Group would like to thank all the people who gave their time to be interviewed for this publication. Your expertise, knowledge and generosity have made this publication possible. We truly hope this publication will support your work and the provision of support to communities throughout the region during times of disaster.

Humanitarian Advisory Group would like to express gratitude to the members of the Steering Committee who provided guidance, peer review and recommendations throughout the development of this publication. The Steering Group members include: Eileen Turare (SPC), Angus Lambkin (UN-OCHA through Australia Assists), Emily Cooper (ACMC), Peter Giugni (ACMC), Jessica Liddle-Boh (ACMC), Natalie McLean (ACMC), Olga Prorovskaya (UN-OCHA), and Andrea Ciletti (CFE-DM).

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy, currency, and completeness of this publication. As updates will be considered as changes occur, feedback and suggestions for amendment are welcomed. Comments may be submitted to acmc.research@defence.gov.au

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INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF THE PUBLICATION

This publication, *Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination in Emergencies: Towards A Predictable Model (Pacific Edition)*, was commissioned by the Regional Consultative Group (RCG) on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination for Asia and the Pacific to strengthen the predictability, effectiveness, and appropriateness of disaster response efforts in the Pacific region. It aims to map and analyse key civil-military coordination mechanisms at both regional and national levels, with a focus on five Pacific countries—Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu—selected for their frequent exposure to natural hazards.

The publication was developed in response to growing calls from regional stakeholders for a Pacific-specific resource to promote a common understanding of civil-military coordination mechanisms in the region. It parallels the 2017 *Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination in Emergencies: Towards a Predictable Model* publication,

and its 2020 update in collaboration with the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management (AHA Centre), which focused on five disaster-prone countries in Asia.

This Pacific Edition was developed with the support of the Australian Civil-Military Centre (ACMC) and guided by representatives from the Steering Committee organisations: Pacific Community (SPC), Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) and ACMC. The research was led by the Humanitarian Advisory Group (HAG), in partnership with local consultants in each of the five focus countries. These consultants conducted desk reviews and key informant interviews with civilian and military actors and led the development of the country chapters and case studies, ensuring the publication reflects local perspectives and operational realities.

WHAT IS THE RCG?



Established: 2014



Secretariat: UN-OCHA Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP), ACMC, CFE-DM



Australian Government
Australian Civil-Military Centre



Chairing: The RCG is co-chaired by one of the participating Member States or organisations, selected on a rotational basis.



Topics discussed: Civil-military coordination, logistics, information sharing, activation of coordination structures, preparedness, response and recovery phases, emerging policy issues, review of guidance documents, lessons learned and good practice, linkages with other relevant forums



Participation and membership: This multi-stakeholder group includes representatives from member states, armed forces, regional organisations, UN and international organisations, Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (RCRC), donors, academia and think tanks, international, national and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs), and the private sector.



GEOGRAPHIC FOCUS FOR THIS PUBLICATION



Fiji



Papua New Guinea



Solomon Islands



Tonga



Vanuatu



WHO IS THIS PUBLICATION FOR?

This publication is designed for civilian and military organisations and agencies who are involved in crisis response in the Pacific region. It is relevant to actors operating at international, regional, and national levels, including:



INTERNATIONAL

Organisations and governments that support or operate in the Pacific region, particularly those involved in humanitarian action, such as partner governments, International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs), Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (RCRC), UN agencies, funds, and programs.



REGIONAL

Organisations involved in regional response to disaster, such as Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), the Pacific Community (SPC), Micronesian Islands Forum (MIF), Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG), and Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO).



NATIONAL

Government and civil society actors within Pacific Island countries who play key roles in disaster preparedness and response, such as National Disaster Management Organisations (NDMOs), police, military, fire and rescue services, local civil society, faith-based networks, and private sector partners.

PACIFIC REGION



**HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY
COORDINATION IN EMERGENCIES**

Aerial view of Solomon Islands. Vicki Garside ([@maketimetoseetheworld.com](https://www.instagram.com/maketimetoseetheworld.com)) / Unsplash

HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN THE PACIFIC

Humanitarian civil-military coordination in the Pacific is shaped by the regional geographic diversity, vulnerability to disasters, and diverse political and cultural landscapes. The frequency of disasters, such as earthquakes, tropical cyclones, flooding, drought, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions, reinforces the need for coordinated efforts between civilian and military agencies to provide timely and effective assistance. Environmental factors, including rising sea levels and the impacts of climate change, further exacerbate these risks, requiring comprehensive and adaptive response strategies.

Whilst disaster response is civilian-led, the response to large-scale emergencies can require military support.

This can include aerial reconnaissance, delivery of relief supplies, and the transport of personnel, both into affected countries and within them, including inter-island movements. The capabilities of civilian agencies, including NDMOs, varies across the Pacific and within nations themselves. Given these dynamics, it is critical for international and regional actors to understand the structure and mechanisms of coordination to ensure they can work in support of national governments when they are requested to do so.

In addition to climate and disaster risk, there are key thematic priorities and trends that impact humanitarian civil-military coordination in the Pacific region. They include:



LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND EQUITABLE PARTNERSHIPS

The Pacific has a long tradition of community-based leadership, and external actors often overlook existing capabilities.



CLIMATE AND DISASTER RISK FINANCING

The Pacific is on the frontline of the climate crisis. Sea level rise, cyclones and droughts are not future risks, they are current, lived realities.



PROTECTION, GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

Gender-based violence remains prevalent, and women are often underrepresented in formal humanitarian leadership.



HUMANITARIAN-DEVELOPMENT-PEACE NEXUS

Protracted climate impacts and social and political unrest blur the lines between response and development.

What is civil-military coordination?

Civil-Military Coordination (CMCoord) formalises essential dialogue and interaction between humanitarian organisations and militaries to enhance responses and generate better outcomes for affected communities.

In this publication, the 'civilian' element includes humanitarian agencies, government agencies such as NDMOs, fire and rescue services and police; international, national and local NGOs; the RCRC, donor governments and intergovernmental organisations such as SPC and the PIF; UN funds, programs and agencies, and the private sector.

The 'military' element refers to the national militaries of governments.

Civil-military coordination aims to protect and promote humanitarian principles, avoid competition, minimise inconsistencies and, when appropriate, pursue common goals. The ways civilian and military actors work together can vary—sometimes they fully cooperate, other times they simply operate side by side without direct interaction. Coordination is a shared responsibility facilitated by liaison and common training.

[Adapted from UN Civil-Military Coordination definition, UN-OCHA]

KEY EVENTS IN THE EVOLUTION OF HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN THE PACIFIC

Over the past two decades, the Pacific region has developed guidance, agreements and mechanisms in response to multiple major disaster events.

2005	First Regional Exercise Longreach was conducted as part of a regional disaster symposium in Solomon Islands. This initiated annual regional disaster relief planning and operational procedure development for militaries to support Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR) operations.	2019	An outbreak of measles in Samoa sees Australian Medical Assistance Teams (AUSMAT) and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) deployed. This demonstrated civil-military coordination in a public health emergency, including logistics, medical support, and coordination with local health authorities.
2006	First Exercise Pacific Partnership was conducted. This established a recurring multilateral HADR exercise involving civil-military coordination across nations and NGOs.	2020	During the COVID-19 pandemic, military and police forces supported infrastructure, logistics, contact tracing and border management. This highlighted the role of military assets in health crisis management and led to new coordination practices between health agencies and defence forces.
2007	Release of revised <i>UN Guidelines on the Use of Military and Civil Defence Assets in Disaster Relief (Oslo Guidelines)</i>. This updated global standards for use of military and civil defence assets in disaster relief, influencing Pacific practices.	2021	AUSMAT deployed to Papua New Guinea for the COVID-19 response. This reinforced the importance of joint civil-military health response mechanisms.
2009	Samoa earthquake and tsunami response included civil-military coordination as a central element, influencing future procedures and coordination models.	2022	<i>2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent</i> was agreed by PIF Leaders which has a focus on improving response to climate change and disasters. - The Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha’apai volcanic eruption and tsunami in Tonga response highlighted the need for streamlined CMCoord through multinational coordination protocols. It accelerated discussions around predictable coordination models and pre-clearance protocols. - Inaugural Pacific Disaster Risk Reduction Ministers Meeting endorsed a Pacific disaster reduction declaration.
2014	First Exercise Tropic Twilight was conducted. Introduced a recurring New Zealand-led HADR exercise with civil-military coordination and infrastructure development.	2023	Marking the 30th anniversary of the FRANZ Arrangement, France, Australia and New Zealand reaffirmed their commitment and agreed to consider ways to work towards eco-friendly practices in disaster response.
2015	Global endorsement of the <i>Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030</i>. This has shaped regional Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) strategies and civil-military roles.	2024	- The Pacific Humanitarian Warehousing Project began, led by SPC, which will support pre-positioning of humanitarian supplies in 14 Pacific countries. - Members of the Joint Heads of Pacific Security (JHoPS) endorsed drafting instructions for a Regional Operations Deployment Framework. This regional governance mechanism would coordinate for civilian, military and police deployments in response to security challenges. - Members of the South Pacific Defence Ministers’ Meeting (SPDMM) reaffirmed their commitment to enhance collective readiness and cooperation in responding to climate induced disasters, ensuring rapid, effective, and well coordinated humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, endorsing the establishment of the Pacific Response Group (PRG). - In response to an earthquake in Vanuatu, the PRG and Pacific Police Support Group (PPSG) were deployed for the first time.
2016	The RCG on Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination for Asia and the Pacific convened its inaugural meeting. This established a formal regional consultative group focused on humanitarian civil-military coordination.	2025	The Pacific Humanitarian Response Coordination Mechanism (PResCoM), was formulated as a regional coordination mechanism for humanitarian response involving civil-military actors.
2017	Tropical Cyclone (TC) Winston, the Pacific region’s strongest cyclone on record, hit Fiji, Niue and Tonga. Response established a ‘Request for Assistance’ system, an operational innovation that allowed humanitarian actors to move supplies around the affected region using foreign military assets.		
2018	- The Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP) was established to support implementation of the <i>Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific</i> (FRDP) in support of disaster response. - The <i>Boe Declaration on Regional Security</i> was adopted by the PIF, which includes supporting the delivery of humanitarian assistance during disasters. - UN-OCHA releases new guidance: <i>Recommended Practices for Effective Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination of Foreign Military Assets (FMA) in Natural and Man-Made Disasters</i>. This recommended practices for effective coordination of foreign military assets in disasters.		

KEY REGIONAL POLICIES SHAPING HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN THE PACIFIC

This section outlines the key regional policy frameworks that influence civil-military coordination and broader response and resilience.



2050 STRATEGY FOR THE BLUE PACIFIC CONTINENT

Endorsed by PIF Leaders in July 2022, the *2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* sets out a unified long-term vision to advance the security, resilience and wellbeing of Pacific peoples. It places disaster response and resilience at the heart of sustainable development and regional security.

The Strategy calls for strengthened collective action across early warning systems, preparedness and response. It prioritises Pacific-led coordination that reflects cultural values and local knowledge, while enabling partnerships with international humanitarian actors. It also links disaster risk management to economic resilience, social protection and sovereignty, emphasising that effective response is essential to safeguard the long-term future of the Blue Pacific.



BOE DECLARATION ON REGIONAL SECURITY

Endorsed by PIF Leaders on 5 September 2018 in Nauru, the *Boe Declaration on Regional Security* reaffirms the region's collective commitment to peace, resilience and collaboration in the face of growing and complex security challenges.

The Declaration expands the concept of security to include human, environmental and cyber dimensions, and recognises climate change as the single greatest threat to the Pacific. It explicitly calls for regional cooperation in disaster preparedness and response. To support implementation, the *Boe Declaration Action Plan* (2019) provides a roadmap with clear priorities and performance indicators aligned to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and regional resilience frameworks. The Declaration reinforces a people-centred approach to security, placing the safety and wellbeing of Pacific communities at the centre of regional policy.



FRAMEWORK FOR RESILIENT DEVELOPMENT IN THE PACIFIC 2017 – 2030

Agreed in 2016 and endorsed by Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), the *Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific* (FRDP) is the region's principal guide for addressing climate and disaster risks through integrated and inclusive approaches. It is voluntary and non-political, offering practical guidance for local, national and regional actors.

The FRDP advocates for mainstreaming climate resilience and DRR into development planning and programming across sectors. It complements national strategies and encourages collaboration among governments, communities, the private sector and international partners. In the humanitarian space, it underscores the importance of preparedness, risk-informed development and localised response systems, while also supporting Pacific advocacy in global climate and disaster policy forums.



PACIFIC RESILIENCE FACILITY

Endorsed by PIF Leaders in 2020, the *Pacific Resilience Facility* (PRF) is a Pacific-owned and Pacific-led financing initiative designed to support climate and disaster resilience.

The PRF addresses barriers to accessing global climate finance by providing predictable, grant-based funding for small-scale, high-impact community projects across key areas such as disaster preparedness, climate adaptation, loss and damage, and social protection. It is governed by a regional model that includes a council of finance ministers and an independent board, with Tonga selected as its host country. Programming is expected to scale up from 2026 and it will offer a practical mechanism to strengthen local capacity and reduce future humanitarian needs through community-driven resilience-building.

RELEVANT GUIDANCE FOR HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN THE PACIFIC

A range of guidance that exists to support the interaction and coordination of civil and military actors operating in shared environments during disaster response. This guidance is regularly applied in exercises and simulations to provide predictable relationships, clarify roles and responsibilities, and establish modes of working during crises.

At the global level, there are recent civil-military guidance documents that can be contextualised to the Pacific region. These frameworks help ensure that humanitarian principles are upheld while enabling efficient and respectful collaboration between diverse actors.



UPDATED UN CIVIL- MILITARY COORDINATION HANDBOOK- V2.1

The UNCMCoord Handbook v2.1 (2025) offers a refined set of principles and operational guidance that are relevant to Pacific disaster contexts, where state militaries and police often serve as first responders and foreign military assets may be mobilised. In the Pacific, geography complicates response and the humanitarian–military interface can be tightly interwoven. In light of this, the handbook’s emphasis on principled dialogue, context specific coordination mechanisms and interoperability helps ensure that civil-military engagements reinforce humanitarian space rather than erode it. The updated edition’s inclusion of new case studies and lessons learned strengthens its applicability in Pacific settings. It provides guidance on information sharing, liaison roles and managing military support in humanitarian operations in ways that respect sovereignty, neutrality and the capacities of small island states.



GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF FOREIGN MILITARY AND CIVIL DEFENCE ASSETS IN DISASTER RELIEF (THE ‘OSLO’ GUIDELINES) – UPDATED 2007

The Oslo Guidelines offer essential guardrails for integrating foreign military and civil defence assets into disaster response in a way that respects sovereignty, humanitarian principles and local capacity. The Oslo Guidelines stipulate that such assets be deployed only as a last resort – when no comparable civilian alternative exists – and always with the consent of the affected state and under civilian coordination. The guidelines emphasise that military or civil defence contributions should complement, not substitute, national and humanitarian efforts. In practice, applying the Oslo approach in Pacific settings means establishing pre-agreed status agreements, clearly defining liaison arrangements, setting explicit exit criteria and maintaining strict demarcation between military support and humanitarian roles. This ensures that militaries augment capacity without undermining humanitarian space, preserving trust and accountability in small island states that are particularly sensitive to external presence and intervention.



ADDITIONAL REGIONAL GUIDANCE

Additional regional guidance is intended primarily for military use:

Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines for the Use of Foreign Military Assets in Natural Disaster Response Operations (APC-MADRO)

Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference (APICC), *Multinational Guidelines for Information Support to Military Disaster Relief Operations*

Multinational Standing Force – Standard Operating Procedures (MNF-SOP)

KEY PACIFIC REGIONAL BODIES FOCUSED ON DISASTER RESPONSE AND COORDINATION

This section outlines the regional and subregional bodies that work to implement the regional policies and frameworks mentioned in the section above.

Regional bodies negotiate agreements, develop guidance, host mechanisms, facilitate exercises and make decisions about the deployment of resources. Council of Regional Organisations in the Pacific (CROP) agencies, such as PIF and SPC, play a key role in supporting coordinated, Pacific-led disaster responses. CROP agencies bring specialised technical expertise, regional networks and policy leadership to preparedness, response and recovery efforts.

REGIONAL BODIES



PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM (PIF)

The Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), founded in 1971, brings together 18 member countries and territories to address pressing regional challenges and promote collaboration in achieving shared goals. The Forum aims to foster cooperation in areas such as peace, security, social inclusion and prosperity, and it sets the political and strategic frameworks such as the Boe Declaration on Regional Security and the 2025 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent.



THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY (SPC)

The Pacific Community (SPC) is the principal scientific and technical organisation in the Pacific region, providing dedicated support to sustainable development since 1947. As an international development organisation, SPC is owned and governed by its 27 member countries and territories. Under SPC, the Pacific Islands Emergency Management Alliance (PIEMA) serves as a regional mechanism to enhance emergency and disaster management capabilities across Pacific Island countries and territories.



UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC (USP)

The University of the South Pacific (USP), created in 1968, plays a pivotal role in HADR across the Pacific by providing education, applied research and capacity development rooted in regional expertise. Its Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development (PaCESD) delivers key modules and training on subjects such as post disaster needs assessment, humanitarian response and 'build back better' principles all of which integrate disaster risk management, climatology and resilience planning into practical curricula.



PACIFIC ISLANDS ASSOCIATION OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (PIANGO)

The Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO) is the regional network of national umbrella NGOs – known as National Liaison Units (NLUs) – across 28 Pacific Island countries and territories. Established in 1991, PIANGO acts as a convening and capacity building body, amplifying civil society voices, facilitating information sharing, and supporting the NLUs to engage meaningfully in regional and national policy processes.



SOUTH PACIFIC DEFENCE MINISTER'S MEETING (SPDMM)

The SPDMM, established in 2013, is the annual defence ministerial dialogue in the region that shapes Pacific-led responses to security challenges. Members include Australia, Chile, Fiji, France, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga, with observers including Japan, the UK and the USA. The SPDMM promotes regional cooperation and initiatives such as the Future Leaders' Summit that promotes good practice in civil-military coordination during humanitarian crises.



UNITED NATIONS OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS PACIFIC (UN-OCHA PACIFIC)

In 1999, UN-OCHA established the Office of the Pacific (OoP) to lead and coordinate timely, effective and principled humanitarian responses in collaboration with both national and international stakeholders. Located in Fiji, the office oversees humanitarian coordination across 14 Pacific Island countries and territories: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

SUBREGIONAL BODIES



MELANESIAN SPEARHEAD GROUP (MSG)

The Melanesian Spearhead Group (MSG) plays an evolving role in advancing disaster management and resilience across the Melanesian subregion. Comprising Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and the Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front (FLNKS) of New Caledonia, the MSG provides a political and technical platform to strengthen collaboration on DRR, climate adaptation and emergency response. The MSG supports regional coordination through shared early warning systems, humanitarian surge planning and capacity-building initiatives tailored to Melanesian contexts.



MICRONESIAN ISLANDS FORUM (MIF)

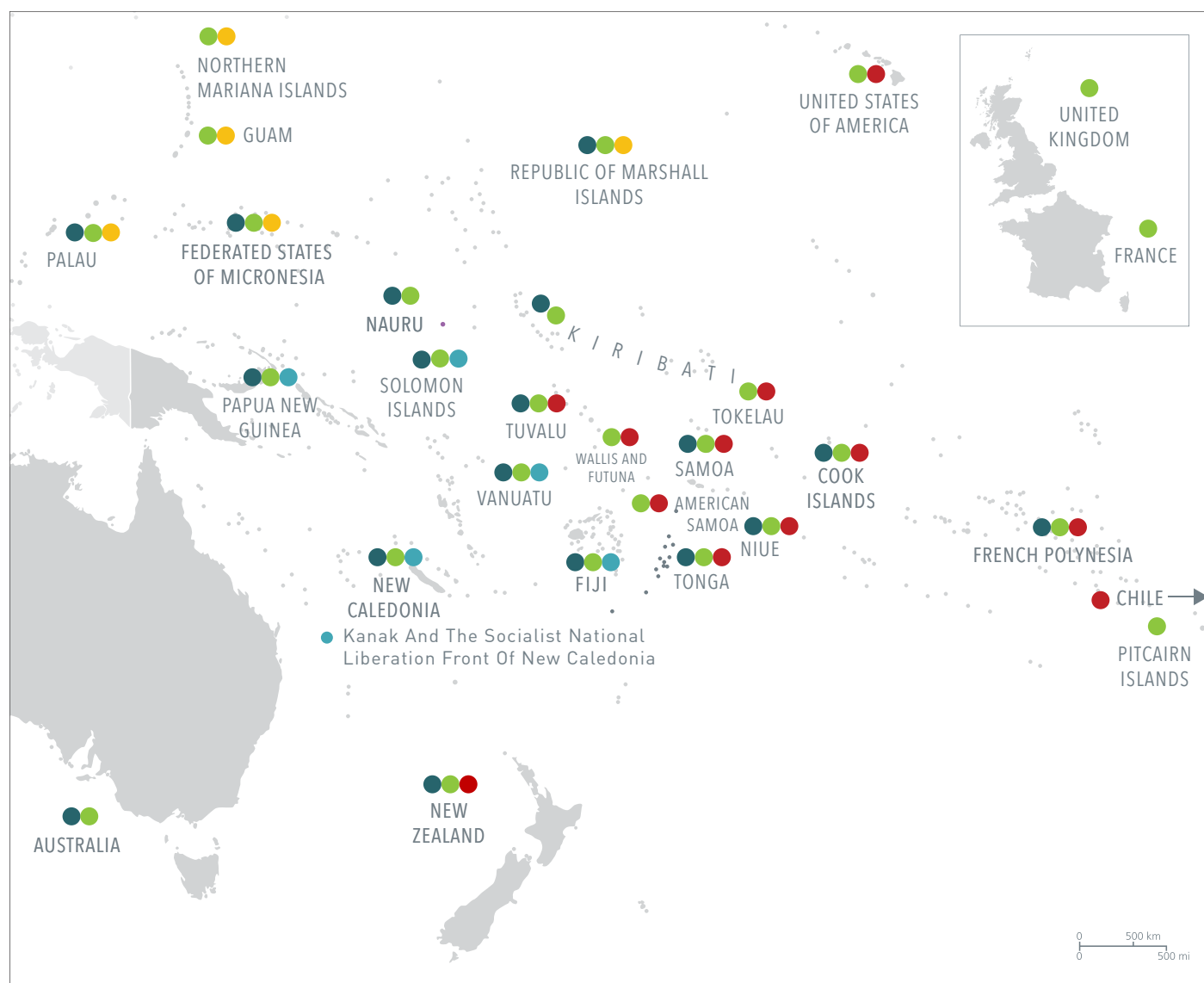
The Micronesians Islands Forum (MIF) plays an increasingly important role in shaping disaster management efforts across the North Pacific. Bringing together leaders from FSM, Palau, RMI, Nauru, Kiribati, Guam and Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the MIF provides a strategic platform for regional collaboration on shared priorities, including climate resilience, DRR and emergency response coordination. The MIF offers a space for countries to align policies, pool resources and advocate collectively for tailored support from international partners. It also strengthens subregional leadership by enabling Pacific voices to shape disaster governance in ways that reflect local systems, sovereignty and traditional knowledge.



POLYNESIAN LEADERS GROUP (PLG)

The Polynesian Leaders Group (PLG) was established to strengthen cooperation across the region. It is an intergovernmental coalition of independent countries and other territories in Polynesia; members include American Samoa, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, Hawai'i, New Zealand, Niue, Rapa Nui, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Wallis and Futuna.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS FORUM (PIF), THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY (SPC), MELANESIAN SPEARHEAD GROUP (MSG), THE MICRONESIAN ISLANDS FORUM (MIF) AND THE POLYNESIAN LEADERS GROUP (PLG)



● Pacific Islands Forum PIF: 18 members: Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, French Polynesia, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu.	● The Pacific Community SPC: 27 members: American Samoa, Australia, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, France, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Nauru, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Pitcairn Islands, Republic of Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, United States of America (USA), Vanuatu, Wallis and Futuna.	● Melanesian Spearhead Group MSG: 5 members: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and the Kanak and the Socialist National Liberation Front of New Caledonia.	● Micronesian Islands Forum MIF: All states in the Federated States of Micronesia (Chuuk, Kosrae, Pohnpei and Yap), the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, Nauru and the two US territories of Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands.	● Polynesian Leaders Group PLG: 12 members: American Samoa, Chile, Cook Islands, French Polynesia, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Wallis and Futuna, and USA.
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HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION MECHANISMS IN THE PACIFIC REGION

There are a range of international organisations who provide surge support for disaster assessment, coordination and information management from organisations like the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC), who can deploy Field Assessment and Coordination Teams (FACTs) and UN-OCHA, who can deploy UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC teams).

This section outlines the mechanisms where coordination takes place in the Pacific region, considering the capabilities that can be deployed and the guidance under which organisations work.

PACIFIC HUMANITARIAN TEAM (PHT)

The Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) was established in 2008 by UN-OCHA's OoP to enhance the timeliness,

effectiveness and predictability of humanitarian response across the region. It is a coordinated network of humanitarian organisations that work collaboratively to support 14 PICTs. Endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) in 2012 as a formal coordination body, the PHT supports nationally led disaster responses in support of Pacific governments and partners to ensure preparedness systems are in place. During emergencies, the PHT provides rapid, effective and appropriate support to governments, NGOs and communities. In non-emergency periods, the PHT focuses on strengthening disaster preparedness and enabling coordinated international support. Guided by humanitarian principles and a strong commitment to gender equality, the PHT prioritises accountability and inclusive participation to ensure the needs and rights of all disaster-affected people in the Pacific, especially the most vulnerable, are addressed.

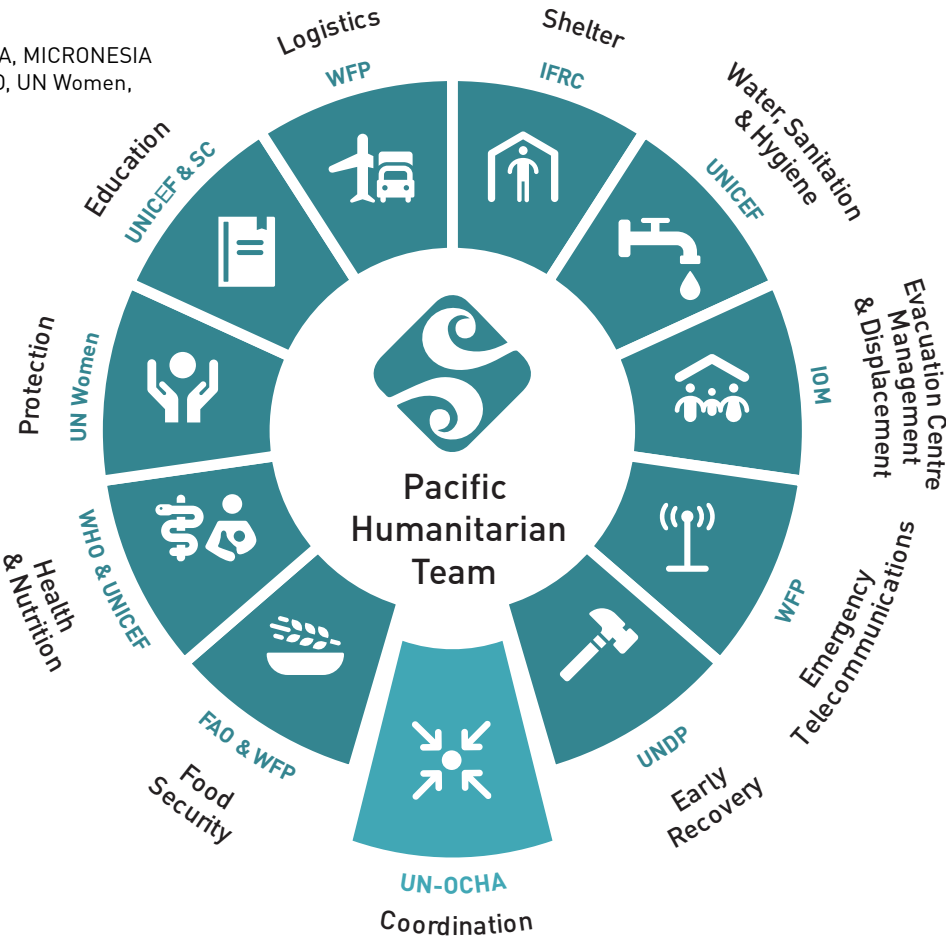
PHT PRINCIPALS



RESIDENT COORDINATORS MCOs FIJI, SAMOA, MICRONESIA
OCHA, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, IOM, UNFPA, FAO, UN Women,
UNDP, OHCHR, IFRC, OXFAM


Pacific Regional Cash
Working Group

PHT CLUSTER COORDINATION GROUP



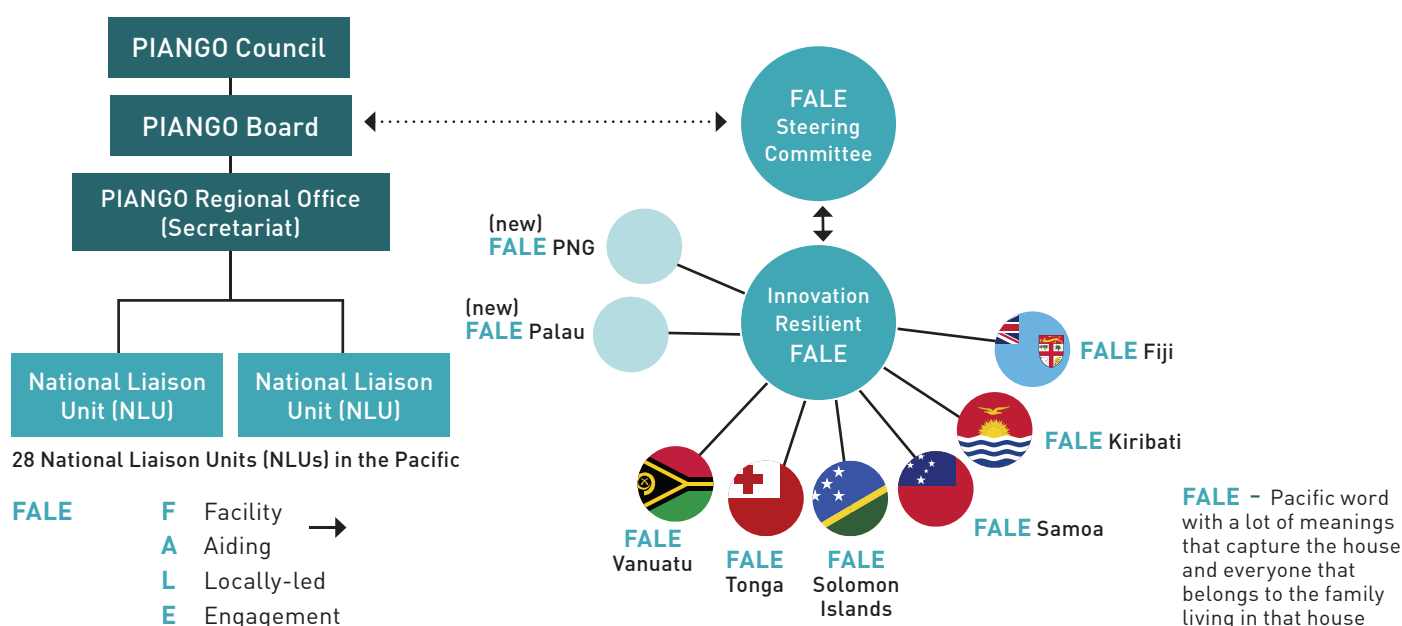
Source: UN-OCHA. Adapted from reliefweb.int

FACILITY AIDING LOCALLY-LED ENGAGEMENT (FALE) PACIFIC

PIANGO has been a key driver of developing the [FALE Pacific](#). The FALE Pacific was created to strengthen locally led humanitarian action across the Pacific. FALE Pacific supports local actors to lead crisis response and shape humanitarian strategies that reflect their own priorities and contexts. With national FALE hubs established in Fiji, Kiribati, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu, the initiative provides a collaborative platform that brings

together local and national responders, governments, the private sector, academia, UN agencies and international partners. Through this inclusive model, FALE Pacific is helping to build a more effective, equitable and coordinated humanitarian system – one that puts Pacific leadership and solutions at the forefront.

The structure of the FALE Pacific is summarised below:



INTERNATIONAL ARRANGEMENTS THAT SUPPORT DISASTER RESPONSE IN THE PACIFIC

FRANZ TRILATERAL COOPERATION ARRANGEMENT

The [FRANZ Arrangement](#), established on 22 December 1992 between France, Australia and New Zealand, is a key mechanism for coordinating disaster response and relief assistance in the Pacific. FRANZ provides a coordinated response when the scale of a disaster exceeds a country's capacity to respond and the affected country requests assistance. This civilian-led arrangement, supported by defence forces, places strong emphasis on respecting the sovereignty and leadership of affected countries. Leadership under the arrangement is provided by the [French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development](#), [Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#), and [New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#).

QUAD PARTNERSHIP FOR HADR IN THE INDOPACIFIC

In 2022, the foreign ministers of Australia, India, Japan and the USA formally activated the [Quad Guidelines for HADR](#), establishing a dedicated framework for coordinated humanitarian response across the IndoPacific. The partnership is designed to enhance collective capacity, interoperability and operational synergy during crises. Quad partners commit to responding only when requested by the affected state, coordinating through joint or individual support in phases spanning preparedness, response and postcrisis reviews. The Quad Guidelines further emphasise respect for sovereignty, inclusion of vulnerable groups (including women, persons with disabilities and minorities) and zero tolerance for sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (SEAH). The Quad convenes biannual meetings and runs at least one scenario-based tabletop exercise annually to enhance readiness and coordination among partners.

KEY PACIFIC REGIONAL CAPABILITIES DEPLOYED TO DISASTERS IN THE PACIFIC

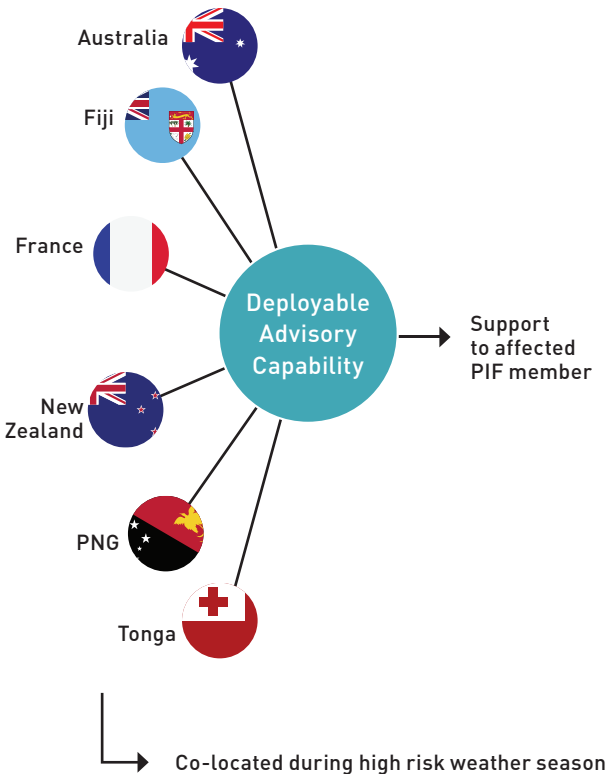
PACIFIC POLICE SUPPORT GROUP (PPSG)

The Pacific Police Support Group (PPSG), which falls under the Pacific Policing Initiative (PPI), is a multinational, deployable policing capability designed to provide coordinated law enforcement support across the Pacific in times of crisis. Drawing together police personnel from Pacific Island countries and Australia, the PPSG can be rapidly deployed to assist with public order, community safety and humanitarian operations – often in the aftermath of natural disasters or civil unrest. The PPSG operates under a principle of supporting, not supplanting, local police services and emphasises culturally appropriate, community-focused engagement. In practice, the PPSG enhances regional security cooperation while respecting Pacific sovereignty and leadership. As climate and disaster risks increase, the PPSG’s ability to provide scalable, collaborative support to national police forces is becoming a key asset in regional preparedness and response. The PPSG reflects a broader shift toward Pacific-led, Pacific-partnered approaches to security and resilience.

PACIFIC RESPONSE GROUP (PRG)

The Pacific Response Group (PRG) was formally endorsed at the SPDDM meeting in October 2024. The PRG is a regional deployable military capability that is ready to assist PIF members in their response to disasters, working in support of civilian authorities. The PRG is a rapidly deployable military unit designed to assist civilian authorities in disaster-affected states. The PRG is permanently co-located during high-risk weather season and capable of supporting preparedness planning, and if requested, can rapidly deploy a Forward Planning Team to support military liaison, operational planning, and the identification of potential military support tasks. As a regional asset, the PRG aims to strengthen coordinated military deployments across the Pacific, supporting civilian-led HADR efforts.

The PRG will be deployed if requested by a member of the Pacific Island Forum and will have a rotating command structure. The PRG is composed of personnel from SPDMM member countries, Australia, Fiji, France, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga. Chile is also an SPDMM member and supportive of the unit but is not contributing personnel at this time.



NATIONAL LEVEL CAPABILITIES DEPLOYED TO DISASTERS IN THE PACIFIC

Key capabilities at the national level can be requested by disaster-affected countries to support disaster response. Not all PICTs have response teams as outlined below, hence intra-regional deployments are becoming more common.

URBAN SEARCH AND RESCUE TEAMS (USAR)

Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams are highly specialised emergency response units trained to locate, rescue and provide immediate medical assistance to people trapped in collapsed buildings or other urban disaster environments. Globally coordinated through the [International Search and Rescue Advisory Group \(INSARAG\)](#), these teams are critical in the aftermath of earthquakes, cyclones and other complex emergencies. In the Pacific, where remoteness, limited infrastructure and frequent natural hazards present unique challenges, USAR capacities are increasingly being adapted to suit island contexts. There are USAR focal points in most Pacific countries.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL TEAMS (EMTs)

[Emergency Medical Teams \(EMTs\)](#) are specialised groups of health professionals trained to provide rapid, high-

quality medical care during disasters and public health emergencies. In the Pacific region, where communities are particularly vulnerable to natural hazards and the impacts of climate change, the development of national EMTs has become a cornerstone of health emergency preparedness. There are different levels of EMTs with certification through [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#). [EMTs](#) have been instrumental in responding to events like the 2022 Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption and the 2019 measles outbreak in Samoa. EMTs undergo rigorous training and simulations to ensure readiness. Their establishment not only enhances immediate response capabilities but also strengthens long-term resilience by building local expertise and fostering regional collaboration.

ENVIRONMENTAL EMERGENCY SPECIALISTS

The [UN Environment Programme \(UNEP\)/UN-OCHA Joint Environment Unit](#) has trained a cohort of Pacific-based professionals who can be deployed to ensure that environmental concerns are integrated into disaster response, including conducting environmental assessments and providing recommendations. This work is supported by the [Environmental Emergencies Centre](#).



REGIONAL EXERCISES AND SIMULATIONS

There are various military led exercises in the region that involve strengthening civil-military coordination mechanisms. In addition the exercises listed below, POVAI ENDEAVOUR Cooperative Operations and Exercises Framework is designed to strengthen interoperability among Pacific defence forces and improve coordination across the region. Initially endorsed at the 2013 SPDMM, the Framework supports the SPDMM community by enabling more effective collaboration through joint operations and exercises, organised around three key thematic areas: maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and peacekeeping and stabilisation operations.

EXERCISE	OBJECTIVE	STATES INVOLVED	FREQUENCY
<u>Exercise Tropic Twilight</u>	This exercise is led by New Zealand and regional partners to build capability for HADR operations in the Pacific.	New Zealand and regional partners.	Once per year
<u>Regional Exercise Longreach</u>	This exercise aims to strengthen Pacific military cooperation, coordination and contributions to regional humanitarian assistance and disaster relief responses. Civil society actors and NGOs are also involved.	• SPDMM members (Australia, Chile, Fiji, France, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and Tonga) • 3 observer countries (Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) • other regional partners	Once per year
<u>Exercise Pacific Partnership</u>	This exercise brings together military, civilian, government and NGO actors from host and partner nations to conduct medical, engineering, disaster management and community engagement activities, with the goal of strengthening interoperability, capacity and regional relationships. Pacific Partnership also functions as a platform for advancing civilmilitary coordination norms, testing response modalities, building interoperability and enabling host nations to deepen their national disaster response systems in cooperation with external partners.	• The United States Pacific Fleet • Participating nations: Australia, Canada, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea (ROK), Singapore, and the United Kingdom • Recent visits and mission stops in the Pacific: Fiji, Tonga, Papua New Guinea	Once per year, multiple locations
<u>Exercise Croix du Sud</u>	This exercise is the South Pacific's largest HADR exercise which also involves civil-society actors.	• Australian Defence Force • French Armed Forces of New Caledonia (FANC) • His Majesty's Armed Forces of Tonga • Papua New Guinea Defence Force • New Zealand Defence Force • United States Armed Forces	Every two years

WHAT ELSE IS ON THE HORIZON?

There are a range of new regional initiatives that are relevant to civil-military coordination during emergencies. Some of these are about to become operational from 2026 onwards.

PACIFIC HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE COORDINATION MECHANISM (PResCoM)

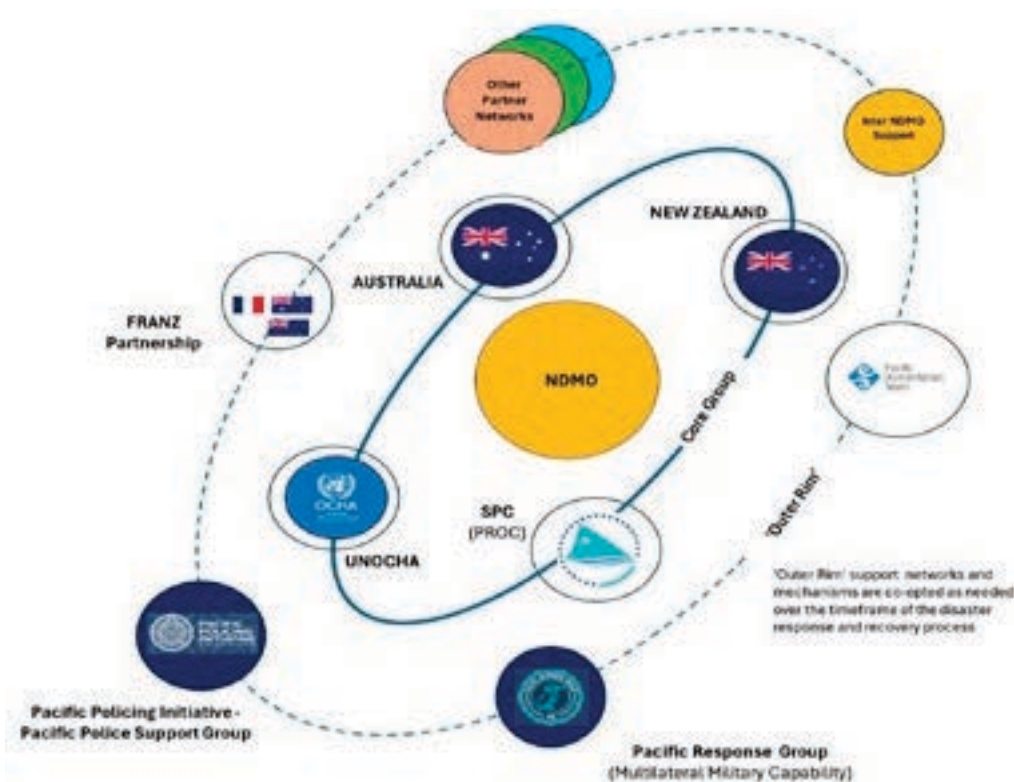
Pacific Humanitarian Response Coordination Mechanism (PResCoM) is a new regional approach designed to strengthen collective preparedness and enable a timely, coordinated humanitarian response to disasters in the Pacific. The concept for a PResCoM was first outlined in the 2019 *Boe Declaration Action Plan*, endorsed by Pacific Islands Forum Leaders. Since then, momentum has built through a series of regional discussions, including the inaugural Meeting of Pacific DRR Ministers in September 2022, the Pacific Regional Disaster Managers Meetings (PRDMM) in 2023, and the 2024 Forum Officials Sub-Committee on Regional Security.

These discussions have reaffirmed a collective commitment to strengthening national and regional

humanitarian response capabilities. In line with the Boe Declaration, Leaders have called for the development of a regional mechanism that supports cross-border assistance, enhances coordination with the international community and establishes key components such as a Pacific-wide incident management system, competency-based training, peer-to-peer learning and shared resourcing. Governance arrangements to support this mechanism are set for further discussion in 2026.

Convened under the leadership of the SPC and guided by Pacific-led principles, PResCoM brings together national governments, UN agencies, regional organisations, NGOs, donors and other partners to align efforts before, during and after emergencies. Its primary function is to facilitate decision-making, surge coordination and resource mobilisation during large-scale crises – particularly when national capacities are overwhelmed. Built on lessons from past responses such as TC Winston and the COVID-19 pandemic, PResCoM reinforces Pacific leadership in humanitarian coordination while promoting interoperability, localisation and respect for humanitarian principles.

PResCoM 'PLANETARY SYSTEM'



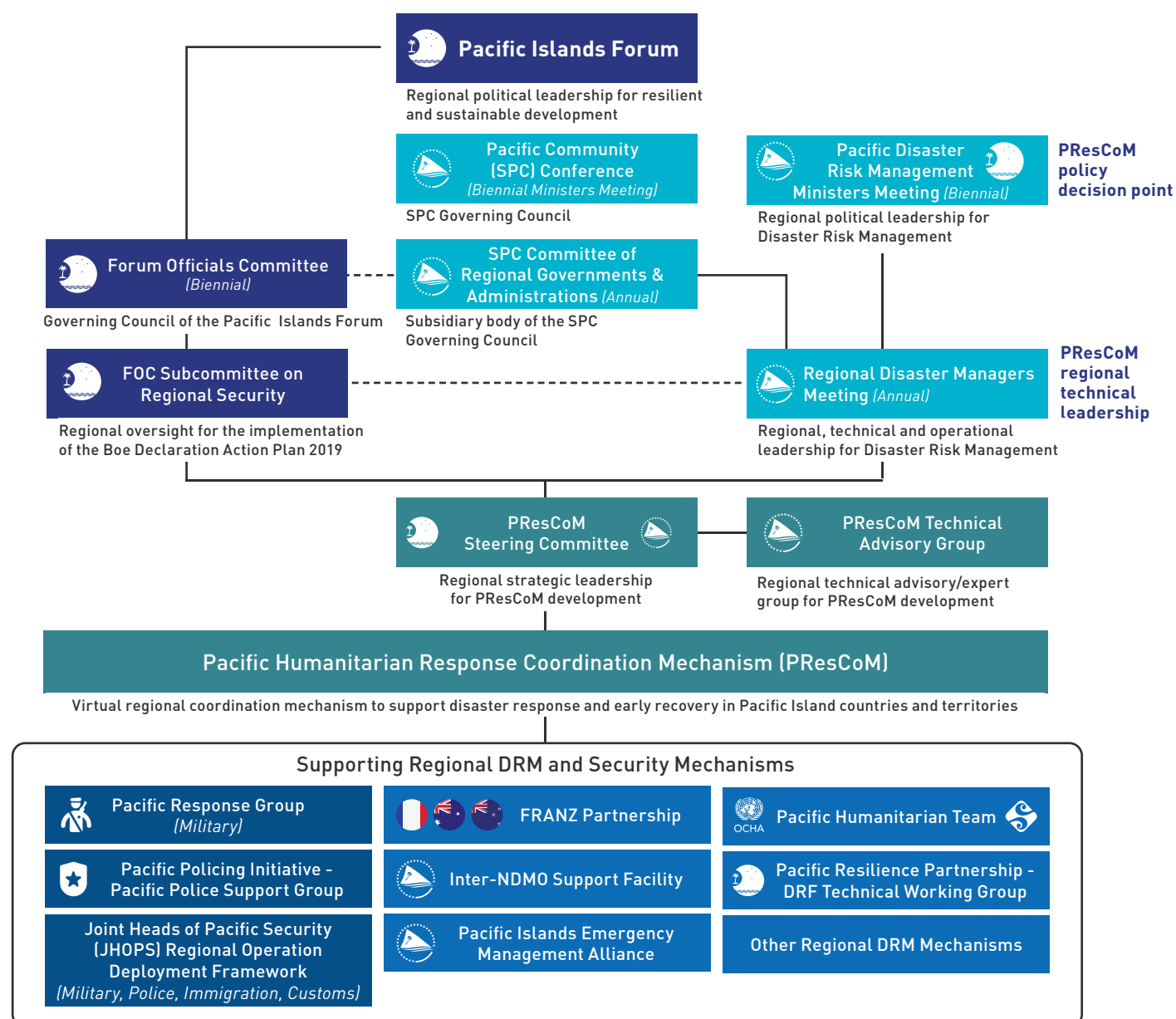
Source: Pacific Humanitarian Response Coordination Mechanism (PResCoM) Policy & Operating Guideline October 2025, p. 24

The PResCoM will be a virtual mechanism that will provide coordination for both regional and international disaster response surge support. Whilst not an operational agency itself, the PResCoM will be a civilian-led platform to facilitate requests for and offers of assistance.

The PResCoM's operational responsibilities are:

- Provide shared situational awareness before, during and after crises
- Convene to consider requests for humanitarian response and early recovery support from NDMOs
- Liaise with affiliated humanitarian and other organisations on the provision of requested support
- Monitor and review surge support capacity with NDMO and relevant organisations and revise or adjust as may be needed
- Support the undertaking of 'after action reviews'

PResCoM REGIONAL GOVERNANCE AND SUPPORT STRUCTURE



Source: Adapted from Pacific Humanitarian Response Coordination Mechanism (PResCoM) Policy & Operating Guideline October 2025, p. 13

JOINT HEADS OF PACIFIC SECURITY (JHOPS) – REGIONAL OPERATIONS DEPLOYMENT FRAMEWORK

The proposed JHoPS framework will look to establish a regional governance mechanism to coordinate civilian, military and police deployments, filling a key gap in the current regional architecture. Building on the strategic direction of the *2000 Biketawa Declaration* and the *2018 Boe Declaration*, it would provide a common, Pacific-led mechanism to guide responses to regional security challenges, including through deployment of the PPSG and the PRG. Such a framework would meet regional needs by streamlining both bilateral and regional deployments during crises, demonstrating the strength of the JHoPS in turning Pacific Leaders' strategic guidance into operational outcomes. Members agreed that the negotiation of any framework must ultimately be led by Pacific Leaders and committed to briefing relevant domestic agencies – such as foreign ministries, legal offices and national security agencies – on its potential value to secure political endorsement for future negotiations. The Secretariat was tasked, through the Intersessional Working Group (IWG), to compile a register of issues and concerns, including legal considerations, to inform ongoing discussions. Members will report back on progress to the JHoPS meeting in 2026.

REVIEW OF REGIONAL ARCHITECTURE

A review of the regional architecture is currently underway and is examining political groupings, institutional processes and mechanisms, governance mechanisms, and engagements and partnerships. It is possible that the findings and recommendations of the review will have an ongoing impact on how civilian and military actors engage during times of crisis.

OCEANS OF PEACE DECLARATION

The *Oceans of Peace Declaration* is a Pacific-led initiative endorsed by Pacific Leaders in 2025. It seeks to establish the Blue Pacific as a zone of peace, security and cooperation. The initiative emphasises respect for sovereignty, non-militarisation and regional autonomy, while reinforcing commitments to maritime security, climate resilience and rule-based governance of the ocean space. A component of this initiative is the PPI, which aims to establish regional training centres, a code of conduct and a standing deployable police capability, thereby strengthening regional mechanisms for crisis and security cooperation. The Oceans of Peace framework builds on earlier security and development norms such as the Boe Declaration and the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific.



ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AAWG	Anticipatory Action Working Group
ACMC	Australian Civil-Military Centre
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AHA Centre	ASEAN Coordination Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on disaster management
APC-MADRO	Asia-Pacific Conference on Military Assistance to Disaster Relief Operations
APICC	Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUSMAT	Australian Medical Assistance Team
CCAWG	Crisis Communication and Advocacy Working Group
CFE-DM	Centre for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
CMCS	Civil-Military Coordination Section
CROP	Council of Regional Organisations of the Pacific
CSF	Centre for Sustainable Futures
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DCRP	Disaster and Community Resilience Program
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EMT	Emergency Medical Team
FACT	Field Assessment and Coordination Team
FALE	Facility Aiding Locally-Led Engagement
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEMAT	Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team
FLNKS	Kanak and Socialist National Liberation Front
FMA	Foreign Military Assets
FPF	Fiji Police Force
FRANZ	France, Australia, and New Zealand Arrangement
FRDP	Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific
FRSC	Pacific Islands Forum Regional Security Committee
FSM	Federated States of Micronesia
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response
HAG	Humanitarian Advisory Group
HERS	Humanitarian Emergency Relief Supplies
HMI	Humanitarian Military Interaction
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IFRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IMWG	Information Management Working Group
INDOPACOM	US Indo Pacific Command
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation

INSARAG	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group
ISU	Infrastructure Specialists Unit
IWG	Intersessional Working Group
JHoPS	Joint Heads of Pacific Security
MIF	Micronesia Islands Forum
MNF-SOP	Multinational Standing Force – Standard Operating Procedures
MPAT	Multinational Planning and Augmentation Team
MSG	Melanesian Spearhead Group
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLU	National Liaison Unit
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
OXFAM	Oxford Committee for Famine Relief
PaCESD	Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development
PCRIC	Pacific Catastrophe Risk Insurance Company
PHT	Pacific Humanitarian Team
PHWP	Pacific Humanitarian Warehousing Program
PIANGO	Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organisations
PIC	Pacific Islands Country
PICTs	Pacific Island Countries and Territories
PIDP	Pacific Islands Development Program
PIEMA	Pacific Islands Emergency Management Alliance
PIF	Pacific Islands Forum
PIFS	Pacific Islands Forum Secretariate
PLG	Polynesian Leaders Group
PPI	Pacific Policing Initiative
PPSG	Pacific Police Support Group
PRCWG	Pacific Regional Cash Working Group
PRDMM	Pacific Regional Disaster Managers Meeting
PResCoM	Pacific Humanitarian Response Coordination Mechanism
PRF	Pacific Resilience Facility
PRG	Pacific Response Group
PRP	Pacific Resilience Partnership
RC	Resident Coordinator
RCG	Regional Consultative Group
RCRC	Red Cross/Red Crescent
RFMF	Republic of Fiji Military Forces

RMI	Republic of the Marshall Islands
ROAP	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (UN-OCHA)
RPIL	Resilient Pacific Islands Leaders
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEAH	Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
SIDS	Small Island Developing State
SPC	Pacific Community
SPDMM	South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting
SREM	Strategic Roadmap for Emergency Management
TC	Tropical Cyclone
UN	United Nations
UN MCO	United Nations Multi-Country Office
UN OoP	United Nations Office of the Pacific
UN-CMCoord	United Nations Civil-Military Coordination
UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination for Humanitarian Affairs
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAR	Urban Search and Rescue
USP	University of the South Pacific
WFP	World Food Program
WHO	World Health Organization

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Fiji



HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN EMERGENCIES

Leleuvia Island, Fiji. Photo: Josaia Cakacaka / Unsplash

FIJI

Fiji was ranked 72nd out of 193 countries in the 2025 World Risk Report. Fiji's main hazards are climate-related and geological, including tropical cyclones, flooding, storm surges, and droughts. It is also vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis and has active volcanoes. These hazards are exacerbated by climate change and pose significant risks to its population, environment, and economy, emphasising the need for effective coordination across all stakeholders in disaster response.

Fiji has developed a robust disaster response framework, shaped by its frequent exposure to tropical cyclones (TCs) and other climate-related hazards. Disaster governance is guided by the National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024 and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2018–2030. The National Disaster Management Council (NDMC) provides strategic oversight, while the National Disaster Risk Management Office (NDRMO) coordinates preparedness, response and recovery operations across national and subnational levels.

The Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) and Fiji Police Force (FPF) play key roles in national disaster response, particularly during rapid-onset emergencies. The RFMF supports logistics, engineering and relief operations, while the FPF ensures public order and safety. Coordination is facilitated through the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) and Fiji Cluster System.

Fiji's participation in regional exercises and its experience managing responses to events such as TC Winston (2016) and the COVID-19 pandemic (2020) have strengthened its civil-military coordination and contributed to broader regional disaster preparedness efforts. While the current humanitarian coordination is managed by the National Disaster Risk Management Office (NDRMO) and follows a standard cluster system, the military plays a critical role in disaster and emergency response particularly in supporting the logistic aspect, managing and moving supplies.

KEY EVENTS IN THE RECENT EVOLUTION OF HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN FIJI

2016	- Fiji's Emergency Medical Assistance Team (FEMAT) was launched. FEMAT was established to enhance the country's capacity to deliver rapid medical assistance during disasters and emergencies. - Fiji's largest recorded TC Winston response catalysed significant improvements in civil-military coordination, particularly involving the RFMF and international defence actors. It highlighted the importance of interoperability and prompted policy development to formalise response roles.
2017	Cabinet approval of the National Humanitarian Policy for Disaster Risk Management. This institutionalised humanitarian practices and promoted proactive disaster management, with emphasis on civil-military coordination.
2017-18	The FPF Annual Report referenced police responsibilities in disaster response, including crowd control, security for aid distribution, and support for community resilience after a disaster.
2018	Launch of the National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2018–2030). The policy provides a 12-year framework that explicitly supports a multi-agency approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR), including structured coordination between civilian and military actors.
2019	- The Fiji Inter-Cluster System was formalised as the key national mechanism for coordination among sectoral and subnational actors, with engagement from military and police actors embedded in humanitarian operations. - FEMAT achieved its first World Health Organization (WHO) certification as a Type 1 Fixed Emergency Medical Team (EMT), making it ready for international deployment. This milestone established FEMAT as the first team in the Pacific Islands region with this capability.
2021	Enactment of the Climate Change Act 2021 which introduced legally binding climate resilience and adaptation measures, including planned relocation, which intersects with disaster response coordination.
2022	Opening of Blackrock Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Camp (Blackrock Camp). This regional training and operational hub was purpose-built to support rapid, coordinated responses to disasters across the Pacific, particularly through mobilisation of humanitarian personnel and relief supplies.
2023	Establishment of the National Emergency Response Team (NERT).
2024	- The Enactment of the National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024. This expands and clarifies disaster risk management (DRM) architecture, creating multiple tiers of responsible officers and mechanisms. - The Pacific Community (SPC) included Fiji in its Mapping of Disaster Risk Management Legislation Policy and Organisational Responsibility Across the Pacific Region, providing external validation of its evolving approach to joint disaster response.
2025	Operationalisation of the National Disaster Risk Management Act. This Act further institutionalises coordination roles, including for the RFMF and FPF. This aligns with Fiji's forward-leaning environmental policy and ongoing efforts to strengthen response systems in light of increasing climate risks.

DISASTER RISK PROFILE

KEY FACTS

- Official name:** The Republic of Fiji
- Area:** 18,270 km²
- Population:** 931, 024 (SPC 2025)
- Capital:** Suva
- Official language:** English, Fijian, Fiji Hindi
- Disaster focal point:** National Disaster Risk Management Office
- Military:** The Republic of Fiji Military Forces
- Police:** Fiji Police Force



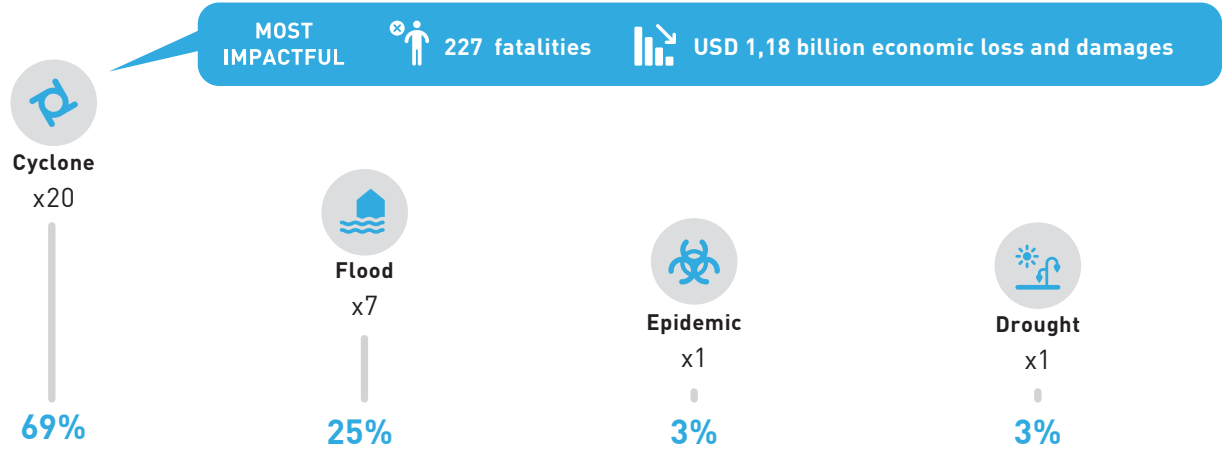
GENERAL INFORMATION

Fiji faces high exposure to TCs, often experiencing multiple events each year. TCs typically occur during the wet season from November–April and are less frequent during El Niño periods. They cause loss of life and significant economic damage, hindering the country’s economic growth. Intensifying cyclones, as well as rising sea levels and increasingly frequent floods and landslides, highlight Fiji’s vulnerability to climate change.

Fiji has been affected by 29 natural disasters over the last 25 years. Fiji is ranked the 72nd most at-risk country for natural disasters due to its geographical location in a high-risk area of the South Pacific.

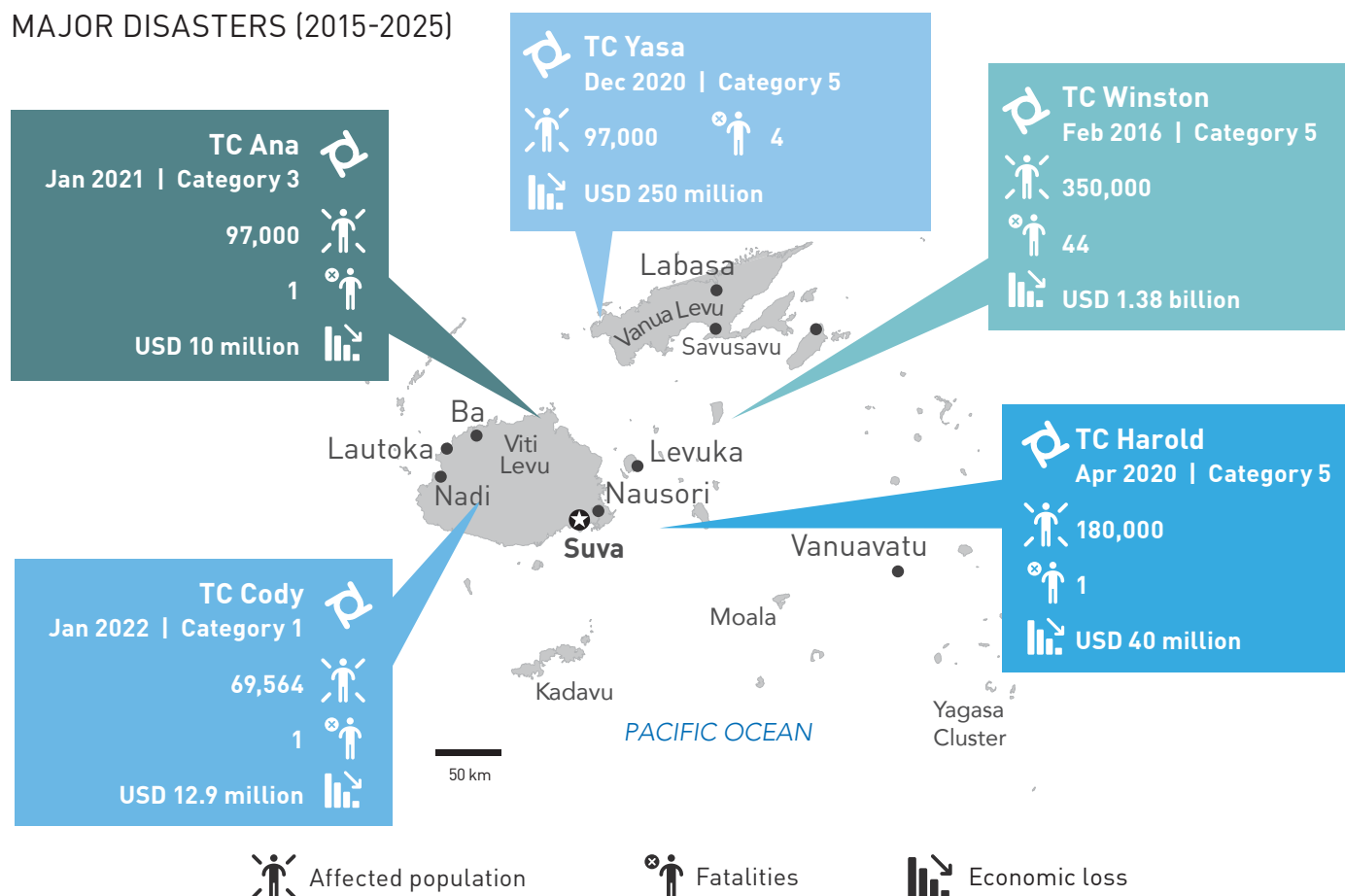
The graph below orders the natural disasters by type according to their frequency, with the most to least frequent moving left to right and the percentage frequency illustrated. The most impactful disaster type is identified but not ranked. Since 2000, cyclones (69%) have been the most frequent disaster to affect Fiji, followed by floods (25%). Cyclones were also the most impactful, causing a significant number of fatalities and economic loss.

FREQUENCY AND PROPORTION OF DISASTERS BY TYPE FROM 2000 TO 2025



Source: <https://public.emdat.be/data>

MAJOR DISASTERS (2015-2025)



INFORM

INDEX FOR RISK MANAGEMENT

INFORM Risk is an open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters. INFORM Risk gives each country a risk score of 1-10 (1 being the lowest and 10 the highest) for each of the dimensions, categories, and components of risk, as well as an overall risk score. The higher the score, the more at risk a country is to disasters.

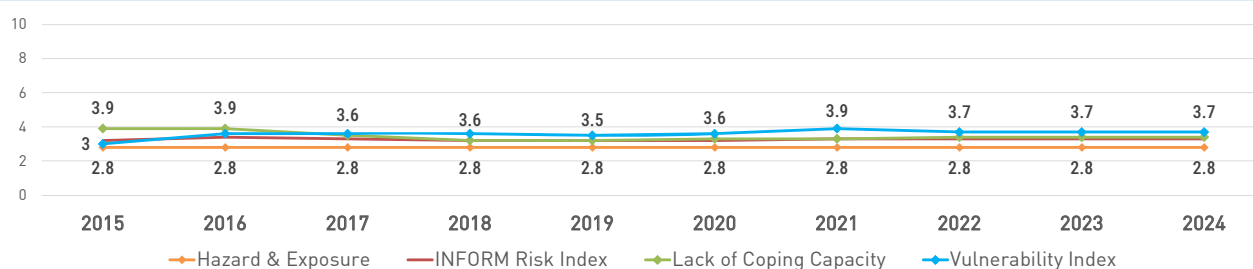
INFORM RISK VALUE AND RANKING 2025

Fiji has moderate values for hazards and exposure, and vulnerability, and an average value for lack of coping capacity. Fiji is medium risk.

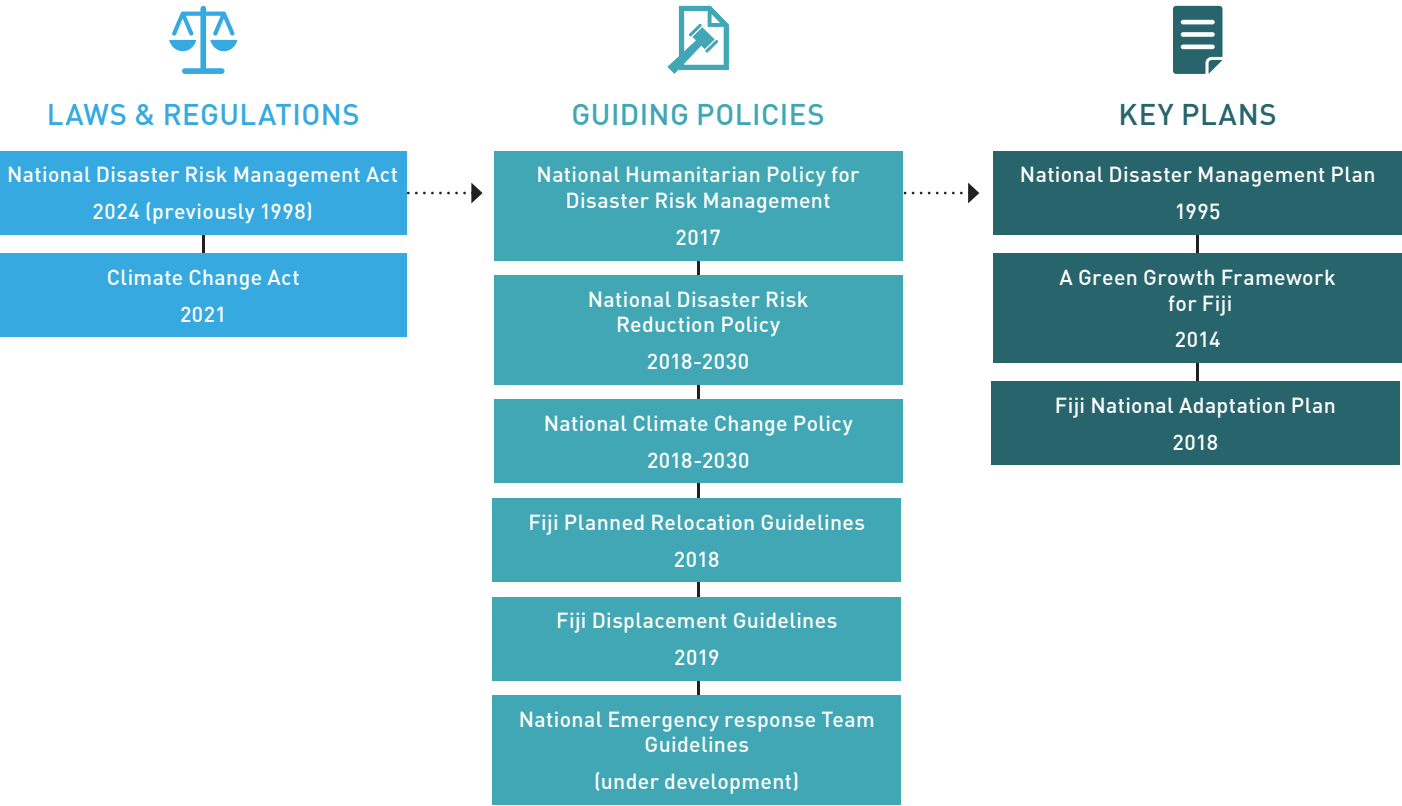
INFORM Risk and dimensions of risk	VALUE (10 as the highest)	WORLD RANK (out of 191 countries)
INFORM Risk	3.3	103
Hazard & Exposure	2.8	104
Vulnerability	3.3	98
Lack of coping capacity	3.4	128

INFORM RISK TEN-YEAR TREND (2015-2024)

While hazards and exposure have remained relatively stable, Fiji has demonstrated improvements in coping capacity and a modest reduction in vulnerability following a previous peak. The country's overall INFORM Risk Index has shown only minor fluctuations since 2015 and remains at medium.



KEY POLICIES, PLANS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION



Natural Disaster Management Act No. 21 of 1998

The Natural Disaster Management Act 1998 is the cornerstone of Fiji’s disaster risk governance framework. It established the NDMC as the principal body responsible for disaster policy and coordination, supported by the NDRMO and the NEOC. The act delineates the roles of key officials, including the National Disaster Controller (NDC) and Divisional Commissioners, and outlines procedures for declaring natural disasters, coordinating emergency operations, and mobilising resources across national and subnational levels. It also mandates the development of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery plans, and provides for the integration of non-governmental organisations and international assistance into the national disaster management system.

It also redefines the responsibilities of key officials including the Minister responsible for DRM, the NDC, and Divisional Commissioners, and updates procedures for declaring disasters arising from natural, biological and environmental hazards.

It is worth noting that Fiji is particularly focused on reducing climate change risks and enhancing resilience, which generates disaster prevention activities as well as informing disaster planning and response. The Climate Change Act 2021 and National Climate Change Policy 2018-2030 formulate Fiji’s comprehensive legislative framework on climate change, reflecting its commitment to sustainable development and international climate obligations. As neither legislation is specific to civilian-military coordination they are not detailed here.

National Disaster Risk Management Act No. 14 of 2024

The National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024 builds on and modernises Fiji’s disaster risk governance framework. It replaces Fiji’s earlier disaster governance framework established under the 1998 Act. This iteration strengthens the role of NDRMO as the principal body for national disaster risk policy and coordination.

National Disaster Management Plan 1995

The National Disaster Management Plan outlines the roles and responsibilities of agencies and ministries in all aspects of disaster management, including mitigation, preparedness, emergency response, relief, and recovery. It serves as operational guidance, providing arrangement for coordination of all disaster activities in Fiji.



National Humanitarian Policy for Disaster Management 2017

Fiji's National Humanitarian Policy for Disaster Risk Management, approved by Cabinet in August 2017, establishes guidance for humanitarian action across the disaster management cycle. Developed in response to the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters, such as TC Winston in 2016, the policy aims to institutionalise humanitarian practices and promote a shift from reactive to proactive disaster management. The policy emphasises the importance of coordinated efforts among government agencies, civil society and international partners to enhance disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Key thematic priorities outlined in the policy include the development of national guidelines for humanitarian coordination, strengthening information management and communication systems, building national and local capacities, and establishing robust financial monitoring mechanisms. The policy also advocates for the integration of vulnerable groups, such as women, children and persons with disabilities, into DRM processes.



National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy for 2018–2030

The National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2018–2030 provides a framework aimed at minimising disaster risks and enhancing resilience across the nation. Aligned with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the policy emphasises a proactive, whole-of-society approach to DRM. It integrates DRR into national and local development planning, budgeting, and decision-making processes, ensuring that risk considerations are embedded across all sectors. The Policy outlines strategic objectives focusing on strengthening disaster risk governance, investing in risk reduction for resilience, and enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and recovery.



Fiji Planned Relocation Guidelines 2018

This document provides strategic guidance on integrating planned relocation into climate adaptation efforts, particularly in response to disasters and slow-onset climate impacts. Central to its approach is a commitment to inclusivity, gender, responsiveness, and active community participation.



Fiji Displacement Guidelines 2019

This document provides the Fijian Government and all other stakeholders within Fiji with guidance on reducing vulnerabilities associated with displacement. It offers sustainable strategies to prevent the root causes of displacement, particularly those arising from climate change and disaster-related events. Furthermore, it aims to support the alignment of human mobility policies through robust financial mechanisms, in accordance with Fijian legislation such as the Climate Relocation of Communities Trust Fund.



National Emergency Response Team Guideline (Under Development)

The Guideline will establish a unified operational structure under the NDC, through which all government agencies – including the FPF, the RFMF and the National Fire Authority (NFA), operate under a single chain of command during declared disasters. This ensures coherence between the disaster management frameworks and the statutory mandates of these institutions.



A Green Growth Framework Fiji 2014

The Green Growth Framework for Fiji: Restoring the Balance in Development that is Sustainable for Our Future (2014) is a strategic blueprint aimed at hybridising economic development with environmental sustainability and social inclusion. It supports and complements national development plans, such as the Peoples Charter for Change, Peace and Progress and the 2010–2014 Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio-Economic Development. The framework is structured around three pillars – environmental, social and economic – and identifies 10 thematic areas to guide sustainable development. It emphasises the need for integrated and inclusive approaches, encouraging participation from government, the private sector, civil society, and communities to collectively address development challenges and promote resilience, particularly in the face of climate change and natural disasters. The most relevant aspect of this policy for humanitarian civil–military coordination is on building resilience to climate change and disasters. Central to this effort is strengthening the roles and coordination of key agencies such as the NDRMO within the National Climate Change Policy.



Fiji National Adaptation Plan 2018

Fiji's National Adaptation Plan, launched in 2018, is designed to enhance the nation's resilience to climate change, with a significant focus on disaster response. Recognising the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, particularly TCs, the Plan outlines 160 prioritised adaptation actions across various sectors to be implemented over a five-year period.

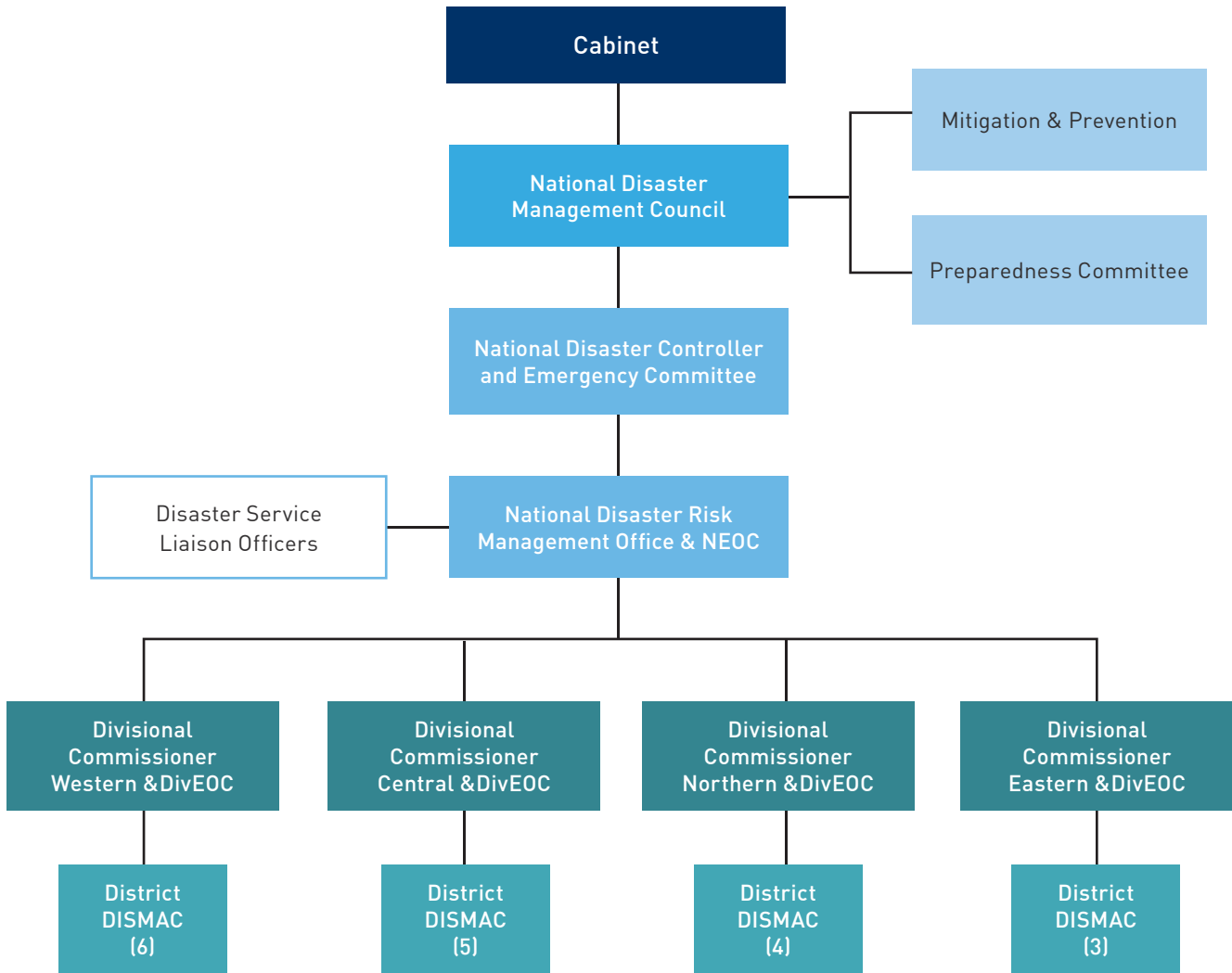
KEY CIVILIAN RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTERS

NATIONAL DISASTER FOCAL POINT

In Fiji, the NDMC is the central decision-making body responsible for overseeing DRM policy and strategy. It is supported operationally by the NDRMO, which leads the coordination and implementation of preparedness, response and recovery activities across national and subnational levels.

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management plays a critical administrative role, ensuring that sectoral agencies and humanitarian actors are aligned through structures such as the NEOC and the Fiji Cluster System.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT COUNCIL (NDMC)

The NDMC is the government body responsible for formulating policies and strategies aligned with the objectives of the National Adaptation Plan. The Emergency Committee of the NDMC coordinates emergency response activities.



Established by: Natural Disaster Management Act 1998 and reinforced by the National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024



Leadership: Minister of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management (chair)



Key functions:

- Undertaking community awareness activities
- Initiating and coordinating the implementation of disaster mitigation activities
- Coordinating emergency operations
- Advising cabinet on declarations of natural disasters.



Composition: Representatives from each Ministry, Directors of other key agencies (including state-owned enterprises), and civil society represented by the Director of the Fiji Red Cross Society and the Fiji Council of Social Services.

NATIONAL DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT OFFICE (NDRMO)

The NDRMO serves as the central coordination hub for the Fijian Government during national disasters. Operating under the National Disaster Management Act, Fiji's NDRMO carries out its work under the direction of the National Disaster Management Council. This is comprised of Permanent Secretaries from selected Government Ministries and agencies critical to DRM. It implements specific disaster management-related activities and advises the Cabinet, the NDC and the NDMC and other related government agencies on disaster management while formulating policy.



Established by: National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024



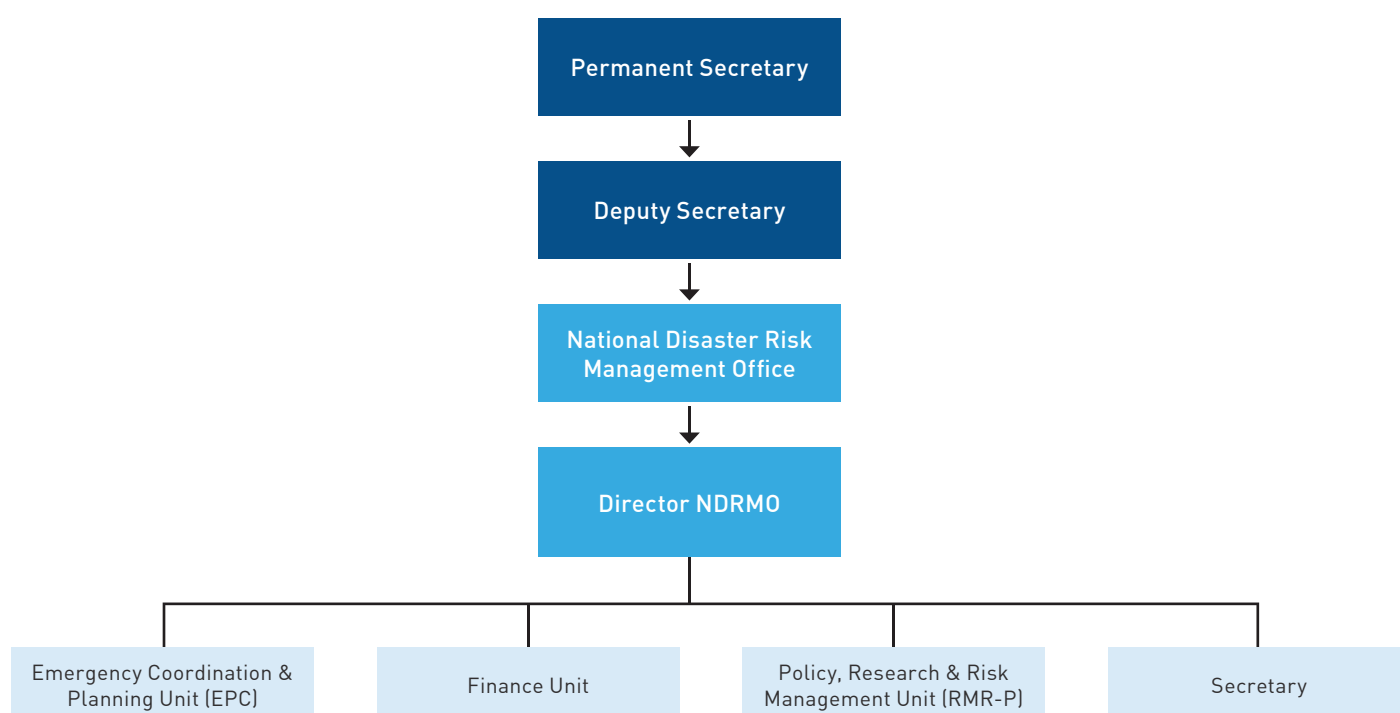
Leadership: Chaired by the Minister for Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management



Key functions:

- Advise the Cabinet, the NDMC and the NDC
- Coordinate with relevant agencies, donors and other parties
- Issue warning information in the event of an emergency
- Set up and operate the NEOC as needed under the command of the NDC
- Oversee and supervise emergency operation centres at the provincial or district level.

NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT OFFICE

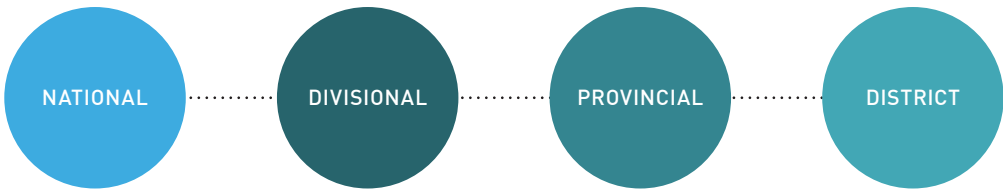


SUBNATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT COUNCILS

Operating at both the Divisional and District levels, Subnational Disaster Management Councils comprise the heads of all relevant government agencies and NGOs operating within those jurisdictions. They are chaired by the Divisional Commissioner at the divisional level, by Provincial Administrator at the provincial level, and the District Officer at the district level, and are tasked with providing strategic guidance and operational support for DRR, mitigation and emergency response.

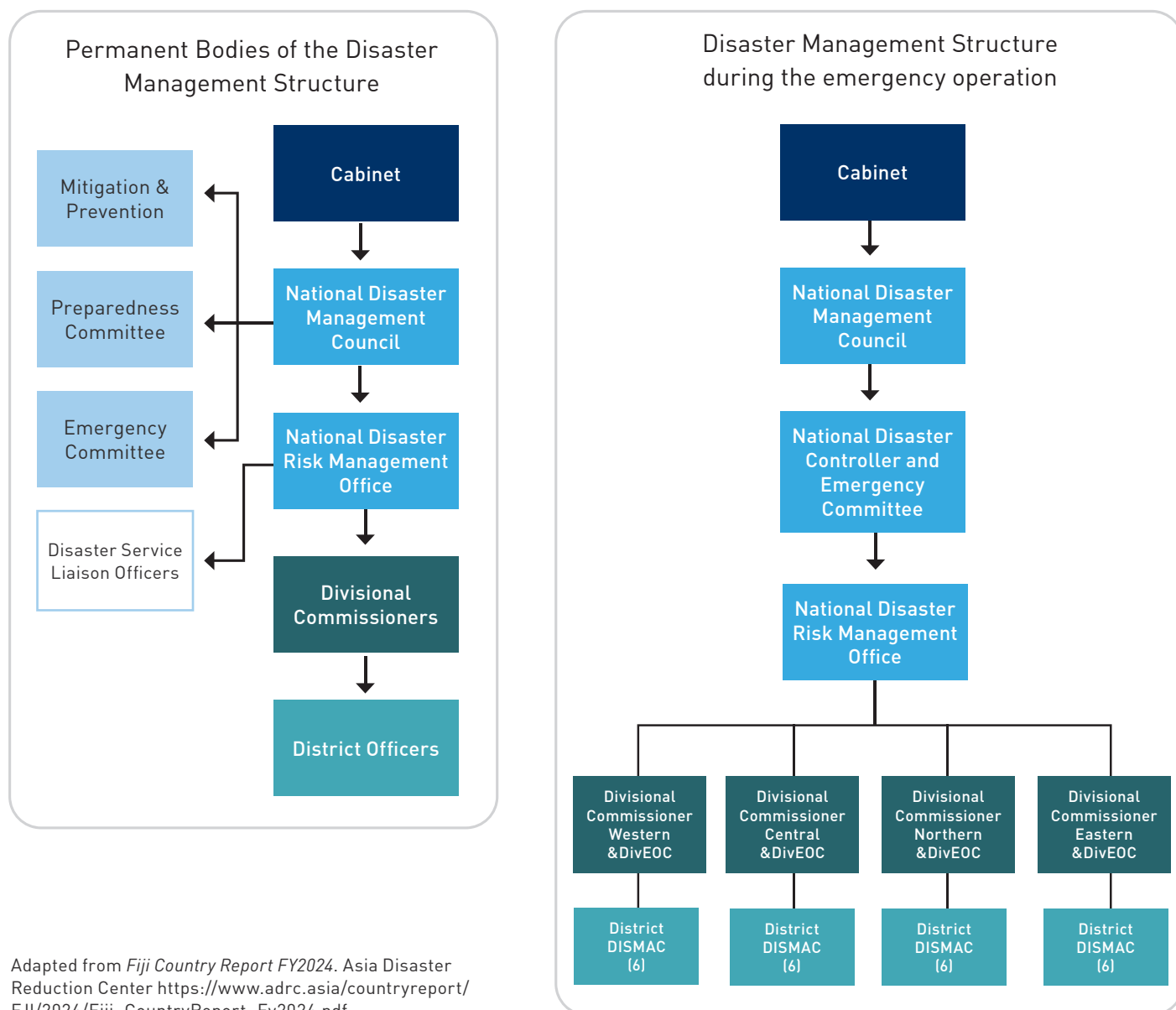
ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN FIJI

The administrative levels in Fiji are divisions, provinces, and districts and towns/cities. Each of these has a Disaster Management Council.



	NAME	LEAD AUTHORITY	NUMBER
FIRST LEVEL	National	NDMC NDRMO	1
SECOND LEVEL	Divisional	Divisional Commissioner’s Office Divisional Disaster Management Council Divisional Emergency Operations Centre (DivEOC)	4
THIRD LEVEL	Provincial	Provincial Disaster Management Council Provincial EOC	15
FOURTH LEVEL	District	District Disaster Management Council District Emergency Operations Centre	17

SUBNATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



KEY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

MINISTRY OF RURAL AND MARITIME DEVELOPMENT AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT (MRMDDM)

The Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management plays a pivotal administrative role in aligning sectoral agencies and humanitarian actors through coordination structures such as the NEOC and the Fiji Cluster System. It is responsible for developing the National Disaster Management Plan (NDMP), which outlines the roles and responsibilities of all disaster management stakeholders. It coordinates national disaster activities through the Ministry's organisational structures, ensuring effective engagement at the national, divisional and local community levels. Regionally, disaster management is supported by Divisional Commissioners and a network of District Officers, with the Ministry's headquarters based in Suva and 33 stations operating across the Central, Northern, Eastern and Western Divisions.

MINISTRY OF POLICING

The Ministry of Policing is responsible for maintaining public safety, law and order and national security through the formulation and implementation of policies, programmes, and projects related to policing and internal security. It provides institutional and administrative oversight for FPF, ensuring that policing services are effective, transparent and aligned with national development priorities. The Ministry's role extends to the review of policing legislation, policy coordination with other government agencies and engagement in inter-agency operations related to national emergencies, crime prevention and public order management.

THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND VETERAN AFFAIRS (MDVA)

The MDVA provides strategic leadership, policy direction and administrative oversight on national defence and security matters. The Ministry advises the Government, sets defence policies, and coordinates international and inter-agency engagements. The RFMF works with the Ministry through the Military Liaison Cell to ensure communication, coordination and alignment of operations with national defence priorities, as well as participation in inter-agency planning, defence diplomacy, peacekeeping and international security activities. At the same time, the RFMF operates independently with its own constitutional mandate and operational command, carrying out defence and security operations in accordance with the Constitution and government policy.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND MEDICAL SERVICES (MHMS)

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services coordinates health sector preparedness and emergency operations, ensuring that health facilities and staff are ready, issuing public health advisories, monitoring health risk and promoting climate-resilient healthcare systems. Through its National Health Emergency and Disaster Management Unit, the Ministry develops policies, conducts risk assessments and ensures that health facilities and personnel are trained and equipped for emergencies. An example of this capacity is the FEMAT, a World Health Organization-classified Type 1 Fixed Emergency Medical Assistance Team. FEMAT can deploy and run field clinics both within Fiji and internationally, providing emergency medical care during disasters. FEMAT also engages in civil-military collaboration and conducts two joint training exercises per year across health and non-health sectors, including the FPF, RFMF, Navy and NFA. These exercises include logistics and medical team training, such as Major Incident Medical Systems training.



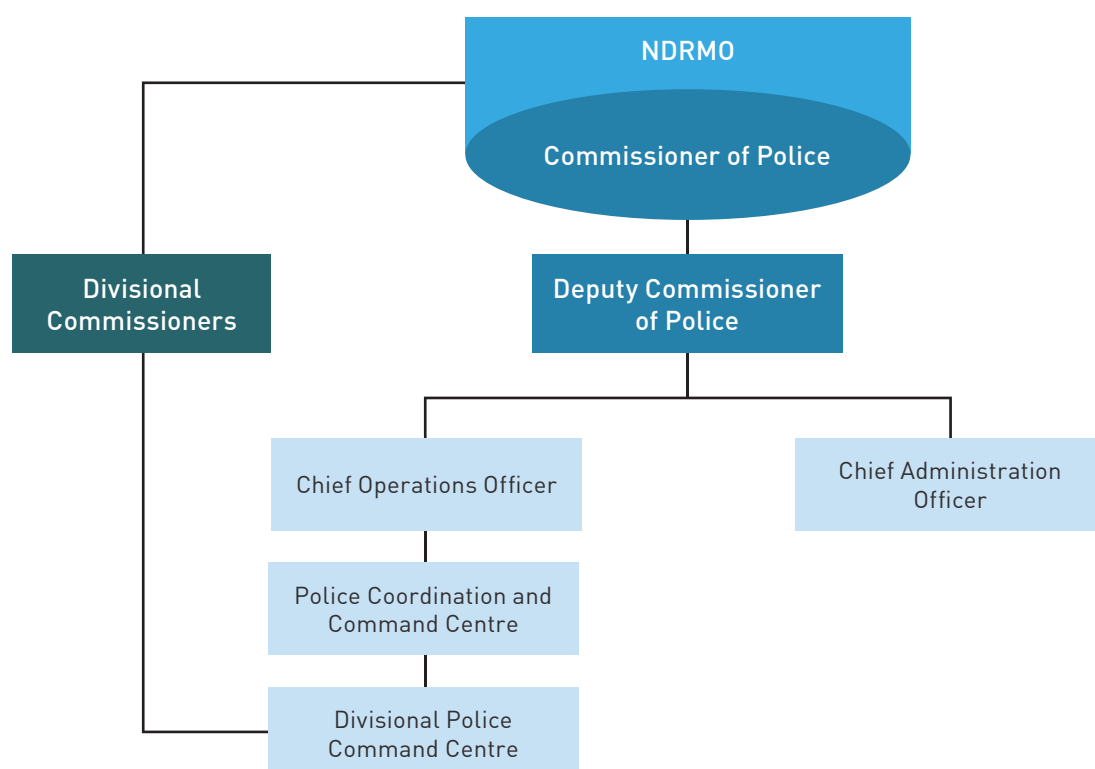
FIJI POLICE FORCE (FPF)

The FPF's role in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief is articulated within the Police Act (CAP 85) and the National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024. As the COVID-19 pandemic struck, FPF coordinated with the RFMF in enforcing lockdowns and other regulations and laws. Some other key responsibilities during disaster include management, allocation and prioritisation of police resources, services, and responsibilities during national disasters, and issuing warnings (Police Advisory to the People) upon the recommendation of the National Command Centre. Fiji has five divisions, each with its own Divisional Command Centre. These command centres function as coordination units at the subnational level between police stations and the National Command Centre, ensuring effective sharing information and implementation activities.

NATIONAL FIRE AUTHORITY (NFA)

The NFA was established under the National Fire Service Act of 1994. It has 44 branches across the country. The NFA works with related organisations to conduct rescue operations during disasters. It also carries out fire education activities as part of disaster education community initiatives targeted at young people.

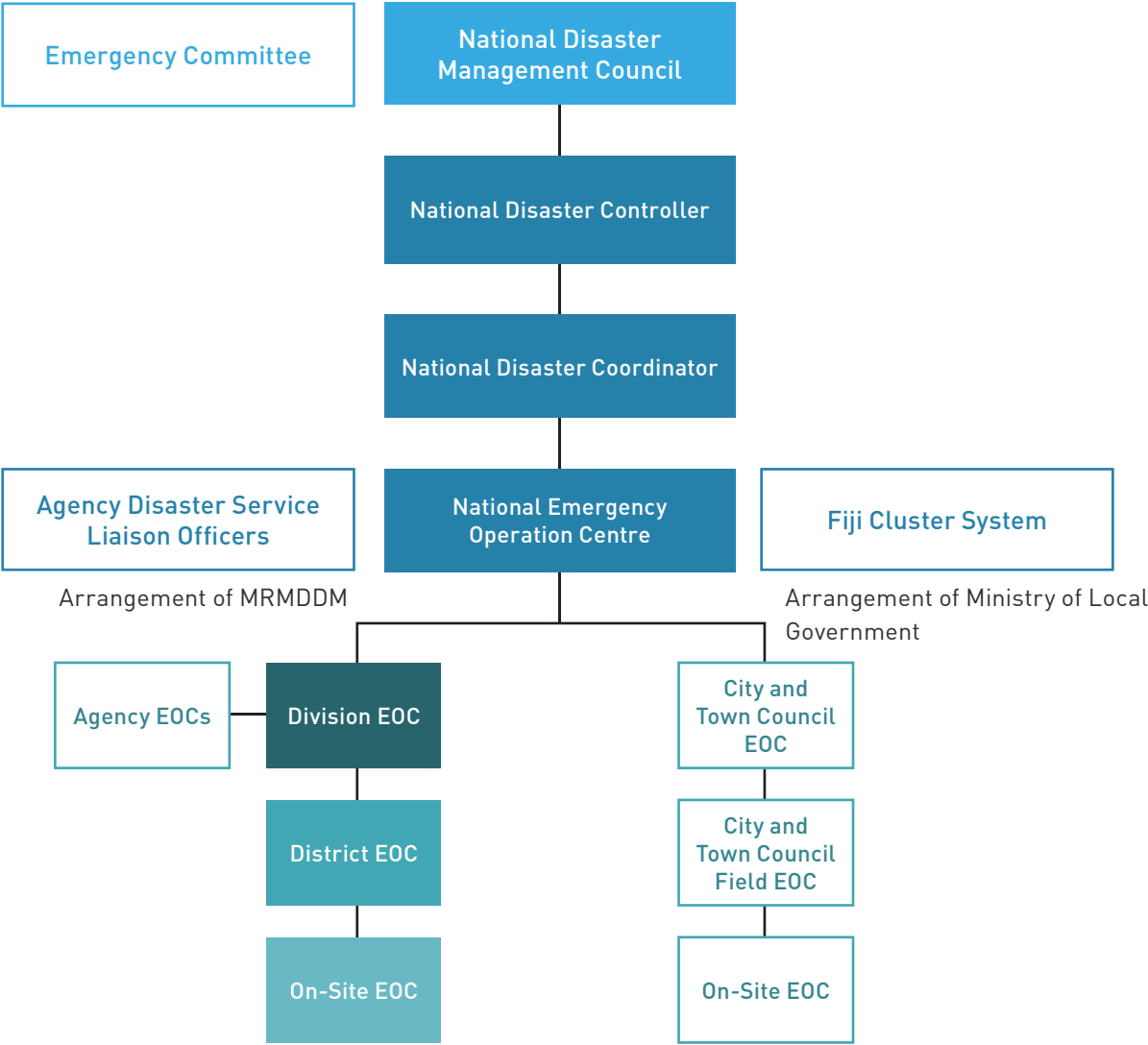
THE COMMAND STRUCTURE FOR THE FIJI POLICE FORCE DURING A STATE OF NATIONAL EMERGENCY



COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Fiji’s disaster response coordination structure operates across three levels. The NDMC leads at the strategic level. The coordination level is supported by three sub-committees: Mitigation and Prevention, Preparedness, and Emergency, chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and

Disaster Management, who also serves as the NDC. At the operational level, coordination is managed via the NEOC, which is overseen by the NDRMO. The National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024 provides guidance and the legal framework for this structure.

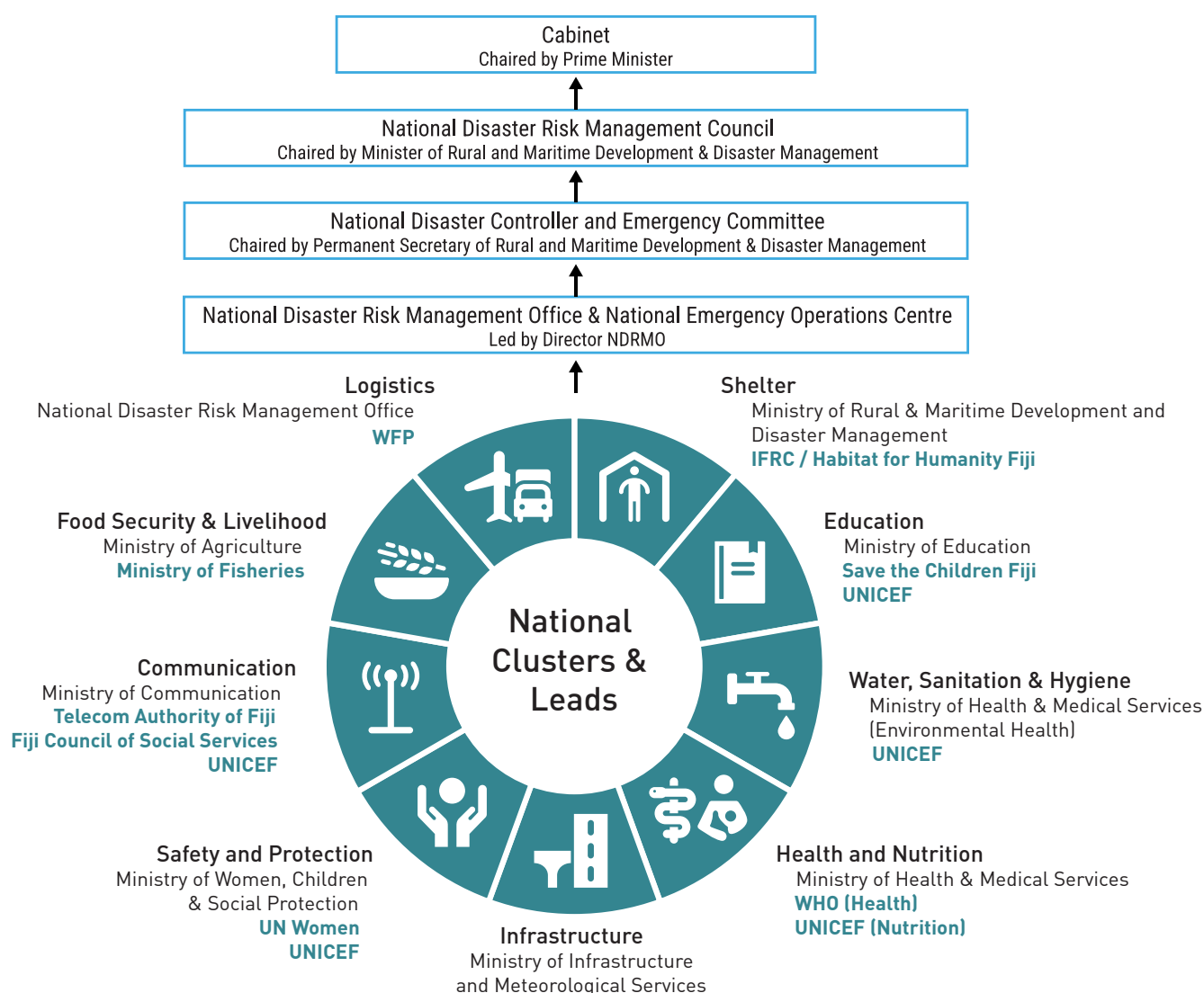


NATIONAL CLUSTER SYSTEM

The Fiji Cluster System is the overarching mechanism for humanitarian coordination in Fiji and is the forum for inter-operability between sectoral clusters, subnational humanitarian coordination and the Fijian Government. The Permanent Secretary for Disaster Management (the NDC under the National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024) is the inter-cluster lead, and the NDRMO Director is the inter-cluster coordinator. There are currently nine clusters, each under the leadership of the Permanent Secretary of an appropriate ministry. Each sectoral cluster coordinates the activities of actors operating in that sector.

The Cluster System was first introduced in Fiji following TC Evans in 2012. It was initially led by United Nations (UN) agencies; Fiji later developed its own adapted structure known as the Fiji Cluster System. This government-led coordination mechanism currently operates across three disaster management phases: preparedness, response, and recovery & rehabilitation. The RFMF and FPF are particularly engaged under the Logistics Sector in the National Cluster System.

NATIONAL COORDINATION STRUCTURE



Source: Adapted from <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/fiji/fiji-humanitarian-coordination-structure-28-october-2025>

NATIONAL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE (NEOC)

During emergency operations, the NDRMO sets up the NEOC to coordinate disaster monitoring, warning and immediate post-disaster response, including disaster relief work.

 **Leadership:** Director of NDRMO

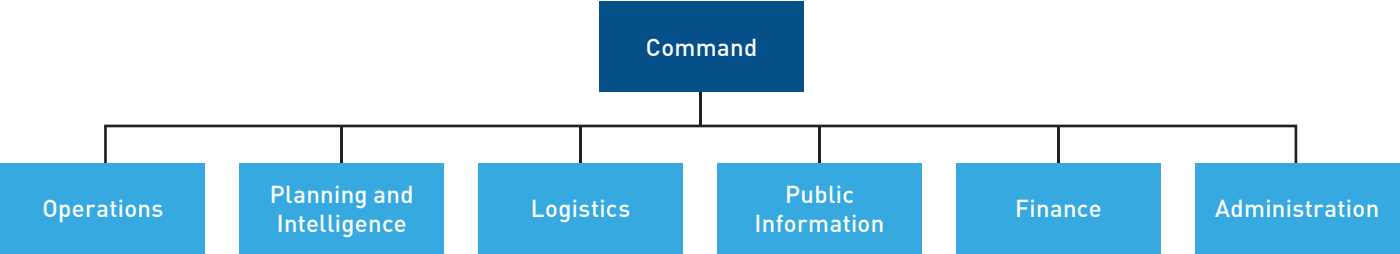
-  **Key Functions:**
- Coordinating the activities of disaster monitoring, warning and immediate post-disaster response including disaster relief work
 - Gathering, collating, assessing, and circulating information
 - Providing operational and logistic support for the emergency operations.

 **Composition:** public servants from relevant agencies including RFMF, FPF, Fiji Posts and Telecommunications, and the Ministry of Information

SUBNATIONAL EMERGENCY OPERATION CENTRES

The National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024 mandates the establishment of subnational Emergency Operation Centres (EOCs) to coordinate DRR, preparedness, response, and recovery. The Divisional Commissioner, in consultation with the National Coordinator, must establish EOCs at the divisional, provincial and district levels. Additional EOCs may be set up at the municipal and community levels by local authorities in coordination with the Divisional Commissioner and National Coordinator. The functions, activation protocols, funding, and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for these EOCs are determined collaboratively with subnational DRM committees. Operationally, the Divisional EOC serves as the central command for all disaster-related activities within the division, with all government resources and agencies at lower levels under the authority of the Divisional Commissioner. Similarly, Provincial and District EOCs operate under the leadership of Provincial Administrators and District Officers, respectively.

NATIONAL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE



MOBILISATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

The National Coordinator, in consultation with Divisional Commissioners and the Fiji Cluster System, assesses national response capacity and advises the NDC on whether external assistance is required. Offers of international assistance must be directed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), which, after consultation with the NDC, may accept or decline the offer, either in full or part.

Registered humanitarian organisations must notify the National Coordinator of any accepted contributions from their affiliated international organisations or members. All international donations must be reviewed against a preapproved list of items before shipment to Fiji.

SINGLE WINDOW INTERNATIONAL FACILITATION TEAM (SWIFT)

The Disaster Management Council may establish a Single Window International Facilitation Team to be led by a focal point nominated by the Ministry responsible for trade in consultation with the National Coordinator.



Established by: National Disaster Risk Management Act 2024



Leadership: NDC

Co leads: The team comprises representatives from key national agencies, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, Immigration Department, Biosecurity Authority, Airport Authority, Maritime Safety Authority, and the Telecommunications Authority. Additional members may be appointed by the Emergency Committee.



Key Functions:

- Consolidating and expediting the legal requirements concerning the entry of incoming international personnel, goods, equipment and transport of international relief in case of a disaster, emergency or international initial recovery
- Controlling and monitoring unsolicited bilateral donations
- Advising Ministers on available legal facilities
- Support DMCs at Subnational Level
- Support Management Committee at Subnational Level



Composition: MFA, Fiji Revenue and Customs Service, Immigration Department, Biosecurity Authority, Airport Authority, Maritime Safety Authority, and the Telecommunications Authority. Additional members may be appointed by the NEOC.



Government-approved cluster(s): Water Sanitation and Hygiene, Shelter, Education, Health & Nutrition, Logistics, Safety & Protection, Food Security & Livelihoods, Public Works & Utilities, and Communications



Supporting partners: Supporting partners including Fiji Red Cross Society, Fiji Council of Social Services (FCOSS), and the Fiji Business Disaster Resilience Council. UN-OCHA plays an observer role.

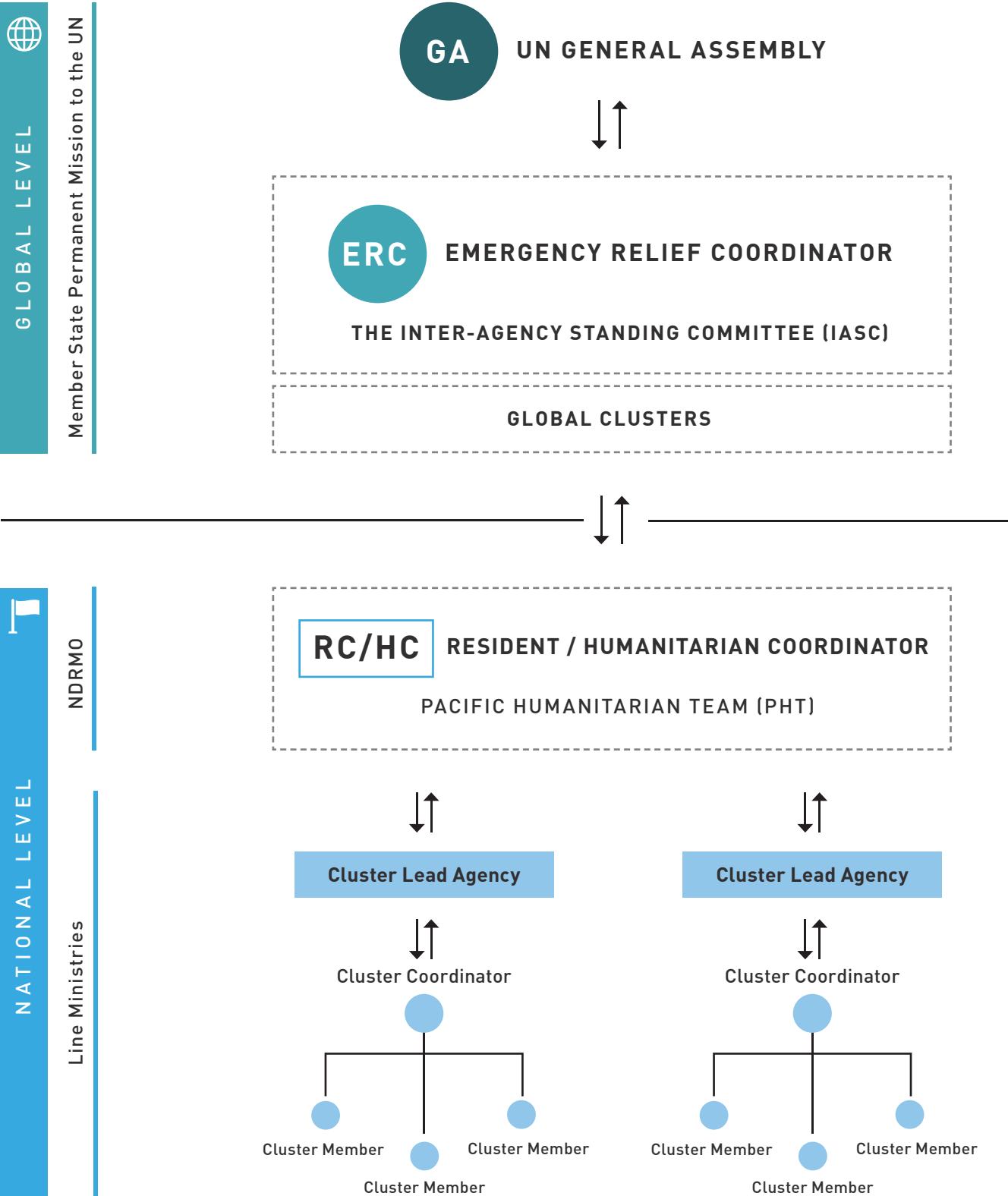
COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

During the emergency stage, all international assistance is requested through the Minister of Foreign Affairs and coordinated by the NDC. Within 72 hours of a disaster, the Government of Fiji, through the NDC, will hold an initial briefing for diplomatic missions, UN agencies, and regional organisations, based on early damage and needs assessments. If Fiji requests international assistance following a natural disaster, the NDC will arrange more frequent consultations with donor countries and organisations. These meetings will outline specific requirements for operational support, emergency relief and recovery efforts, enabling donors to coordinate their contributions and meet any outstanding needs. To support effective collaboration, a staff member from the NDC's office will be appointed as the main point of contact for international agencies, assisting with coordination and providing relevant updates as needed. The National Cluster System, set up by the Government of Fiji and relevant support agencies, is a civilian coordination mechanism for international humanitarian assistance. It is coordinated by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) and co-ordinated by key government agencies. When the Government of Fiji requests and/or accepts international assistance, coordination between the Pacific Humanitarian Team, the UN Resident Coordinator and national response systems and bodies, including NDMC and lead government agencies, is initiated.

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION SYSTEM

Fiji's government-led National Cluster System works in parallel with international humanitarian coordination. During emergencies, this dual-track system ensures that international assistance complements and strengthens nationally led disaster response, with coordination flowing through established government channels and the SWIFT for streamlined support.

GLOBAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL COORDINATION INTERFACE



Source: Adapted from IASC Handbook for RCs and HCs on Emergency Preparedness and Response
<https://eird.org/publicaciones/Handbook.pdf>

KEY MILITARY RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTERS

The RFMF, previously the Royal Fiji Military Forces until 1987, is the national military of Fiji. With total personnel of approximately 6900 it is one of the smallest militaries in the world. The RFMF as part of its constitutional role, maintains peace and security within the nation, and contributes to regional and global peace and stability. The most important international contribution that the RFMF makes is towards peacekeeping in the Middle East. It has provided significant support during Fiji disaster response and contributes to shaping national resilience strategies. The RFMF is engaged for major disaster events, alongside FPF and NFA services.

REPUBLIC OF FIJI MILITARY FORCES

 **Established:** 1987

 **Leadership:** Commander of the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (President is Commander in Chief)

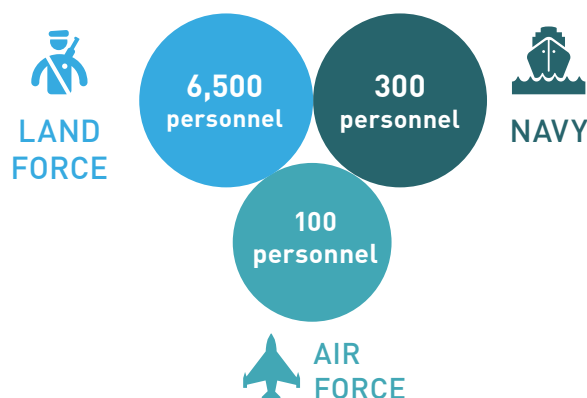
 **Headquarters:** Suva

 **Area of commands:**

- Strategic Command: oversees high-level policy, welfare, and strategic planning
- Land Force Command: manages operational units including infantry, engineering, and logistics
- Joint Task Force Command (JTFC): based at Blackrock Camp; coordinates humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, regional training, and peacekeeping support

 **Key role of RFMF:** The RFMF is activated during significant national emergencies to support humanitarian response. It provides essential logistics, evacuation capacity and technical support under a whole-of-government approach, collaborating closely with the NDRMO, FPF and NFA.

COMPONENTS OF THE MILITARY FORCES



Key functions of the RFMF in emergency response:

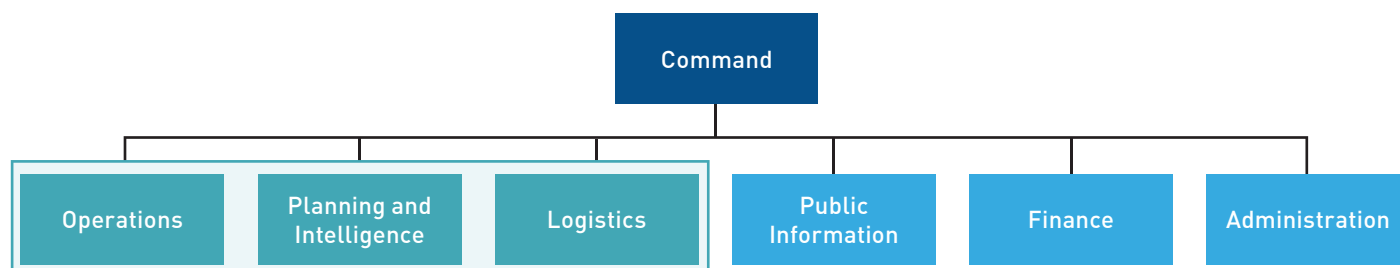
- Deploying personnel, vehicles and vessels for evacuation and relief operations
- Supporting the NEOC with coordination, communications and situational reporting
- Conducting damage assessments and relaying findings to government and humanitarian partners
- Facilitating regional disaster readiness and training, particularly through the JTFC at Blackrock Camp.

Composition:

- Land Forces: approx. 6,500 active personnel and 6,000 reservists, structured into six battalions (three regular, three reservist), plus engineering, logistics and training units
- Naval Forces: approx. 300 personnel operating multiple patrol vessels, including Australia-donated Guardian-class boats
- Air Force: approx. 100 personnel

Civil-military coordination mechanisms: JTFC

THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY AS PART OF THE NEOC SOPS



Source: Fiji Disaster Risk Management Arrangement p. 12.

FIJI MILITARY FORCES COORDINATION

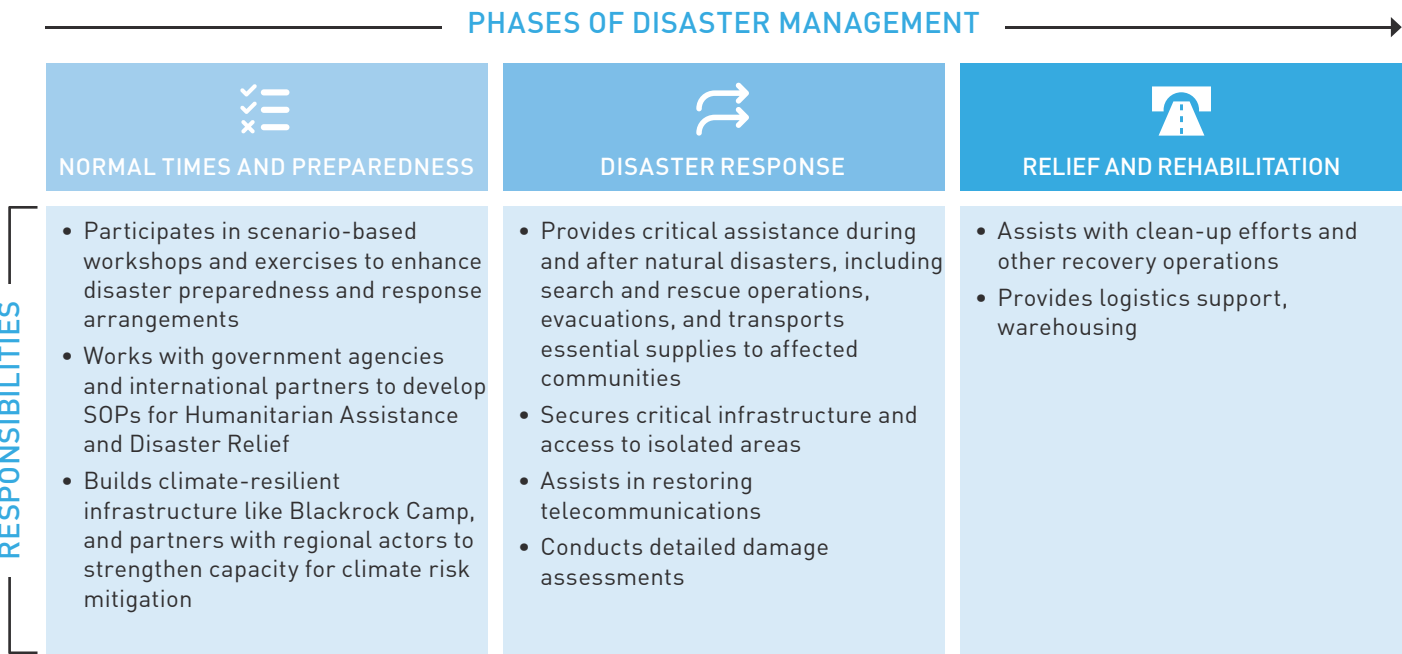
DISASTER MONITORING AND COORDINATION

The JTFC links national and international response mechanisms and connects with the NEOC through the Disaster Service Liaison Officers. RFMF supports the EOCs at divisional level, the Western, Northern, Central and Eastern Division EOCs, and On-Site Command Posts. The RFMF helps formulate the foreign military assets requests. It works closely with foreign military forces and collaborates across other international humanitarian actors, to support coordinated disaster response.

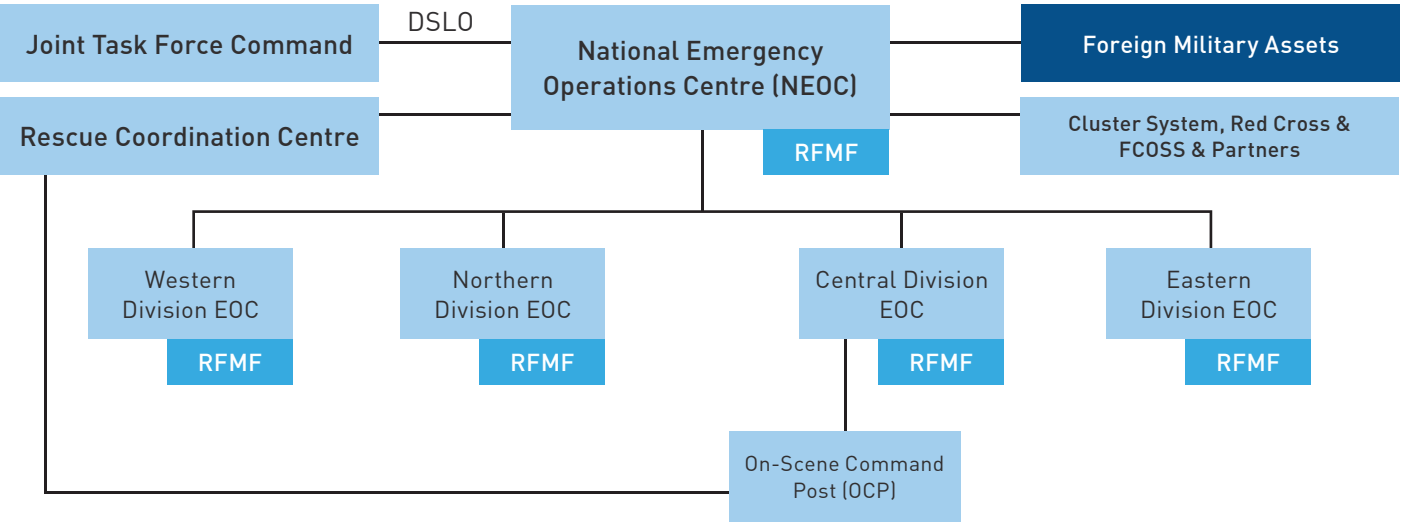
HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND RELIEF

The RFMF plays an active role in disaster response in collaboration with other Government agencies. It has the capability to provide critical assistance such as evacuations, response and rebuilding. The RFMF can also deploy to aid neighboring countries. It works closely with international partners, such as Australia, New Zealand, France and US, in joint disaster response exercises and training.

ROLE OF RFMF IN PHASES OF DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITIES



THE JOINT TASK FORCE COMMAND WITHIN THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



Source: Adapted from Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination, p. 34.

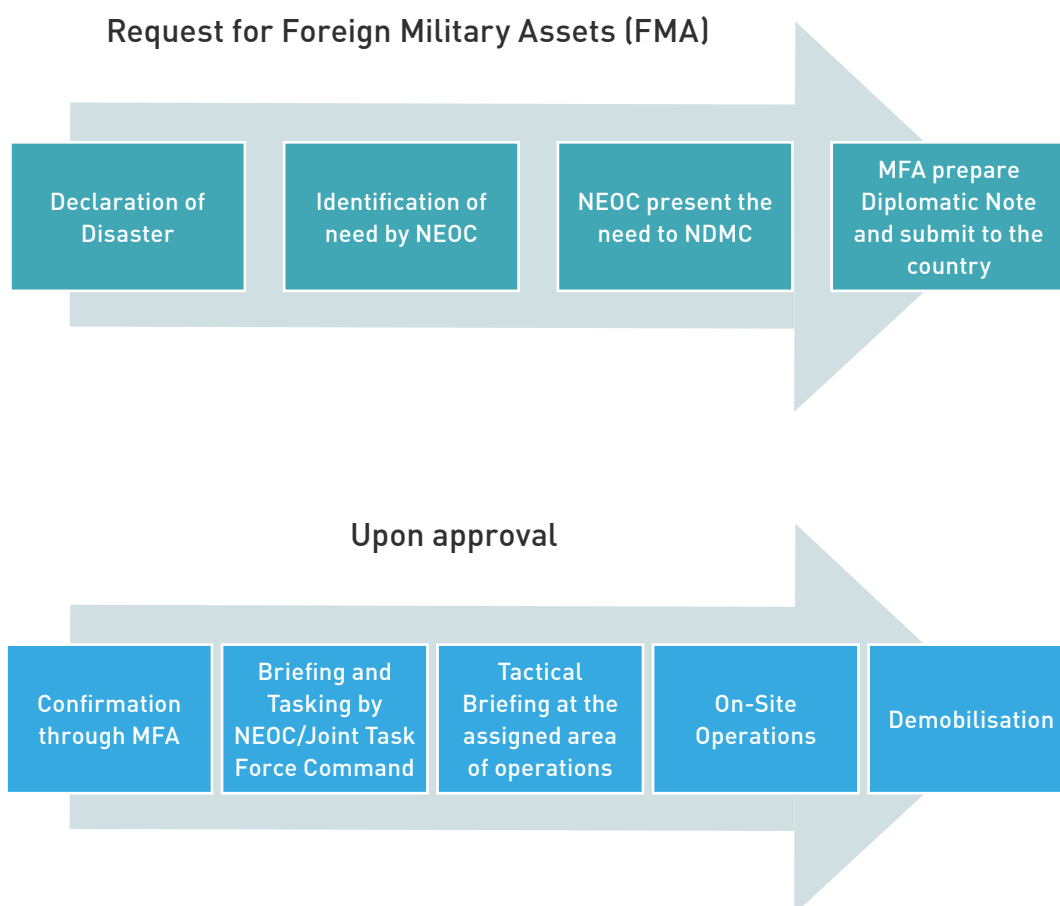
HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION MECHANISMS

COORDINATION OF FOREIGN MILITARY ASSETS

There are two main phases related to requesting and deploying foreign military assets (FMA) in response to a disaster. The first phase begins with the declaration of disaster, followed by the NEOC's identification of need. NEOC then presents the identified need to the NDMC, after which the MFA prepares and submits a diplomatic note to the relevant foreign entity. Upon approval, the second

phase outlines the steps following the acceptance of the request. It starts with confirmation through the MFA, followed by briefing and tasking by NEOC or the JTFC, then a tactical briefing at the assigned area of operations, leading to on-site operations, and concluding with demobilisation. The chart below outlines the flow of FMA coordination.

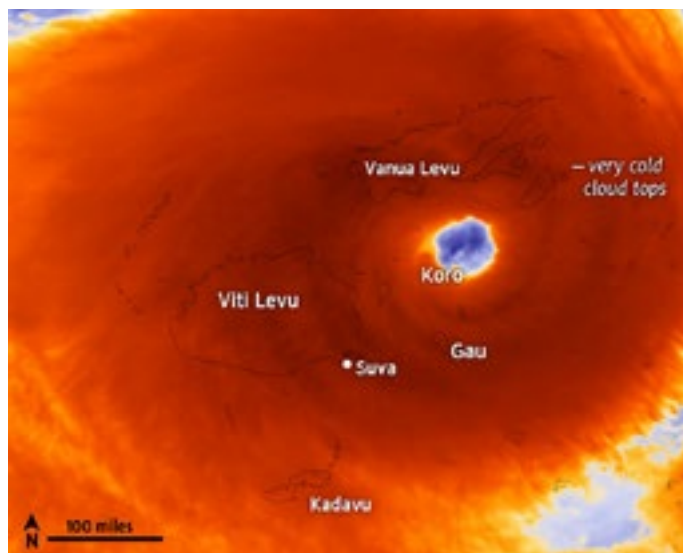
OPERATIONAL DIAGRAM OF REQUEST AND APPROVAL FOR FMA



Source: Humanitarian Civil Military Coordination, pp. 31 & 32.

CASE STUDY: TROPICAL CYCLONE WINSTON 2016

 20-21 February 2016
  Category 5
  350,000 affected
  44 fatalities
  USD 1.38 billion



Source: <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/event-tracker/tropical-cyclone-winston-causes-devastation-fiji-tropical-paradise>

OVERVIEW

Tropical Cyclone Winston struck Fiji on 20–21 February 2016 as a Category 5 cyclone, bringing devastation on a scale previously unseen in the country. With wind speeds reaching nearly 300 km/h, Winston followed an unpredictable path that complicated preparedness and response efforts. The cyclone caused catastrophic damage, particularly on the northern and eastern sides of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu, flattening entire villages, destroying infrastructure, and crippling the agricultural sector. Out of 350,000 affected, 40,000 people were displaced and 44 were killed, and the economic losses were estimated at more than USD 1 billion, over 20% of Fiji's gross domestic product.

The cyclone's impact extended beyond immediate destruction. Crops, livestock, and fisheries were decimated, threatening food security for months. Schools, hospitals, roads, and utilities suffered widespread damage, leaving many communities isolated and vulnerable.

NATIONAL COORDINATION AND CIVIL-MILITARY RESPONSE

The Fijian government responded to TC Winston by declaring a state of emergency, triggering access to emergency funding and opening the door to international assistance. The NDRMO, operating under the NDMC, assumed the lead coordination role. It brought together representatives from government ministries, the RFMF, the FPF, NGOs and international partners, ensuring a unified approach to disaster management.

Civilian authorities maintained leadership throughout the response, focusing on restoring critical services, distributing food and seedlings, and managing long-term recovery through the Ministry of Finance, Strategic Planning, National Development, and Statistics. The Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Protection played a central role, ensuring that gender, disability, and protection issues were integrated into all phases of the response. Data collection and reporting were disaggregated to ensure targeted support for vulnerable groups, and FCOSS acted as the voice for civil society, coordinating NGO efforts and ensuring their integration into national plans.

The RFMF was mobilised rapidly, with personnel embedded in the NEOC and deployed across all divisions. Military engineers prioritised reopening roads and restoring access to remote communities, while also supporting search and rescue, relief distribution and damage assessments. Coordination with international military partners, such as Australia and New Zealand, was facilitated through established protocols, ensuring that FMA aligned with Fiji's priorities.

The FPF, as primary first responders, managed public order, enforced curfews and maintained security in evacuation centres and affected communities. Their presence was crucial in preventing looting and ensuring the safety of both survivors and relief workers. Joint operational command centres, incorporating representatives from all agencies, enabled daily information sharing and resource allocation, which was vital for prioritising the most affected regions.

KEY AREAS OF COORDINATION

The response to TC Winston showcased the strengths and challenges of Fiji's integrated approach:

- **Search and rescue.** Civilian, military and police teams worked together to conduct life-saving operations, often in difficult and isolated terrain. The RFMF provided heavy equipment and aviation support, while the FPF managed records and family reunification.
- **Relief distribution.** Logistical challenges were immense due to damaged infrastructure. The RFMF's organisational capacity and equipment ensured that relief supplies reached even the most remote islands, with police providing security for routes and distribution sites.
- **Public Order and Security.** The FPF, supported by the RFMF, maintained order, enforced curfews, and protected relief operations, especially in areas where social tensions were heightened by the disaster.
- **Community engagement.** Civil authorities, in partnership with traditional and religious leaders, led information campaigns, organised community clean-ups and provided psychosocial support. The involvement of RFMF and FPF units in these efforts helped foster trust and cooperation.
- **Health and Disease Control.** Rapid establishment of temporary medical facilities and enforcement of public health measures were achieved through coordinated efforts between civil, military and police agencies.

EVOLUTION OF CIVIL-MILITARY STRUCTURES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Fiji's experience with TC Winston drove significant improvements in disaster management. Localisation and community engagement are now central to disaster planning, with greater emphasis on the inclusion of women, people with disabilities, and local leaders in decision-making.

Ongoing training, supported by international partners and agencies like UN-OCHA, ensures that all stakeholders, from engineers to health workers, are prepared for future emergencies. The development of SOPs for NGOs and the annual gathering of civil society organisation practitioners have further institutionalised best practices and improved coordination.

Key Learnings

Despite the overall effectiveness of the response, several challenges emerged:

- **Communications infrastructure was damaged severely**, hampering coordination, especially in remote areas. Satellite phones and radios were essential but not widely available.
- **The scale of the disaster overwhelmed national resources**, making the integration of international assistance both necessary and complex.
- **Overlapping authority between agencies occasionally led to confusion regarding the chain of command**, particularly where military and police responsibilities intersected.
- **Logistical bottlenecks**, such as damaged transportation routes, delayed relief efforts despite best efforts.
- **Lessons from TC Winston led to the creation of the SWIFT** to streamline the importation and distribution of relief goods and prevent future delays.
- **The response to TC Winston in Fiji demonstrates the value of integrated civil-military coordination, strong government leadership, and effective partnerships with international actors.** The lessons learned inform ongoing reforms and capacity-building, ensuring that Fiji is better prepared for future disasters. The experience also offers a replicable model for other disaster-prone nations seeking to strengthen their own disaster management systems.



ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
EMT	Emergency Medical Team
FCOSS	Fiji Council of Social Services
FEMAT	Fiji Emergency Medical Assistance Team
FMA	Foreign Military Assets
FPF	Fiji Police Force
JTFC	Joint Task Force Command
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MRMDDM	Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development and Disaster Management
NDC	National Disaster Controller
NDMC	National Disaster Management Council
NDMP	National Disaster Management Plan
NDRMO	National Disaster Risk Management Office
NEOC	National Emergency Operations Centre
NFA	National Fire Authority
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RFMF	Republic of Fiji Military Forces
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPC	Pacific Community
SWIFT	Single Window International Facilitation Team
TC	Tropical Cyclone
UN	United Nations
UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA



HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN EMERGENCIES

Papua New Guinea. Photo: Asso Myron / Unsplash



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is an island nation highly exposed to a complex interplay of natural hazards and socio-economic risks. The country is vulnerable to a wide range of natural disasters, including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides, floods, droughts, heatwaves, and tropical cyclones. PNG was ranked 12 out of 193 countries in the 2025 edition of the World Risk Report, making it the most at risk country in this study.

Beyond its disaster risks, PNG’s socio-economic landscape further amplifies its vulnerability. As the most populous and culturally diverse nation in the Pacific Island region, it faces significant challenges such as civil unrest, tribal conflict, and rising internal displacement due to migration. These issues have intensified over the past two decades, compounding the impacts of natural disasters and straining response capacities. These overlapping risks underscore the importance of a humanitarian response strategy that not only addresses the needs of the affected communities but is also adaptive to contexts involving conflict and social instability.

Disaster management in PNG is distinctive in several ways. It is primarily guided by the Disaster Management Act 1984 as the foundational legal framework. The evolution of civil-military coordination in PNG has been shaped by its colonial history, post-independence struggles with internal security, and experience with a protracted civil war. Coordination has shifted from an Australian-led model to an increasingly complex system, as the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) takes on internal security and humanitarian roles. The Southern Highlands Earthquake prompted a national State of Emergency and large-scale international humanitarian response, including deployment of the PNGDF and foreign military assets under Operation PNG Assist. This prompted a major shift in how emergency responses are managed not only at the national level but also across provincial administrations by triggering the launch of the PNG National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework 2017- 2030. In the context of international humanitarian coordination, PNG does not have a United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN-OCHA) presence, positioning the United Nation Resident Coordinator Office (UNRC) as the primary liaison with international humanitarian systems.

KEY EVENTS IN THE RECENT EVOLUTION OF HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA

2006-	Establishment of the Disaster Management Team (DMT) to replace the cluster system as PNG’s national coordination mechanism for humanitarian response.
2010	PNG received support through the France-Australia-New Zealand (FRANZ) Arrangement, strengthening regional coordination for foreign military support during disasters.
2012	The PNGDF begins formal participation in regional disaster response exercises under the South Pacific Defence Ministers’ Meeting (SPDMM) framework.
2016	The PNGDF and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) expand cooperation under the Defence Cooperation Program (DCP), embedding ADF advisors in key locations to support disaster preparedness and logistics.
2018	The Southern Highlands Earthquake prompted a national State of Emergency and large-scale international humanitarian response, including deployment of the PNGDF and foreign military assets under Operation PNG Assist.
2019	Launch of the PNG National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework 2017- 2030.
2022	2022: Launch of the PNG-Australia Policing Partnership (PNG-APP) Mission Design 2022-2026.
2023	Signing of the Australia-Papua New Guinea Bilateral Security Agreement (entered into force 2024).
2024	- The Enga Landslide triggered a complex humanitarian response involving PNGDF, United Nations (UN) agencies, and foreign military support; highlighting the need for improved access planning, civil-military coordination, and conflict-sensitive approaches. - The National Executive Council approved the review of the Disaster Management Act 1984 and endorsed the plan to establish the National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA) to modernise PNG’s disaster coordination framework. - PNG participated in the Pacific Response Group (PRG), enhancing regional military coordination for disaster response.
2025	- Ongoing review process of Disaster Management Law and operationalisation of NEMA. - PNGDF and ADF conduct joint training and planning under the DCP, embedding 38 ADF advisors across PNG to support rapid mobilisation during emergencies.

DISASTER RISK PROFILE

KEY FACTS

Official name: The Independent State of Papua New Guinea

Area: 452,860 km²

Population: 10,669, 942 (SPC, 2025)

Capital: Port Moresby

Official languages: Tok Pisin, English, Hiri Motu

Disaster focal point: National Disaster Centre

Military: Papua New Guinea Defence Force

Police: Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary



Source: Adapted from <https://www.unocha.org/publications/map/papua-new-guinea/papua-new-guinea-location-map-2013>

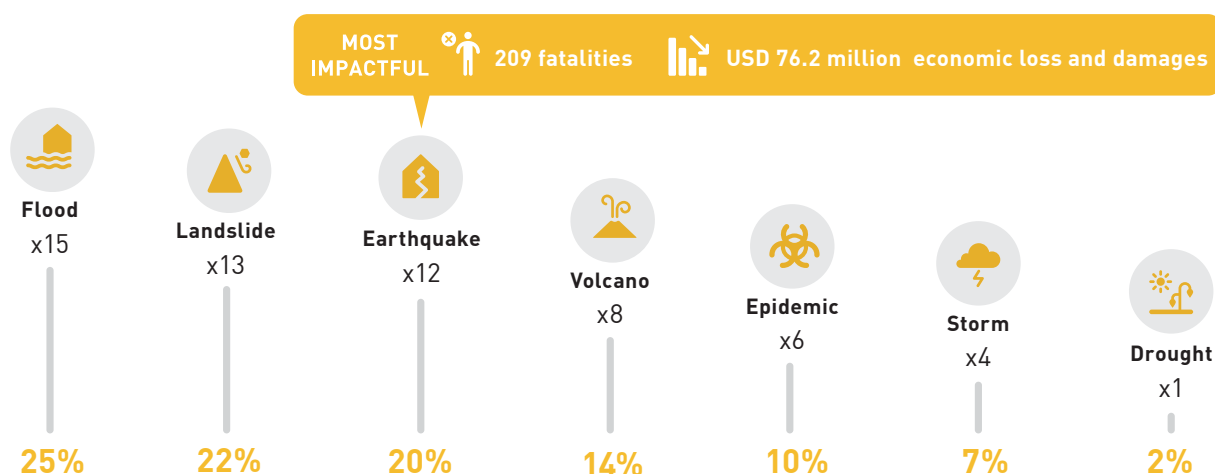
GENERAL INFORMATION

PNG is vulnerable to a wide range of natural disasters, including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, landslides, floods, droughts, heatwaves, and tropical cyclones. Located within the Pacific Ring of Fire, one of the most geologically active regions in the world, PNG experiences daily seismic activity, frequent large earthquakes, and hosts some of the most active volcanoes in the Southwest Pacific.

FREQUENCY AND PROPORTION OF DISASTERS BY TYPE FROM 2000 TO 2025

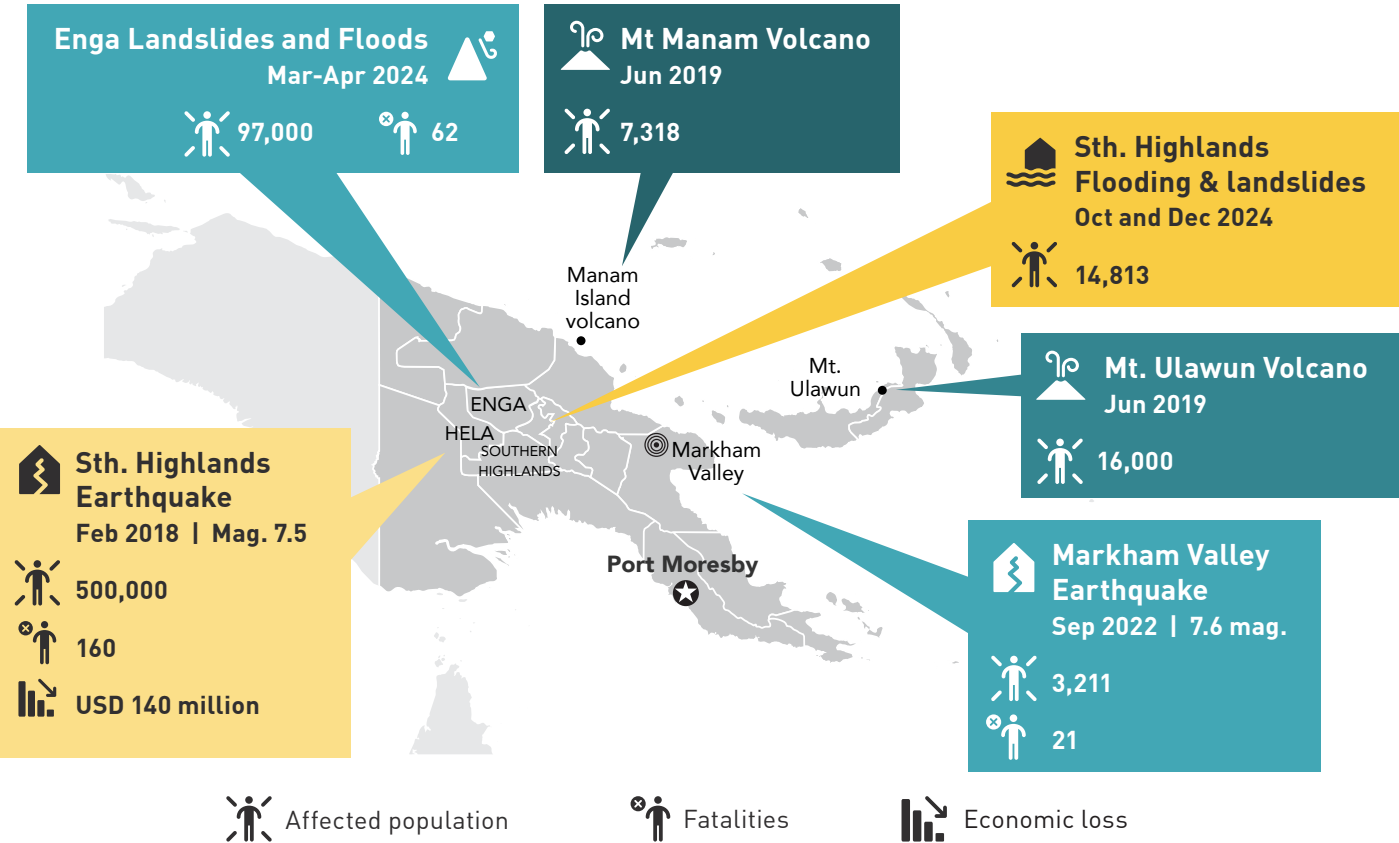
PNG has been affected by 59 natural disasters over the last 25 years.

The graph below orders PNG's natural disasters by type according to their frequency, with the most to least frequent moving left to right, and the percentage frequency illustrated. The most impactful disaster type is identified but not ranked. Since 2000, floods (25%) have been the most frequent disaster to affect PNG, followed by landslides (22%). However, within this period, although not the most frequent, earthquakes were the most impactful, causing a significant number of fatalities and economic loss.



Source: <https://public.emdat.be/data>

MAJOR DISASTERS (2015-2025)



INFORM
INDEX FOR RISK MANAGEMENT

INFORM Risk is an open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters. INFORM Risk gives each country a risk score of 1-10 (1 being the lowest and 10 the highest) for each of the dimensions, categories, and components of risk, as well as an overall risk score. The higher the score, the more at risk a country is to disasters.

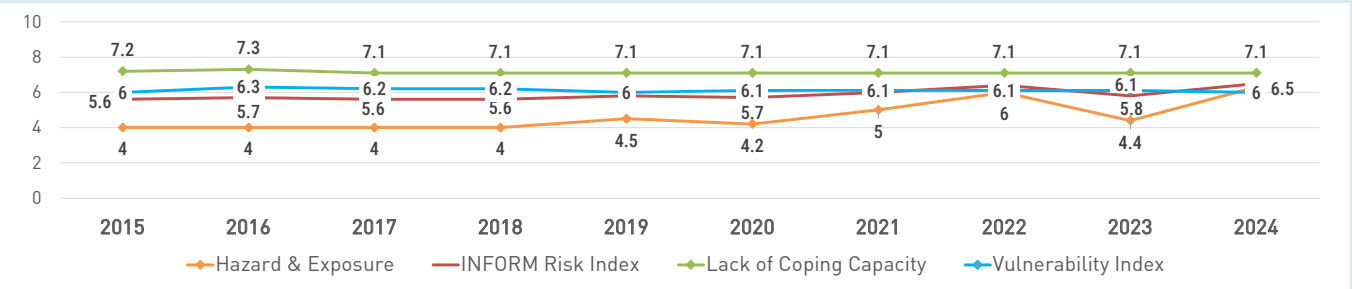
INFORM RISK VALUE AND RANKING 2025

PNG has a high hazards and exposure value, coupled with a high lack of coping capacity. Despite its moderate level of vulnerability value, the risk value is classified as 'high' ranking it in the top 20 globally.

INFORM Risk and dimensions of risk	VALUE (10 as the highest)	WORLD RANK (out of 191 countries)
INFORM Risk	6.5	20
Hazard & Exposure	6.3	35
Vulnerability	6.1	29
Lack of coping capacity	7.1	18

INFORM RISK TEN-YEAR TREND (2015-2024)

PNG's vulnerability, lack of coping capacity and risk values have remained constant since 2015; however, its hazards and exposure value demonstrates sharper rises and falls increased over the last five years due to increasing disasters. Consequently, the INFORM Risk Index has slightly increased, classifying PNG within the high-risk category.



KEY POLICIES, PLANS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION



LAWS & REGULATIONS



Emergency Act 1979

The Emergency Act 1979 made provisions for the PNG government to declare national emergencies across specified provinces (Chimbu, Eastern Highlands, Enga, Southern Highlands, and Western Highlands). It allows the appointment of a controller to uphold public order, they can restrict movement, requisition goods, regulate transport, enter property, and issue emergency directives. Failure to comply or obstructing the controller is an offence, with penalties enforceable even after the emergency ends.

Disaster Management Act 1984

PNG's Disaster Management Act 1984 establishes the legal framework for disaster management. It outlines the structure, roles, and key functions of the National Disaster Committee, Provincial Disaster Committees, and the National Disaster Centre. Additionally, it provides guidance on the procedures for requesting international assistance during emergencies. The law is currently undergoing a comprehensive review to align PNG's disaster management practices with international standards. The review is expected to be completed in 2025 and will pave the way for the establishment of the NEMA, which will enhance coordination and oversight across all phases of Disaster Risk Management (DRM).



GUIDING POLICIES



Emergency (Bougainville) (General Powers) Act 1989

The Emergency (Bougainville) (General Powers) Act 1989 was originally enacted to address the security crisis in Bougainville, authorising the PNG Government, through the National Executive Council to appoint a Controller and support officers to manage emergency operations during the emergency period. Following the Bougainville Peace Agreement and the establishment of the Autonomous Bougainville Government (ABG), Bougainville now has authority to enact its own emergency legislation and establish emergency management arrangements for declared emergencies, with the Bougainville Disaster and Emergency Service Directorate (BDDE) operating under the ABG and working with the National Disaster Centre (NDC) to respond to disasters. However, noting that a National State of Emergency declared by the National Executive Council and emergency legislation enacted by the National Parliament may still apply within Bougainville.



Emergency (Defence Force) Act 1994

The Emergency (Defence Force) Act 1994 was introduced to provide special powers during declared emergencies. It authorises the government, through the National Executive Council, to deploy Defence Force personnel to assist civil authorities in maintaining public order and security. Under this Act, the Defence Force may exercise powers like those granted under other emergency acts to support law enforcement and protect communities.



Emergency (General Powers) Act 2018

The Emergency (General Powers) Act 2018 originated following the 7.5 magnitude earthquake in February 2018, covering the provinces of Enga, Hela, Southern Highlands and Western. It allows the government, through the National Executive Council, to appoint a controller, along with deputies and assistants, to coordinate emergency response and issue emergency orders. These orders include powers similar to those in other emergency legislation, such as restricting movement, requisitioning goods, vehicles, labour and property, regulating transport, and entering premises. The main difference from the Emergency Act 1979 is that it introduces a more structured coordination framework, with deputy and assistant controllers as part of the structure.

 PNG National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework 2017- 2030

PNG has developed further DRM efforts with the endorsement of the National Disaster Risk Management Framework 2017–2030. Led by the National Disaster Centre, the framework aligns with the global Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and guides national and local stakeholders in prioritising risk reduction through 2030. This framework applies to partners at all levels of government including provincial, district, and local, to ensure coordinated implementation.

 PNG National Disaster Management Plan 1987

The PNG Disaster Management Plan was first introduced in 1987 and is currently under review. The National Disaster Committee oversees programming and project planning to align with the plan’s objectives. The plan provides strategic guidance for all stakeholders both government and non-government, across all levels, to integrate self-reliance in disaster management. The plan is supported by key documents such as the Mitigation Policy, Corporate Plan, standard operating procedures (SOPs), Response Plans, and the National Framework for Action 2005–2015.

KEY CIVILIAN RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTERS

NATIONAL DISASTER FOCAL POINT

In PNG, the National Disaster Centre serves as the country’s central authority for disaster management, responsible for coordinating national efforts in disaster preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation. The National Disaster Centre was established under the Disaster Management Act of 1987 and is overseen by the Ministry of Defence. It provides technical guidance, formulates DRM policies and plans, and facilitates collaboration with provincial administrations, local level governments, and communities. The National Disaster Centre also acts

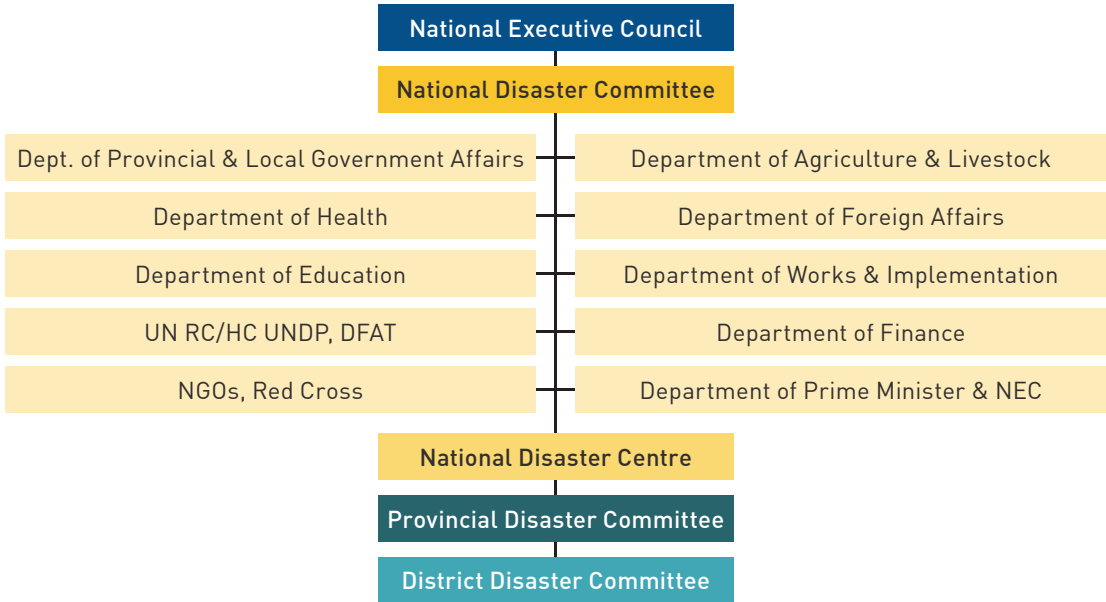
as PNG’s official liaison with regional and international disaster management bodies, including the Pacific Islands Forum, the Pacific Islands Emergency Management Alliance, United Nations agencies, and bilateral partners. It serves as the Secretariat of the National Disaster Committee (NDCOMM), a multi-agency body that sets policy direction. Operationally, the National Disaster Centre works in close partnership with the PNGDF, police, health services and other key agencies during emergency situations.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (NEC)

The National Executive Council (NEC), comprising of

ministers, is the decision-maker for any disaster related policy issues. The NEC receives consolidated advice from key government agencies who oversee disaster



management coordinated through the National Disaster Committee (NDCOMM).

 **Established by:** Disaster Management Act 1984

 **Leadership:** Prime Minister

 **Key functions:**

- Act as the Cabinet and highest executive authority
- Provide high-level policy decisions, including the formulation and implementation of national development plans and the annual budget
- Monitor the implementation of government decisions and reforms
- Declare national emergencies and authorise powers
- Coordinate inter-ministerial actions and crisis response

 **Composition:** The Prime Minister and secretaries of all cabinet departments.

THE NATIONAL DISASTER COMMITTEE

The National Disaster Committee leads PNG's disaster management system, reporting to the NEC via the Minister for Defence. The Committee acts as the operational decision-making body for emergencies and disaster-related matters. While its core membership is fixed, the Committee has the authority to co-opt additional organisations including NGOs and faith based organisations when needed.

 **Established by:** Disaster Management Act 1984

 **Leadership:** The Secretary of Defence

 **Key functions:**

- Supervise the national state of preparedness for emergencies and disasters and report to the NEC
- Maintain the national emergency plan
- Assign responsibilities for disaster related activities to departments and other bodies
- Advise NEC if assistance required
- Provide guidelines for the preparation and format of provincial disaster plans
- Approve grants

- Foster public awareness of the effects of natural hazards and measures which can be taken to reduce their effects
- Maintain stockpiles of relief supplies
- Advise the national executive council in declaring a national emergency

 **Composition:** The Commander of the PNGDF, the Police Commissioner, and Departmental heads of various government departments including the Prime Minister's Office, Finance, Health, Works, Defence, Police, Foreign Affairs, National Planning, and Provincial and Local Governments.

THE NATIONAL DISASTER CENTRE

This government agency is responsible for coordinating responses to all disasters across the country. In performing its coordination role, the National Disaster Centre works in consultation with the National Disaster Committee, also serving as its secretariat. The National Disaster Centre operates under the Ministry of Defence and is organised into two main divisions: Risk Management, which focus is on disaster risk management and reduction activities and programmes, and the Community and Government Liaison Division which overseas disaster response, emergency management, and corporate affairs.

 **Established by:** Disaster Management Act 1984

 **Leadership:** Director who is appointed by the National Executive Council (NEC)

 **Key functions:**

- Develop policies, frameworks, plans, and SOPs
- Provide technical advice on all disaster management and risk reduction matters
- Lead and coordinate national disaster relief operations including mobilising and deploying assessment teams
- Manage a network of disaster management liaison officers to facilitate communication and coordination including managing donor and government relief funds
- Report annually to the National Disaster Committee
- Provide disaster management training for various sectors and levels
- Design and conduct community awareness and education on disaster management
- Record and report incidents

SUBNATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Subnational disaster management in PNG is coordinated through Provincial Disaster Committees (PDCOMMs), established under the Disaster Management Act (1984).

Chaired by Provincial Administrators, these committees are responsible for preparing emergency plans, assessing local hazards, coordinating relief efforts, and advising provincial governments. There are 22 subnational committees: one in each of the 20 provinces, with equivalent arrangement in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville and the National Capital District (NCD).

Each PDCOMM has a Provincial Disaster Office (PDO) which acts as the PDCOMM’s secretariat, manage emergency operations centres, and facilitates communication with national and district authorities although the capacity of the PDO will vary depending on the level of funding allocated by the respective provincial administration.

THE PROVINCIAL DISASTER COMMITTEES

PDCOMMs are responsible for preparing emergency plans for the provinces and coordinating relief operations. They report to the Provincial Executive Councils (PECs). PDCOMMS may seek national assistance for an emergency that has overwhelmed the capacity of provincial authorities to respond through the National Disaster Committee

 **Established by:** Disaster Management Act 1984

 **Leadership:** Provincial Administrator

-  **Key functions:**
- Provide advice to the PEC through the Governor on development plans for the province for specific hazards
 - Conduct hazard assessments for commonly occurring hazards in the province
 - Prepare provincial contingency plans for these hazards and supervise the state of preparedness for emergencies in the province
 - Foster public awareness and mitigation measures; including the training of provincial relief workers who receive requests for assistance
 - Coordinate prepositioning of emergency supplies and relief operations.

 **Composition:** Provincial Police Commander, Provincial Works Manager, and representatives from health, agriculture, education, and other relevant departments

PROVINCIAL DISASTER OFFICE

As with the national level, the PDO serves as the secretariat to the Provincial Disaster Committee. This structure is used to best channel information and resources in disaster response. PDOs are also increasingly supporting work to develop community integration strategies to ensure civil society organisations are involved in preparedness, mitigation, and response processes.

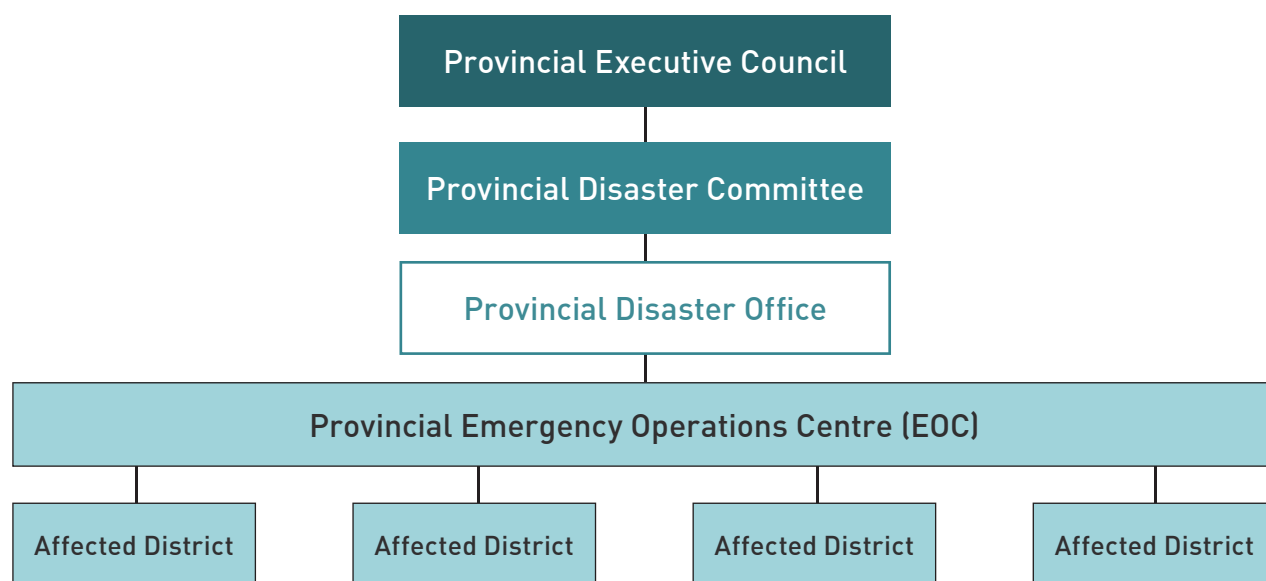
 **Established by:** Disaster Management Act 1984

 **Leadership:** Provincial Disaster Coordinator/Director/ Manager/Adviser

-  **Key functions:**
- Establish and maintain emergency operations centre (EOC)
 - Coordinate and communicate with the affected districts, NDC, and other stakeholders particularly the DMT.



SUBNATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN PNG

The administrative levels in PNG are divided into 20 provinces plus the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, and the National Capital District (NDC) in Port Moresby. Each Province is further divided into districts, which are subdivided into sub-districts and local level government (LLG).



	NAME	LEAD AUTHORITY	NUMBER
FIRST LEVEL	National	NDCOMM	1
SECOND LEVEL	Provincial	Provincial Disaster Committees	19 and 4 functioning
THIRD LEVEL	District	District Disaster Committees	89



KEY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

DEPARTMENT OF PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL-LEVEL GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS (DPLGA)

The DPLGA is one of the principal government authorities responsible for disaster management in PNG. It plays a critical role, alongside decentralised governance systems, in connecting the national government with grassroots communities across the provinces and districts. It is mandated to empower provincial and local-level governments to ensure that essential services, resources, and development initiatives reach populations most in need.

THE DEPARTMENT OF PRIME MINISTER AND NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (PMNEC)

The PMNEC is the central policy and coordination mechanism for disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response, and recovery in PNG. It plays a central role in disaster management by advising the Prime Minister and Cabinet on disaster policies, endorsing national disaster frameworks, and making key decisions on emergency declarations and recovery. It supports the National Disaster Committee to ensure disaster risk reduction is integrated into national planning and provincial disaster committees' activities, linking national directives with local disaster management efforts. Furthermore, it monitors the national state of preparedness and supervises the implementation of disaster management activities to ensure timely and effective response during emergencies.

THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

The National Disaster Committee and its Secretariat are under the Ministry of Defence. The Minister responsible for Defence is also responsible for disaster management and emergency services. The Secretary for Defence serves as Chair of the National Disaster Committee.

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE

In the context of disasters, the Department of Finance advises on and develops sustainable financing mechanisms to address disaster funding needs, support resilience and risk reduction initiatives, and manage the financial impacts of disasters on government, businesses, and households.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

In disaster contexts, through the Department of Health and Provincial Health Authorities, public health personnel are deployed as part of the emergency management teams. These teams deliver emergency medical care, disseminate critical health information, and ensure access to essential services such as medicines, treatments or surgeries, and mental health support.

DEPARTMENT OF WORKS AND HIGHWAYS (DoWH)

The DoWH is the government agency responsible for development, management, and maintenance of public Infrastructure. Emergency and Disaster Response is recognised as one of the key service areas under the DoWH. The Department acts as a frontline responder, rapidly deploying resources to restore damaged infrastructure such as roads and bridges affected by floods, landslides, or earthquakes. Additionally, it rapidly intervenes to minimise disruption to communities by re-establishing essential transport routes, thereby supporting both humanitarian relief and economic continuity.

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS (DFA)

The DFA serves a vital coordination, protocol, and diplomatic function when international assistance is required in disaster response. The DFA acts as the primary channel of communication between the government and foreign entities, including embassies, international organisations, and donor countries. It facilitates diplomatic clearances for foreign relief personnel, supplies, and equipment entering PNG, working closely with the National Disaster Centre, Department of Defence, and Customs. Additionally, to facilitate engagement and collaboration with international partners, the DFA supports coordination of high-level visits and donor missions during major disasters.

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT

The Department of Transport, which includes the National Weather Service (NWS), plays a central coordination and enabling role during disaster response by supporting safe and effective movement, communication, and early warning systems. During a disaster, the Department works closely with the NDC and other agencies to coordinate transport logistics, maintain infrastructure operability where possible, and ensure that emergency responses are guided by accurate meteorological information.



DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL PLANNING AND MONITORING (DoNPM)

In the context of disasters, DoNPM does not operate as a frontline responder. Instead, it holds a strategic and coordination role in supporting disaster management efforts. This includes integrating DRR, preparedness, and climate resilience into PNG's Medium-Term Development Plans (MTDPs) and Vision 2050 (PNG's long-term development blueprint), to ensure that recovery and reconstruction efforts are aligned with national and sectoral development priorities. Another key responsibility of the DoNPM is collaborating with the Department of Treasury and Finance to mobilise both domestic and international funding. This includes securing access to climate and resilience funds, grants, and concessional loans. Additionally, under one of its flagship initiatives, the department manages the Environmental Data Portal, which provides access to national environmental datasets. These datasets support the monitoring, evaluation, and analysis of environmental conditions and trends, thereby informing environmental planning, forecasting, and reporting at all levels.

COORDINATION MECHANISMS

The Secretary of Defence, as the chair of National Disaster Committee, holds overall responsibility for coordinating disaster management, including disaster risk reduction, DRM, and emergency response. The DFA oversees the coordination of international assistance, while liaison with provincial authorities is managed by the DPLGA.

During emergencies, the Government and Community Liaison Coordinator within the National Disaster Committee facilitates response coordination. When a national emergency is declared, the Prime Minister typically appoints an Emergency Controller, who is responsible for overseeing national-level personnel, resources, and activities in accordance with the constitutional provisions for emergencies. In several instances over the past decade, SOE Controllers have been appointed from outside the NDC, representing key stakeholder agencies.

The SOE Controller may request support from other national bodies such as the PNGDF via the NEC, depending on the nature of the emergency. The Controller may also engage the National Disaster Committee to activate the National Emergency Operations Centre, which serves as the central hub for communications and operational control during the response.

THE ROYAL PNG CONSTABULARY (RPNGC)

The primary role of the RPNGC is to uphold law and order and ensure public safety. During a disaster, it continues with these functions and supports coordinated emergency response. The RPNGC engages in disaster management through two key mechanisms:

- **Committee Membership:** The Commissioner of Police serves as a member of the National Disaster Committee, which oversees national preparedness and assigns responsibilities during emergencies
- **National Emergency Declaration:** When a National Emergency is declared under the PNG Constitution, an Emergency Controller is appointed. Under this arrangement, the police force operates under the direction of the Emergency Controller to support the national disaster response.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT TEAM (DMT)

In PNG, sectoral coordination for humanitarian and disaster response is overseen by the DMT and includes the NDC alongside the United Nations and international NGOs operating in the country. The DMT also engages national NGOs and faith-based partners. Operational coordination is overseen by the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), which coordinates key sectors including the Health sector and the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector, Education, Protection, and Logistics. Each sector is led by a designated government agency and co-lead partner agency, ensuring a structured and collaborative approach to emergency preparedness and response. The following figure depicts the DMT structure within the humanitarian architecture in PNG.

SUBNATIONAL EMERGENCY OPERATION CENTRES (EOCS)

EOCs coordinate any response that requires resources above those available at the local level. The EOC allows the Provincial Disaster Coordinator to communicate with affected districts and locations, as well as with the NDC and other stakeholders, especially from the DMT or the private sector. Depending on the PDC location and whether the PNGDF has a large-scale presence nearby. Based on the Disaster Management Act, the PDCOMM may seek national assistance for an emergency exceeding the capacity of provincial authorities to respond. This request goes to the NDCOMM, which can determine the pathway through which the Government of PNG will assist the affected province for example through NDC support or by appointing an SOE Controller.

MOBILISATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

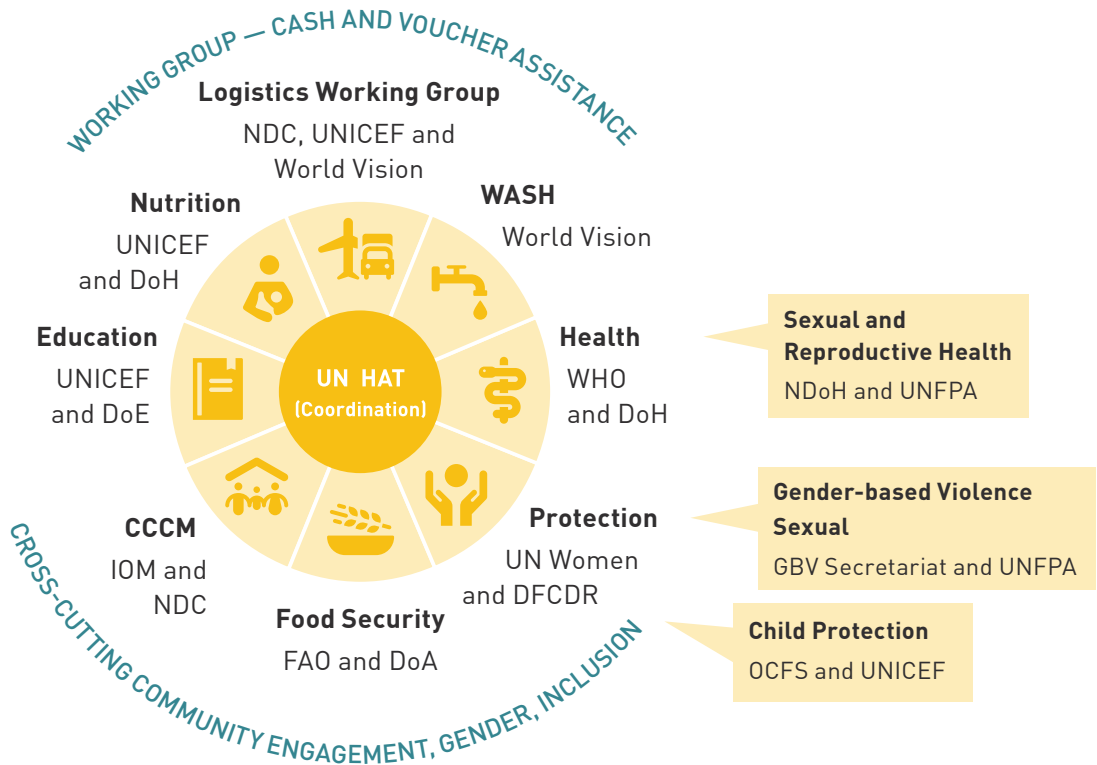
The National Disaster Coordinator advises the NEC on whether international assistance is required and is the focal point for international and bilateral support. The DMT brings the National Disaster Coordinator together with the leaders of international organisations, NGOs, and donor representatives. To strengthen mechanisms for mobilisation of international assistance, the National

Disaster Coordinator and provincial authorities, with support from UN agencies develop disaster risk management (DRM) plans and SOPs.

COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

The Disaster Management Team (DMT) is PNG’s highest-level strategic coordination body for international humanitarian assistance. It facilitates decision-making and oversight for the coordination of international support, including the development and implementation of joint strategies among key national and international humanitarian actors. In all emergency situations, regardless of whether the Government of PNG has requested, accepted, or declined international assistance, the DMT complements national efforts by coordinating the activities of international organisations in alignment with national and local authorities. To support this function, the DMT is co-chaired by the the Director of the National Disaster Centre and United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC). It brings together a broad coalition of stakeholders, including UN agencies, international NGOs, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, faith-based organisations, private sector representatives, and key development partners. Outside of emergency response operations, the DMT routinely monitors hazard events each year and typically coordinates a response to at least one major incident.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT TEAM (DMT) SECTOR CO-LEADS



Source?

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION SYSTEM

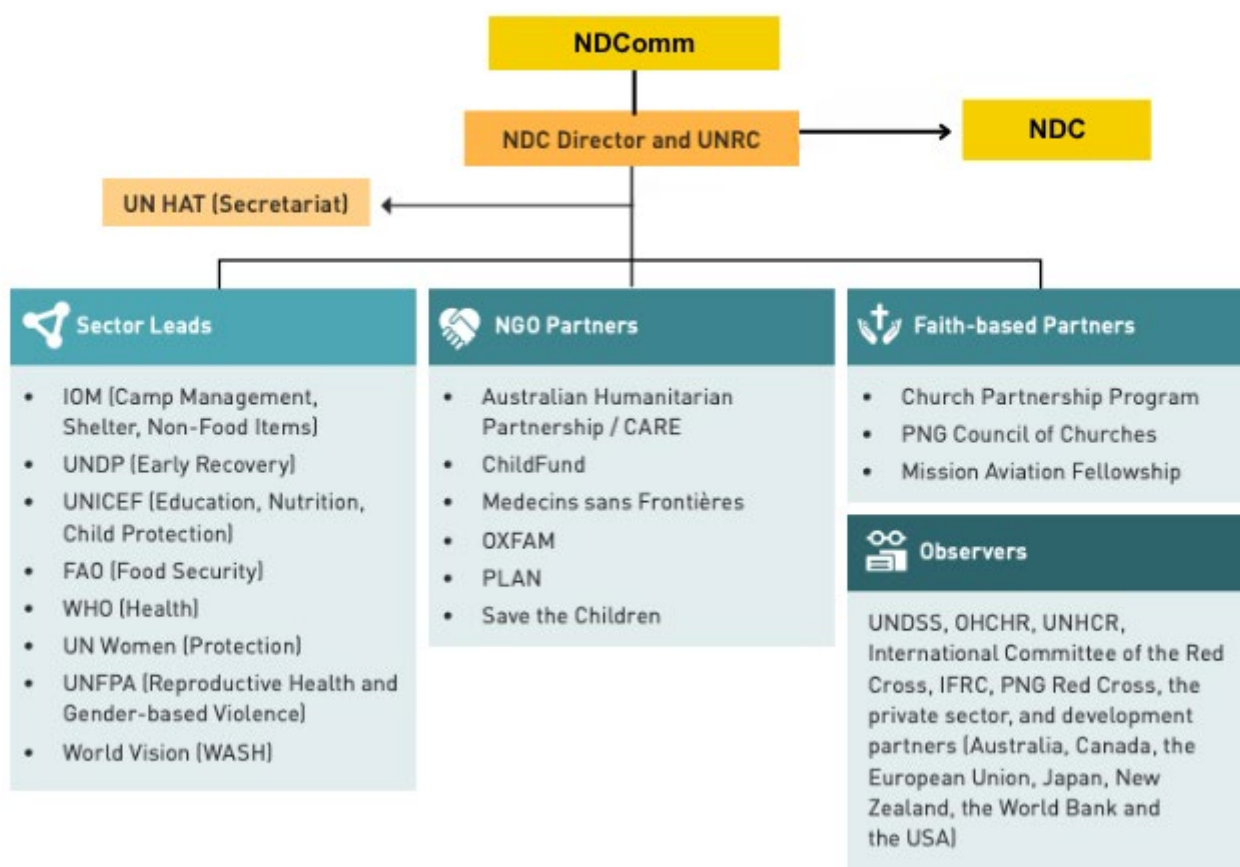
There are 14 UN system agencies operating in PNG, delivering programmes across a wide range of sectors, including education, food security, health, migration, livelihoods, and human rights. Under the leadership of the UNRC, these UN agencies collaborate to ensure effective coordination among agencies.

UN agencies also play a key role in emergency response, primarily through the DMT. As the UNRC also serves as the Humanitarian Coordinator, the UN Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRC Office) includes a dedicated Humanitarian Advisory Team (UNHAT). This team supports the UNRC's leadership in preparedness and response coordination and ensures the effective functioning of the DMT secretariat.

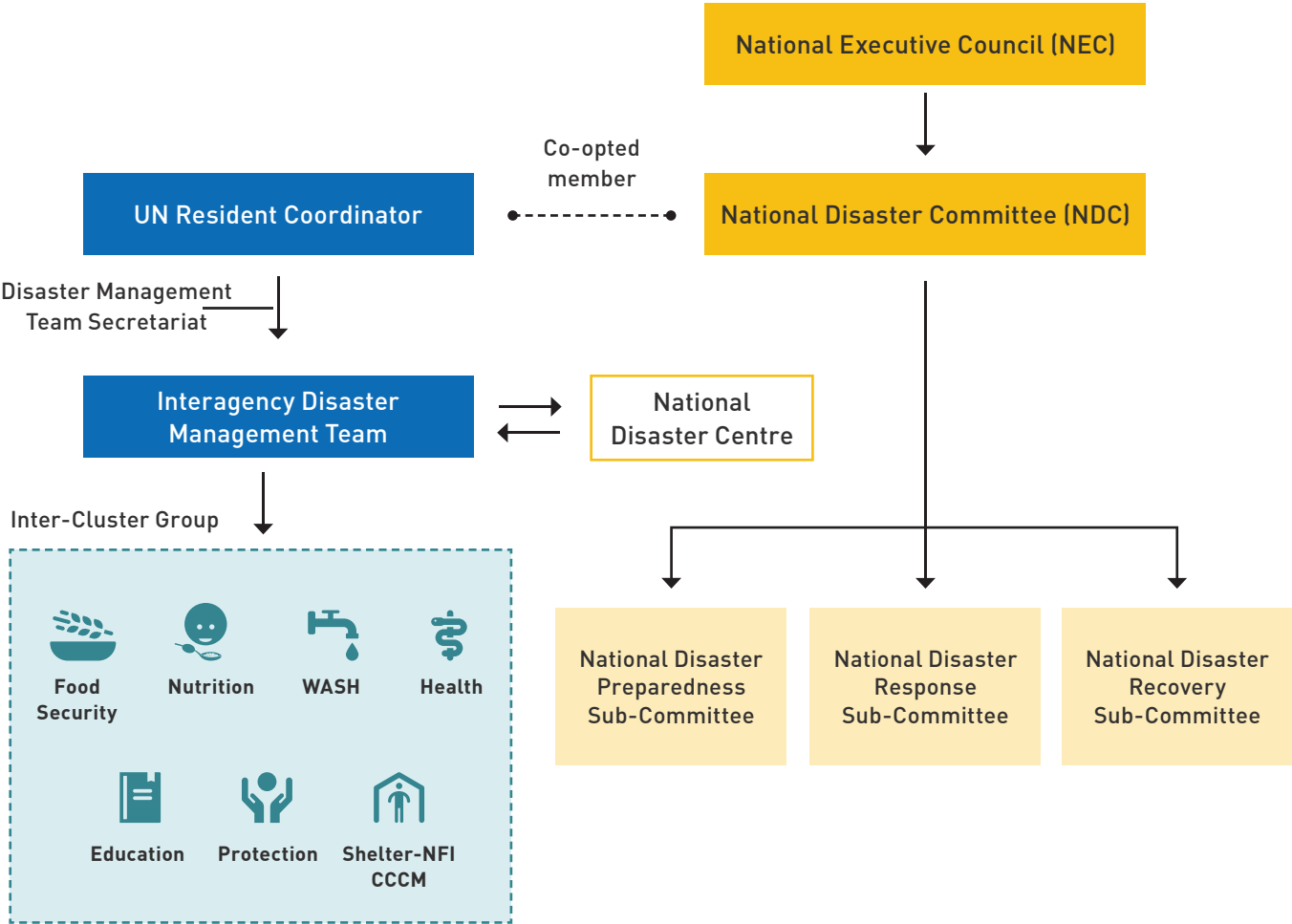
The UNHAT contributes to various aspects of humanitarian response, including coordination, impact and needs assessments, logistics, early recovery, and long-term recovery planning. It works closely with the National Disaster Centre, the PNGDF, and the Provincial Disaster Committees of affected provinces particularly in managing humanitarian data and information.

During disaster response, the Inter-Sector Coordination Group (ISCG), led by NDC with co-lead from UNHAT, brings together sector co-leads from humanitarian organisations and government bodies, the Australian Humanitarian Partnership, the PNG Disability Sector Coalition, the Church Partnership Programme, and private sector partners.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT TEAM STRUCTURE



INTERFACE BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL COORDINATION STRUCTURES



Source: Consultation with key stakeholders

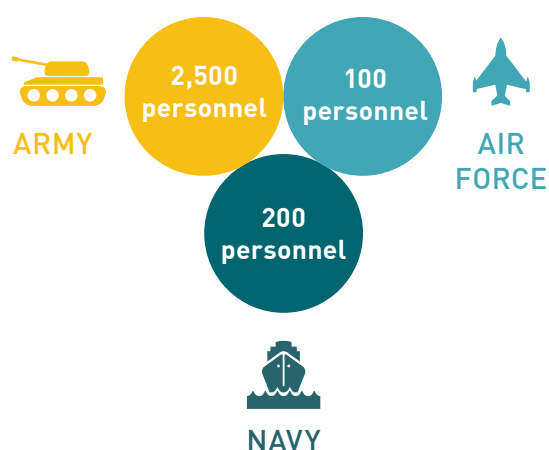


KEY MILITARY RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTERS

THE PAPUA NEW GUINEA DEFENCE FORCE (PNGDF)

The PNGDF, the national military of PNG, is responsible for the defence of Papua New Guinea. It has origins in the Australian Army land forces of the territory of Papua New Guinea before independence, coming into being in January 1973 and having its antecedents in the Pacific Islands Regiment. The PNGDF is a small force, numbering around 2,800 personnel, and consists of land/army (around 2,500 personnel), air (around 100 personnel) and maritime (around 200 personnel). It is a joint force tasked with defending PNG and its territories against external threats, as well as having secondary functions including nation-building and internal security tasks.

COMPONENTS OF THE MILITARY FORCES



The responsibility for DRM policy design lies with the Minister for Defence, however, the PNGDF, in collaboration with the National Disaster Coordinator, supports its implementation. This is carried out under the strategic direction of the National Disaster Committee with coordination facilitated through the NDC. In accordance with the Constitution, the PNGDF are responsible for supporting civilian-led Disaster Response activities, primarily for logistics capabilities. Additionally, during emergencies, the PNGDF is deployed to restore law and order, ensure public safety, and provide security for humanitarian operations for humanitarian workers. Their presence in disaster-affected areas has been essential to enabling effective emergency relief operations. Their presence in disaster-affected areas has been essential to enabling effective emergency relief operations.



Established: Defence Act 1974



Leadership: Chief of the Defence Force (CDF)



Headquarters: Murray Barracks, Port Moresby



Key Roles:

- Search, rescue, and evacuation: Locating and evacuating affected people
- Transportation and logistics: Moving supplies and personnel using military vehicles, boats, and aircraft; delivering, prepositioning, and transporting relief assistance
- Engineering and infrastructure restoration: Clearing debris, repairing roads, restoring essential services, and building temporary facilities like shelters or bridges
- Security and law enforcement support: Assisting police and civil authorities in maintaining order, crowd control during aid distribution, and property protection
- Regional cooperation and preparedness: Participating in joint exercises with regional partners and supporting humanitarian operations under Pacific frameworks.
- Medical support: Providing field medical teams and emergency health services

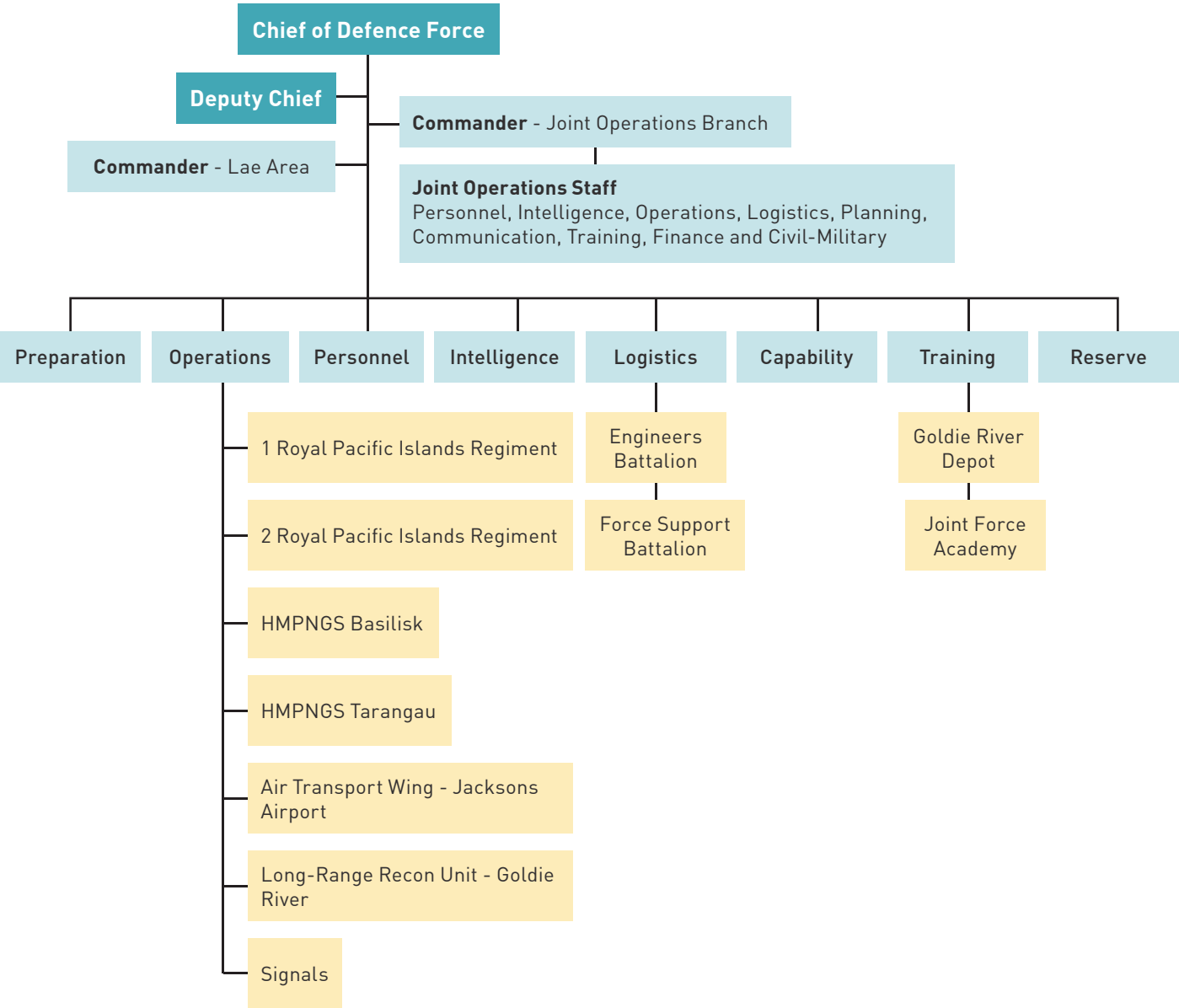


Coordination mechanisms: PNGDF coordinates disaster response primarily through the National Disaster Centre



Components: Land, air, and navy

PNGDF STRUCTURE

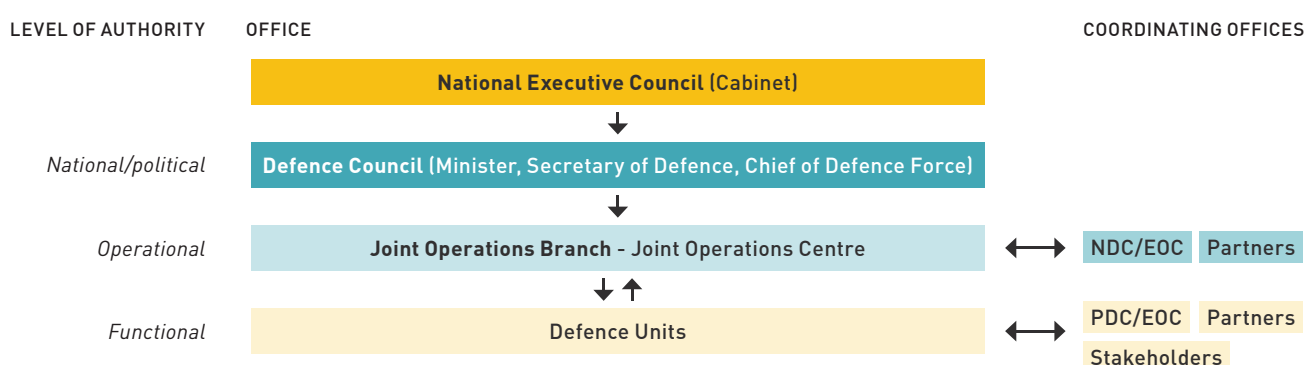


HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION MECHANISMS

Civil-military coordination for humanitarian response in PNG is structured across three levels: National (political), operational, and functional. At the national level, the National Executive Council is the highest authority and delegates command to the Defence Council, comprising the Minister for Defence, the Secretary for Defence, and Chief of the Defence Force. The Defence Council directs the Joint

Operations Branch through the Joint Operations Centre, which coordinates with the National Disaster Centre and other partners in disaster response through the national EOC. At the functional level, Defence Units implement on-the-ground response activities in collaboration with Provincial Disaster Committees and other key stakeholders, coordinated through subnational EOCs.

NATIONAL MILITARY CALL-OUT AUTHORITY FOR EMERGENCIES



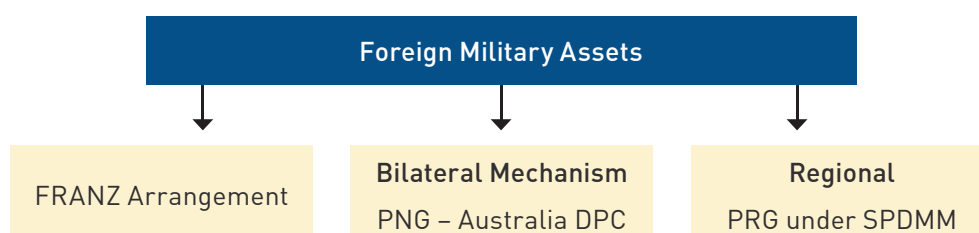
COORDINATION OF FOREIGN MILITARY ASSETS

Foreign military coordination in support of PNG is structured through longstanding bilateral and multilateral frameworks that enable rapid, organised deployment of defence assets during crises.

On the multilateral side, PNG is a partner supported by the FRANZ Arrangement, a disaster response arrangement involving Australia, France, and New Zealand whereby their foreign military assets coordinate through their respective foreign affairs ministries. When PNG requests international assistance, the FRANZ partners coordinate their military deployments such as reconnaissance aircraft, naval vessels, and logistics units to support PNGDF operations. Coordination occurs both bilaterally and trilaterally, ensuring that all foreign assets operate in a unified and complementary manner alongside PNGDF and each other.

At the bilateral level, Australia plays a central role through its DCP, which embeds 38 permanent advisors from the ADF within the PNGDF. These advisors, stationed in Port Moresby, Lae, Wewak, and Manus Island, work directly with PNGDF units. This ensures that Australian military assets can be mobilised quickly and in close coordination with PNGDF during emergencies. Some key initiatives to support this include ongoing joint training, planning, and operational integration.

Additionally, the PNGDF participates in the PRG, an initiative under the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting (SPDMM). This regional mechanism further enhances coordination among Pacific militaries, allowing for shared planning and resource pooling during large-scale disaster relief efforts.



CASE STUDY: ENGA LANDSLIDE 2024

 May 2024

 9,000 affected

 670-2,000 fatalities

 Not available



OVERVIEW

Between 23 and 24 May 2024, a devastating landslide struck the Tulpar community in Yambali village, Enga Province, PNG. The disaster caused widespread destruction, severely impacting homes, livelihoods, and thousands of lives. An estimated 7,850 people were directly affected, with around 1,680 people displaced. Casualty figures varied significantly, with UN estimates at around 670 and PNG Government up to 2,000.

The response to the disaster was notably complex, driven by several compounding challenges. These included severely disrupted access caused by blocked highways, remote locations, unstable terrain and the lack of reliable demographic data for the affected area. Security was also a major concern for the humanitarian responders including PNG Red Cross Society (PNGRCS) due to tribal clashes linked to the volatile security situation driven by competition over resources and longstanding inter-communal tensions. This complexity delayed and disrupted relief assistance. Another key challenge was coordination with multiple international actors and civil-military actors which required a strong coordination mechanism to allow quick deployment.

As part of the initial response, the government initiated the immediate evacuation and resettlement of affected populations. The Enga Provincial Disaster Office worked closely with the DMT secretariat which led the coordination of humanitarian responders on the ground including the PNGDF, the RPNGC, and UN agencies.

These joint efforts included providing essential items, coordinating evacuations, restricting access to the disaster site, and identifying new settlement areas.

CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION

Civil-military collaboration was instrumental in disaster response, particularly in addressing access constraints, managing evacuations and displacement, and delivering relief. The PNGDF led search and rescue operations, however, the site’s remoteness and damaged access roads prevented heavy machinery from reaching the area delaying recovery efforts. To support this, UN agencies and partners coordinated with local and national authorities to mobilise engineers and earth-moving equipment to improve access, though unstable debris continued to pose safety risks. Efforts to establish alternative routes were also hindered, with the Porgera–Lae Road only nearing completion four months after the disaster.

The UN Coordination Team was established in the provincial capital Wabag to support the Provincial Disaster Committee in coordinating the response. Security became a major concern due to ongoing clan disputes, particularly in Tambitanis, which resulted in further casualties and property damage. The PNGDF provided escorts to ensure the safe passage of relief convoys as many humanitarian personnel were stationed away from the affected area and relied on these escorts for safe travel.

To support displaced communities, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in collaboration with the Enga Provincial Disaster Response Team, established a Displacement Tracking Matrix across the affected wards, Yambali, Pokolip, Kuandak, and Yuyango, between June and July 2024. Two tented evacuation sites (Care Centres) were established and initially managed by PNGDF personnel to accommodate displaced communities.

Furthermore, UN agencies (IOM, UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA) and INGOs (World Vision, Care International) supported response efforts at the Mulitaka Care Centre by providing basic needs through the local government. The Provincial Administration distributed emergency food, household supplies, water containers, and purification tablets. Food remained a critical need, as many residents had lost farmland and livestock in the landslide. Host families also supported displaced individuals.

Foreign military forces also contributed to the response, notably from Australia and New Zealand. Australia played a key role, providing assets to support the deployment of technical expertise and supplies to PNG. The ADF supported the movement of personnel and supplies between Port Moresby and Enga Province, deploying a number of military assets such as a C-27 Spartan, a C-130J Hercules aircraft, and a C-17A Globemaster to deliver relief supplies from Brisbane to Port Moresby. New Zealand provided approximately NZD 900,000 in aid, deploying a Defence Force C-130 aircraft and emergency personnel to support relief operations.

Key Learnings

- **Access constraints require pre-planning:** Blocked highways and unstable terrain significantly delayed relief operations. Future disaster preparedness should include contingency plans for alternative access routes and pre-positioned supplies in remote areas.
- **Accessibility and availability of data are critical:** The lack of reliable demographic and geographic data complicated response coordination and resource allocation. Strengthening local data systems and conducting regular assessments can improve emergency response efficiency.
- **Security risks can undermine humanitarian efforts:** Ongoing tribal clashes and inter-communal tensions posed serious risks to responders and displaced communities. Integrating conflict-sensitive approaches and enhancing civil-military coordination are essential in volatile environments.
- **Civil-military collaboration enhances operational capacity:** Civil-military collaboration played a vital role in the response efforts, contributing significantly to search and rescue operations, securing access routes, and delivering humanitarian aid. Establishing a more predictable and structured civil-military coordination mechanism is essential to enable rapid deployment and effective collaboration during emergencies. This also includes coordination with foreign military forces, particularly in situations where the scale of the response exceeds the capacity of domestic resources.



CASE STUDY: SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS EARTHQUAKE 2018



February 2018



544,000 affected



160 fatalities



USD 140 million

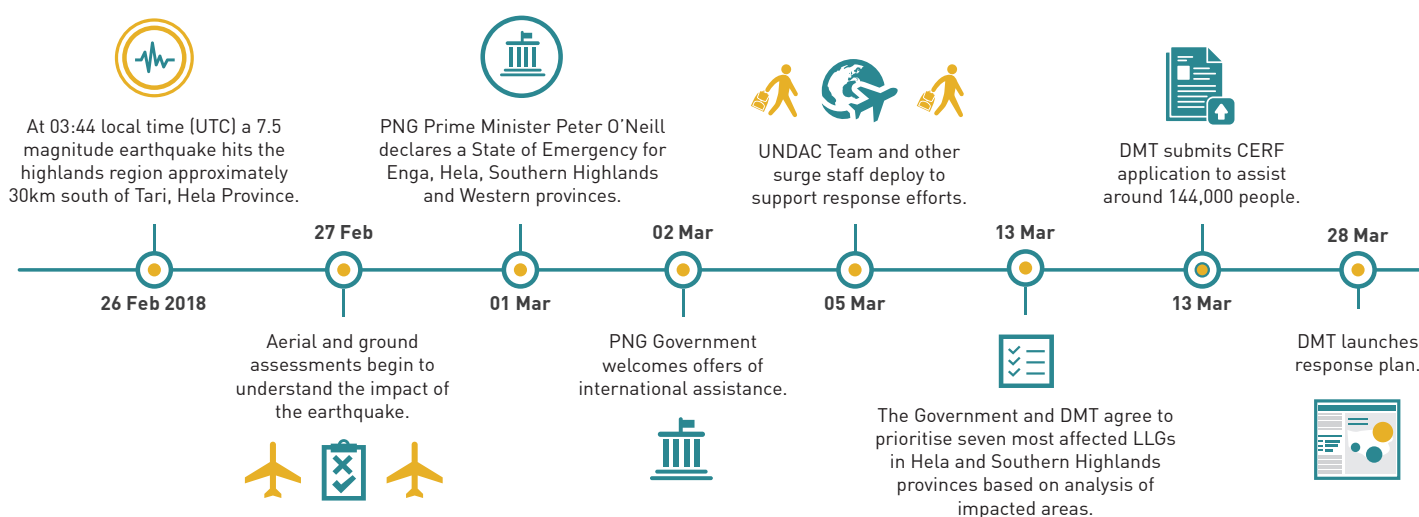
In 2018, a powerful 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck the remote Southern Highlands of PNG, affecting over 544,000 people and displacing nearly 18,000. The earthquake and hundreds of aftershocks caused widespread destruction to roads, bridges, homes, schools, and hospitals, further isolating an already insecure region. Aerial surveys revealed extensive landslides that severed access to entire villages, isolating them from aid for days and even weeks. As a result of these hazardous conditions and ongoing safety concerns, many residents opted to sleep outdoors to avoid further risk.

Together, with humanitarian partners and the private sector, the UN mobilised over \$20 million to aid 200,000 people in need of immediate relief. The humanitarian response faced significant challenges including damaged infrastructure, limited access, and ongoing inter-communal violence. Clan conflicts led also to further displacement, loss of services, reduced economic activity, and heightened tensions. Access to clean water, food, shelter, and medical care became urgent priorities, with

many displaced people living in informal camps lacking adequate water and sanitation.

Security concerns affected the delivery of humanitarian assistance and clashes and escalating tensions led to a temporary suspension of operations. In Hela Province, multiple incidents prompted humanitarian organisations to halt their activities. On 14 June, violent protests erupted in Mendi, Southern Highlands Province, following a court ruling on an election dispute. In response, the Prime Minister declared a State of Emergency. International humanitarian agencies collaborated with the PNG Government to identify safe locations for scaled-down operations, aiming to resume the response as soon as conditions allowed. Meanwhile, relief efforts continued in areas unaffected by the unrest. Besides delivering the humanitarian assistance, the the HAT and UNDAC also supported the National Disaster Centre with information management and coordination of assessments.

TIMELINE OF FOREIGN DISASTER RELIEF AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE IN 2018



Source: Adapted from <https://reliefweb.int/report/papua-new-guinea/papua-new-guinea-highlands-earthquake-disaster-management-team-response-plan>

CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION

During the earthquake response, the PNG Government was simultaneously managing multiple overlapping emergencies, creating one of the most complex humanitarian coordination contexts in PNG. The humanitarian response to the earthquake was led by the National Government through a designated Disaster Controller, supported by the Disaster Management Committee (DMC) and DMT. Coordination at the provincial level was carried out by the Southern Highlands and Hela Provincial Disaster Coordination Offices, alongside the PNGDF.

The response efforts were overseen by the Disaster Controller, who also served as Acting Provincial Administrator. Meanwhile, the response to a concurrent polio outbreak was led by the National Department of Health, with support from WHO and UNICEF, and implemented through emergency operations centres within provincial health departments.

For earthquake response, a UN Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team was deployed within the first week to assist the PNG Government and humanitarian partners. The UN facilitated coordination through the PNG DMT which quickly mobilised to define priorities and support government-led efforts. To strengthen field operations, the UN also established coordination offices in both Southern Highlands and Hela provinces. PNGDF played a key role in the earthquake affected area clearing armed roadblocks and working with local communities to ensure a safe relief distribution.

Foreign militaries were also involved, with the ADF launching Operation PNG Assist 2018 to support earthquake relief efforts. Over 110 ADF personnel, along with aircraft including a C-130J, a C-27 Spartan, and CH-47F Chinooks, delivered essential supplies to remote areas. A C-17A Globemaster also transported aid from Brisbane to Port Moresby. ADF teams supported the PNGDF in distributing medical supplies and conducted early damage assessments of key infrastructure.

Key Learnings

- **Prepositioned supplies play a critical role:** Prepositioned emergency items such as shelter kits and WASH items enabled a rapid initial response, allowing immediate distributions while additional resources were mobilised.
- **Surge capacity and ready personnel were instrumental:** The rapid deployment of surge personnel from within the UN system and standby partners was instrumental. Their expertise, commitment, and resilience under challenging conditions significantly strengthened the response.
- **Access, infrastructure challenges, security, and conflicts disrupted the aid delivery:** Damaged roads, bridges, and airfields, combined with the region's remoteness and landslides severely restricted access to affected areas, delaying aid delivery. Moreover, the conflict also contributed to temporary suspensions of operations in Hela province and a declared State of Emergency in the Southern Highlands.
- **Strong civil-military coordination is essential:** Strong collaboration between the PNGDF, ADF, and humanitarian actors was essential for ensuring effective logistics, security, and aid distribution, particularly in hard-to-reach areas. This coordination was especially critical in the context of overlapping emergencies, where integrated and flexible mechanisms were required to manage complex and evolving response needs.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACMC	Australian Civil-Military Centre
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AHP	Australian Humanitarian Partnership
CPP	Church Partnership Programme
DCP	Defence Cooperation Program
DMT	Disaster Management Team
DPLGA	Department of Provincial and Local Government Affairs
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
FRANZ	France-Australia-New Zealand
ISCG	Inter-Sector Coordination Group
LLG	Local Level Government
NDC	National Disaster Centre
NEC	National Executive Council
NEMA	National Emergency Management Authority
PDC	Provincial Disaster Centres
PEC	Provincial Executive Council
PNGDF	Papua New Guinea Defence Force
PNG	Papua New Guinea
PRG	Pacific Response Group
RCO	Resident Coordinator's Office
RPNGC	Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
SPDMM	South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting
UNHAT	United Nations Humanitarian Advisory Team
UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNRC	United Nations Resident Coordinator

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SOLOMON ISLANDS



HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN EMERGENCIES

Inlets and passages in the south east of Choiseul island, Solomon Islands.
Photo: Gilmore Tana / Shutterstock



SOLOMON ISLANDS

Solomon Islands is highly susceptible to natural disasters. The country has eight active volcanoes, with approximately 17% of the population residing within 30 kilometres of one. In addition, Solomon Islands is exposed to earthquakes, tsunamis, tropical cyclones, floods and droughts. Solomon Islands was ranked 34th out of 193 countries in the 2025 edition of the World Risk Report, the second highest after Papua New Guinea in this analysis. This diversity of hazards and high vulnerability emphasises the need for effective coordination across all stakeholders in disaster response.

Recognising the connection between climate change and disasters, the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) has placed strong emphasis on responding to climate change in disaster management strategies, key policies and government structures. Solomon Islands' disaster management framework build upon the National Disaster Council Act of 1989. Its coordination is led by the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO), and overseen by the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster

Management and Meteorology (MECDM). Furthermore, the National Disaster Management Plan 2018 provides strong operational guidance by establishing institutional arrangements that enable the SIG to coordinate disaster management. This national coordination system integrates a wide range of stakeholders, including national agencies, provincial authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Red Cross movement, United Nations (UN) agencies, and regional partners.

Solomon Islands is one of many Pacific nations without a standing military that can be assigned to disaster response and humanitarian operations. The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) acts as the counterpart for foreign military related support. In addition, the SIG has cultivated strategic relationships with foreign defence and military partners to ensure support is available when needed. These partnerships are facilitated through mechanisms such as the FRANZ Arrangement and the Australia-Solomon Islands Bilateral Security Treaty, which enable coordinated international assistance during emergencies.



KEY EVENTS IN THE RECENT EVOLUTION OF HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN SOLOMON ISLANDS



DISASTER RISK PROFILE

KEY FACTS

Official name: Solomon Islands

Land Area: 27,990 km²

Population: 828,857 (SPC, 2025)

Capital: Honiara

Official Languages: Solomon Islands Pidjin, English

Disaster Focal point: National Disaster Management Office

Police: Royal Solomon Islands Police Force



Source: Adapted from reliefweb.int Solomon Islands location map

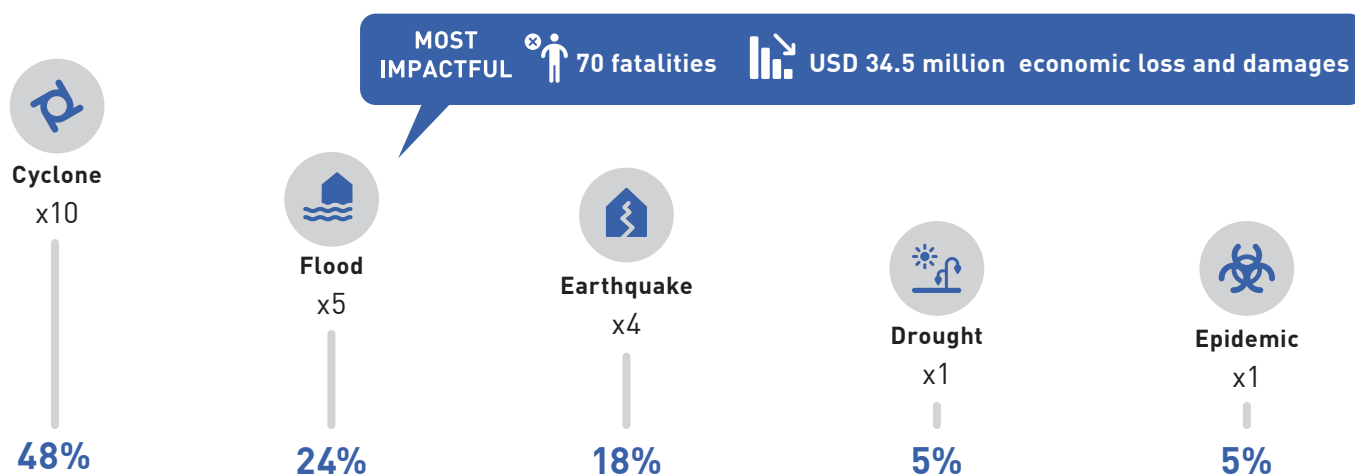
GENERAL INFORMATION

Solomon Islands is an archipelagic state situated in the southwest Pacific Ocean west of Papua New Guinea and northeast of Vanuatu. Solomon Islands faces significant and multifaceted natural hazards, including tropical cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, droughts, and volcanic activity. The SIG currently maintains separate policies and governance arrangements for climate change and DRR, but its Disaster Risk Mitigation (DRM) plans are being increasingly linked to climate considerations.

FREQUENCY AND PROPORTION OF DISASTERS BY TYPE FROM 2000 TO 2025

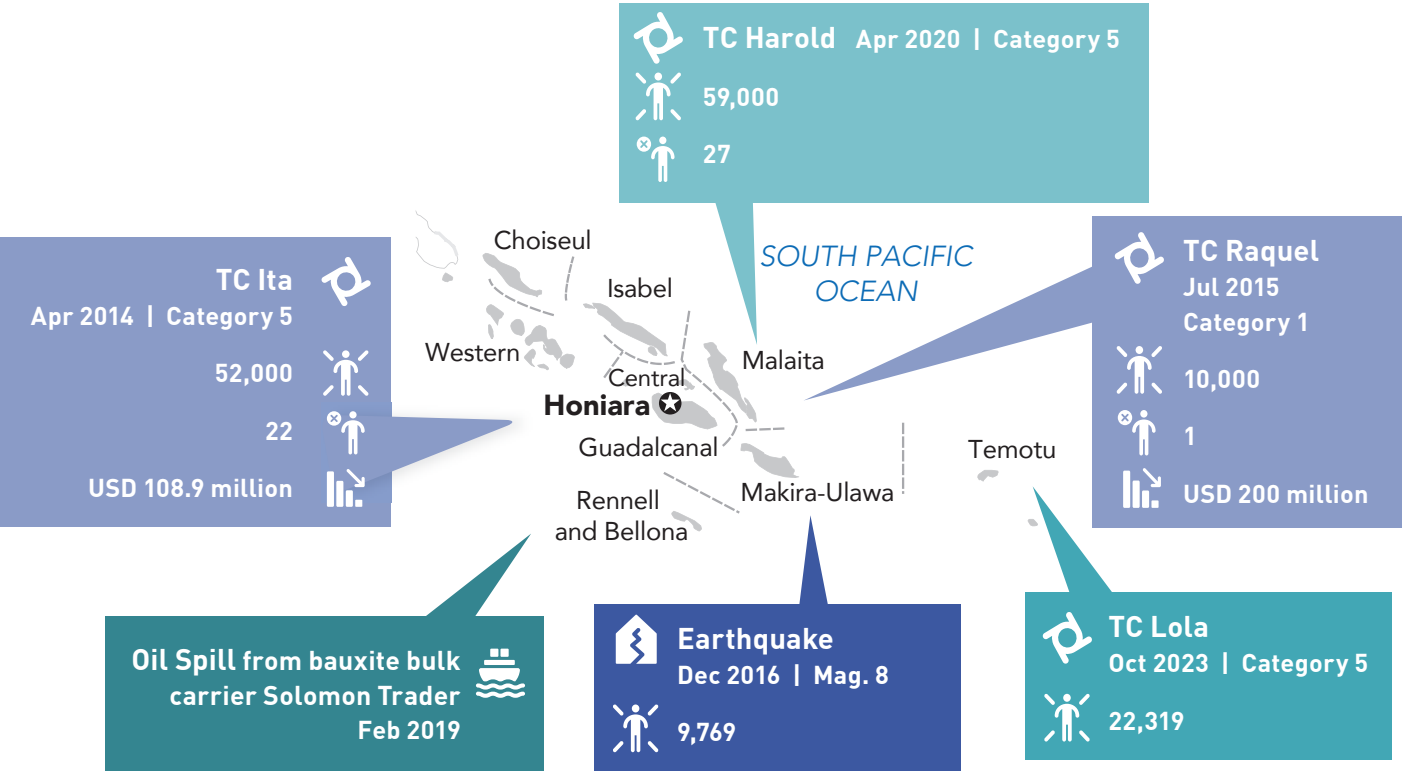
Solomon Islands has been affected by 21 natural disasters over the last 25 years. Its location in the "Pacific Ring of Fire" and the cyclone belt ranks it as 34th most at-risk country for natural disasters, the highest risk ranking in this analysis.

The graph below orders Solomon Islands' natural disasters by type according to their frequency, with the most to least frequent moving left to right and the percentage frequency illustrated. The most impactful disaster type is identified but not ranked. Since 2000, cyclones (48%) have been the most frequent disaster to affect Solomon Islands, followed by floods (24%). Floods were the most impactful, causing a significant number of fatalities and economic loss.



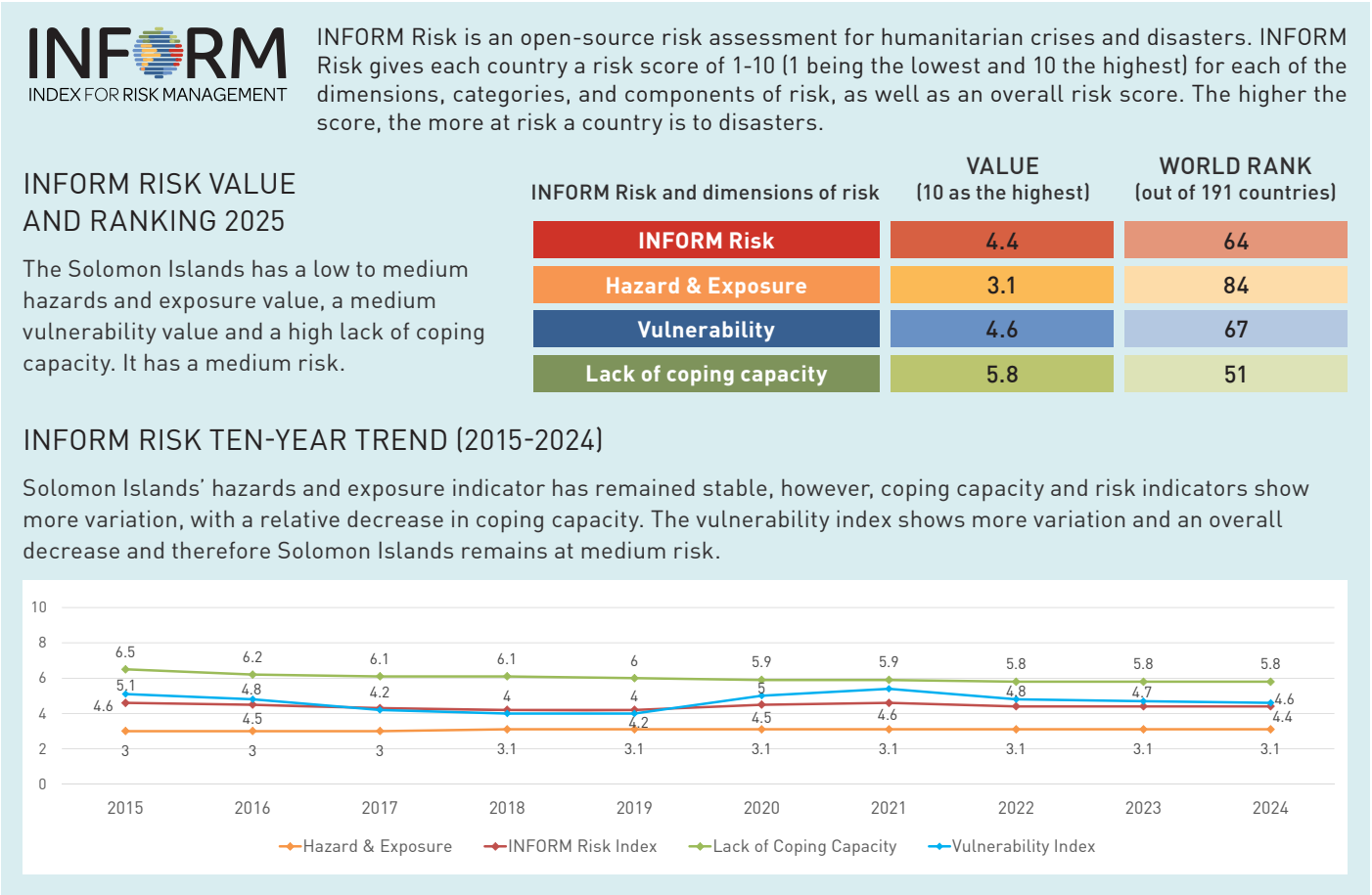
Source: <https://public.emdat.be/data>

MAJOR DISASTERS (2014-2025)



Divisions on the map represent the 9 provinces of the Solomon Islands.

Affected population Fatalities Economic loss



Source: <https://drmkc.jrc.ec.europa.eu/inform-index/INFORM-Risk/Country-Risk-Profile>

KEY POLICIES, PLANS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION



National Disaster Council Act 1989

The [National Disaster Council Act](#) outlines the national framework for disaster management by establishing the National Disaster Council as responsible for coordinating national efforts in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. The act established the MECDM which forms a National Disaster Management Committee, Provincial Disaster Committees (PDCs), which develop both national and provincial disaster plans. It provides a legal basis for the National Disaster Council to perform its mandates during emergencies, including exercising authority, issuing directives and mobilising resources through the National Disaster Council Fund, and legal protections and mechanisms for accountability such as financial audits and reporting to Parliament.



National Development Strategy 2016–2035

The [National Development Strategy](#) maps out a strategic direction for the development of policies, priorities, and programmes for Solomon Islands. It sets out a framework for their use as an integrated reference for both government and non-government stakeholders.



National Disaster Risk Financing Strategy 2024–2027

The [National Disaster Risk Financing Strategy](#) helps identify strategic financial enhancements to enable the country to respond to and recover from disaster events more effectively. This strategy complements initiatives already underway, such as those contained in the [Solomon Islands Roadmap for Improving Access to Climate Finance and Public Spending 2022–2027](#).



National Disaster Management Plan 2018

The [National Disaster Management Plan](#) sets the DRM arrangements and establishes processes for implementation and capacity strengthening. Rooted in the National Disaster Council Act 1989, the Plan outlines roles and responsibilities across national, provincial and community levels, emphasising coordination through bodies like the National Disaster Operations Committee (N-DOC) and the Recovery Coordination Committee (RCC).



KEY CIVILIAN RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTERS

NATIONAL DISASTER FOCAL POINT

The National Disaster Council (NDC), established under the Disaster Council Act 1989, provides strategic leadership for disaster risk management in Solomon Islands. It advises all ministries and coordinates national preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. The National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) supports the Council by serving as its secretariat and leading planning, coordination, and public awareness across all levels of government. Operational and recovery functions are carried out by the N-DOC and the RCC, while the proposed Climate and Risk Resilience Committee will integrate disaster and climate risk management.

NATIONAL DISASTER COUNCIL

The National Disaster Council reports to the Cabinet and leads the development of disaster management policies and strategic planning. It oversees disaster response and coordinates international, regional, and bilateral support during emergencies. There are three committees under the National Disaster Council: The National Disaster Operations Committee (N-DOC), the Recovery Coordination Committee (RCC), and the Climate and Risk Resilience (CRR) Committee.

 **Established by:** Disaster Council Act 1989

 **Leadership:** Permanent Secretary of MECDM

-  **Key functions:**
- Overseeing the establishment and maintenance of structures for preparedness and response operations at the national, provincial and local levels
 - Advising Cabinet on strategic institutional, policy and funding issues necessary for effective disaster management
 - Providing management oversight of the activities of the National Disaster Council committees, approving annual committee programs and recommending committee initiatives for funding where appropriate
 - Managing relationships with international, regional and bi-lateral partners to coordinate and optimise external support for DRM activities
 - Receiving annual reports from the National Disaster Council committees – in the event of a disaster provide strategic oversight of the response to and recovery from the event.

 **Composition:** Permanent Secretaries of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade Relations, Ministry of Transport, Works and Public Utilities, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, Ministry of Posts and Communications, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Ministry of Provincial Government, Commissioner of Police, Secretary to Cabinet.

NATIONAL DISASTER OPERATIONS COMMITTEE (N-DOC)

The N-DOC is responsible for coordinating disaster management operations for both preparedness and response. It supports planning and coordination at the national, provincial and local levels. It consists of committees on health, education, protection, livelihood, infrastructure and camp management.

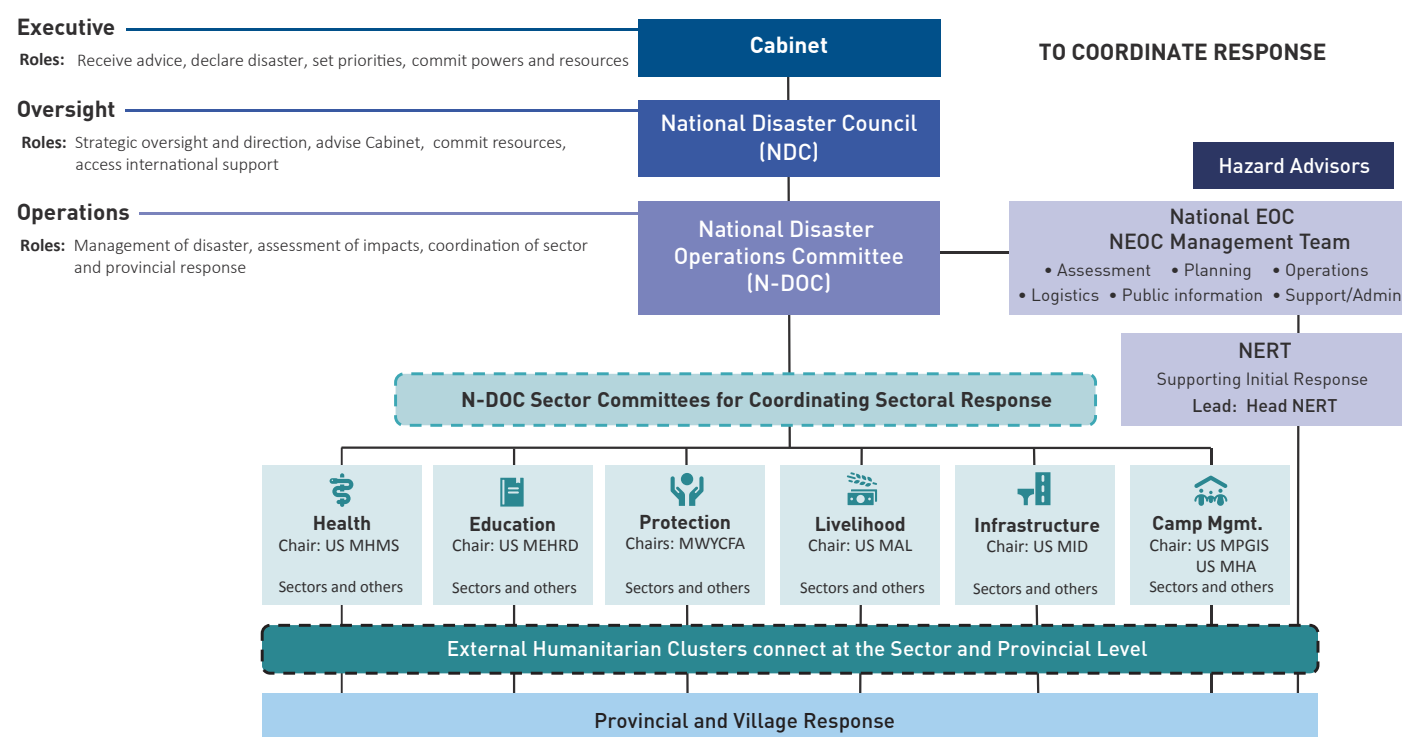
 **Established by:** National Disaster Management Plan 2018

 **Leadership:** Director of NDMO

-  **Key functions:**
- Providing public awareness and training, issuing early warnings
 - Managing impact assessments for the sectoral committees
 - Delivering sectoral responses (health, education, protection etc.) to disasters.

 **Composition:** Deputy Commissioner of Police Operations and Under Secretaries from the Ministries of Finance and Treasury; Women, Youth, Children and Family Affairs; Health and Medical Services; Education and Human Resources Development; Agriculture and Livestock; Infrastructure Development; Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening; and Home Affairs. It also includes representatives of the RCC, the UN and the Solomon Islands Red Cross Society.

N-DOC STRUCTURE: DISASTER MANAGEMENT OPERATIONAL ARRANGEMENT



Source: Adapted from <https://www.rcrc-resilience-southeastasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/National-Disaster-Management-Plan-2018.pdf>, p. 42

RECOVERY COORDINATION COMMITTEE (RCC)

The RCC was established following the April 2014 floods and is led by MDPAC. The RCC is responsible for the national recovery action plan and supporting a coordinated national response to recovery efforts. Its responsibilities include establishing arrangements, policies and procedures at the national, sectoral and provincial levels to guide and coordinate recovery and rehabilitation following disaster events. This involves a transition of coordination responsibilities from the NDMO to MDPAC between the response and recovery phases, intended to integrate recovery more closely with national development planning.

 **Established by:** National Disaster Management Plan 2018

 **Leadership:** Permanent Secretary or Under-Secretary of MDPAC

 **Key functions:**

- Managing and coordinating the recovery and rehabilitation planning process following disasters and for overseeing sector implementation
- Developing recovery funding arrangements for recommendation to Cabinet through the National Disaster Council. This includes reallocating sector budgets, international partner and stakeholder

support and commitment through national development planning as appropriate.

 **Composition:** Representatives of various government ministries and agencies, with its leadership and specific composition based on the nature of the disaster.

CLIMATE AND RISK RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Proposed to be established under the resilient development framework, with responsibility for the promotion of risk resilience and the integrated management of disaster and climate risk.

 **Established by:** National Disaster Management Plan 2018

 **Leadership:** Permanent Secretary or Under-Secretary of MDPAC

 **Key functions:**

- Coordinating the activities of agencies for disaster and climate risk purposes
- Coordinating policy development and the management of programs for resilient development and disaster and climate risk.

NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT OFFICE (NDMO)

The NDMO, operating under MECDM, hosts the NEOC and serves as the Secretariat to the National Disaster Council. It plays a central role in coordinating national DRR and emergency response. The NDMO is responsible for leading and overseeing DRM planning at the national level, ensuring that strategies are effectively coordinated and monitored. It also supervises the implementation of DRR initiatives by NGOs and other partners, fostering collaboration across sectors. In addition, the NDMO supports communities to reduce their vulnerability and manage the impacts of disasters.

 **Established by:** Disaster Council Act 1989

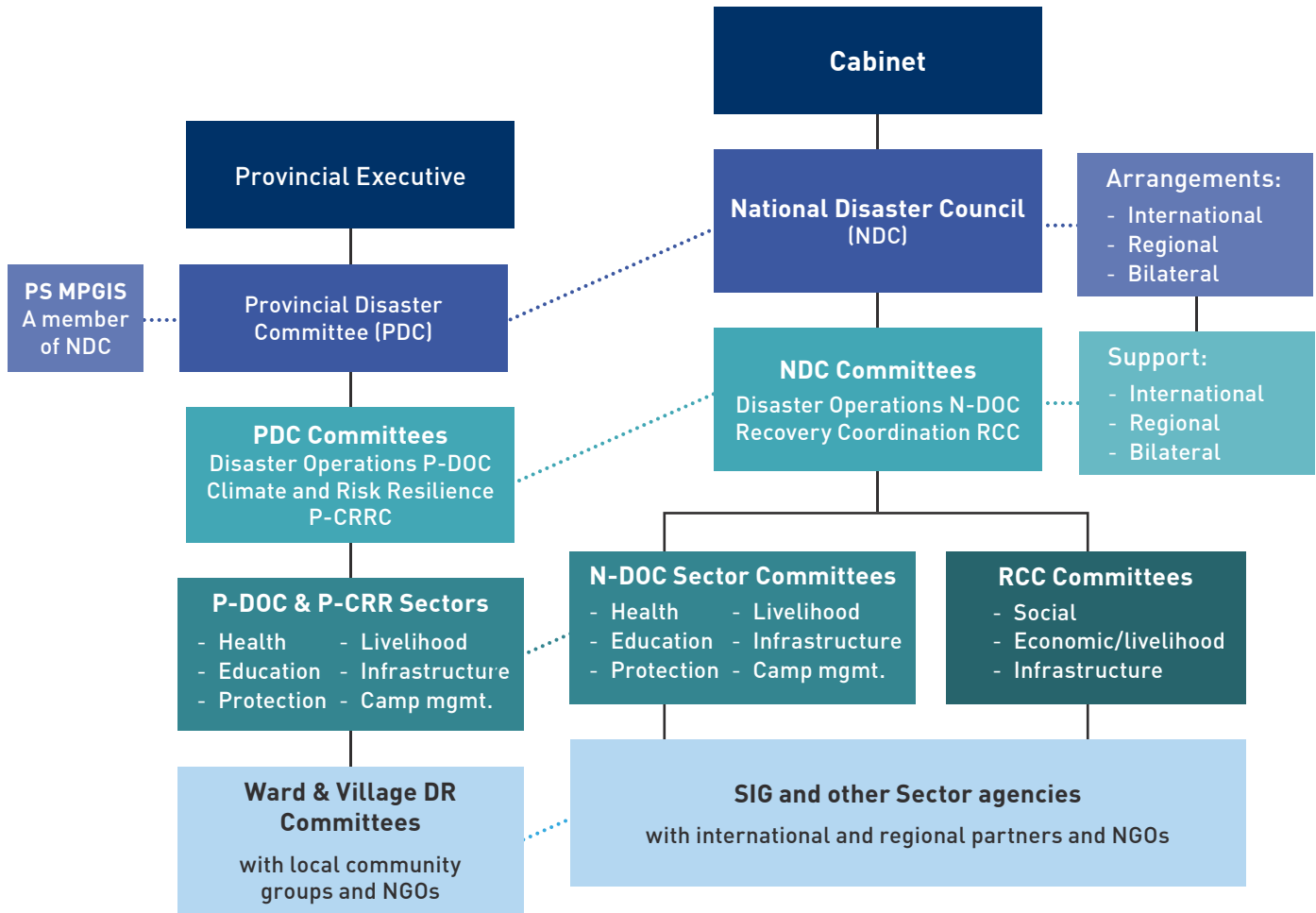
 **Leadership:** Director of NDMO

 **Key functions:**

- Advising the Minister and the National Disaster Council on all matters relating to DRM

- Developing policy and providing leadership and advocacy across the DRM sector
- Providing planning for DRM at the national level
- Coordinating, supporting and monitoring planning and operations for DRM at the sector, provincial, and community levels
- Coordinating the national response to and recovery from disasters
- Developing and supporting public awareness of DRM and their role within it
- Engaging with partners, NGOs, and civil society to ensure their involvement in DRM is integrated with the arrangements of the National Disaster Management Plan
- Establishing and maintaining a database for DRM information, including hazard and vulnerability maps, planning documents and disaster information
- Monitoring disaster risk mitigation efforts and reporting to the National Disaster Council.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



Source: Adapted from <https://reliefweb.int/report/solomon-islands/solomon-islands-disaster-management-reference-handbook-october-2023>

SUBNATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

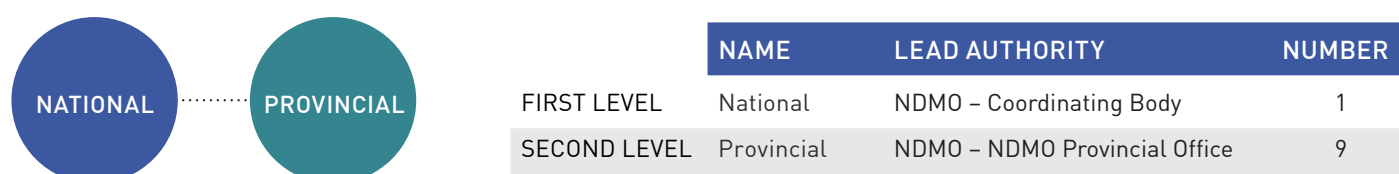
Subnational disaster management in Solomon Islands operates at two levels: provincial and community. At the provincial level, PDCs lead disaster planning and coordination, guided by the National Disaster Council and supported by technical working groups. At the community level, Ward and Village Disaster Committees coordinate direct support to affected communities.

The disaster committee structure is reflected at the provincial level through the establishment of PDCs. These committees operate under the guidance of the National Disaster Council and are responsible for implementing and managing the Provincial Disaster Plan. Additionally, each committee at the provincial level is supported by a Provincial Technical Working Group. The Provincial Government serves as the lead authority in disaster coordination at the local level, with its members drawn from various provincial offices. Each PDC is chaired by the Provincial Secretary.

At the community level the National Disaster Council has established Ward and Village Disaster Risk Committees, which work closely with sector committees to provide resources and other support to households and individuals during and after disasters.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN SOLOMON ISLANDS

Solomon Islands is a unitary state with two levels of government, the national government and provincial governments.



SUBNATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

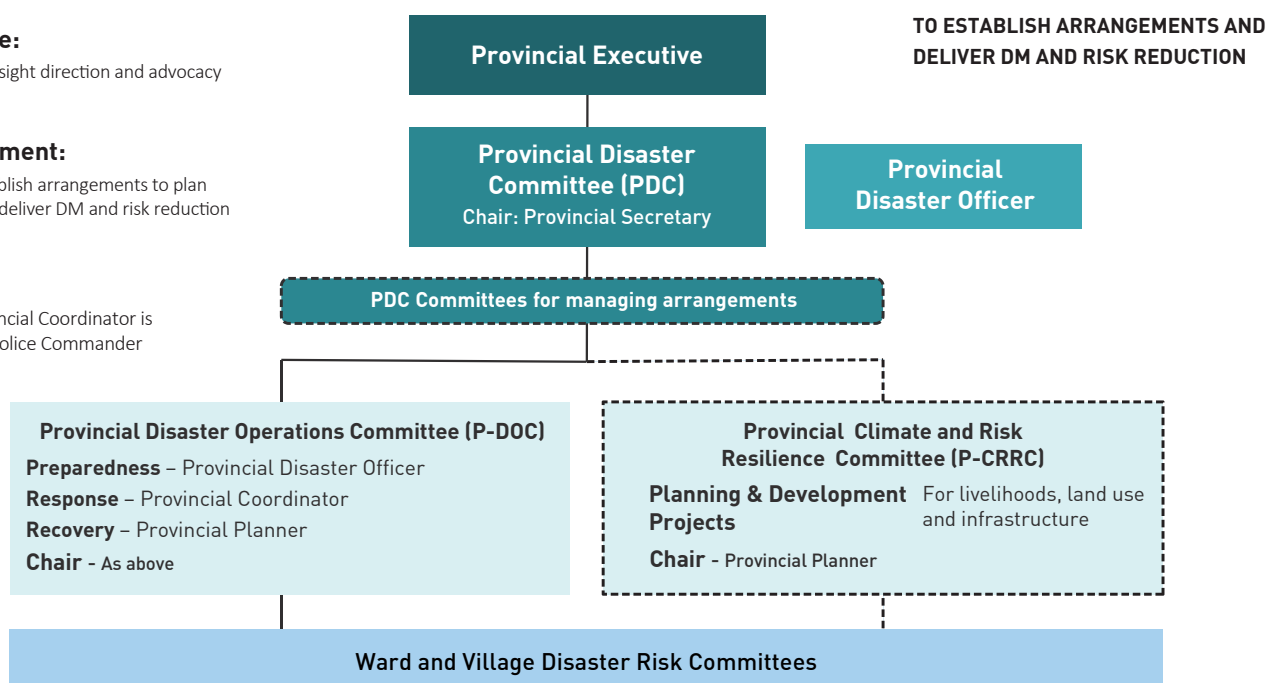
Executive:

Roles: Oversight direction and advocacy

Management:

Roles: Establish arrangements to plan and deliver DM and risk reduction

Note: Provincial Coordinator is Provincial Police Commander



Source: Adapted from <https://www.rcrc-resilience-southeastasia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/National-Disaster-Management-Plan-2018.pdf>, p. 40

KEY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND METEOROLOGY (MECDM)

The MECDM comprises four technical divisions: Environment and Conservation, Climate Change, Disaster Management, and Meteorology. It leads disaster management across prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery, with the NDMO and Climate Change Division serving as key implementing bodies for disaster risk reduction and climate-related policies.

MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

The Ministry of Home Affairs coordinates functions that shape the welfare of Solomon Islands citizens. In coordination with the NDMO, it participates in disaster management through its role as a member of the National Disaster Council and the N-DOC.

MINISTRY OF PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL STRENGTHENING

The key mandates of the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening (MPGIS) are to strengthen provincial governance by overseeing government departments, delivering community services, and managing resettlement schemes to support effective decentralisation and improve service delivery. It helps build provincial capacity for DRM, working closely with other ministries such as MECDM to ensure a coordinated approach. MPGIS collaborates with provincial governments and stakeholders to align disaster management with national priorities, while facilitating access to financial resources, including the Provincial Capacity Development Fund, to support climate resilience and risk reduction initiatives.

MINISTRY OF POLICE, NATIONAL SECURITY AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES

The Ministry of Police, National Security and Correctional Services coordinates national security, policing and correction services to ensure a safe and secure Solomon Islands. It is mandated to support the corporate functions and the operations of the RSIPF and the Correctional Services of Solomon Islands (CSSI). In disaster management, its role focuses on maintaining law and order, security, and providing assistance during emergencies. This includes coordinating national security efforts, supporting the RSIPF and CSSI, and assisting in disaster response and recovery.

MINISTRY OF TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE, PEACE AND ECCLESIASTICAL AFFAIRS

The Ministry of Traditional Governance, Peace and Ecclesiastical Affairs was tasked to implement frameworks such as the National Reparation Policy and the National Reintegration Policy. Its mission is to enable an inclusive and resilient state for the future. The Ministry implements peacebuilding initiatives, such as facilitating reconciliation ceremonies and community dialogues, while fulfilling its broader mandate to contribute to social stability. It also works with communities recovering from disasters to restore social stability.



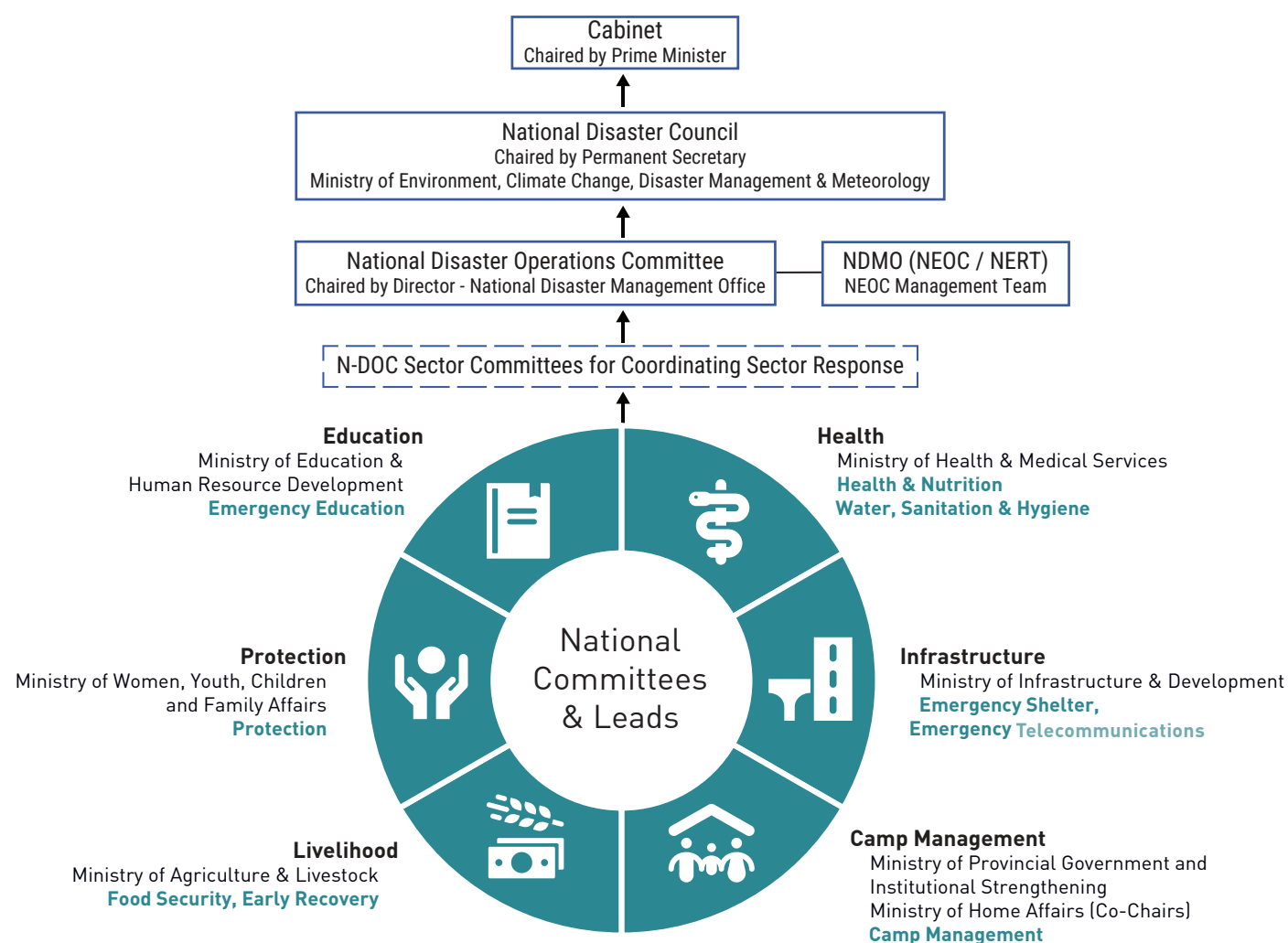
COORDINATION MECHANISMS

NATIONAL CLUSTER SYSTEM

The National Disaster Operations Committee and its sectoral committees can be described as the cluster system of Solomon Islands. The SIG uses the term committee instead of cluster. As presented in the disaster management structure, the SIG devolves the coordination function to two committees: the N-DOC, which handles emergency coordination, and the Climate Risk and Resilience Committee which handles long term resilience and risk reduction.

Within this framework, sectoral committees on Health, Education, Protection, Livelihood, Infrastructure, and Camp Management coordinate disaster response efforts. These committees are led by the relevant ministries and are coordinated under the overall leadership of the NDMO. International humanitarian actors and CSOs are expected to align their support with their respective sectors of activity and operate within the sectoral framework. The following figure depicts the link between the sectoral committees with the national coordination mechanism.

NATIONAL COORDINATION STRUCTURE



Source: Adapted from <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/solomon-islands/solomon-islands-humanitarian-coordination-structure-23-october-2025>

MOBILISATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Coordination of international humanitarian assistance is facilitated through the structure illustrated below and managed by the NDMO. Furthermore, the Ministry of Finance and Treasury oversees financial accountability and tracks funds.



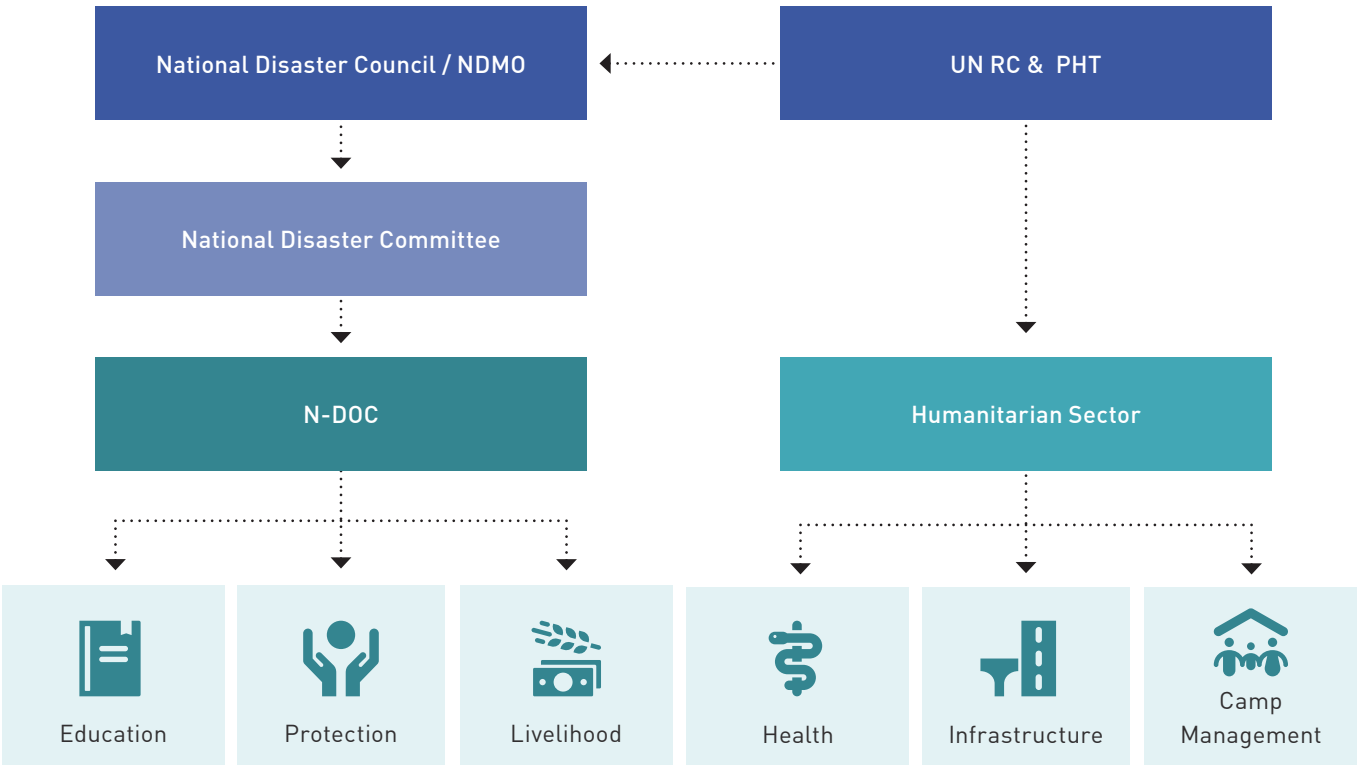
COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

During disasters, international coordination is managed by the N-DOC, and during recovery by the RCC, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs acting as the primary point of contact for international partners. The National Disaster Management Plan 2018 also outlines coordination through the donor mechanism led by the UN JPO, and operational support via the PHT and Inter-Agency Standing Committee cluster arrangements.

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION SYSTEM

In Solomon Islands, UN agencies coordinate through the Resident Coordinator based in the Multi-Country Office in Fiji. The RC also oversees other Pacific countries including Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. As part of this regional framework, a dedicated country coordination specialist supports and coordinates UN efforts specifically for the Solomon Islands. The Resident Coordinator also leads the Pacific Humanitarian Team in these countries with secretariat support provided by UN-OCHA. The PHT is a function of the Global Cluster system and includes UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations.

The following figure illustrates the connections between the international coordination system and the national coordination framework through the UN RC (HC) and the PHT.



KEY POLICE RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTERS

ROYAL SOLOMON ISLANDS POLICE FORCE

The Royal Solomon Islands Police Force (RSIPF) is part of Solomon Islands' national disaster management structure. It contributes to national coordination arrangements as a member of the NDC and N-DOC.

 **Established:** 1954

 **Leadership:** Commissioner

 **Headquarters:** Honiara

 **Key role:** The RSIPF coordinates with other agencies, including the NDMO to provide disaster relief and support to affected communities

Key functions:

- maintaining a liaison presence in the NEOC through the Operations Function Team, contributing information to the assessment of the situation
- providing transport and logistic support to initial response and assessment through the NERT
- being the Solomon Islands civil/military focal point for foreign armed forces providing support to disaster situations. Support is provided through the NEOC with RSIPF.

 **Composition:** RSIPF operates as a single mobile unit with specialised functions including fire and emergency response. It also has a maritime division which carries out operations across the nation's Exclusive Economic Zone and national borders to support fisheries enforcement, immigration control, and national security.

 **Coordination mechanism:** N-DOC

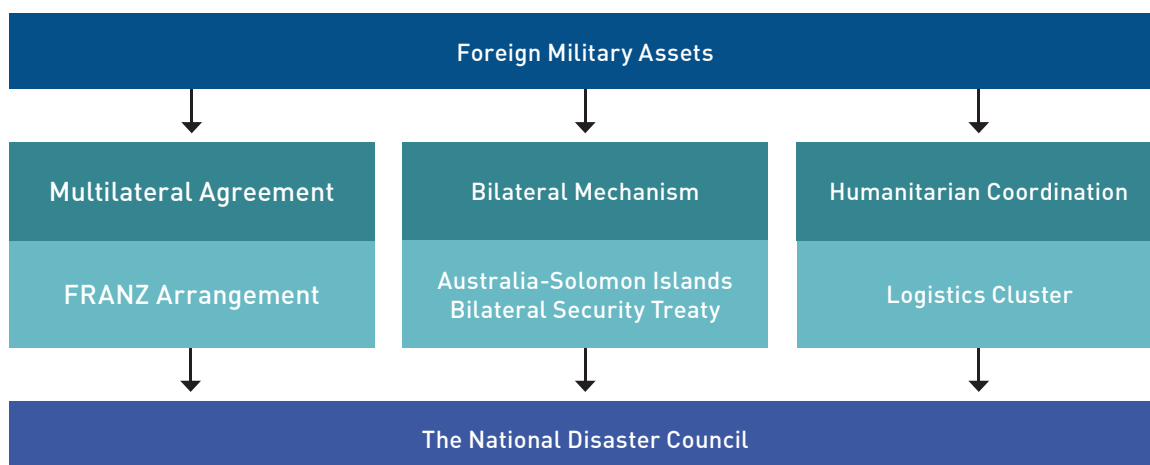
HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION MECHANISMS

COORDINATION OF FOREIGN MILITARY ASSETS

Foreign military assistance to SIG is facilitated by agreements such as the Australia–Solomon Islands Bilateral Security Treaty, the FRANZ Arrangement, and other international security agreements under HADR. The assistance includes providing personnel and resources for search and rescue operations, conducting damage assessments and supporting initial clean-up efforts, and contributing to broader DRM initiatives.

Coordination takes place either directly with the NDMO or through the Ministry of Police.

COORDINATION OF FOREIGN MILITARY ASSETS



CASE STUDY: TROPICAL CYCLONE ITA | FLASH FLOOD 2014



3 April 2014



50,000 affected



23 fatalities



USD 108 million

OVERVIEW

In April 2014, Solomon Islands experienced some of the worst flooding in its history. After two weeks of heavy rain, a low-pressure system developed into TC Ita. The heavy rain caused severe flooding in Honiara and the surrounding Guadalcanal Plains, bursting the banks of the Mataniko River and washing away bridges and the homes of riverside communities. Large areas of Honiara were submerged, affecting over 50,000 people and resulting in 23 fatalities. Significant infrastructure damage left large areas of the city without water, sewerage, and electricity.

Access roads to Honiara were closed due to fallen debris and damaged or destroyed bridges. The government declared a state of emergency and set up 13 evacuation centres in Honiara city, temporarily sheltering about 10,000 people.

Overcrowding and contamination of water supplies became major health concerns in some evacuation centres. Additionally, because the Guadalcanal Plains include World War II battlefields, flooding posed a risk of displacing and exposing unexploded ordnance, significantly increasing hazards.



Destruction alongside the Mataniko riverbank in Honiara after flash floods. Photo: Janna Hamilton / New Zealand Red Cross

Source: <https://floodlist.com/australia/thousands-affected-by-floods-in-solomon-islands>

CIVIL–MILITARY COORDINATION

The NDMO led the flood response, supported by the Solomon Islands Red Cross Society and the wider Red Cross Red Crescent Movement (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Australian Red Cross, Fiji Red Cross Society, French Red Cross, New Zealand Red Cross, and Papua New Guinea Red Cross Society), alongside the RSIPF, NGOs, UN agencies and donor partners. The NDMO activated National and Provincial Emergency Operations Centres in Honiara City and Guadalcanal respectively. Australia and New Zealand sent military aircraft to deliver supplies and personnel and provided financial assistance for flood relief.

Key learnings

- **Pre-established protocols and clear disaster management roles for government, humanitarian actors and local authorities are critical.** This is particularly important during the transition from the declaration of a state of emergency to initiating early response measures, such as establishing evacuation centres, which require robust coordination.
- **Coordinated planning should account for multiple overlapping risks,** such as health emergencies, infrastructure damage and unexploded ordnance. Cross-sector collaboration enables more comprehensive and effective management of complex disaster situations.
- **Blocked roads, damaged bridges and disrupted utilities hindered relief efforts.** Coordinated logistics planning – including transport, communications, and supply chain management – is essential to reach affected areas rapidly and deliver aid efficiently.

CASE STUDY: TROPICAL CYCLONE HAROLD 2020



2-3 April 2020



Category 1



59,000 affected



27 fatalities



Solomon Islands coastal regions after being hit by TC Harold. Source: <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/cyclone-harold-intensifies-to-category-two-storm-aims-for-vanuatu-and-solomon-islands/ZQEZT3ZEHXAQ6H3S3QFR2AX7NI/>

OVERVIEW

TC Harold, a Category 1 storm, made landfall in the Solomon Islands on 2 April 2020, causing widespread flooding.¹ During the storm, 27 people died after being swept overboard from a ferry. The Australian Government and humanitarian agencies provided the NDMO with emergency funding to support damage assessment and initial clean-up. Communities in Western Province, Guadalcanal, Makira, and Rennell & Bellona were severely affected, with widespread damage to farms and homes. Buildings and roads across Honiara sustained significant damage. The NDMO led response coordination, focusing on immediate needs such as food security, shelter, health, and water and sanitation services.

CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION

Following TC Harold, the Solomon Islands NEOC worked closely with the PDCs in the four affected provinces to coordinate and carry out initial damage assessments. The disaster further strained communities already grappling with the state of emergency restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The RSIPF played a critical role in enforcing COVID-19 restrictions, quarantine measures, and border protocols throughout the relief

operation. Its logistical assets, including patrol boats and vehicles, were used to transport assessment teams and deliver supplies to remote islands. The UN, international NGOs and other humanitarian partners, including those under the Australian Humanitarian Partnership, worked alongside the SIG to conduct assessments and distribute emergency relief. This included shelter materials, hygiene kits, and water, sanitation, and hygiene supplies. Operating under the NDMO, the RSIPF coordinated with Australian, New Zealand and other partners' armed forces to facilitate technical and operational assistance. The ADF provided vital support during the response, primarily through logistics including the transportation of relief supplies.

Key Learnings

- **Disaster preparedness should include contingency planning for multi-hazards response,** such as to a concurrent cyclone and pandemic.
- **Investment in logistics and communications infrastructure is essential prior to disasters,** especially to ensure timely access to and support for remote and hard-to-reach areas.

¹ The storm gained strength and hit Vanuatu as category 5; it continued to move southeast to Fiji, where it displaced 10,000 people before reaching its full capacity in Tonga

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Australian Defence Force
AHP	Australian Humanitarian Partnership
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FRANZ	France–Australia–New Zealand Arrangement
JPO	Joint Presence Office
MECDM	Ministry of Environment, Climate Change, Disaster Management and Meteorology
MDPAC	Ministry of Planning and Aid Coordination
MPGIS	Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
N-DOC	National Disaster Operations Committee
NEOC	National Emergency Operations Centre
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PDC	Provincial Disaster Committee
PHT	Pacific Humanitarian Team
RCC	Recovery Coordination Committee
RSIPF	Royal Solomon Islands Police Force
SIG	Solomon Islands Government
SIMS	Solomon Islands Meteorological Services
TC	Tropical Cyclone
UN	United Nations
UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization
WFP	World Food Organization

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TONGA



**HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY
COORDINATION IN EMERGENCIES**

Kingdom of Tonga, viewed from above. Photo: Michal Durinik / Shutterstock

TONGA

The Kingdom of Tonga (Tonga) was ranked 34th out of 193 countries in the 2025 edition of the World Risk Report due to a combination of climate change risk, geographic location, and socio-economic features. It is an archipelago of 176 volcanic and coral islands (36 inhabited) in the southwest Pacific. Tonga faces frequent natural disasters, including tropical cyclones, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. In 2022 the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha’apai volcanic eruption and subsequent tsunami caused widespread devastation, damaging infrastructure and contaminating water supplies. Other hazards include droughts, earthquakes, and flash floods.

Disaster management in Tonga is overseen by the National Disaster Risk Management Office (NDRMO), formerly known as the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO), operating under the Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change, and Communications (MEIDECC). It is governed by the Disaster Risk Management Act 2021, which replaced the Emergency Management Act 2007, and guided by the National Disaster Risk Management Policy 2023–2030. Strategic coordination is provided by the National Disaster Risk Management Committee (NDRMC), while the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) supports

operational response. Tonga adopted a humanitarian cluster system in 2015 to facilitate coordination across sectors, with the first full activation taking place during Tropical Cyclone (TC) Gita in 2018. During disasters, Tonga’s military, known as His Majesty’s Armed Forces (HMAF), and the Tonga Police provide valuable support to the NDRMO, particularly in key area such as logistics, security, evacuations, and search and rescue. Both the military and police coordinate with NDRMO through the NDRMC and the NEOC.

Tonga’s civil-military coordination has evolved through participation in modern disaster response and international peacekeeping operations. The HMAF, formerly the Tonga Defence Service (TDS), has developed a contemporary focus on internal security, disaster relief, and participation in regional peacekeeping and security operations, enhancing its relationship with both its own civilian population and international allies through exercises like Exercise Talisman Sabre and the Pacific Partnership Mission. These engagements have strengthened Tonga’s disaster response capabilities, not only at the national level but also within the broader Pacific context.



KEY EVENTS IN THE RECENT EVOLUTION OF HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN TONGA

2015	The Government of Tonga formally introduced the cluster system, laying the foundation for structured humanitarian coordination across sectors which interfaces with civil-military coordination component.		
2018	Tropical Cyclone (TC) Gita (Category 4) triggered the first full-scale activation of the cluster system. Lessons from TC Gita informed the revisions to the National Emergency Plan. The response also involved civil-military coordination, with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) providing airlift, transport, logistical and engineering support.	2023	- The Pacific Partnership mission was carried out in Tonga, bringing together nearly 1,500 military personnel from Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, the UK, and the US to conduct humanitarian and civic preparedness activities, including engineering, disaster response, public health, and community outreach. - Tonga's Cabinet approved the Disaster Risk Management Policy Framework 2023–2030, giving overarching policy direction for managing disaster and climate risks. It aligns with the 2021 Disaster Risk Management Act and clarifies the roles of civilian and military actors, including the national cluster system.
2020	- TC Harold (Category 5) struck Tonga in April during the COVID-19 pandemic. Tonga Police and HMAF supported evacuations, search and rescue, and relief operations while following national health related restrictions. - In parallel, COVID-19 preparedness operations saw Tonga declare a State of Emergency before any cases were recorded. Tonga Police and HMAF took central roles in border control, quarantine enforcement, and supply logistics, demonstrating coordination beyond natural disasters.	2024	Tonga adopted the Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) Policy 2024–2030, formalising civilian and military roles in early warning dissemination and preparedness, ensuring timely and inclusive alerts across the whole of Tonga.
2021	The Disaster Risk Management Act 2021 (Royal Assented 2023) was drafted to replace the Emergency Management Act 2007. It also established the NDRMO and codified the civil-military coordination structure. The Disaster Risk Financing Strategy 2021–2025 was also launched, providing financial mechanisms to support rapid mobilisation of resources for disaster operations.	2025	- Tonga conducted its first Public Health Emergency Operations Centre simulation exercise, with support from the World Health Organization (WHO). The exercise strengthened health security coordination and tested integration between the health sector, NDRMO, Tonga Police and HMAF in epidemic preparedness and response. - Regional Exercise Longreach was held in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, bringing together military forces, non-government organisations, and civilian agencies to strengthen disaster response capabilities.
2022	The Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai volcanic eruption and tsunami represented the largest disaster in Tonga's modern history. The NEOC coordinated all operations and civilian, police and military actors collaborated on security, logistics, evacuations, damage assessment and relief distribution, with strong support from international partners, local civil societies and the Tonga Red Cross Society (TRCS).		



DISASTER RISK PROFILE

KEY FACTS

Official name: The Kingdom of Tonga

Land Area: 720 km²

Population: 103,972 (SPC 2025)

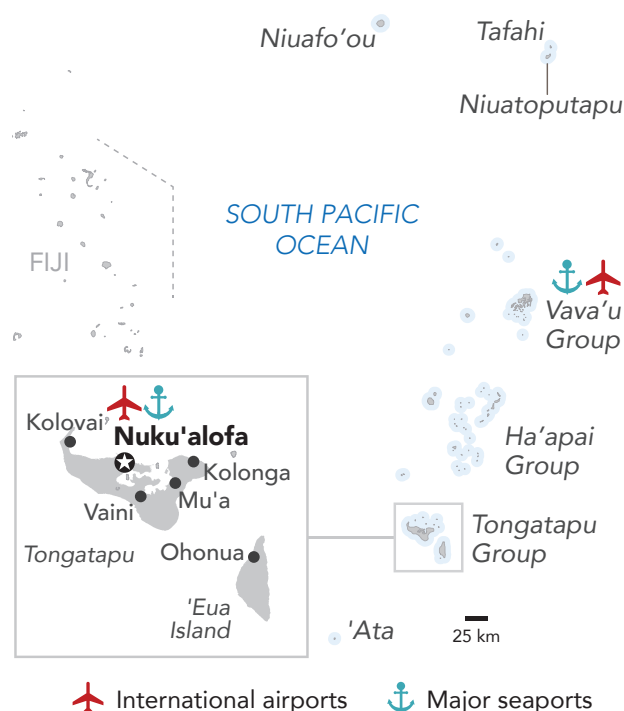
Capital: Nuku'alofa

Official Languages: Tongan, English

Disaster Focal point: National Disaster Risk Management Office

Military: His Majesty's Armed Forces

Police: Tonga Police



Source: Adapted from reliefweb.int Tonga location map, May 2024

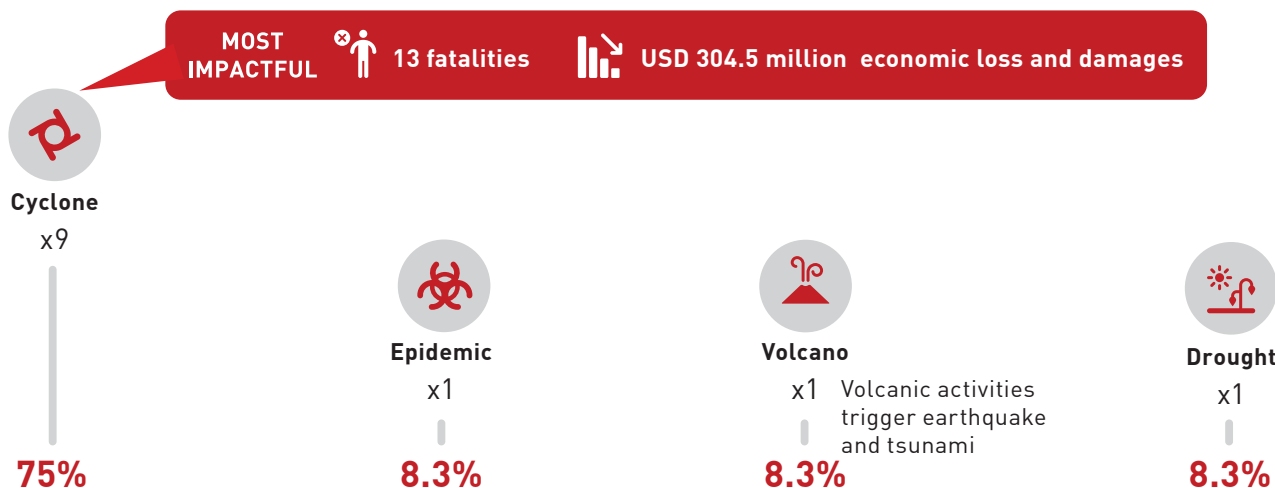
GENERAL INFORMATION

Tonga is highly exposed to a wide range of natural hazards, including tropical cyclones, floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and tsunamis, and low-lying coastal areas exacerbate these risks, which are further intensified by climate change. All of its islands are situated in a seismically and volcanically active region, meaning volcanic activity, earthquakes and tsunamis are frequent threats.

FREQUENCY AND PROPORTION OF DISASTERS BY TYPE FROM 2000 TO 2025

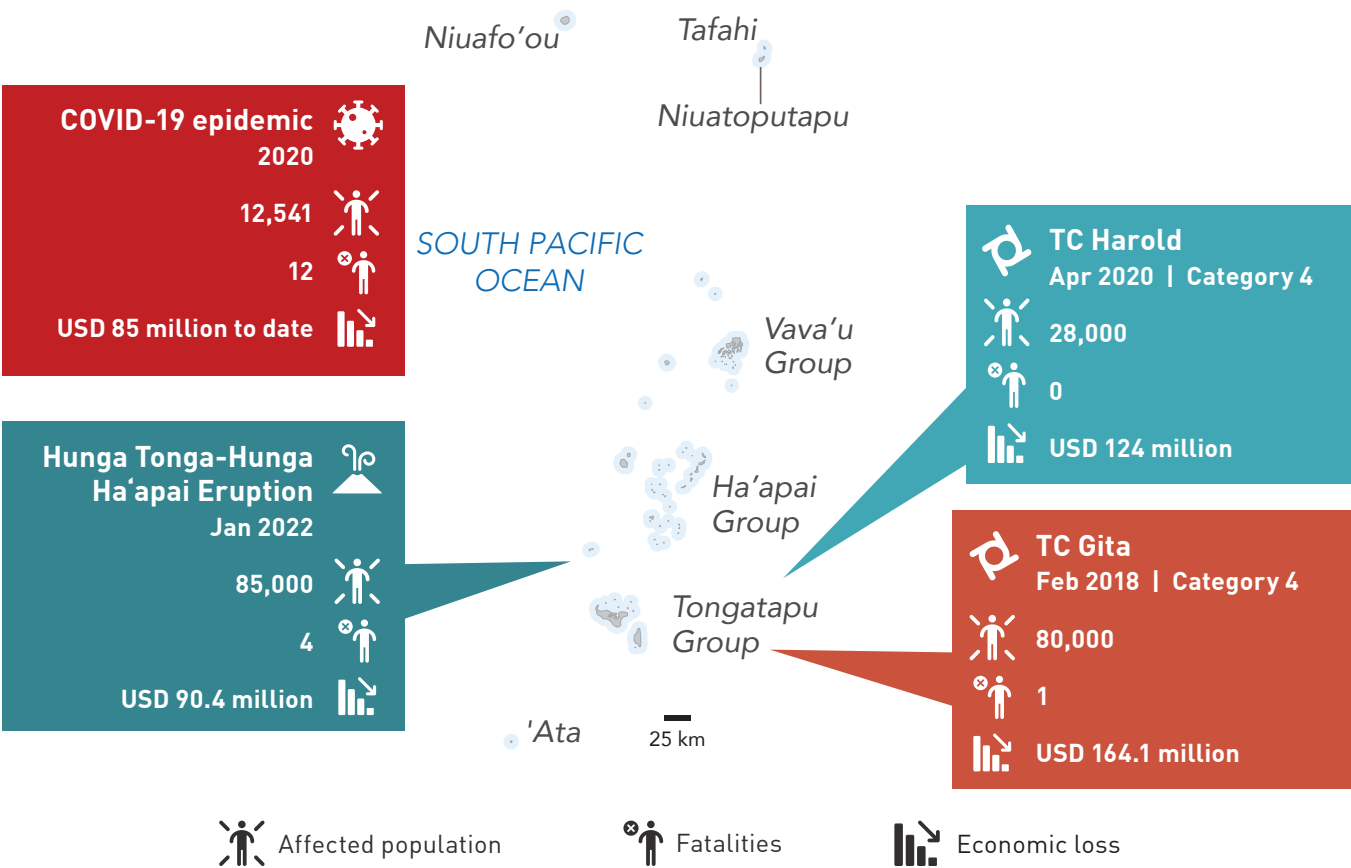
Tonga has been affected by 12 natural disasters over the last 25 years. Its geographical location on the Pacific Ring of Fire and in a cyclone-prone area, combined with the vulnerabilities of a small island developing state (SIDS), makes it the world's 104th most at-risk country for natural disasters.

The graph below orders Tonga's natural disasters by type according to their frequency, with the most to least frequent moving left to right, and the percentage frequency illustrated. The most impactful disaster type is identified but not ranked. Since 2000, tropical cyclones (75%) have been the most frequent disaster to affect Tonga, followed by epidemics, volcanos, and droughts equally (8.3% each). Cyclones were also the most impactful, causing a significant number of fatalities and economic loss.



Source: <https://public.emdat.be/data>

MAJOR DISASTERS (2015-2025)



INFORM
INDEX FOR RISK MANAGEMENT

INFORM Risk is an open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters. INFORM Risk gives each country a risk score of 1-10 (1 being the lowest and 10 the highest) for each of the dimensions, categories, and components of risk, as well as an overall risk score. The higher the score, the more at risk a country is to disasters.

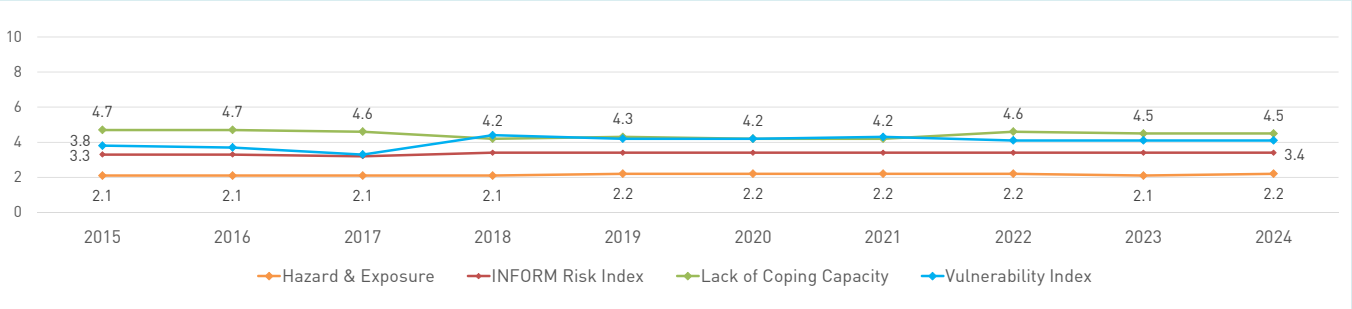
INFORM RISK VALUE
AND RANKING 2025

Tonga has low hazards and exposure value, with medium values for vulnerability and lack of coping capacity. The overall risk value is medium.

INFORM Risk and dimensions of risk	VALUE (10 as the highest)	WORLD RANK (out of 191 countries)
INFORM Risk	3.4	98
Hazard & Exposure	2.2	129
Vulnerability	4.1	83
Lack of coping capacity	4.5	86

INFORM RISK TEN-YEAR TREND (2015-2024)

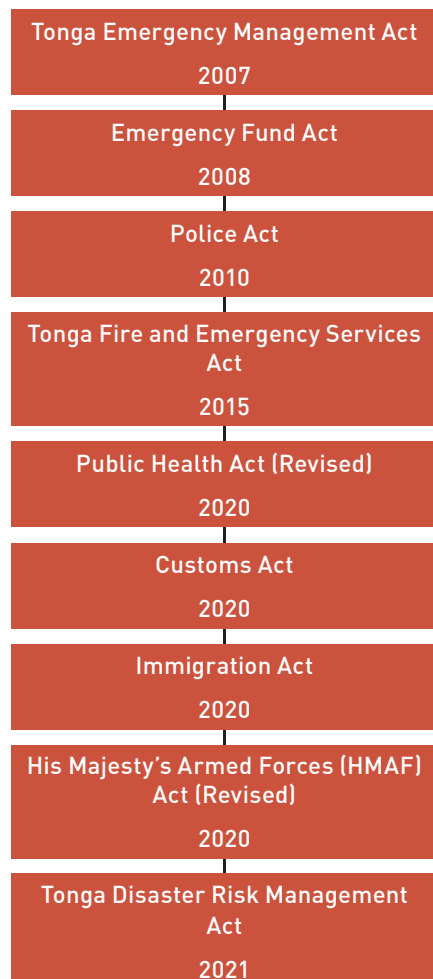
Tonga's hazards and exposure and risk values have remained stable, and although there is some variation in the vulnerability and lack of coping capacity values between 2017 and 2022, by 2024 they are very similar to the values in 2015. Consequently, the INFORM risk index remains the same, classifying Tonga within the medium-risk category.



KEY POLICIES, PLANS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION



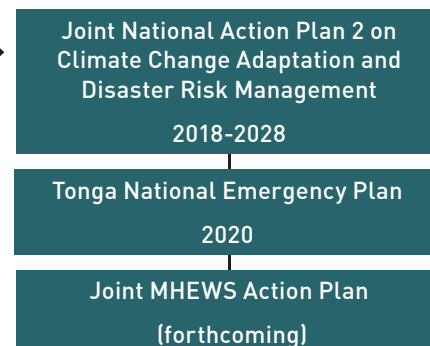
LAWS & REGULATIONS



GUIDING POLICIES



KEY PLANS



Tonga Emergency Management Act 2007

The NEMO's revision of the [Tonga Emergency Management Act \(2007\)](#) led to the proposal and eventual adoption of the Disaster Risk Management Act 2021. This earlier act provided the legal foundation for Tonga's disaster management system. It also formally establishes key institutional structures, including the National Emergency Management Committee, the NEMO (later NDRMO), and subnational bodies such as the District Emergency Management Committees and Village Emergency Management Committees to support emergency response.



Emergency Fund Act 2008

The [Emergency Fund Act 2008](#) established a dedicated financial mechanism to support disaster preparedness, response, and recovery activities. It authorises the

government to allocate and disburse funds swiftly during declared emergencies, ensuring that civil, police, and military institutions have access to the resources required for effective operations. This act complements the legal powers provided under the Emergency Management Act 2007 and the Disaster Risk Management Act 2021 by providing the financial means to operationalise inter-agency coordination during times of crisis.



Police Act 2010

The [Police Act 2010](#) established the mandate of the Tonga Police to uphold law and order, prevent and detect crime, and ensure public safety. In the context of emergencies, the act empowers police to play a central role in disaster response, including enforcing evacuation orders, securing affected areas, and protecting relief supplies. It also provides the legal framework for joint

operations with civil authorities and the armed services, making Tonga Police a critical actor in maintaining stability and supporting coordinated emergency management.

Tonga Fire and Emergency Services Act 2015

The Tonga Fire and Emergency Services Act 2015 established the legal basis for the Tonga Fire and Emergency Services (TFES), defining its responsibilities in fire prevention, firefighting and emergency response. Beyond its traditional firefighting role, the act empowers TFES to respond to a wide range of hazards, including natural disasters, hazardous materials incidents, and rescue operations. In the context of Disaster Risk Management (DRM), TFES works in close coordination with civil authorities, Tonga Police and HMAF to deliver first response services, support search and rescue, and provide critical expertise in community safety and resilience. This act positions TFES as a core actor in Tonga's DRM system, with strong linkages to both national and subnational disaster management structures.

Public Health Act (CAP. 12.15, 2020 Revised Edition)

The Public Health Act establishes Tonga's legal framework for protecting and promoting public health, including powers to manage communicable diseases, sanitation, water quality and quarantine. It provides explicit provisions for declaring a public health emergency and designating emergency officers, including health workers, police and members of the armed forces. During crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the act enables authorities to enforce quarantine, isolation, movement restrictions and border health controls. Enforcement is supported through coordination with Tonga Police, Customs, Immigration and HMAF, ensuring that public health measures are upheld while maintaining law, order and national security. This act therefore underpins inter-agency cooperation in managing health emergencies and safeguarding population resilience.

Customs Act (CAP. 11.02, 2020 Revised Edition)

The Customs Act established the legal framework for the regulation of imports and exports in Tonga, including the imposition of customs duties, valuation of goods, and enforcement powers. In the context of emergencies, the act is particularly important for managing the entry of humanitarian relief supplies and the movement of goods critical for disaster response and recovery. Coordination between Customs, Tonga Police, and HMAF ensures that emergency goods can be cleared and delivered quickly, while maintaining border security and compliance with national laws. The act therefore plays an enabling role in disaster response and recovery by supporting the smooth entry of international assistance and critical goods through established border procedures.

Immigration Act (CAP. 10.01, 2020 Revised Edition)

The Immigration Act governs the entry, stay and removal of non-citizens in Tonga, providing the legal framework for border management. In emergencies, the act facilitates the rapid entry of humanitarian responders and international assistance, while safeguarding national security. It empowers immigration officers, supported by Tonga Police and HMAF, to enforce border control measures, detain unlawful entrants, and manage the flow of people during crises. Effective coordination under this act ensures that relief personnel can enter swiftly, while maintaining law, order and public safety.

His Majesty's Armed Forces (HMAF) Act (CAP. 9.02, 2020 Revised Edition)

The His Majesty's Armed Forces Act provides the statutory foundation for the organisation, functions, and regulation of HMAF. In addition to their role in defending the Kingdom, the act mandates that HMAF assist and support civil authorities. Under Section 6, HMAF may be called out in aid of civil authorities to help maintain public order. Section 7 further empowers HMAF to support civil authorities during civil emergencies such as natural disasters, epidemics, or transport accidents. These provisions enable HMAF to provide logistics, engineering, transport, and security support during national crises, ensuring effective integration with Tonga Police and other civilian agencies in coordinated emergency operations.

Tonga Disaster Risk Management Act 2021

The Disaster Risk Management Act 2021, superseded the Emergency Management Act 2007. It provides a coherent legal, institutional and regulatory framework for the planning and management of disaster risk reduction and preparedness activities, the coordination of emergency response during a disaster, and the facilitation of disaster recovery work following a disaster. This act established the NDRMO, formerly known as the National Emergency Management Office (NEMO), under the ministry responsible for DRM (MEIDECC). This is the comprehensive framework that integrates civilian and military structures to effectively manage disaster risk and response.

Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015–2025

The Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015–2025 (TSDF II) serves as Tonga's overarching development blueprint, aiming to achieve a more progressive nation that supports a higher quality of life for all citizens. Structured around a results-based approach, it outlines a national level impact supported by seven national outcomes and 29 organisational outcomes, grouped into five pillars: economic development, social development, infrastructure and

technology, natural resources and environment, and governance. The framework emphasises inclusive and sustainable growth by integrating cultural values and aligning with international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals. Developed through extensive consultations with communities, civil society and development partners, TSDF II guides sectoral and corporate planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes across government ministries and agencies, ensuring coordinated efforts to achieve national development goals.



Tonga Strategic Roadmap for Emergency and Disaster Risk Management 2021–2023

The Tonga Strategic Roadmap for Emergency and Disaster Risk Management 2021–2023 provides a coordinated national approach to strengthening disaster preparedness, response, and risk reduction across Tonga. It outlines strategic priorities to improve institutional governance, legislative frameworks, coordination mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement. Developed through a collaborative, multi-agency process involving key actors such as NDRMO, Tonga Police, TFES, and HMAF, the roadmap aligns with the Tonga Strategic Development Framework and promotes an all-hazards, whole-of-government approach. It emphasises updating laws, integrating cluster coordination, enhancing capacity-building, and establishing monitoring systems to ensure Tonga is better equipped to manage natural and human-induced emergencies.



Tonga Disaster Risk Financing Strategy 2021–2025

Building upon Tonga's existing legal and policy frameworks for disaster and financial risk management, the Disaster Risk Financing Strategy unifies current and planned initiatives across multiple sectors. It aims to quantify and reduce the financial impacts of disasters. Developed by Tonga's Ministry of Finance, the strategy serves as a coordinated framework guiding collaboration among key stakeholders in implementing targeted actions. Its overarching goal is to enhance the financial resilience of the Tongan government, households, organisations, and businesses to disaster events.



Tonga Disaster Risk Management Policy 2023–2030

The Tonga Disaster Risk Management Policy 2023–2030 provides the overarching framework for implementing the Disaster Risk Management Act 2021, shifting the national approach from reactive response to proactive, and to whole-of-society resilience building. Guided by principles of inclusivity, transparency and equity, it sets out 25 policy objectives spanning risk reduction, preparedness, response, and recovery, and mandates action through national, island, district and village DRM plans under the cluster system. The policy clarifies

roles and responsibilities across civil authorities, police and HMAF. It also strengthens monitoring and evaluation systems and aligns with regional and global commitments such as the Sendai Framework, the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific, and Tonga's Strategic Development Framework.



Tonga Multi-hazard Early Warning System Policy (MHEWS) 2024–2030

The Tonga Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (MHEWS) Policy 2024–2030 provides a national framework to strengthen the country's capacity to anticipate, communicate, and respond to multiple natural hazards, including cyclones, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and floods. Anchored in a people-centred approach, the policy emphasises timely and accessible warnings, last-mile connectivity, and coordinated action between civil authorities, Tonga Police, and HMAF. Spearheaded by the MEIDECC, the policy was developed through extensive community consultations across Tonga's islands, ensuring inclusivity and local relevance.



Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management 2018–2028

The Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management (JNAP2) 2018–2028 is a key strategic framework that integrates climate change adaptation and DRM into one coordinated plan. It aligns national priorities across sectors to strengthen resilience and reduce vulnerability to both climate-related and natural hazards. The JNAP2 builds upon the foundations of Tonga's first JNAP by implementing six policy objectives outlined in the Climate Change Policy 2016, aiming to promote a coherent, collaborative and strategic approach to resilience-building initiatives across the country.



Tonga National Emergency Management Plan 2020

The Tonga National Emergency Management Plan (NEMP) 2020 establishes a comprehensive DRM framework. Developed under the Emergency Management Act 2007, the plan delineates the roles and responsibilities of national, district and village-level committees to ensure coordinated preparedness, response and recovery efforts. It emphasises a multi-hazard approach, integrating both natural and technological risks, and outlines procedures for activation, coordination, and communication during emergencies. The NEMP also incorporates strategies for public education, training programs, and the development of specific contingency plans, aiming to enhance community resilience and ensure effective emergency management. As of the writing of this report, the NDRMO is drafting a revised National DRM Plan which will supersede the NEMP 2020.

KEY CIVILIAN RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTERS

NATIONAL DISASTER FOCAL POINT

Tonga’s national disaster management system is governed by the National Disaster Risk Management Committee (NDRMC), established under the Disaster Risk Management Act 2021. Chaired by the Minister for MEIDECC, the NDRMC coordinates strategic decision-making, resource mobilisation, and emergency funding. It is supported by three sub-committees: Operations, Recovery, and Inter-Cluster Coordination, which manage response, rehabilitation, and sectoral coordination. Central to this structure is the National Disaster Risk Management Office (NDRMO) which leads implementation, policy development, and operational coordination. The NDRMO also provides secretariat support to all governing bodies, ensuring effective disaster preparedness, response, and recovery across Tonga.

NATIONAL DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (NDRMC)

The NDRMC facilitates coordination at the national level.

 **Established by:** Disaster Risk Management Act 2021

 **Leadership:** Minister for MEIDECC

-  **Key functions:**
- Advising Cabinet on the status of the work of key DRM entities towards their DRM objectives
 - Coordinating government ministries and, during declared states of emergency, calling on Ministry resources including personnel, vehicles, equipment, consumables and office space
 - Endorsing funding requests to the Emergency Fund in relation to NDRMC’s work
 - Convening meetings of its sub-committees when necessary to implement appropriate response and recovery efforts.

 **Composition:** Minister for MEIDECC (Chair), Chief Secretary and Secretary to Cabinet; Chief Executive Officers of the relevant Ministries (MEIDECC, Finance, Agriculture, Food and Forest, Lands, Health, Internal Affairs, Education and Training, Foreign Affairs, Public Enterprises, and Infrastructure), Police Commissioner; TFES Commissioner, Chief of Staff, HMAF, Attorney General, Government Statistician, Director of the NDRMO, and Secretary General of the TRCS.

NATIONAL DISASTER OPERATIONS SUB-COMMITTEE

 **Established by:** Disaster Risk Management Act 2021

 **Leadership:** CEO of MEIDECC

-  **Key functions:**
- Initiating operational response through government ministries and first responders
 - Preparing and submitting initial damage assessment reports to the NDRMC
 - Identifying, prioritising, and coordinating immediate disaster relief needs
 - Managing the distribution of emergency relief supplies
 - Reporting to the NDRMC on the progress and outcomes of its assigned tasks.

 **Composition:** CEO for MEIDECC (Chair), Director of NDRMO, Police Commissioner, TFES Commissioner, CEOs for Ministries of Finance and IA, Secretary General of the TRCS, and any other member determined by the NDRMC. The NDRMO also provides secretariat services to this sub-committee.

NATIONAL DISASTER RISK RECOVERY SUB-COMMITTEE

 **Established by:** Disaster Risk Management Act 2021

 **Leadership:** CEO of MEIDECC

-  **Key functions:**
- Coordinating immediate recovery and rehabilitation activities after a disaster
 - Preparing and submitting detailed damage assessment reports to the NDRMC
 - Reporting to the NDRMC on the status and outcomes of assigned work.

 **Composition:** CEO for MEIDECC (Chair), Director of NDRMO, CEOs for Ministries of Finance and IA, CEO for Infrastructure, CEO for Agriculture, Food and Forest and any other member determined by the NDRMC. The NDRMO also provides secretariat services to the sub-committee.

INTER-CLUSTER COORDINATION COMMITTEE

Reporting to the NDRMC and funded by the Emergency Fund, the Inter-Cluster Coordination Committee is responsible for the coordination of cluster activities during an emergency.



Established by: Disaster Risk Management Act 2021



Leadership: CEO for MEIDECC



Key functions:

- Overseeing and coordinating the activities of the clusters
- Ensuring clarity and coordination of cluster roles and responsibilities
- Reviewing Cluster Plans and consolidating them into national-level response plans with recommendations to the NDRMC
- Monitoring and reviewing the implementation of Cluster Plans.



Composition: CEO for MEIDECC (Chair), Director of NDRMO (Deputy Chair), a representative from National Planning and a representative of each Ministry that is a cluster lead.



Key functions:

- Lead and coordinate disaster risk management
- Implement the national disaster risk management policy
- Advise the minister and governing bodies on DRM issues
- Develop policies, guidelines, strategies, plans, programmes, and SOPs for all DRM activities
- Report on activities and implement ministerial decisions
- Provide secretariat services to governing bodies
- Lead the cluster system including developing relevant SOPs in consultation with the NDRMC and support from the clusters.
- Prepare a national recovery plan within three months of a declared emergency.

NATIONAL DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT OFFICE (NDRMO)

Formerly known as the NEMO, the NDRMO operates under the MEIDECC. It coordinates national efforts for disaster risk reduction and recovery and ensures that its staff, as well as Ministry personnel, are well trained and capable of effective coordination with lead agencies, sector clusters and statutory bodies. The NDRMO also provides secretariat support to the various governing bodies established under the Disaster Risk Management Act, reinforcing its central role in Tonga's disaster governance framework.



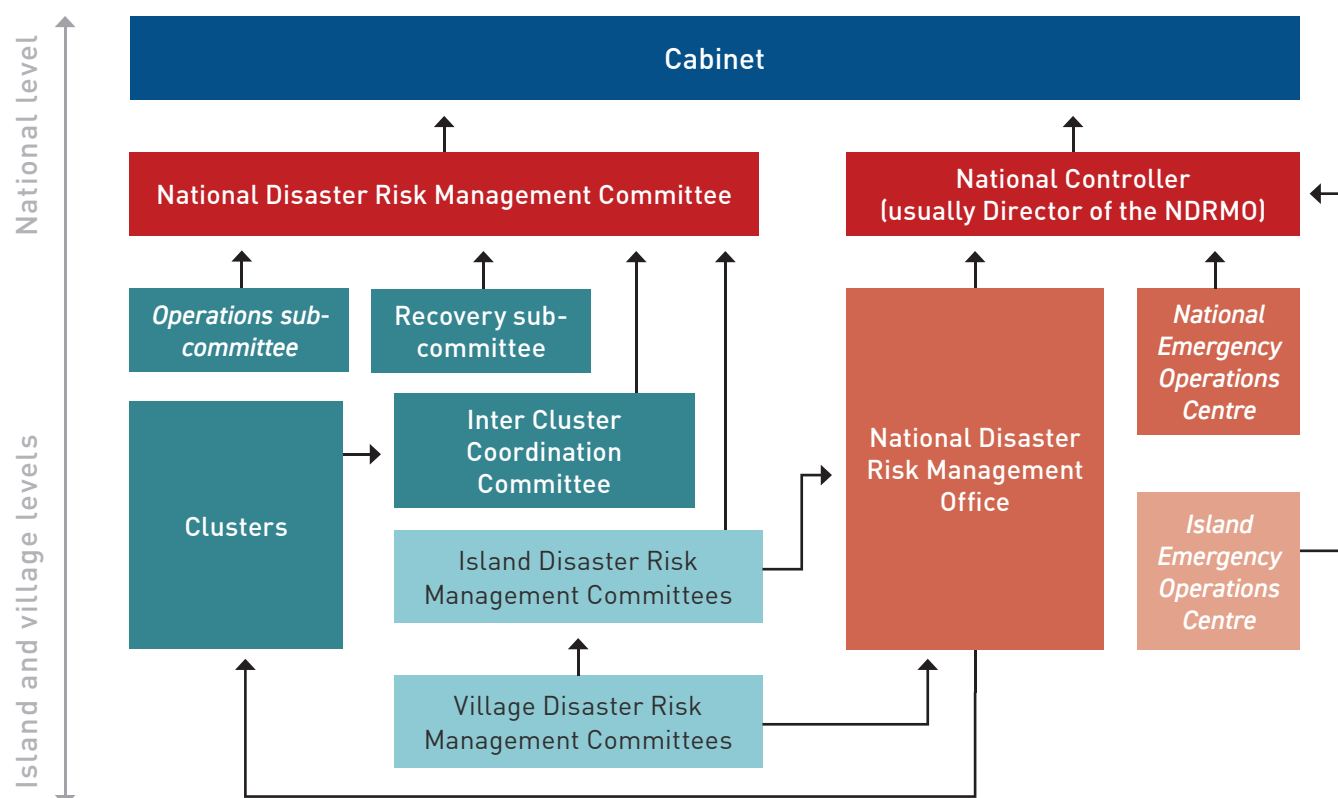
Established by: Disaster Risk Management Act 2021



Leadership: Director of NDRMO



DISASTER MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE



Note: Entities in *italic* are only active during emergencies; they provide emergency first response services. Solid arrows indicate a formal reporting or oversight relationship. Source: Tonga DRM Policy, p. 32 (Adapted from the Government of Tonga DRM Act 2021).

NATIONAL CONTROLLER

The National Controller is the Director of the NDRMO, or an appointee of the NDRMC. The National Controller has the power to:

- Activate the NEOC which has the central role in national disaster operations, reporting daily to the NDRMO and the Cabinet
- Determine the priority of response roles for Government and non-government entities in consultation with the NDRMC
- With the consent of the Minister, allocate available government resources that the Director considers necessary for responding to an event that may happen, is about to happen, or is happening
- Perform any other function of the National Controller specified in the Disaster Risk Management Act 2021 or any of its regulations.



SUBNATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

At the subnational level, DRM Committees are established at both island and village levels to coordinate preparedness, response, and recovery activities. These Subnational DRM Committees are integrated with the NDRMO and national structures to ensure that DRM is implemented effectively on the ground.

The Island DRM Committees operate with operational budgets from the Emergency Fund and are responsible for preparing and implementing Island DRM Plans guided by the National DRM Policy and funded from the MEIDECC's recurrent budget.

ISLAND DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

Island DRM Committees are established for each of Tonga's main island groups, including Tongatapu, 'Eua, Ha'apai, Vava'u, Niuatoputapu and Niuafo'ou. These committees, except for the Tongatapu Island DRM Committee, are accountable to the NDRMO.

 **Established by:** Disaster Risk Management Act 2021

 **Leadership:** The Governors of Vava'u and Ha'apai and the government representatives of 'Eua, Niuafo'ou and Niuatoputapu.

 **Key functions:**

- Contributing to the development of DRM policies, regulations, and procedures
- Developing and implementing DRM plans and programs in line with Ministry directives
- Conducting operational procedures and training as requested by the Ministry
- Reporting and making recommendations to the NDRMC on local DRM activities
- Supporting communities before, during, and after disasters, and promoting awareness on mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery
- Identifying and coordinating local resources, and managing emergency operations in line with national policies
- Establishing and maintaining communication systems for use in emergencies
- Providing timely information on disasters and their impacts to the NDRMC.

 **Composition (all Island DRM Committee except Tongatapu):** Governors of Vava'u and Ha'apai and Government Representatives in 'Eua and the Niuaas (Chair), a representative of the NDRMO (deputy chair); District Officers of the island; Officers in Charge of a

Government Ministry that is a member of the National Disaster Operations Sub-Committee; and any other member nominated by the chair and approved by the Minister for MEIDECC.

 **Composition (Tongatapu only):** Tongatapu Island DRM Committee – Representative of the NDRMO (Chair), District Officers of Tongatapu, and any other member nominated by the Chair and approved by the Minister for MEIDECC.

VILLAGE DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

At the community level, Village DRM Committees are linked to the Island DRM Committees, providing information upward and helping to ensure that national DRM priorities are implemented at the grassroots level.

 **Established by:** Disaster Risk Management Act 2021

 **Leadership:** Town Officer of the village

 **Key functions:**

- Providing support to village communities to ensure effective disaster risk management before, during, and after a disaster
- Promoting village and community awareness of DRM, including ways of mitigating, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from a disaster
- Managing emergency operations for each village in accordance with MEIDECC policies and procedures
- Establishing and reviewing communication systems for use prior to a disaster, or when a disaster happens
- Providing information about a disaster or its impact in the village to the Island Committee and NDRMO.

 **Composition:** Town Officer (Chair), up to eight representatives nominated by the village Fono (traditional assembly or council of the village, which consists of village leaders) with the approval of the Minister for MEIDECC. These representatives should include women, youths, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups.

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN TONGA



	NAME	LEAD AUTHORITY	NUMBER
FIRST LEVEL	National		1
SECOND LEVEL	Divisional	NDRMO	5
THIRD LEVEL	Districts		23

KEY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

MINISTRY OF METEOROLOGY, ENERGY, INFORMATION, DISASTER MANAGEMENT, ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND COMMUNICATIONS

The MEIDECC plays a central role in enhancing Tonga’s resilience to climate change and managing disaster risks across the nation. NDRMO sits under MEIDECC and is tasked with overseeing emergency response operations and coordinating DRR initiatives. Additionally, NDRMO functions as the secretariat for three national-level emergency committees, ensuring streamlined communication, and strategic coordination during times of crisis.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

The Ministry of Finance holds the primary responsibility for setting strategic direction and providing policy guidance on economic and financial matters within the government. As part of its commitment to strengthening national resilience, the Ministry developed the Disaster Risk Finance Strategy which establishes a coordinated framework for collaboration among key stakeholders, aimed at implementing targeted actions that enhance the financial resilience of the Tongan government, households, and businesses in the face of disasters

MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE

In Tonga, the Ministry of Infrastructure contributes to disaster management by strengthening essential infrastructure such as ports, roads, and airports to improve response to disasters. The Ministry also ensures that DRR is embedded within national development frameworks. In addition, it works closely with international partners to support initiatives aimed at climate change adaptation and enhancing long-term disaster resilience.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

The core function of the Ministry of Health is to deliver prevention and health services for the people of Tonga. For disaster management, it provides a representative to the NDMC, and national working group, monitors potential health problems following a major incident and assists in damage assessments. The Ministry of Health is also designated as the lead entity for the Health and Nutrition and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Clusters, with responsibility for ensuring a needs-based approach and for executing all functions mandated under its TOR.

HIS MAJESTY’S DIPLOMATIC SERVICE

His Majesty’s Diplomatic Service provides a representative to the NDMC and Cluster Country Group (CCG), participates in and supports disaster mitigation project activities. It serves as the primary liaison with international humanitarian partners during the delivery of international humanitarian assistance.

MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS

The Ministry of Internal Affairs serves as the lead entity for the Safety and Protection Cluster, responsible for coordinating all functions outlined in the cluster's TOR. In this role, the Ministry ensures that vulnerable groups are reached, and their specific needs are met. It also collaborates with the Ministry of Finance and MEIDECC/ NDRMO to develop and implement the Adaptive Social Protection Strategy, strengthening national systems for inclusive and responsive disaster risk management.

MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND FORESTS

The Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Forests is the lead entity for the Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster, responsible for coordinating all functions outlined in the cluster's TOR. It ensures that a needs-based approach guides all food security and livelihood interventions, promoting effective, timely, and equitable support to affected communities.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The Ministry of Education and Training is the lead entity for the Education Cluster, with responsibility for coordinating and delivering all functions specified in the cluster's TOR.

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ENTERPRISES

The Ministry of Public Enterprises is the lead entity for the Critical Services Cluster, responsible for coordinating and overseeing all functions outlined in the cluster's TOR to ensure the continuity and restoration of essential public utilities and services during emergencies.

TONGA GEOLOGICAL SERVICES (UNDER THE MINISTRY OF LANDS AND NATURAL RESOURCES)

Tonga Geological Services conducts geological surveys of areas at risk and provides scientific information to guide preparedness and response. It records seismic and other geological activity and is responsible for issuing warnings and disseminating information on earthquakes and related hazards to the public.

TONGA METEOROLOGICAL SERVICES (UNDER THE MEIDECC)

The Tonga Meteorological Service is responsible for collecting meteorological data and providing weather forecasts, including for tropical cyclones, as well as issuing timely meteorological hazard warnings to support public safety and disaster preparedness.

COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT (UNDER THE MEIDECC)

The Communications Department serves as the lead entity for the Emergency Telecommunications Cluster, responsible for all functions outlined in the cluster's TOR. It ensures that emergency communication systems are in place and operational during disasters, including maintaining alternative channels such as satellite and V/ HF radio when standard networks fail, and overseeing the installation and upkeep of early warning systems such as tsunami sirens to support timely alerts and coordinated response.

TONGA FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES (TFES)

The TFES operates under the Tonga Fire and Emergency Services Act 2015, which expanded its mandate beyond firefighting to include broader emergency services. Guided by its vision of building a safer and more resilient Tonga and its mission to protect life, property, and the environment from fires and other emergencies, TFES delivers a wide range of critical functions. These include:

- Fire suppression, prevention, and investigation
- Emergency response before, during, and after disasters
- Public fire safety awareness and warnings
- Community engagement to strengthen resilience.

With seven fire stations across Tonga and a workforce of 178 personnel (including 31 women), TFES has divisions for Fire and Emergency Response, Community Safety, and Staff and Organizational Development. In the DRM context, TFES is a core frontline responder working closely with civil authorities, Tonga Police and HMAF to provide firefighting, rescue and emergency services that safeguard communities nationwide.

TONGA POLICE

In 2010, Tonga enacted a new Police Act, replacing the outdated 1968 legislation. While the new act introduced updated police powers and administrative reforms, two key changes stand out: the separation of powers between the Minister and the Commissioner of Police, and the adoption of Community Policing as the guiding philosophy and operational model for the Tonga Police.

 **Established:** Tonga Police Act 2010

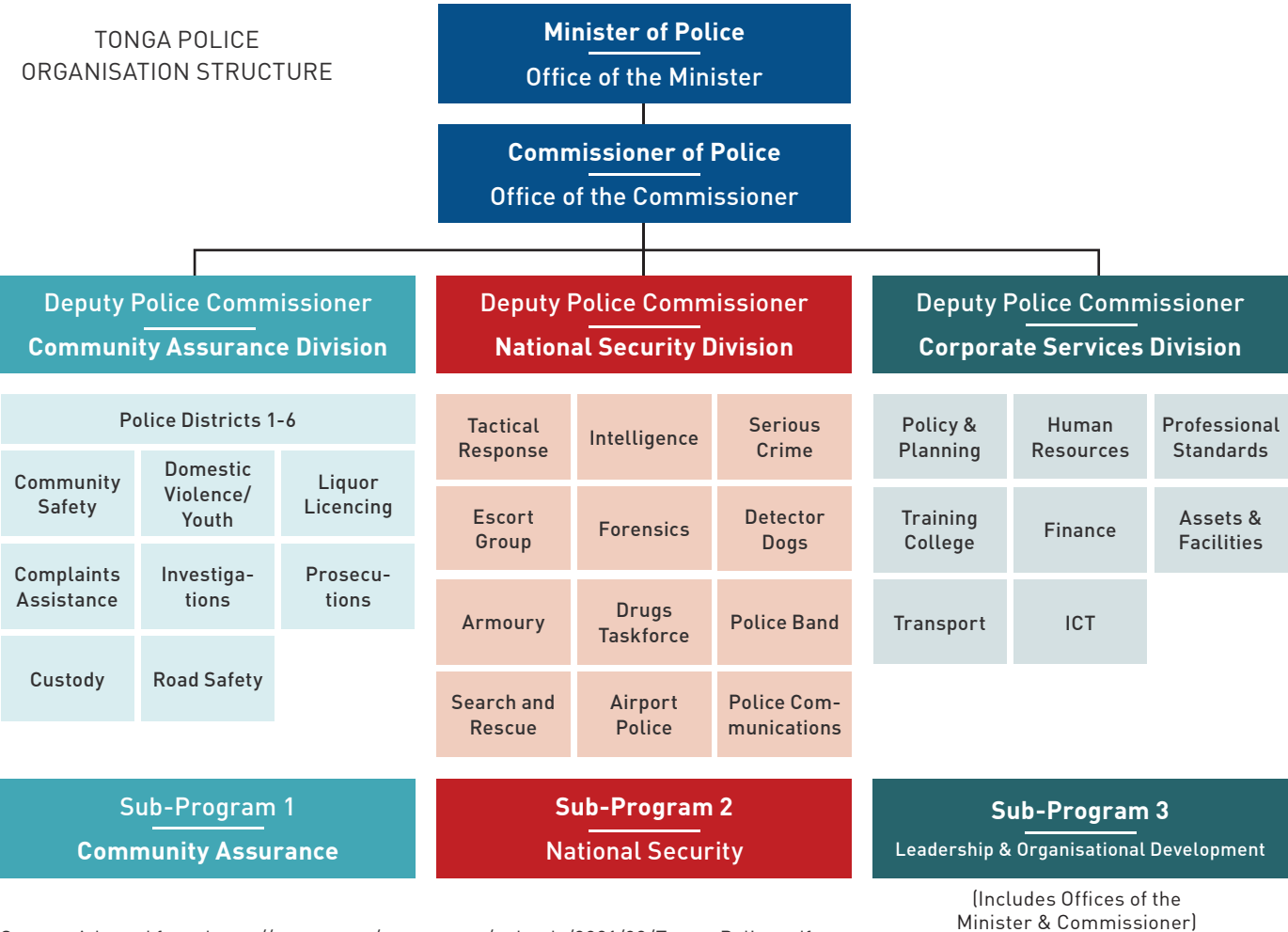
 **Leadership:** Commissioner of Tonga Police - appointed from AFP

 **Headquarters:** Longolongo

-  **Key Roles:**
- First responder
 - Contributes to Logistic and Coordination Cluster activities
 - Supports establishing and operating the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC)
 - Initial Damage Assessments (IDAs), search and rescue, relief distribution, and overall logistic management.

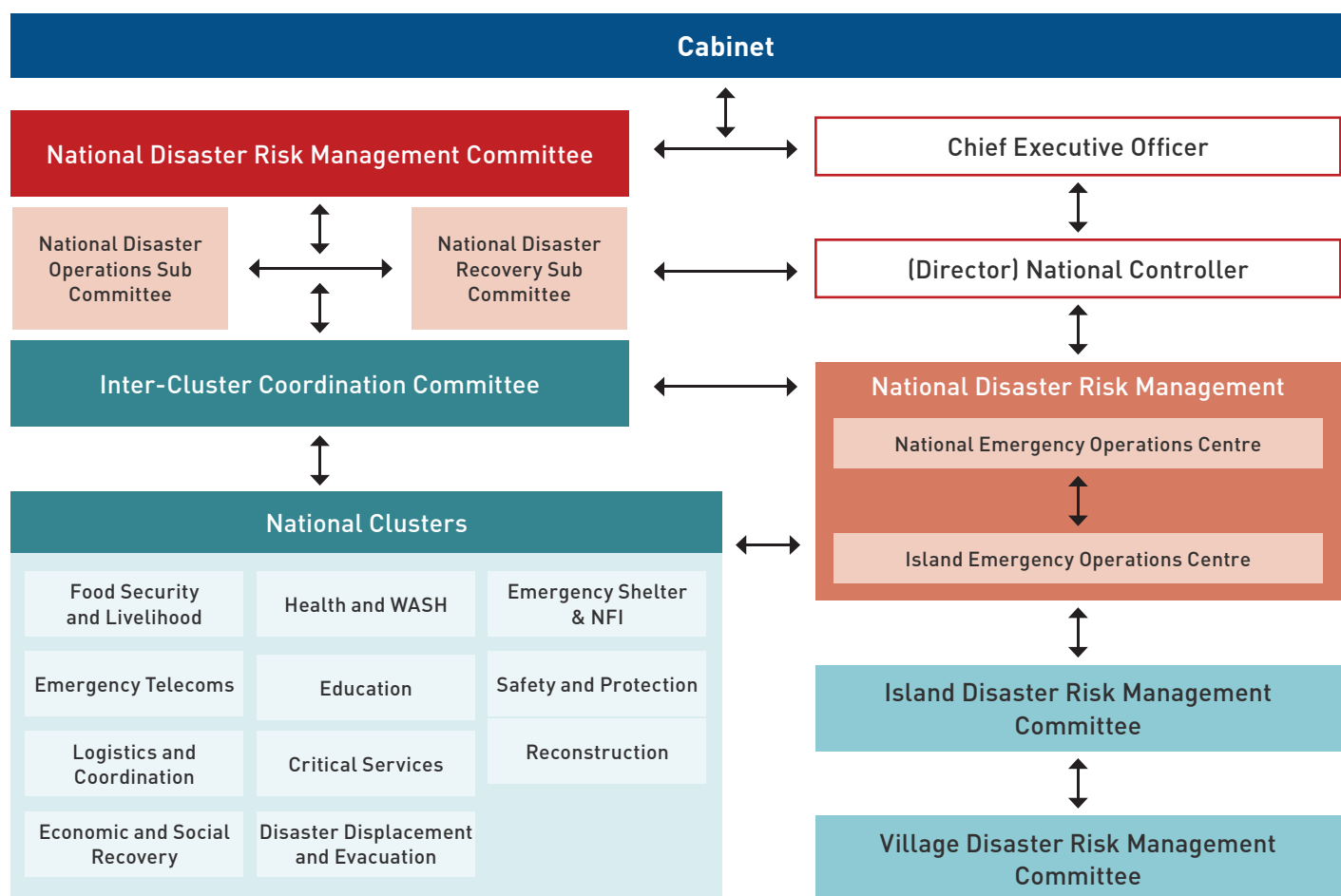
-  **Key functions:**
- Maintaining law and order
 - Preserving the peace
 - Protecting life and property
 - Preventing and detecting crime
 - Providing community support and reassurance
 - Upholding the laws of Tonga
 - Serving and executing court processes
 - Conducting land and marine search and rescue operations
 - Performing any other functions conferred by the Police Act or other legislation.

-  **Components:**
- Community Assurance Division
 - National Security Division
 - Corporate Services Division



Source: Adapted from <https://pmo.gov.to/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Tonga-Police.pdf>

COORDINATION MECHANISMS



In the event of an onset disaster or during a disaster, the National Controller is tasked with activating the NEOC, determining the priority of roles, and allocating resources in collaboration with the NDRMC. The NDRMO then collaborates with clusters, represented by the Inter-Cluster Coordination Committee, which oversees and coordinates cluster partners activities.

NATIONAL CLUSTER SYSTEM

A cluster is a group of governmental and non-governmental organisations and other stakeholders established under section 43 of the Disaster Risk Management Act. They coordinate their response efforts during a disaster to reduce duplication of effort, improve information sharing, and facilitate decision-making, thereby increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

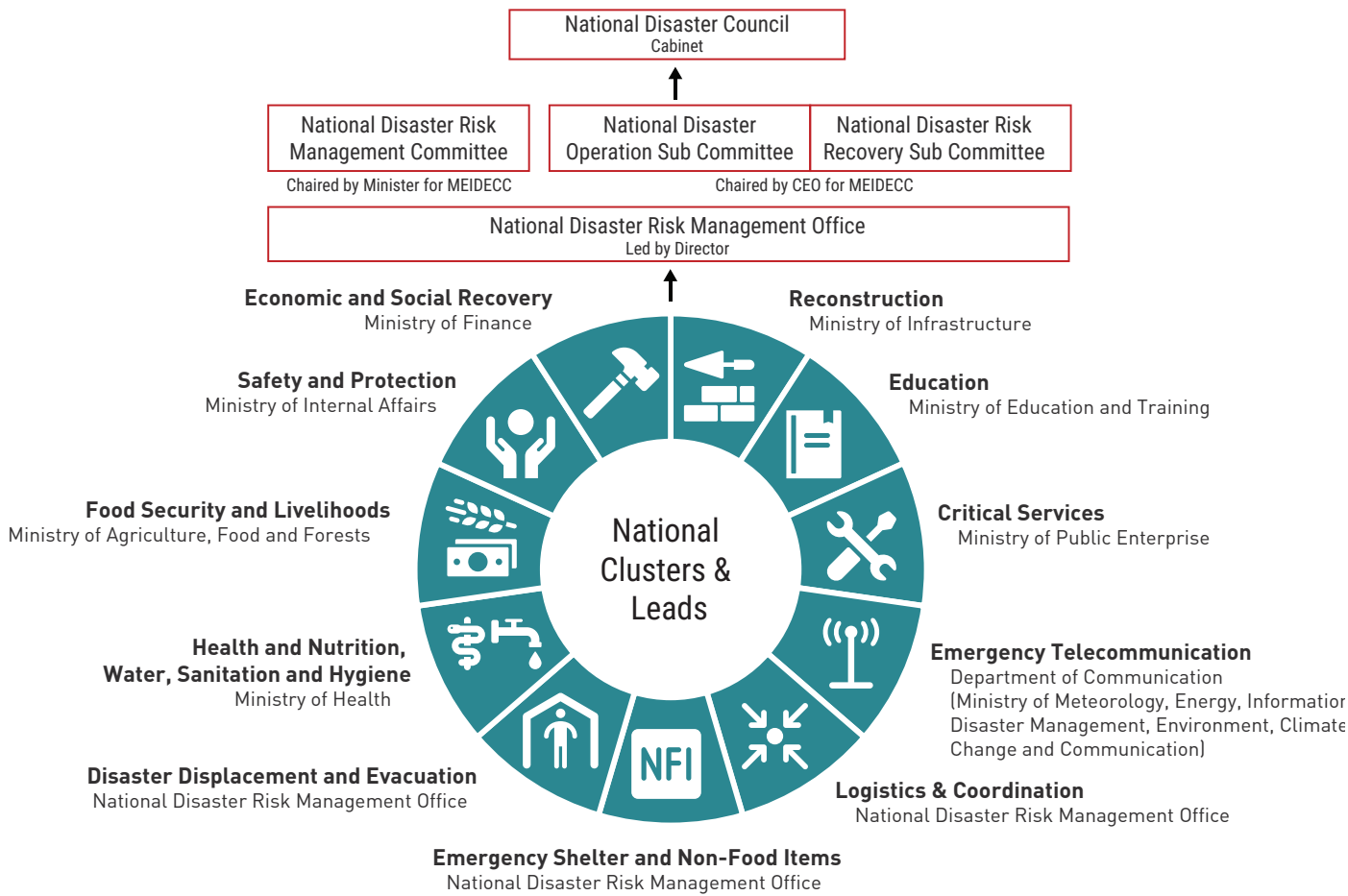
Tonga's cluster system was formally endorsed by Cabinet in 2015 and first activated during Tropical Cyclone Gita in February 2018. Coordinated by the NDRMO, each cluster is led by a designated government ministry and supported by international and regional partners. The cluster lead is stipulated by the Disaster Risk Management Act.

There are currently 11 clusters: Coordination; Essential Services; Emergency Shelter and Non-Food Items; Safety and Protection; Water, Sanitation and Hygiene; Economic and Social Recovery; Education; Reconstruction; Food Security and Livelihoods; Communications; and Displacement and Evacuation Centre Management.

The Inter-Cluster Coordination Committee, chaired by the CEO of MEIDECC and comprising all cluster leads, was established to oversee coordinated disaster management efforts. The NDRMO supports this committee by facilitating coordination and serving as the secretariat for the cluster system. Inter-Cluster Coordination Committee decisions are submitted to the NDRMC for review and then forwarded to Cabinet for final approval.

The overarching vision of the cluster system is to ensure that the specific needs of individuals and communities affected by, or at risk of, humanitarian crises, whether sudden or prolonged, are met. Through coordinated preparedness, response and recovery efforts at the community, national and international levels, the system aims to save lives, enhance livelihoods, and build the resilience of households and communities.

NATIONAL COORDINATION STRUCTURE



Source: Adapted from <https://reliefweb.int/report/tonga/tonga-humanitarian-coordination-structure-10-july-2024>

NATIONAL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE (NEOC)

The NEOC is activated when a disaster approaches or occurs. It serves as the central hub for coordination and command, at the national level, during an emergency operation. The Director of NDRMO, acting as the National Controller, has overall responsibility for supervision of the NEOC and all authorised officers working in the centre. The NEOC is staffed by NDRMO officers and liaison officers from surge capacity teams drawn from key government ministries and agencies. To run the NEOC, the National Controller is supported by the NEOC Task Force, which consists of the Deputy Chief of Staff for HMAF, the Deputy Police Commissioner, and the Deputy Fire and Emergency Services Commissioner.

SUBNATIONAL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRES

When a disaster occurs on any of the islands of Vava'u, Ha'apai, Niuafu'ou, Niuatoputapu or 'Eua, the powers and functions of the National Controller (outlined above) will be extended to an Island Disaster Controller. The Island Disaster Controller is responsible for activating and overseeing the operations of an Island Emergency Operation Centre (IEOC) in accordance with the relevant provisions. This Centre serves as the central hub for coordination and command at the island group level during emergency operations. The IEOC taskforce is composed of officers from the MEIDCC and nominated representatives from the relevant ministries. The functions of the Island Emergency Operations Centre mirror those set out for the NEOC, with the distinction that the Island Emergency Operations Centre exercises its functions specifically in relation to the island group.

MOBILISATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

Under the Disaster Risk Management Act 2021, the Ministry of MEIDECC is required to develop regulations to facilitate international assistance for disaster response and recovery. In developing these regulations, the Ministry must consult relevant stakeholders, including other key government ministries and governing bodies established under the act, development partners, the TRCS, faith-based and non-governmental organisations, and, where feasible, the Tongan diaspora. The act also provides for establishing arrangements with other countries, development partners and international bodies, and enables coordination and receipt of external relief supplies through national authorities.

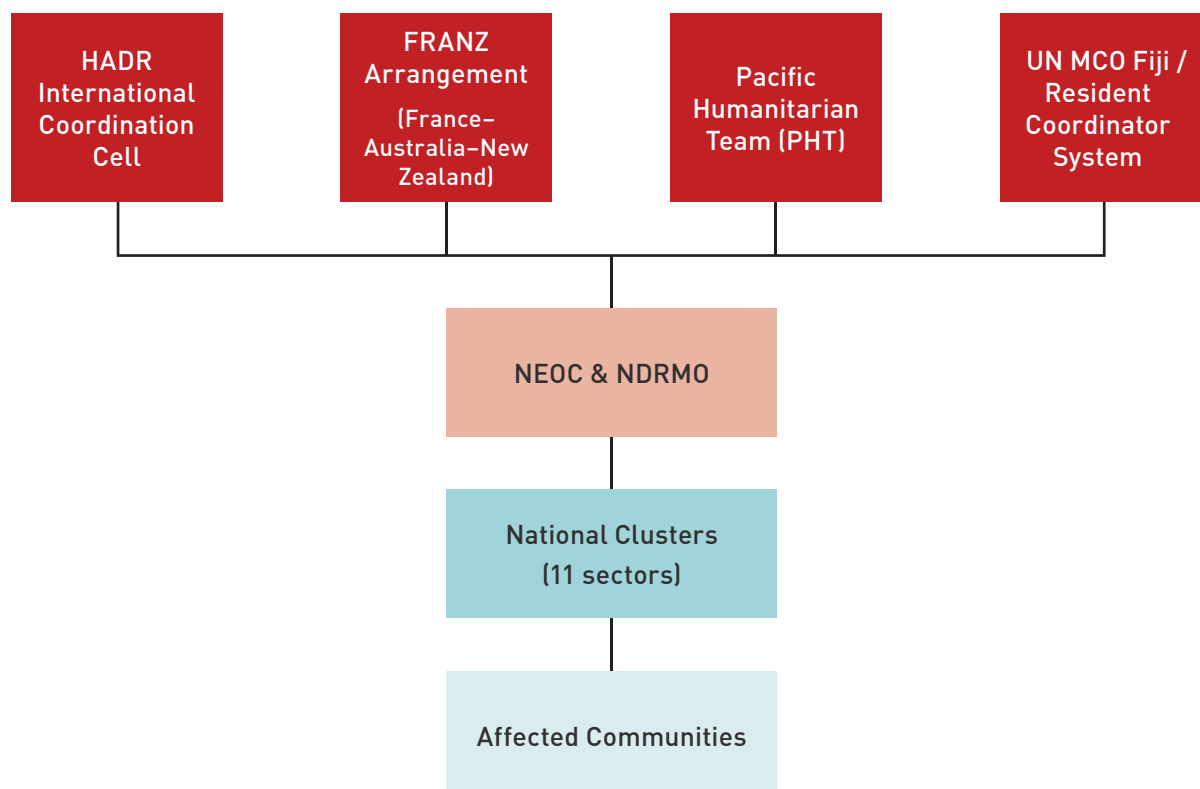
COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

International assistance to Tonga is coordinated through government-led mechanisms (NDRMO/NEOC) and complementary bilateral and multilateral arrangements. The FRANZ (France–Australia–New Zealand) Arrangement, a standing arrangement since 1992, is activated to coordinate reconnaissance and relief to PICTs upon request, including Tonga in 2022. These mechanisms operate in support of, and in alignment with, government-led priorities and cluster coordination.

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION SYSTEM

Tonga engages the Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT), a United Nations (UN)–supported regional inter-cluster network that mobilises international technical and operational capacity in support of nationally led clusters. Regional coordination is provided through UN-OCHA and the UN Multi-Country Office (MCO) in Fiji, under the UN Resident Coordinator covering Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. At country level, Tonga applies the cluster approach led by government ministries and coordinated by NDRMO through the NEOC. As per the UN Country Implementation Plan 2023–2025, Tonga hosts eight resident UN agencies, whose staff provide programmatic support and reinforce preparedness and response capacity.

The NEOC serves as the operational hub that integrates these international arrangements (FRANZ, PHT and the UN system) with Tonga’s nationally led cluster coordination. When activated, the NEOC acts as the entry point for incoming assistance, aligns it with sectoral clusters, and ensures that international resources are directed according to government priorities and community needs.



KEY MILITARY RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTERS

HIS MAJESTY’S ARMED FORCES

The primary responsibility of HMAF is the defence of Tonga’s sovereignty, people and national interests. The Royal Guard, established in the 1860s, took various forms before being renamed HMAF in 2013. Established originally under King George Tupou I as part of a broader strategy to secure Tonga’s independence from colonial influence, it was initially a means of gaining diplomatic legitimacy rather than a fighting force.

Defence cooperation agreements with Australia, the United States, and New Zealand provide partial support to HMAF. Presently, it consists of 600–700 active personnel, one of the world’s smallest sovereign armed forces. HMAF’s role includes acting as one of Tonga’s first responder agencies to disasters, supporting the NEOC when activated, participating in IDAs, undertaking search and rescue, distributing relief supplies, and providing logistical support.

 **Established:** Tonga Defence Services Act 1992

 **Leadership:** Chief of the Defence Staff

 **Headquarters:** Vilai Barracks in Nuku’alofa

 **Key roles:** Serve as one of the four key first responders, participate in NEOC activations including carry out IDAs, search and rescue, relief distribution, and overall logistics management. Responsible for internal security and maritime patrol

-  **Key Functions:**
- Defence of the Kingdom
 - Aiding civil authorities in maintaining order
 - The support of civil authorities more broadly, including during emergencies
 - Other functions as His Majesty may determine.

-  **Components:**
- HMAF HQ
 - Land Force
 - Tongan Royal Guards Air Wing
 - Information, Communication, and ICT
 - Northern Command
 - Training



HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION MECHANISMS

COORDINATION OF FOREIGN MILITARY ASSETS

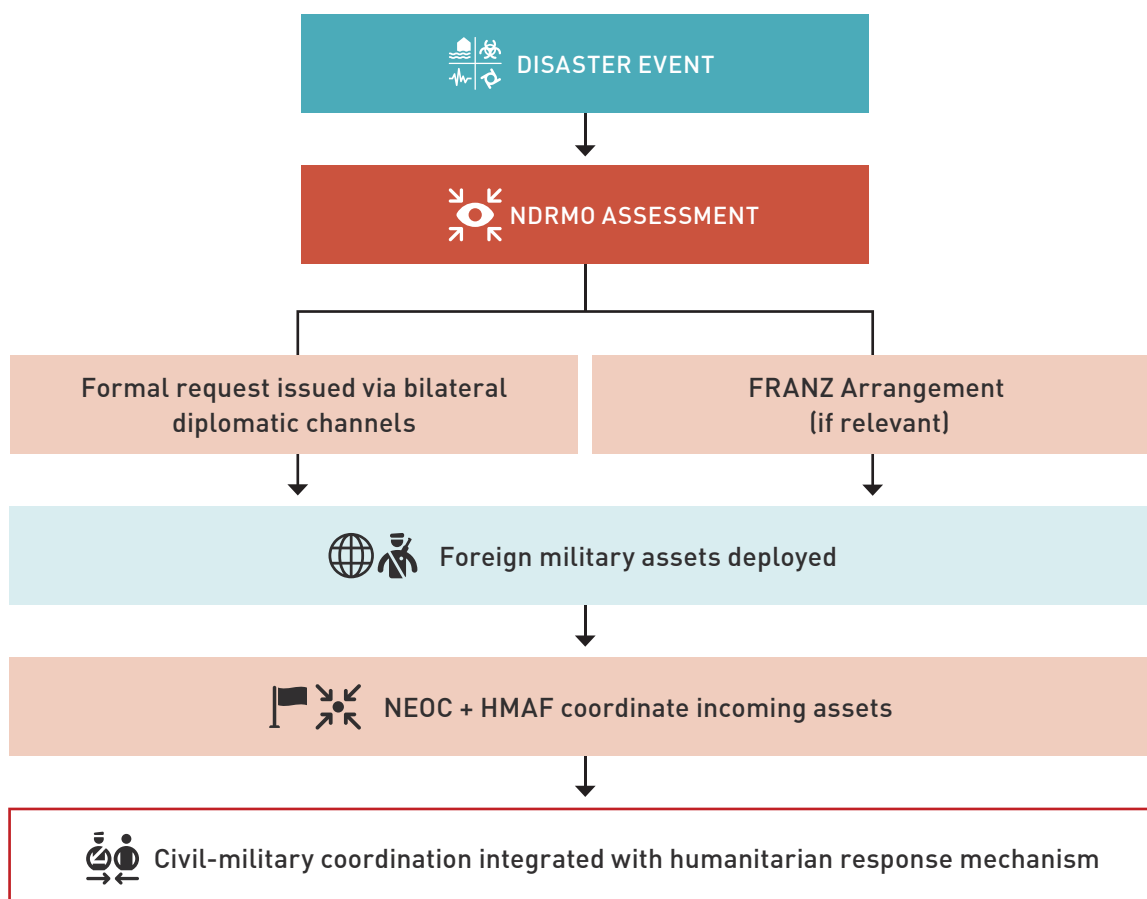
In Tonga, HMAF leads defence coordination with foreign military partners, particularly during emergencies that exceed national capacity and necessitate international assistance. The Government of Tonga issues formal requests for support through diplomatic channels, either bilaterally, engaging partners such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America, France and Japan, or via regional mechanisms like the FRANZ Arrangement, which facilitates coordinated reconnaissance and relief efforts across the Pacific.

Once foreign military assets are accepted, they are integrated into Tonga's national response system through the NEOC, with HMAF acting as the primary liaison for defence-related support. To ensure alignment with government-led priorities and the broader humanitarian response framework, a Civil-Military Coordination Cell may be established under the NEOC. If an international humanitarian response is activated, the UN-OCHA can provide UN civil military coordination support to help

manage civilian-military engagement while upholding humanitarian principles.

HMAF typically collaborates with foreign forces on logistics, relief distribution, engineering support and communications, often through embedded liaison officers. These coordination mechanisms are regularly strengthened through joint exercises that test policies, procedures, and interoperability. Notable examples include Exercise Longreach, Exercise Povai Sapper and the Civil-Military Coordination Workshop & Tabletop Exercise conducted under the Pacific Partnership initiative.

Efforts to develop a formal coordination in the context of mobilising foreign military assets remain a work in progress; no official mechanism has yet been established. At present, coordination occurs primarily through HMAF liaison officers assigned to the NEOC when it is activated.



CASE STUDY: HUNGA TONGA–HUNGA HA'APAI ERUPTION & TSUNAMI 2022



15 January 2022



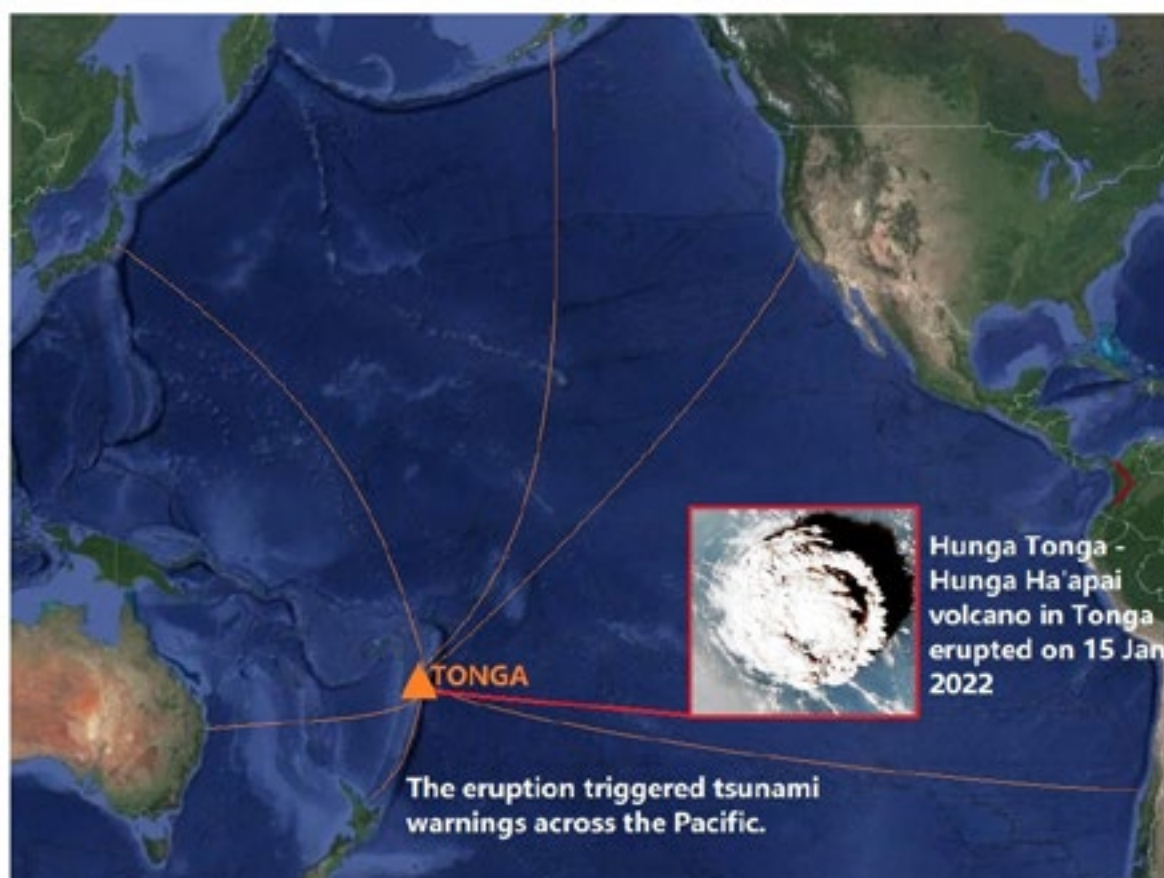
85,000 affected



4 fatalities



USD 90.4 million



Source: <https://www.geonet.org.nz/tsunami/story/hthh>

OVERVIEW

The Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha’apai submarine volcano, located 65 km north of Tongatapu, erupted with impacts felt across Tongatapu, Ha’apai, ‘Eua, and outer islands. Ashfall disrupted air travel and contaminated water supplies, while the tsunami reached as far as Peru, Japan, and the United States of America west coast.

The Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha’apai (HTHH) eruption and resulting tsunami devastated Tonga’s coastal communities, destroyed homes and businesses, blanketed islands with ash, and severed the nation’s only international undersea communications cable, isolating Tonga from the outside world for weeks. The Government of Tonga, through the National Emergency Management Committee and the

NEMO, coordinated the response under the Tonga Emergency Management Act 2007. The National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) was activated on 14 January 2022 following a tsunami marine warning issued by the Tonga Meteorological Services. Immediate priorities included clearing ash from runways to restore international flights, repairing disrupted communications, conducting rapid needs assessments, and supporting displaced families.

Preliminary government estimates show 84,176 people (84% of the population) on Tongatapu, Ha’apai, and ‘Eua were affected, mainly due to ashfall. ReliefWeb reported a total of about 2,390 displaced people from 465 households, with ongoing humanitarian needs in the aftermath of the

eruption and tsunami. The disaster also caused severe damage to critical infrastructure and services. Fua'amotu International Airport was closed for a week due to ash cover; Queen Salote and Vuna Wharves were clogged with debris, and Vaiola Hospital's backup generators failed due to ashfall. On 'Eua Island, Nafanua Wharf, coastal roads, bridges and multiple government offices were destroyed. The World Bank estimated direct damages at 87.3 million USD (18.5% of GDP), while the Government's Recovery Plan projected 240 million USD with the damage to the communication cable adding significant additional costs in time and money.

The HTHH eruption coincided with Tonga's first community transmission of COVID-19, which further complicated the response. National lockdowns were imposed from 2 February 2022, restricting movement and requiring the adoption of strict contactless delivery protocols for humanitarian assistance. Despite these challenges, the NEOC maintained coordination with government ministries, clusters, and partners through virtual platforms and controlled field operations. The Government of Tonga adopted strict 'contactless delivery' protocols for international humanitarian assistance due to COVID-19 border measures, requiring offshore delivery and disinfection of relief supplies. Regional and international partners including Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Japan, France, the United States, and the PHT supported the government-led response, providing naval vessels, aircraft, engineering support, water purification units and relief goods.

By 18 February 2022, NEMO and partners had distributed food and hygiene kits to 269 households under home isolation, provided over 1.1 million litres of water through assistance from HMNZS Aotearoa, HMNZS Canterbury, Ohsumi, and HMAS Supply, and issued 594 exemption permits to sustain essential logistics operations. Relief distribution continued across Tonga's island groups under COVID-safe conditions, with officers using full PPE and adhering to disinfection protocols.

International humanitarian support was substantial, it was coordinated through the NEOC under contactless conditions. Assistance came from Australia (17 flights, HMAS Adelaide, HMAS Supply), New Zealand (5 flights, 3 vessels), Fiji (Lomaiviti Princess 1), Japan, France, China, the UK, and the USA providing naval assets, aircraft, desalination units, and relief goods. This multinational support was conducted under Tonga's leadership, ensuring alignment with government priorities and COVID-19 safety requirements.

The disaster impacts on many sectors of the economy and infrastructure were severe. The agricultural sector lost over 80% of crops in affected areas, while livestock deaths and widespread ash contamination threatened food

security. Recovery for agriculture alone was estimated at USD 12.45 million, including soil fertility restoration, crop replanting and livestock support. The fisheries sector suffered damages estimated at USD 10.4 million, with nearly 200 small fishing vessels lost, aquaculture farms damaged, and Special Management Area infrastructure destroyed. Widespread water contamination from volcanic ash left rainwater tanks unusable in Tongatapu, Ha'apai and 'Eua. Water quality testing on islands such as Nomuka, Fonoifua and Tungua revealed 'very poor' drinking water, requiring urgent relief. The tourism industry was devastated, with nine large and seven small resorts destroyed on Tongatapu's west coast and nearby islands, causing 20.6 million USD in damages and major employment losses.

CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION

The Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai crisis demanded close cooperation between civil authorities, HMAF, Tonga Police and international military partners. NDRMO coordinated the overall national response through the NEOC, providing direction to clusters, consolidating information, and liaising with Cabinet and humanitarian partners to ensure that relief and recovery operations were aligned with national priorities.

HMAF deployed naval vessels and personnel to Ha'apai and 'Eua for rapid assessments, evacuations and relief distribution, and supported ash clearance at Fua'amotu International Airport. They provided logistics for transporting supplies and restoring essential services. HMAF also served as the primary liaison for incoming foreign military assets operating under Tonga's NEOC coordination. Tonga Police coordinated immediate coastal evacuations, maintained law and order, managed security at ports and airports, and supported distribution of relief supplies in affected communities. TFES led search and rescue operations, cleared debris to restore access routes, and provided emergency fire and safety support at critical facilities, including ports and evacuation centres.

International Military Assistance was significant. Australia's HMAS Adelaide and Supply, New Zealand's HMNZS Aotearoa, Wellington, and Canterbury, Japan's Ohsumi, and vessels from Fiji, France, the USA, and the UK delivered humanitarian cargo, engineering support, and desalinated water. Personnel from the Republic of Fiji Military Force assisted with clearing debris from restricted zones in Nuku'alofa, working alongside Australian Defence Force personnel and HMAF teams.

Through this multi-layered cooperation, Tonga was able to restore essential infrastructure, deliver emergency relief and maintain national health security during a compounded crisis.

Key Learnings

The Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha‘apai (HTHH) disaster provided critical insights for strengthening Tonga’s national preparedness, coordination systems, and institutional governance. The eruption, tsunami, and simultaneous COVID-19 outbreak exposed both strengths and systemic weaknesses in disaster response, coordination, and communication.

- **Coordination and governance through the cluster system improves information sharing:** The response underscored the value of Tonga’s cluster system as an effective coordination framework, with the establishment of Cluster Coordinators widely regarded as a positive development.
- **Legislation and financing needs to be clear to clarify roles and strengthen coordination:** The response occurred as the Government was transitioning from the Emergency Management Act (2007) to the forthcoming Disaster Risk Management (DRM) Bill and National DRM Policy. It reaffirmed the importance of these instruments for providing a clear governance framework that integrates DRR and DRM, clarifies roles and responsibilities, and strengthens coordination across all sectors.
- **Inclusion, local leadership, and community engagement need to be institutionalised:** The vulnerabilities of women-headed households, people with disabilities, and displaced island communities were a key concern. The integration of district and village disaster plans, community leadership, and inclusive participation in cluster operations proved critical for effective outreach and should be institutionalised as part of preparedness and recovery planning.



ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	Australian Federal Police
CCG	Cluster Country Group
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
FRANZ	France–Australia–New Zealand (Arrangement)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HADR	Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief
HMAF	His Majesty's Armed Forces
IDA	Initial Damage Assessment
IEOC	Island Emergency Operations Centre
JNAP	Joint National Action Plan on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management
MCO	Multi-Country Office
MEIDECC	Ministry of Meteorology, Energy, Information, Disaster Management, Environment, Climate Change and Communications
MHEWS	Multi-Hazard Early Warning System
NDRMC	National Disaster Risk Management Committee
NDRMO	National Disaster Risk Management Office
NEMO	National Emergency Management Office
NEMP	National Emergency Management Plan
NEOC	National Emergency Operations Centre
NFI	Non-Food Item
PHT	Pacific Humanitarian Team
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TC	Tropical Cyclone
TFES	Tonga Fire and Emergency Services
TOR	Terms of Reference
TRCS	Tonga Red Cross Society
TSDF II	Tonga Strategic Development Framework 2015–2025
UN	United Nations

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VANUATU



HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN EMERGENCIES

Drone in Vanuatu. Photo: Seiji Seiji / Unsplash



VANUATU

Vanuatu was ranked 44th out of 193 countries in the 2025 edition of the World Risk Report. It is highly susceptible to floods, droughts, tropical cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. These risks are further compounded by Vanuatu's geography. Like many island nations, Vanuatu's remote location poses considerable challenges for the timely delivery of aid, further complicating disaster response efforts. This combination of risk and geography underscores the importance of effective coordination across all key stakeholders in disaster response.

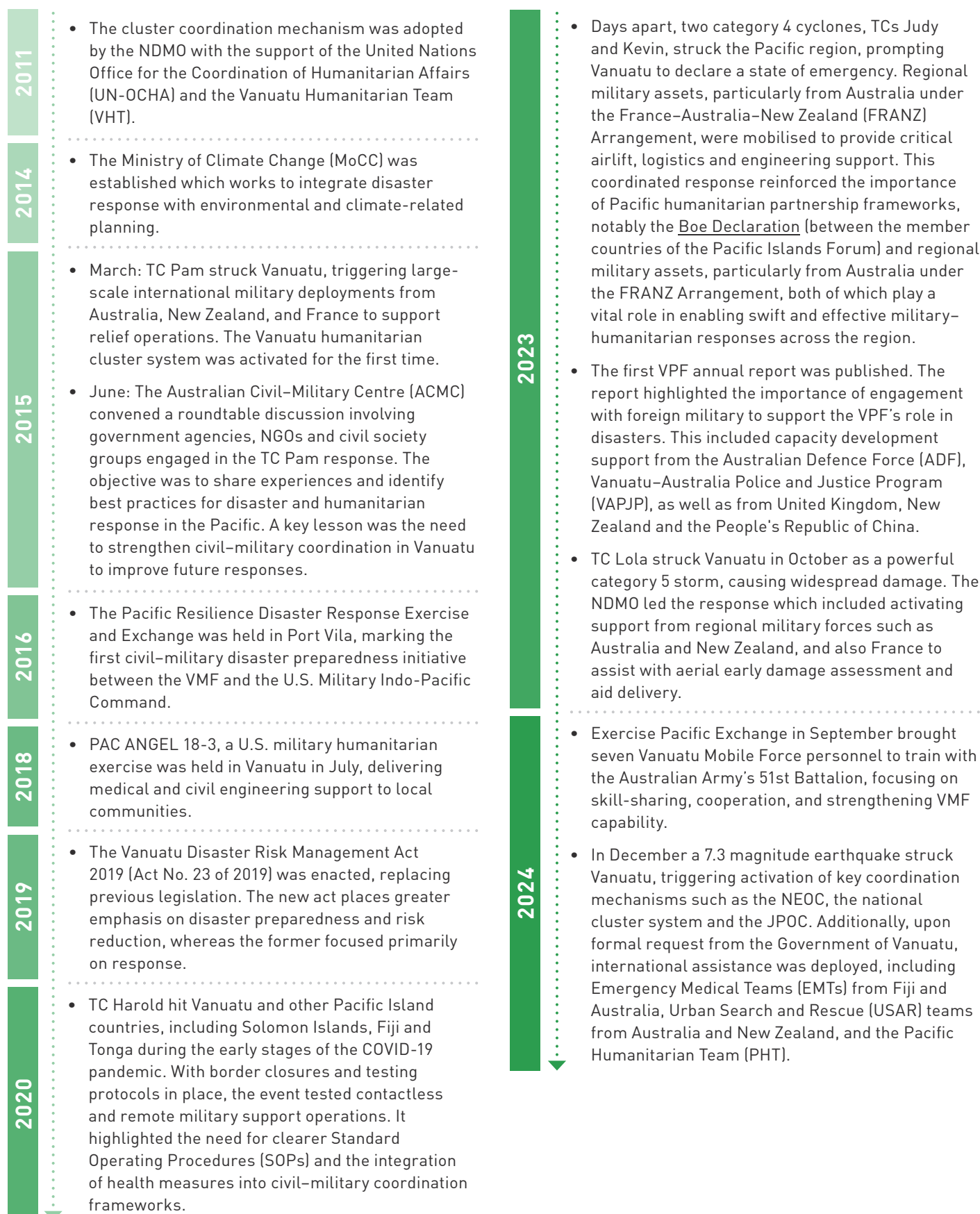
Vanuatu places a strong emphasis on integrating disaster risk elements into its broader disaster management framework. This strategic direction is demonstrated through the updated disaster management legislation, which shifted from the [National Disaster Act 2000](#) to the [Disaster Risk Management Act](#) in 2019. Meanwhile, disaster response mechanisms combine both a national structure and cluster system. The Disaster Risk Management Act 2019 guides disaster management coordination and designates the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) as the lead agency. Following Tropical Cyclone (TC) Pam in 2015, Vanuatu first activated the national cluster system to enhance coordination between government agencies and humanitarian partners that work under the NDMO.

The Vanuatu Mobile Force (VMF) serves a comparable role to that of a military. This mobile unit, comprising around 300 personnel, operates under the Vanuatu Police Force (VPF). The VMF primarily supports law enforcement and acts as a frontline responder in national security and disaster situations. Its role in disaster response is coordinated through the Joint Planning and Operations Centre (JPOC), which coordinates emergency services in disaster response to uphold Vanuatu law. The JPOC operates under the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) led by the NDMO and works in collaboration with the cluster system.

Disasters have been key to developing civil–military coordination in Vanuatu, particularly TCs Pam (13 March 2015) and Harold (6 April 2020) and the recent earthquake last year (2024). This coordination has been complemented by participation in key regional exercises such as [Croix du Sud 2025 \(Southern Cross\)](#), one of the Pacific region's largest multinational disaster response exercises, and the [Pacific Resilience Disaster Response Exercise and Exchange](#). These engagements have strengthened Vanuatu's disaster response capabilities, not only at the national level but also within the broader Pacific context.



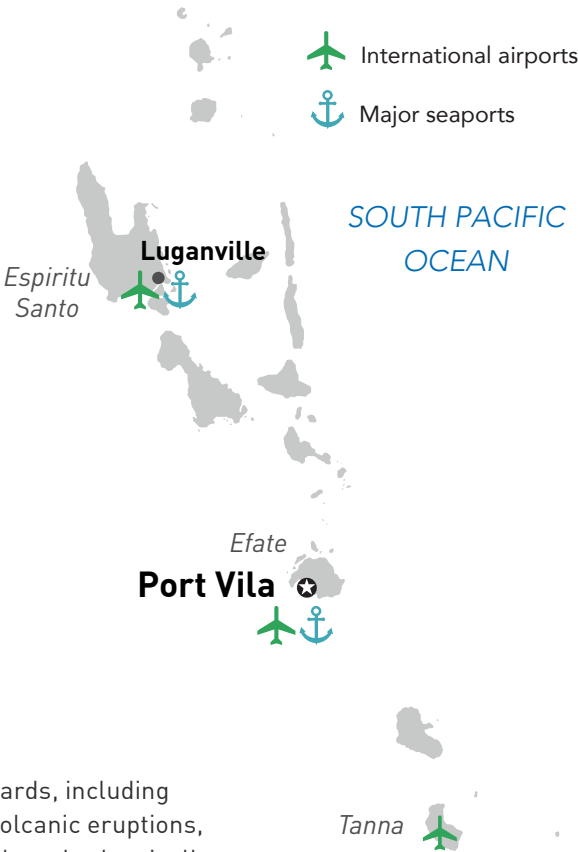
KEY EVENTS IN THE RECENT EVOLUTION OF HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION IN VANUATU



DISASTER RISK PROFILE

KEY FACTS

- Official name:** Republic of Vanuatu
- Land Area:** 12,190 km²
- Population:** 331,700 (SPC, 2025)
- Capital:** Port Vila
- Official Languages:** Bislama, English, French
- Disaster Focal point:** National Disaster Management Office
- Police:** Vanuatu Police Force and its specialised branches, the Vanuatu Mobile Force and the Vanuatu Police Maritime Wing



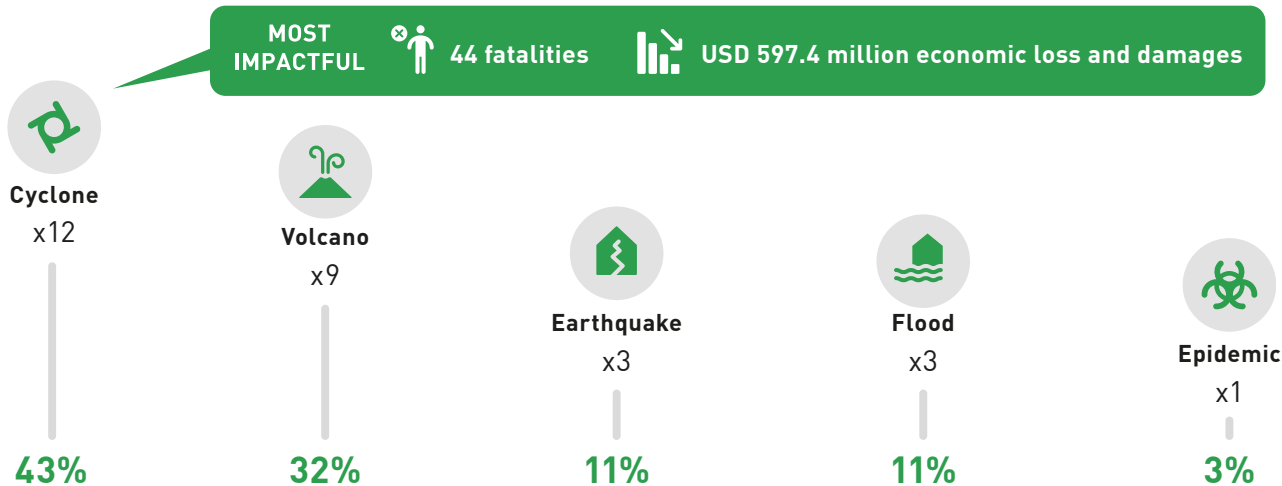
GENERAL INFORMATION

Vanuatu faces significant exposure to a wide range of natural hazards, including tropical cyclones, storm surges, landslides, flooding, droughts, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis. All islands are situated in a seismically and volcanically active region, contributing to the frequent occurrence of volcanic activity, seismic events, and tsunami threats.

FREQUENCY AND PROPORTION OF DISASTERS BY TYPE FROM 2000 TO 2025

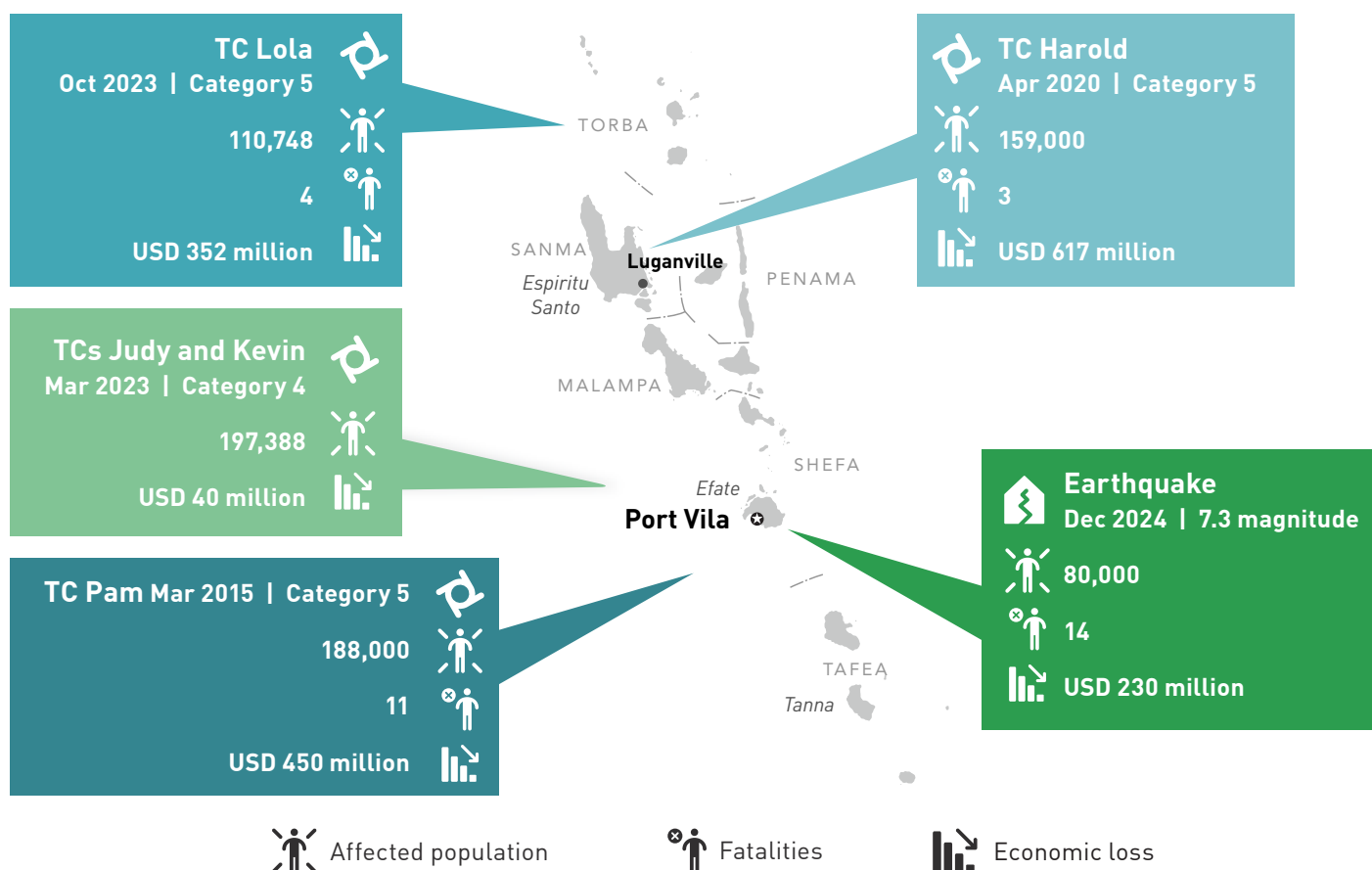
Vanuatu has been affected by 28 natural disasters over the last 25 years. Its geographical location on the Pacific Ring of Fire and in a cyclone-prone area, combined with the vulnerabilities of a small island developing state (SIDS).

The graph below orders Vanuatu’s natural disasters between 2000 and 2025 by type according to their frequency, with the most to least frequent moving left to right and the percentage frequency illustrated. The most impactful disaster type is identified but not ranked. Since 2000, cyclones (43%) have been the most frequent disaster to affect Vanuatu, followed by Volcanoes (32%). Cyclones were also the most impactful, causing a significant number of fatalities and economic loss.



Source: <https://public.emdat.be/data>

MAJOR DISASTERS (2015-2025)



INFORM INDEX FOR RISK MANAGEMENT

INFORM Risk is an open-source risk assessment for humanitarian crises and disasters. INFORM Risk gives each country a risk score of 1-10 (1 being the lowest and 10 the highest) for each of the dimensions, categories, and components of risk, as well as an overall risk score. The higher the score, the more at risk a country is to disasters.

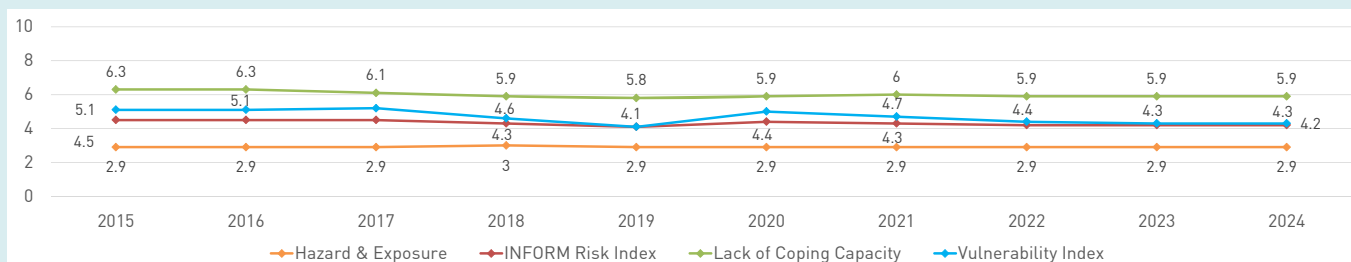
INFORM RISK VALUE AND RANKING 2025

Vanuatu has a low hazards and exposure value and a moderate level of vulnerability but has a considerably higher value in lack of coping capacity. As a result, it is classified as medium risk.

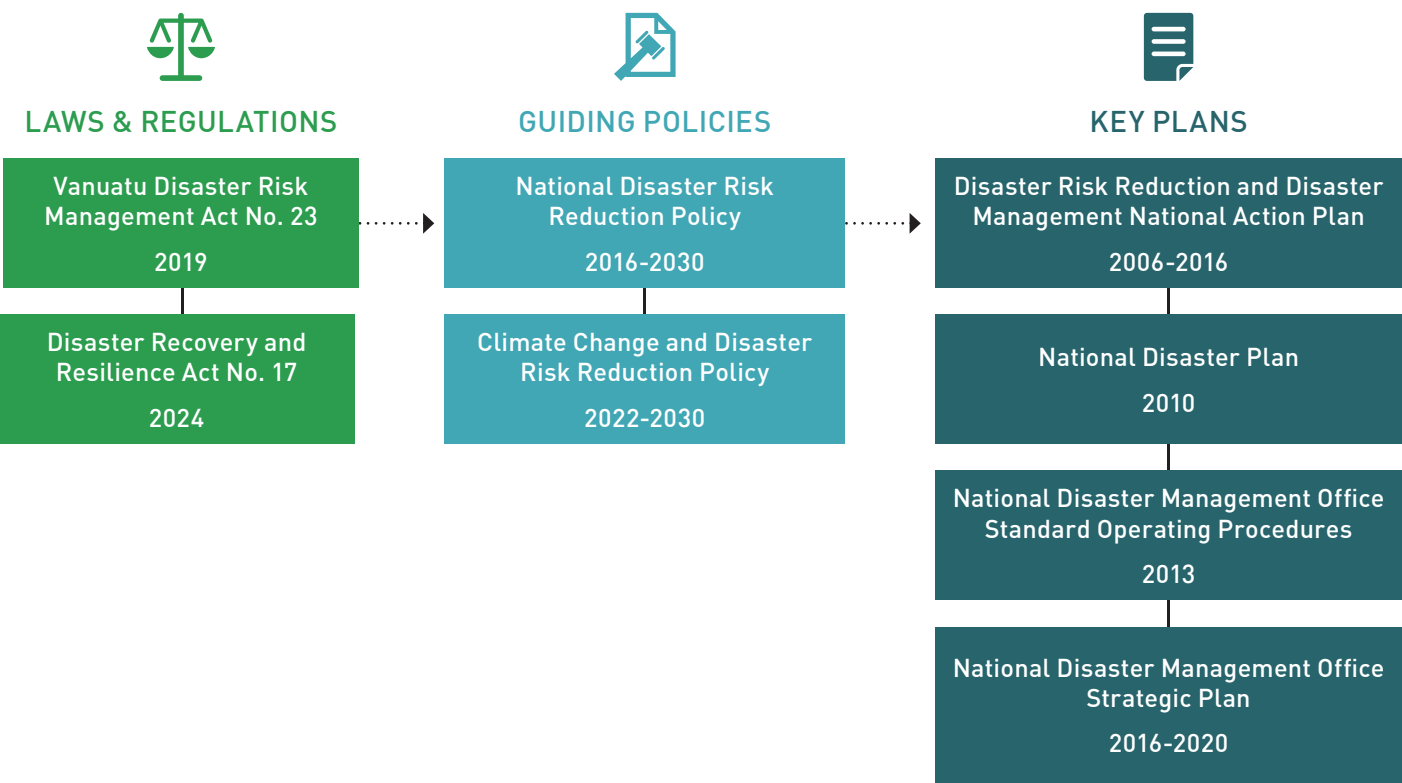
INFORM Risk and dimensions of risk	VALUE (10 as the highest)	WORLD RANK (out of 191 countries)
INFORM Risk	4.2	74
Hazard & Exposure	2.9	99
Vulnerability	4.3	77
Lack of coping capacity	5.9	48

INFORM RISK TEN-YEAR TREND (2015-2024)

Vanuatu's hazards and exposure, coping capacity and risk indicators have remained stable since 2015; however, it's vulnerability demonstrates sharper rise and falls in 2019 and 2020 and then steadily decreased over the last five years due to increasing disasters. Consequently, the INFORM Risk Index has slightly decreased, classifying Vanuatu within the medium-risk category.



KEY POLICIES, PLANS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION



Vanuatu Disaster Risk Management Act No. 23 of 2019

The Disaster Risk Management Act 2019 of Vanuatu replaced the National Disaster Act No 31 of 2000, establishing a regulatory framework for managing disaster risks across preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. It established key governance structures, including the National Disaster Risk Management Council, and sets out the role of the NDMO. At the subnational level, the act outlines decentralised responsibilities to provincial and municipal authorities, enhancing local capacity and coordination. It also assigns specific roles to government agencies, local authorities, NGOs and communities.

Disaster Recovery and Resilience Act No. 17 2024

The Disaster Recovery and Resilience Act No.17 2024 complements the Disaster Risk Management Act 2019 by providing a specific framework for the recovery and resilience efforts while the previous Act provides guidance focusing in response contexts. This act outlines key areas around disaster recovery including the establishment of the National Recovery Committee, provision for the declaration of disaster recovery, provision for international disaster recovery assistance and the establishment of an emergency recovery fund.

National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016–2030

The Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2016–2030 was issued in 2015 by the Government of Vanuatu in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC). This policy outlines the nation’s long-term vision for addressing climate change and enhancing community resilience. The groundwork for this initiative began in 2012 with the creation of the National Advisory Board (NAB) on Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR). The policy encompasses a comprehensive framework guided by principles of accountability, sustainability, equity, community engagement, collaboration and innovation.

Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2022–2030

The Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy 2022–2030 articulates Vanuatu’s vision, guiding principles and strategic priorities in addressing Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction (CCDRR). It provides a platform for integrating these efforts into the national development planning framework, providing a clear mandate for ministries and line agencies to incorporate relevant actions into their business plans. At the subnational level, the Department

of Local Authorities supports provincial and area councils in embedding climate change and disaster risk considerations into their development planning and budgeting processes. Additionally, the policy recognises the critical role of humanitarian actors including the VHT, the NDMO and cluster agencies to support CCDRR efforts through collaboration and coordination.

Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management National Action Plan 2006 – 2016

The Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management National Action Plan 2006 – 2016 outlines strategies to promote resilience in Vanuatu through the reduction of social, economic and environmental impacts of disasters. This framework mainstreams all-hazards risk management into all sectors and decision making process at all levels of government including national planning and budgetary process.

National Disaster Plan 2010

The Vanuatu National Disaster Plan 2010 which replaced the 1987 National Disaster and Emergency Plan, is an arrangement under the provision of Section 9 Part 3 of the National Disaster Act No.31 of 2000. It presents a framework for disaster preparedness, response and recovery in the country. The plan designates the NDMO as the lead coordinating agency, supported by the National Disaster Committee (NDC) and sector-specific cluster groups.

National Disaster Management Office Standard Operating Procedures 2013

The Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for the National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) outline processes and arrangements for operation and coordination in emergency response. These procedures serve as a practical guide to implement operational strategies in response to both natural and human-induced hazards. The SOPs also define operational relationships between NDMO and designated Lead Agencies for various hazard types. It is intended to be used alongside the National Disaster Plan and the National Disaster Act. As the central hub for emergency response coordination, NDMO is maintained in a constant state of readiness to ensure rapid activation and effective management during emergencies and disasters.



National Disaster Management Office Strategic Plan 2016-2020

The National Disaster Management Office Strategic Plan 2016 – 2020 defined the central role of the NDMO in coordinating disaster response efforts across Vanuatu. It highlighted the role of collaboration with key operational partners, including line ministries, UN agencies, faith-based organisations, the private sector, international and local NGOs, and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (RCRC), in assessing and addressing the needs of disaster-affected populations. The plan also emphasises the role of the NDMO to facilitate effective coordination among these humanitarian actors to ensure timely delivery of essential relief services such as food, water, sanitation and emergency shelter. The plan included 4 key objectives :

- Strengthen the NDMO governance framework through reporting/monitoring and evaluation (M&E), planning, budgeting, resourcing, legislation, policy and procedures and by advocacy for DRM and climate change (CC) mainstreaming.
- Improve DRM coordination arrangements with all stakeholders at regional, national, provincial and community levels.
- Enhance DRM operations preparedness, response and recovery for a safer, secure and resilient Vanuatu.
- Facilitate harmonisation and mainstreaming to promote coherence between DRM including CC approaches, systems, programmes and stakeholders involved in development (preparedness, response and recovery).



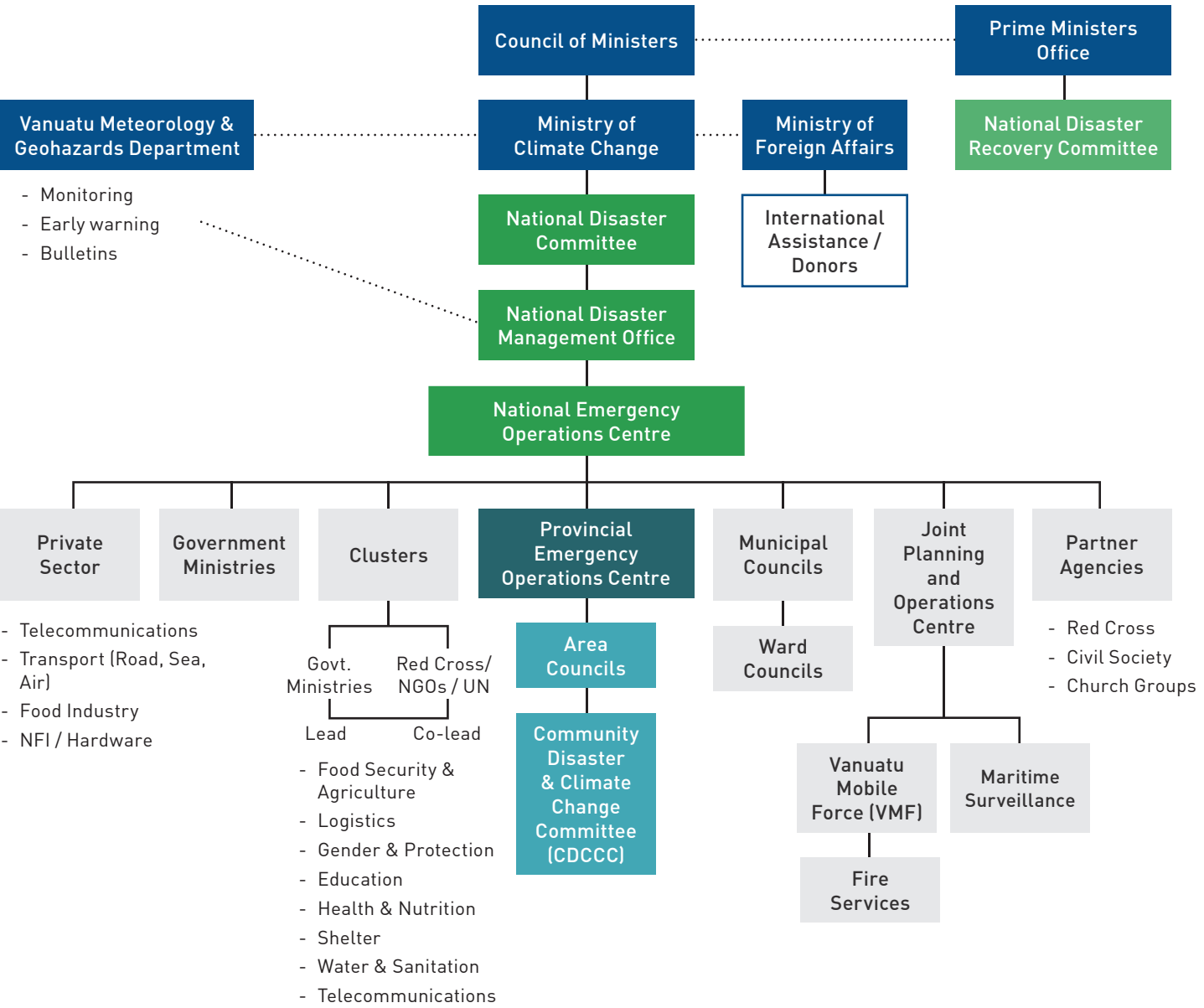
KEY CIVILIAN RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTERS

NATIONAL DISASTER FOCAL POINT

The 2025 Disaster Management Structure published by NDMO for Vanuatu introduces a multi-tiered disaster response framework, with the NDMO at the centre (see diagram below). Strategic oversight is provided by the National Disaster Committee composed of director

generals and chaired by the Ministry of Climate Change. The Council of Ministers oversees this committee, particularly for high-level decision-making. Operational coordination occurs through NEOC, supported by sectoral clusters and provincial coordination units.

NATIONAL COORDINATION STRUCTURE



NFI - Non Food Item NGOs- Non-Government Organisations UN - United Nations

Source: Adapted from National Coordination Structure, National Disaster Management Office

NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

The National Disaster Management Council (NDMC) is the government body that is concerned with the formulation of policies and strategies in relation to the aims of this plan. In times of emergencies, the Emergency Committee of the NDMC undertakes the coordination of emergency activities.



Established by: National Disaster Act No.23 of 2019



Leadership: Director-General of the Ministry of Climate Change



Key functions:

- Develops strategies and policies for the prevention of, preparation for, response to and recovery from disasters
- Ensures the implementation of the strategies by the NDMO, as well as other government and non-government agencies
- Advises ministers on declaring an SOE
- With the approval of the Commissioner of Police, determines the number of members of the VPF to be deployed in all disaster management phases
- Ensures that government agencies comply with direction given by the Minister of Climate Change and Adaptation
- Advises Minister of Climate Change and Adaptation on all matters relating to disasters.



Composition: The Commissioner of Police; Director of the NDMO; Director Generals from line ministries including Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Finance and Economic Management, Ministry of Public Utilities and Infrastructure, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Civil Aviation, Ministry of Lands, Director from Air Coordination and Planning, Department of Provincial Affairs, Vanuatu Metrological and Geohazards Department and CEO of Vanuatu Red Cross Society, and representatives (one of whom must be a woman) of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs).

NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT OFFICE (NDMO)

The NDMO is the principal government agency responsible for coordinating responses to emergencies and disasters across Vanuatu. It supports disaster preparedness and response, working closely with NGOs and international agencies to improve resilience.



Established by: National Disaster Act No.31 of 2000



Leadership: NDMO Director



Key functions:

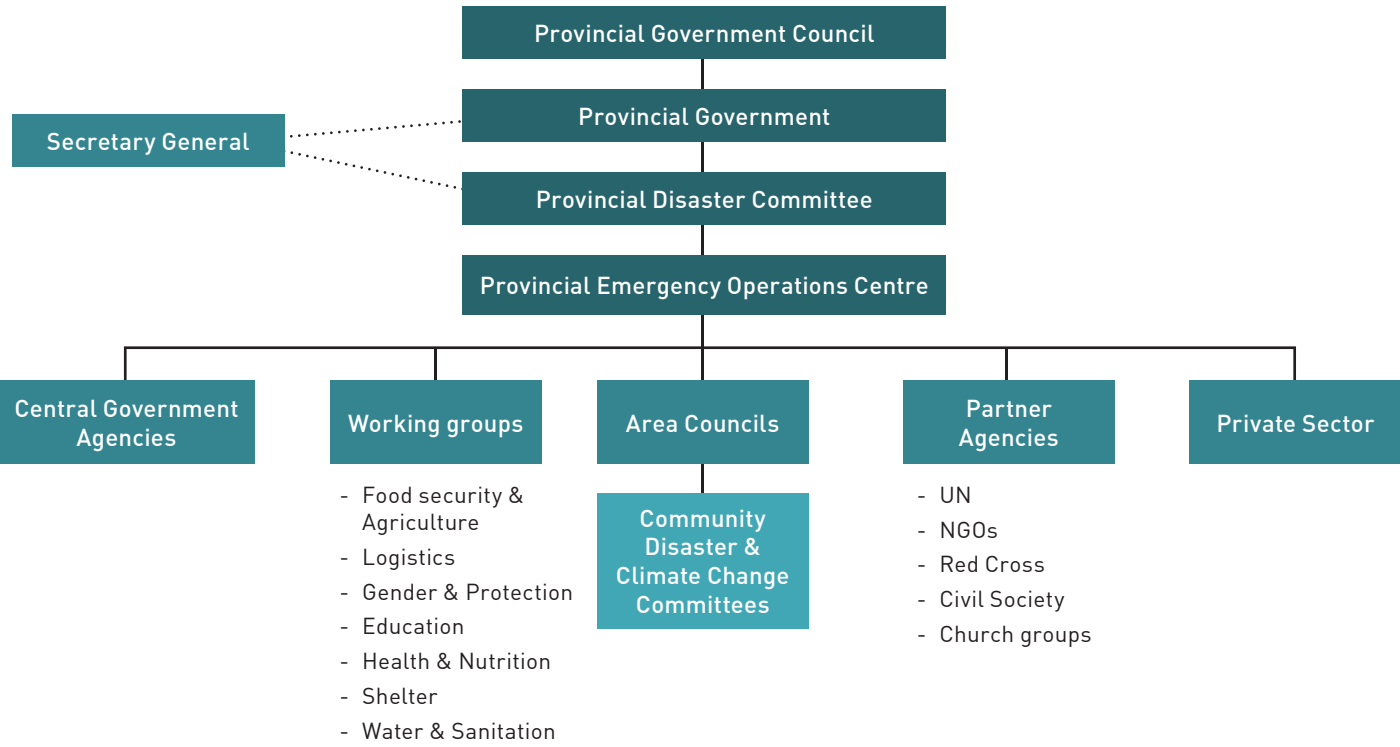
- Coordinates emergency response
- Supports DRR and climate change adaptation programmes
- Informs partners of risks
- Builds communication networks
- Facilitates capacity-building at all levels

SUBNATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

At the provincial and municipal level, structures for disaster management exist in each of the 6 provinces. Subnational disaster management agencies in Vanuatu operate under the authority of the NDMO, as per the Disaster Risk Management Act No. 23 of 2019. Members include provincial government officials, local leaders, community representatives and relevant stakeholders, including non-government agencies nominated by the Vanuatu Association of NGOs (VANGO). The VPF, including the VMF, supports subnational committees by providing security, logistics, and assistance during disaster response operations. Their involvement is coordinated through the NDMO and relevant provincial authorities.

The Vanuatu government's system operates at the national and local scale. Local governance is handled by Provincial and Municipal Councils. Vanuatu is administratively divided into provinces and municipalities, the structure of its Disaster and Climate Change Committees aligns with these governance levels. At the subnational level, there are Provincial Disaster and Climate Change Committees and Municipal Disaster and Climate Change Committees. Communities participate in disaster preparedness and response through Community Disaster Committees (CDCs), which operate with support from the NDMO. The following diagram outlines the subnational disaster management structure.

SUBNATIONAL COORDINATION STRUCTURE



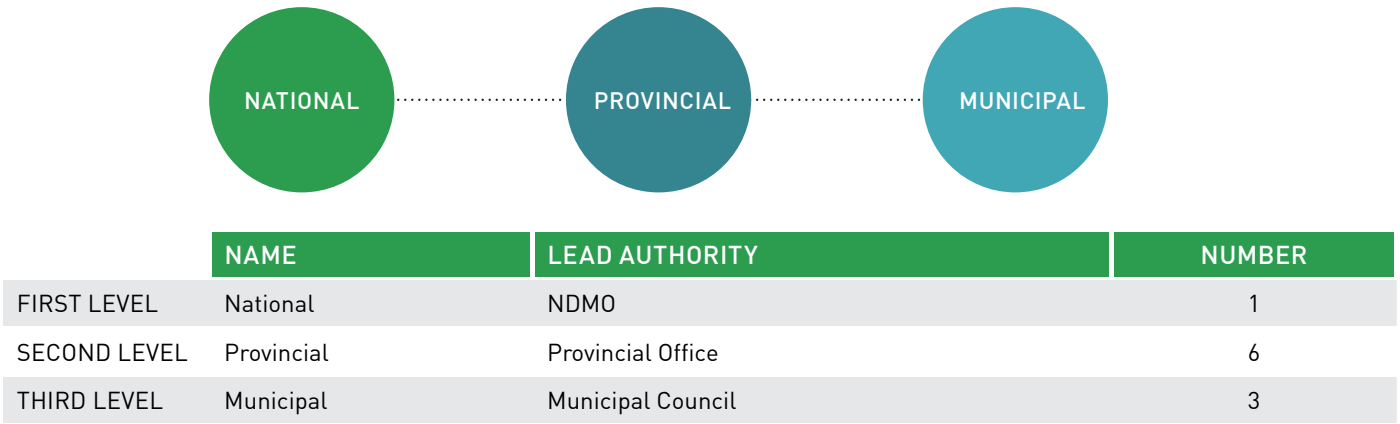
Source: National Coordination Structure, National Disaster Management Office

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN VANUATU

National: The overarching level of government for the entire country.

Provinces: Vanuatu is divided into 6 provinces, each with its own Provincial Council responsible for local governance.

Municipalities: 3 municipalities (Port Vila, Luganville, and Lenakel) have their own Municipal Councils.



KEY GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE (PMO)

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) provides strategic leadership through the development of government policy and oversees national priorities, working collaboratively with domestic and international partners to develop and implement comprehensive DRR strategies. This includes leading the Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management National Action Plan 2006 – 2016, and securing the necessary resources to support its implementation. Furthermore, the PMO also leads the recovery efforts through the Disaster Recovery and Resilience Act 2024 and the National Disaster Recovery Framework 2021 to guide and strengthen recovery and resilience initiatives.

MINISTRY OF CLIMATE CHANGE (MoCC)

Established by the Government of Vanuatu in 2014, the Ministry of Climate Change (MoCC) was created to strategically align departments responsible for responding to natural disasters and promoting sustainable environmental development. It plays a central role in disaster management, leading efforts in climate resilience, DRR, energy and environmental protection. The NDMO operates under this Ministry.

MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS (MoIA)

The primary function of the MoIA is to manage policing, corrections, labour and internal security. During disasters, the ministry provides security and logistical support and ensures the continuity of essential government services during emergencies. Furthermore, the MoIA, through its Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, is involved in capacity-building, field surveys and database development to enhance disaster resilience and support national early warning systems.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH (MoH)

The MoH oversees public health systems and services, coordinating with other agencies, like the NDMO, to ensure a comprehensive approach to health-related issues during and after disasters. The MoH launched the National Health Plan for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation (2021–2025), which serves as a guide to develop and implement plans to address the health impacts of various hazards, including cyclones, earthquakes and pandemics. The MoH aims to support the health and wellbeing of the people of Vanuatu through minimal disruption of the delivery of quality essential health services during and in the aftermath of natural disasters.

COORDINATION MECHANISMS

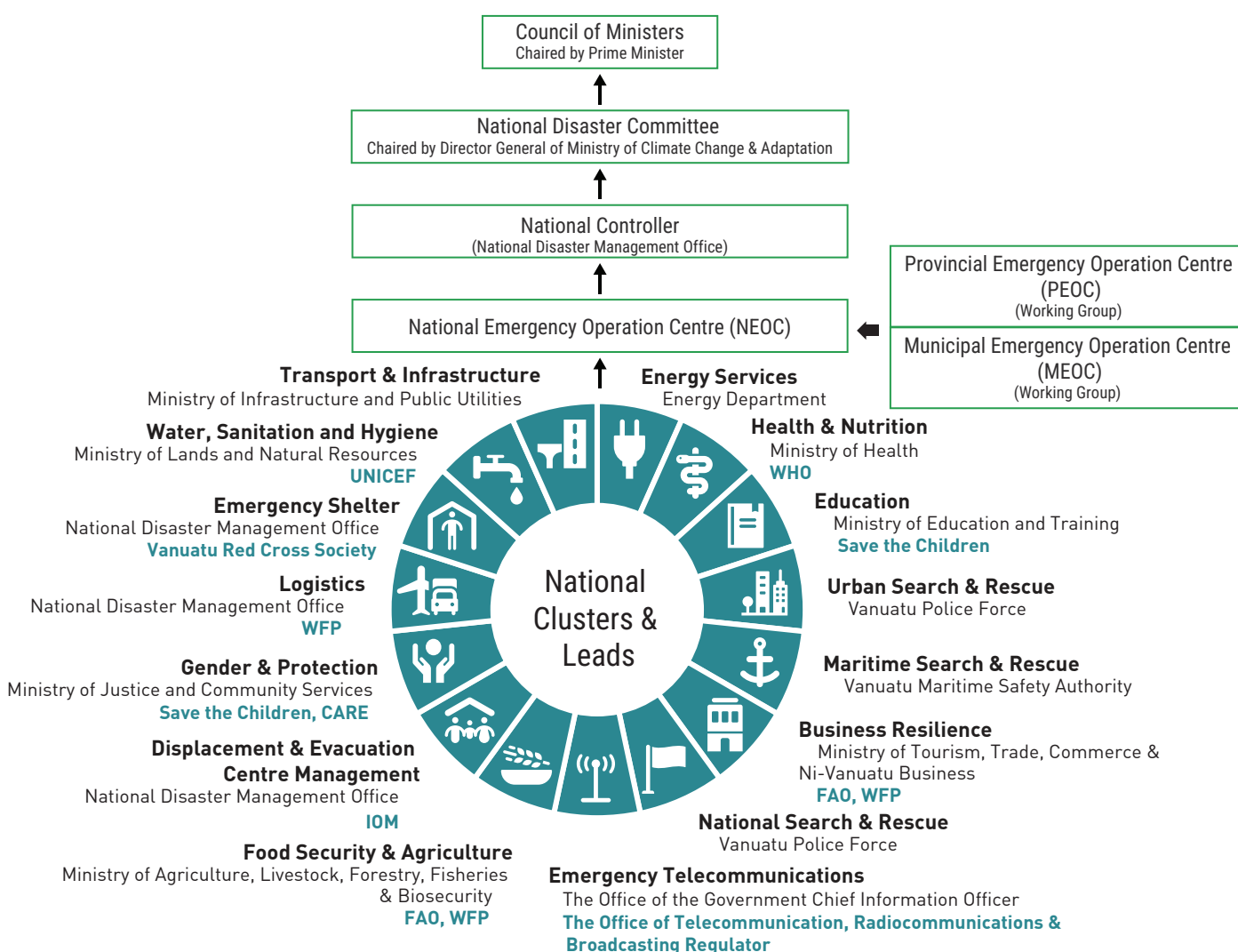
NATIONAL CLUSTER SYSTEM

Vanuatu's disaster response coordination operates through a national cluster system. Each cluster is led by a national government ministry, typically at the director general level, while the co-lead comes from humanitarian agency partners such as the UN, RCRC and NGOs. The clusters cover 12 sectors, including energy services, education, emergency shelter, food security and agriculture, health and medical services, emergency telecommunications, displacement and evacuation centre management, business resilience, gender and protection, logistics, water, sanitation and hygiene, and transport and infrastructure. Following lessons learned from the TC Pam response, the Government of Vanuatu formed the national cluster system as a standing mechanism that serves during disaster response and, importantly, during disaster preparedness activities. At the provincial level, a cluster is referred to as a working group.

NATIONAL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE (NEOC)

The NEOC acts as the central hub during emergencies, facilitating coordination between key agencies, clusters, subnational agencies and international partners. It is activated by NDMO during disaster and major emergency operations to gather information, conduct assessments, coordinate support, make logistical arrangements and prepare reports, such as briefing papers or situational reports. The NEOC is the operational arm of NDMO. However, during emergency response when a state of emergency is declared, the National Controller assumes a higher position than NEOC. To support operational tasks, the centre includes officers of the VPF, as agreed by the Director and the Commissioner of Police and other officers of government agencies determined by the Director of the NDMO.

NATIONAL COORDINATION STRUCTURE



Source: UN OCHA: Vanuatu: Humanitarian Coordination Structure (As of 30 June 2025)

SUBNATIONAL EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE

At the subnational level, each province and municipality in Vanuatu operates a Provincial Emergency Operations Centre (PEOC), which serves as the coordination hub during disasters and facilitates communication between national and provincial authorities. Activation of PEOCs is under the instruction of the Director of the NDMO and is led by the Provincial Disaster Coordinator. Disaster Management Office (NDMO) and is led by the Provincial Disaster Coordinator.



MOBILISATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

In the event of a disaster, the Government of Vanuatu requests and accepts international assistance through established protocols. This support is mobilised through the VHT and the NEOC under the leadership of the NDMO in coordination with Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

COORDINATION OF INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

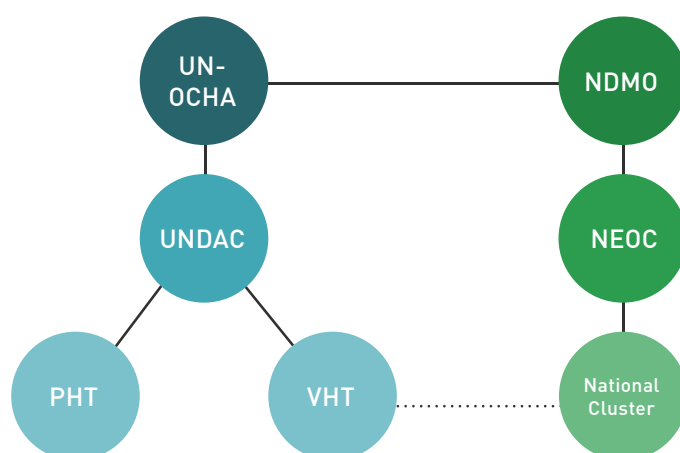
The UN-OCHA Office of the Pacific supports in-country coordination through deployment in response to disasters. The United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) team may be deployed to support UN-OCHA as required. International aid is mobilised through partnerships, including donors such as the World Bank, which provide emergency funding for response and recovery efforts. Coordination with international partners is managed by the NDMO and NEOC, ensuring that assistance aligns with national priorities and effectively addresses the needs of affected communities.

INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION SYSTEM

Vanuatu Humanitarian Team (VHT)

The Vanuatu Humanitarian Team (VHT) is a network of organisations that supports the Government of Vanuatu in humanitarian coordination, disaster preparedness, and emergency response. Coordinated by Oxfam, the VHT brings together a diverse group of members, including the UN, Red Cross, and INGOs. The Pacific Humanitarian Team (PHT) and VHT interact under coordination from UN-OCHA. The PHT provides support to the VHT as the regional coordination mechanism supported by UN-OCHA OoP. Furthermore, this international humanitarian coordination mechanism interfaces with the national system through the cluster approach, facilitated by UN-OCHA in coordination with the NDMO. The diagram below illustrates the connection between international and national coordination structures and composition of VHT.

ALIGNMENT OF INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISMS WITH NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM



KEY VANUATU MOBILE FORCE (VMF) RESPONSIBILITIES IN DISASTERS

VANUATU MOBILE FORCE (VMF)

The VMF is a small, mobile corps of approximately 300 personnel and serves as the paramilitary component of the VPF. Its primary roles include supporting law enforcement and acting as a first line of defence in national security and disaster response.

VMF has participated in multiple international humanitarian and training activities, including PAC Angel 18-3, a 2018 joint exercise with the U.S. military focused on humanitarian medical and engineering support, and Exercise Pacific Exchange 2024, a joint training with the Australian Army's 51st Battalion in Cairns, Queensland. These efforts help build VMF capabilities in disaster response, logistics, and medical outreach.

-  **Established:** 1980, following Vanuatu's independence
-  **Leadership:** Led by a Commander under the VPF
-  **Headquarters:** Port Vila, Vanuatu
-  **Area of Commands:** Nationwide jurisdiction through the VPF
-  **Key roles:** Assists in law enforcement, provides initial defence, supports humanitarian efforts, and manages national fire and emergency operations

-  **Key functions:**
 - Supports community preparedness through trainings
 - Coordinates joint operations across the VPF
 - Liaises directly with the NDMO during hazard response
 - Oversees VPF communication networks
 - Provides operational advice to senior police leadership
 - Engages in emergency response, such as search and rescue operations, clearing and repairing infrastructure, evacuation and relief distribution, providing security for disaster relief efforts, assigning a liaison officer to NEOC when activated

-  **Composition:** Operates as a single mobile unit with specialised functions, including fire and emergency response
-  **Coordination mechanisms:** As part of emergency service providers, VMF coordinates with the NDMO and participates in the national cluster system to support the disaster response.

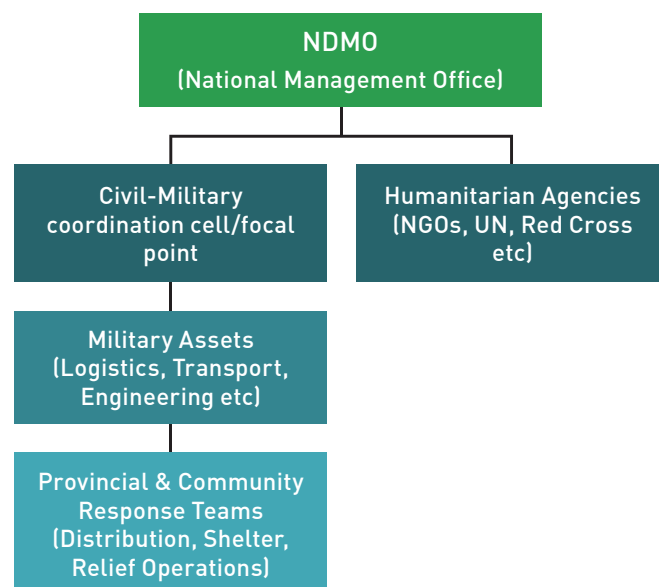


HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION MECHANISMS

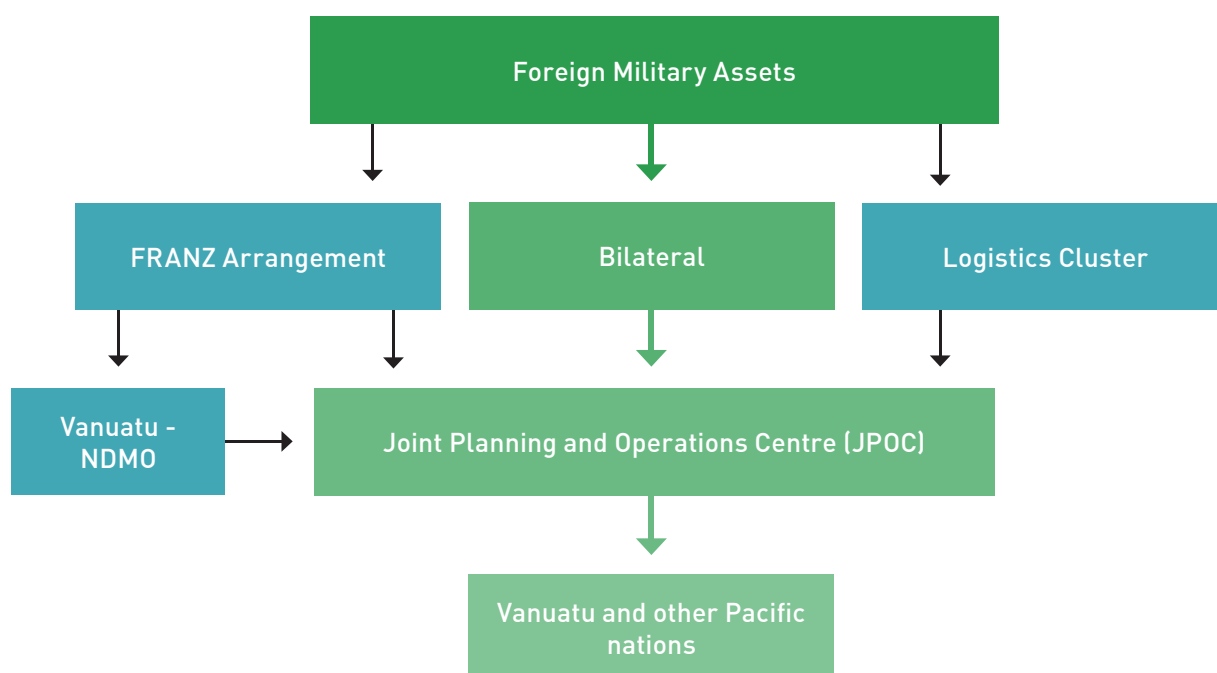
COORDINATION OF FOREIGN MILITARY ASSETS

Under the Disaster Risk Management Act No. 23 of 2019, the NDMO is primarily responsible for coordinating international humanitarian assistance, including foreign military assets. The NDMO ensures that all foreign military support aligns with national priorities and is integrated into existing response structures. The JPOC, housed within the VPF, serves as the operational hub for coordinating with both local and foreign military entities. The JPOC facilitates logistics, communications and deployments in close alignment with the NDMO. Another mechanism is through the FRANZ Arrangement, a trilateral disaster relief framework which plays a critical role in supporting Vanuatu during emergencies. These partners often contribute military assets for rapid response, logistics and humanitarian aid.

HUMANITARIAN CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION STRUCTURE



COORDINATION OF FOREIGN MILITARY ASSETS IN VANUATU



CASE STUDY: TROPICAL CYCLONE PAM 2015



12-14 March 2015



188,000 affected



11 fatalities



USD 450 million

OVERVIEW

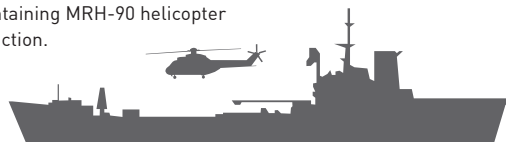
TC Pam, a Category 5 cyclone, struck Vanuatu in March 2015, devastating infrastructure, agriculture, and livelihoods across multiple islands. The VPF played a critical role in disaster response, ensuring law and order, coordinating evacuations and assisting humanitarian partners in relief operations. The greatest impact was in Shefa and Tafea provinces, with severe damage reported in 23 islands. After TC Pam, the Vanuatu Government established a national cluster system which prior to this was not yet in place.

VANUATU: Foreign Military Deployed Assets (as of 29 March 2015)



AUSTRALIA

HMAS Tobruk (landing ship heavy) containing MRH-90 helicopter and engineers to assist with reconstruction. Also has two landing craft which will be utilised to deliver relief to the southern island.

2 x **Kingair B350 aircraft**1 x **C130 aircraft**1 x **C17 aircraft**3 x **Blackhawk helicopters**

NEW ZEALAND

HMNZS Canterbury (multi-role vessel) containing supplies for food and shelter clusters. Arriving on Wednesday 25 March 2015. On board are NZDF personnel, water containers and water tanks, chainsaws, jerry cans, generators, electrical supplies, plumbing materials, building supplies.

1 x **C130H aircraft**1 x **Kingair B200 aircraft**2 x **Seasprite helicopters**

FIJI

35 x **military personnel** and
15 x **medical personnel**.

SOLOMON ISLANDS

Royal Solomon Islands Police Force,
Pacific Class Patrol Boat "**Auki**".



FRANCE

French Frigate Vendémiaire
containing 2 x helicopters
(1 x Puma, 1 x Alouette).

1 x **Patrol Boat La Glorieuse**

2 x **CASA aircraft** operating
between Port Vila,
Tanna and Noumea.



UNITED KINGDOM

1 x **C17 aircraft** which arrived via Amberlie in Queensland on 15/03/2015. 40 hours authorised. Australian DFAT to authorise the use of these hours. Facilitating transport to Port Vila from Brisbane with communications equipment for ADF personnel.



TONGA

Pacific Class Patrol Boat,
VOEA "**Neiafu**".



SUPPORT BY VANUATU

Military Police Patrol Boat
"**Turoroe**".



Creation date: 29 Mar 2015 Data Source: UNDAC Feedback: ochapacific@un.org
www.unocha.org www.reliefweb.int www.humanitarianresponse.info/operations/vanuatu

Source: <https://reliefweb.int/report/vanuatu/vanuatu-foreign-military-deployed-assets-29-march-2015>

CIVIL-MILITARY AND INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION

The VPF coordinated closely with the NDMO, provincial disaster committees, and international partners to support evacuation and shelter management, and assist with clearing debris from roads. Over 5,000 people were evacuated to designated shelters, with VPF officers ensuring safety, registration and orderly distribution of relief supplies. Police maritime units assisted in inter-island transport of medical teams and relief goods to remote communities. Special police units maintained law and order in Port Vila and Lenakel, preventing looting and safeguarding warehouses storing relief supplies.

Key Learnings

- **Pre-established coordination mechanisms for facilitating multi-agency collaboration are essential.** The Vanuatu Government national cluster system illustrates the importance of having established coordination frameworks in place to enable efficient and timely disaster response. The TC Pam response demonstrated the value of multi-agency collaboration between VPF, NDMO, provincial disaster committees, and international partners, particularly in managing evacuations, shelter operations, and debris clearance.
- **Decentralised response is required for localised impact.** The widespread destruction across 23 islands, particularly in Shefa and Tafea provinces, highlighted the critical need for decentralised disaster response capacity at both provincial and community levels. Strengthening local preparedness ensures faster, more locally-driven responses in geographically dispersed emergencies such as in Vanuatu.
- **VPF played a key role in law enforcement and logistics.** VPF played a vital role in maintaining law and order, preventing looting, and securing aid warehouses, and ensuring the safe and rapid distribution of relief supplies. In addition, VPF maritime units facilitated the transport of medical teams and relief goods to remote islands, demonstrating the critical value of mobility assets in reaching isolated communities. This underscores the need for sustained investment in inter-island transport infrastructure and contingency logistics planning to support effective emergency response.
- **Strong link between response coordination mechanisms and police operations are essential.** One of the key recommendations from the TC Pam 'Lessons Learned' workshop was to strengthen the connection between the NEOC and the JPOC to better leverage VPF resources during emergencies. Embedding police coordination into national disaster mechanisms has proven critical, bridging community-level response, technical coordination and international support. This integration enhances operational efficiency and ensures that law enforcement capabilities are effectively aligned with broader humanitarian and disaster response efforts.



CASE STUDY: PORT VILA EARTHQUAKE 2024



17 December 2024



7.3 magnitude



80,000 affected



14 fatalities



USD 230 million

OVERVIEW

On 17 December 2024, a 7.3 magnitude earthquake struck 30 km west of Port Vila, Vanuatu, at 12:47 pm local time. A tsunami warning was issued but then lifted. Search and rescue operations were led by the VPF, with support from regional militaries and humanitarian organisations. Port Vila and surrounding areas on Efate Island were severely impacted with 14 confirmed fatalities. The Government of Vanuatu declared a state of emergency and mobilised a national response through the NDMO, with the VPF central in leading security, crowd management, and logistics for humanitarian delivery.

CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION

The VPF was deployed immediately following the earthquake, assisting with search-and-rescue alongside Fire Service and health teams (NDMO, 2024). VPF is a member of the National Security Taskforce, which was activated immediately after the earthquake struck. The JPOC was also rapidly utilised to lead search and rescue and reported on the number of injuries sustained in the population.

VPF maintained law and order in the declared state of emergency to ensure that orders issued, including curfew orders, were adhered to by the public.



VANUATU

Earthquake: Internationally Deployed Assets

As of 31 December 2024

Activity Summary

40

Total Flights

21

France

11

Australia

7

New Zealand

1

PHAS



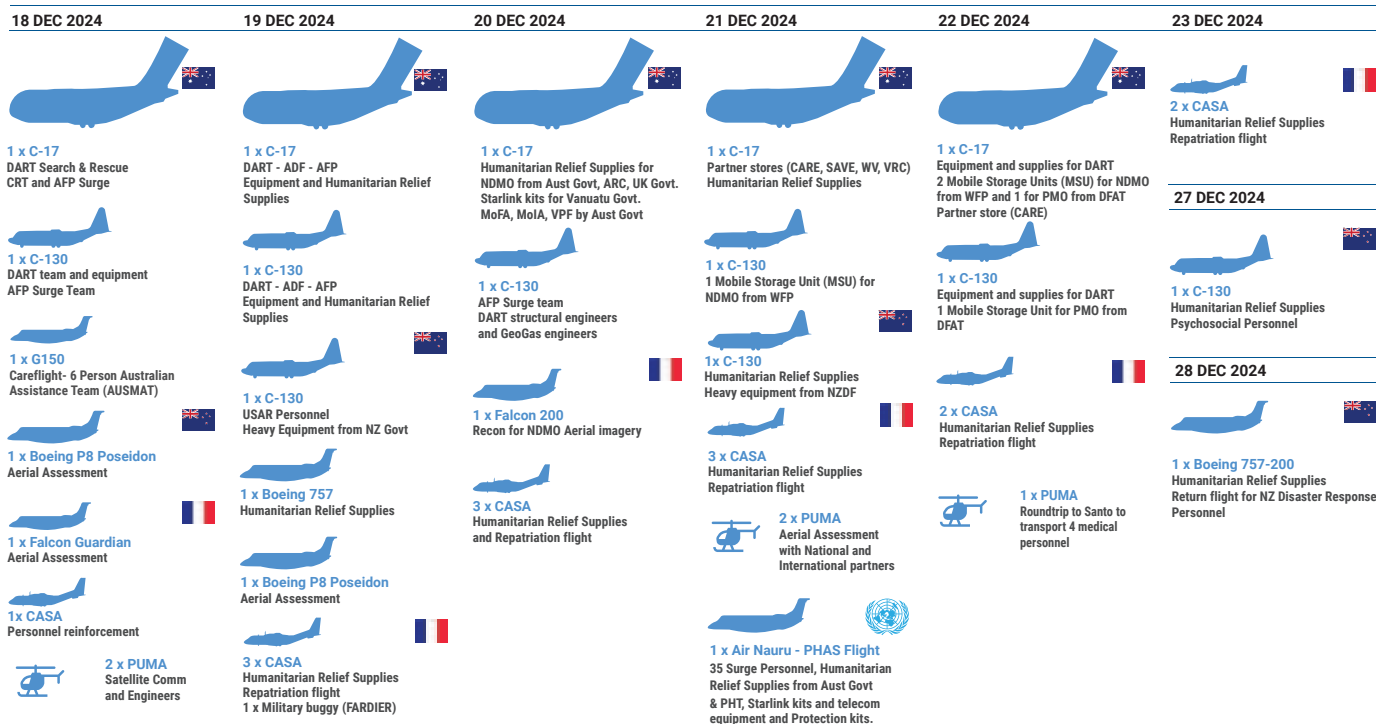
18 Humanitarian Supplies and Efforts



16 Personnel and Heavy Equipment



6 Aerial Assessment



Creation date: 31 Dec 2024 Sources: National Disaster Management Office - NEOC Logistics Cluster, DFAT Humanitarian Response Team, MFAT Humanitarian Response Team, Ambassade de France, Vanuatu
Feedback: ndmo.im@gmail.com ochapacific@un.org www.ndmo.gov.vu www.unocha.org www.reliefweb.int

Source: <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/vanuatu/vanuatu-earthquake-internationally-deployed-assets-28-december-2024>

The state of emergency remained in effect for Port Vila until 24 December during which a 7-day movement restriction was in effect in the heavily impacted business district of Port Vila. Officers coordinated traffic management to facilitate the movement of ambulances, heavy machinery and relief convoys in Port Vila. The VPF set up security perimeters around collapsed infrastructure and high-risk zones to protect civilians.

Working closely with the NEOC, the JPOC led search and rescue operations, in partnership with Pro-Medical, Australia, and New Zealand USAR teams and private companies, including militaries from other countries such as France and Papua New Guinea. The VPF also continued in its role to deal with increased gender-based violence following the earthquake and subsequent displaced populations, as per VPF records.

The VPF enforced the closure of the Port Vila central business district (CBD) following the earthquake, which left collapsed and unsafe buildings and widespread destruction. Community policing units were mobilised to support psychosocial first aid, communications and trust-building with affected communities. The VPF also worked with regional defence partners to secure airports and seaports for incoming humanitarian flights and shipments. The VPF maintained law and order throughout the emergency response period.

After leadership transitioned from the NEOC under the NDMO to the Recovery Operations Centre (ROC) within the PMO, the VPF continued to maintain law and order, ensuring security at ROC premises and enforcing government orders related to CBD closures and demolition of unsafe buildings. Following the earthquake experience, the NDMO established the National Search and Rescue cluster and the USAR cluster, as part of the national cluster system with VPF as lead.

The Disaster Recovery and Resilience Act, enacted in 2024, just prior to the earthquake, provided the framework for recovery efforts. As part of its implementation, the Government of Vanuatu developed a comprehensive Recovery and Resilience Plan. This plan builds on the rapid response and assessments carried out by the NDMO and the newly established ROC.

Key Learnings

- **Rapid activation of police-led search and rescue operations is essential.** The immediate deployment of the VPF, in coordination with the Fire Service, health teams and international partners, demonstrated the importance of pre-established emergency protocols. The swift activation of the JPOC enabled timely search and rescue efforts and injury reporting, reinforcing the value of having dedicated command centres for multi-agency coordination.
- **Law enforcement is a pillar of emergency management.** The VPF played a central role in enforcing the state of emergency, including curfews and CBD closures, ensuring public compliance and safety. The presence of VPF was critical in maintaining law and order, securing high-risk zones and protecting civilians from further harm. This highlights the need for clear legal frameworks and operational readiness for police forces during emergencies.
- **Integrated civil-military and inter-agency coordination has significant impact.** The earthquake response showcased effective collaboration between the VPF, the NEOC, regional defence partners, humanitarian organisations and private sector actors. This multi-layered coordination was essential for securing airports, seaports and facilitating the movement of relief convoys. It underscores the importance of joint planning, shared protocols and interoperability among agencies.
- **Connecting response to recovery aids resilience.** Despite the short timeframe of the earthquake response phase and the leadership shift from NEOC to the ROC under the Prime Minister's Office, the VPF continued to play a vital role in enforcing government orders, securing ROC premises, and supporting recovery activities. This demonstrates the importance of continuity in law enforcement roles throughout the disaster cycle from response to recovery. The enactment of the Disaster Recovery and Resilience Act (2024) also provided a clear mandate for VPF's role in disaster recovery, including road clearance, infrastructure repair, evacuation support and security provision. This legal clarity strengthens institutional accountability and ensures that police contributions are formally recognised and resourced.
- **Dedicated search and rescue clusters streamlines coordination.** Following the earthquake, the NDMO established the National Search and Rescue Cluster and USAR Cluster, with the VPF as the lead agency. This structural reform enhances the incorporation of VPF's work into the humanitarian space, signifying the critical role of VPF in disaster emergencies.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACMC	Australian Civil–Military Centre
ADF	Australian Defence Force
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
CCA	Climate Change Adaptation
CCDRR	Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction
CDC	Community Disaster Committee
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)
DREE	Disaster Response Exercise and Exchange
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EMT	Emergency Medical Team
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FRANZ	France-Australia-New Zealand Arrangement
HPA	Humanitarian Partnership Agreement
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JPOC	Joint Planning and Operations Centre
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MoCC	Ministry of Climate Change
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
NAB	National Advisory Board
NDC	National Disaster Committee
NDMO	National Disaster Management Office
NDRRP	National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy
NEOC	National Emergency Operations Centre
NFI	Non-Food Items
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PEOC	Provincial Emergency Operations Centre
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
RCRC	Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement
ROC	Recovery Operations Centre
SCA	Save the Children Australia
SOP	Standard Operating Procedure
TC	Tropical Cyclone
UN	United Nations
UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAR	Urban Search and Rescue

VANGO	Vanuatu Association of NGOs
VAPJP	Vanuatu–Australia Police and Justice Program
VHT	Vanuatu Humanitarian Team
VMF	Vanuatu Mobile Force
VPF	Vanuatu Police Force
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization

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