

Abstract

Iwi, hapū and Māori communities have consistently demonstrated an ability to effectively engage in readiness, response and recovery for catastrophic hazard events in Aotearoa New Zealand. These actions are operationalised, both independently and in collaboration with local Civil Defence and Emergency Management (CDEM) groups. There are increasing calls from the Aotearoa New Zealand Government and from iwi and hapū to formalise relationships and support available. Little work has been done to understand what the perspectives and experiences of Māori and non-Māori emergency managers have been in navigating past events and planning for future ones. This qualitative research included a series of interviews with emergency managers from across the country on barriers and opportunities for Māori participation in response and recovery. It compares participant experiences with findings from recent reports, research and formal inquiries. This study provides recommendations for areas of focus for the emergency management sector in Aotearoa New Zealand to effectively optimise Māori response and recovery.

Emergency managers' perspectives on Māori response and recovery approaches: managing catastrophic hazard events in Aotearoa New Zealand

Peer reviewed

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Introduction

Māori have played an important role in emergency management for a number of natural hazard events including the 2010–11 Canterbury and 2016 Kaikōura earthquakes, the Edgcombe flood in 2017, the 2019 Tasman Nelson bushfires and the 2023 Cyclone Gabrielle severe weather event. Across Aotearoa, there are examples of iwi [tribe] and hapū [sub-tribes] effectively responding to disasters (Bush International Consulting 2024; Kenney et al. 2015; Carter and Kenney 2018) and preparing their communities for future disaster events. Ngāi Tahu and Ngāti Porou are 2 iwi that are installing emergency management containers at marae that are stocked with supplies such as generators, blankets and food as well as installing Starlink satellite communication systems for marae (Jacobs 2023; Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu 2023). Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu have partnered with the Natural Hazards Commission-Toka Tū Ake to produce a series of videos aimed at Ngāi Tahu whānau [family] to encourage them to prepare for an Alpine Fault rupture using pūrākau [traditional stories].

The Aotearoa New Zealand Government has outlined its commitment to optimise the effort of iwi Māori to benefit all people in an emergency. There are clear national directives for the need to work effectively with iwi, hapū and Māori partners in emergency management but scant guidance on how this is to be achieved equitably at local and regional levels (Technical Advisory Group Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017). From a research

perspective, work that explores the perspectives of emergency managers on working with Tangata Whenua is limited as are Māori approaches to emergency management in acute disaster settings.

This qualitative research project was developed at the request of iwi, hapū and other Māori entities to address knowledge gaps in Māori emergency management theory, knowledge and practices. The research aimed to develop new knowledge to increase understanding about the roles of Māori attributes (knowledges, values and practices) in managing catastrophic emergencies.

Emergency management is legislated in Aotearoa New Zealand, overseen by a national emergency management infrastructure and enacted at the regional level under the auspices of local councils (see, *Civil Defence and Emergency Management Act 2002*). Synergies and areas of dissonance between regional emergency management groups and local Tangata Whenua were documented during this research. The views of regional emergency managers (both Māori and non-Māori) are discussed.

Background

Emergency management in Aotearoa New Zealand is governed by the *Civil Defence and Emergency Management Act 2002* (CDEM Act).¹ The Act provides for the appointment, functions and powers of individuals engaged in civil defence and emergency management as well as civil defence emergency management planning and duties at national and regional levels. The national infrastructure was previously situated within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. In December 2019, a new emergency management structure was authorised with the establishment of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)² to be led by an independent chief executive. NEMA's various roles include providing advice to government on civil defence and emergency management matters; identifying hazards and risks; developing and evaluating the effectiveness of civil defence and emergency management; ensuring coordination at local, regional and national levels; promoting civil defence and emergency management and providing public education on how to prepare for, and act, in an emergency. NEMA also supports emergency management capability development, planning and operations through creating guidelines and standards as well as monitoring the performance of the 16 regional Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) groups. Within these regional groups are joint committees that include elected councillors from each council within regional boundaries.

CDEM groups partner to create consortiums that include representatives from local authorities, emergency services, lifeline utilities and government departments. Groups deliver emergency management through their executives,

planners and operational staff working with partner agencies to identify and understand (local) hazards and risks, prepare CDEM group plans and manage hazards and risks in accordance with the 4 cycles of an emergency (reduction, readiness, response and recovery) (Saunders et al. 2007).

Māori, iwi and hapū are not recognised within emergency management legislation. Neither the CDEM Act nor the *Local Government Act 2022*³ makes mention of Māori or iwi. Recent Māori emergency management initiatives have been challenged by a range of tensions including resistance to collaborative governance, delayed communication with the Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management (now NEMA), delayed integration of Māori responses with the formal civil defence and emergency management infrastructure and non-recognition or support for Māori frontline responders' cultural practices (Jayasinghe et al. 2020; Carter and Kenney 2018; Kenney et al. 2015; Phibbs et al. 2015). Previous research has documented the appropriation of Māori stakeholder resources such as marae [community buildings], food supplies and satellite phones by CDEM groups (Kenney et al. 2015). They have also documented challenges with operationalising marae that are registered as civil defence hubs and issues with non-acknowledgment and resistance to engaging with Māori emergency management volunteers (Carter and Kenney 2018). These diverse issues prompted a ministerial review of emergency management in Aotearoa New Zealand in 2017 (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017). The acting Minister of Emergency Management stated:

Māori are disproportionately impacted by natural disasters and emergencies. However, we also recognise that iwi bring a great deal of capability in relation to emergency management and their contributions have been essential – before, during and after emergencies.
(Fafoi 2021)

Willingness on the part of Māori to mobilise significant human capital and material resources in response to natural hazards has garnered interest from central government and local authorities (Johnson et al. 2014). As an exemplar, the effectiveness of Māori approaches to disaster management was acknowledged in the Technical Advisory Group's (TAG) *Ministerial Review Better Responses to Natural Hazard Disasters and Other Emergencies in New Zealand* (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017). The review recommended that the Aotearoa New Zealand Government and CDEM groups formally recognise the capability that iwi bring

1. *Civil Defence and Emergency Management Act 2002* at www.civildefence.govt.nz/cdem-sector/legislation.

2. NEMA at www.civildefence.govt.nz.

3. *Local Government Act 2022* at www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2002/0084/latest/DLM170873.html.

to emergency management and legislate to enable iwi to participate in planning for and responding to a disaster or other emergency. It also advocated for bringing clarity to the role of iwi and hapū by allowing for appropriate iwi representatives to be part of the Coordinating Executive Groups (CEGs) and on the joint committees. Concurrently, a Ministerial Advisory Committee on Emergency Management was established to advise Cabinet on legislative innovation and to help strengthen the enablement of iwi, hapū and Māori in emergency management. In 2021, NEMA established the national 'Kaitohutohu' ['Advisor'] function to support the management of issues pertaining to iwi, hapū and whānau during a response.⁴

Improving emergency management responses to natural hazards and disasters

The purpose of the TAG review was to generate information and recommendations to inform New Zealand's emergency response capabilities and ensure that the broader disaster management framework is well placed to meet future challenges. The review identified areas for strengthening New Zealand's emergency management infrastructure. Recommendations included enhancing legislation to incorporate professional standards and an expanded system of audit and assurance, establishing NEMA and allocating primary authority for local states of emergency to local governance and group controllers (Technical Advisory Group Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017, p. 2). Specifically, despite ample evidence as to capabilities, the review established that the resources, skillsets and social capital maintained and mobilised by Māori stakeholders to assist in emergency responses were not recognised in current legislation (Technical Advisory Group Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017, p.18). Review findings highlighted that national and regional emergency management stakeholders' engagement and relationships with Māori were not consistently well managed. In addition, consultation with Māori related to emergency management planning often occurred late in the strategy development phase, which resulted in the needs Māori of communities not being adequately recognised in local Civil Defence and Emergency Management Group plans (Technical Advisory Group Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017, p.3). Using marae as welfare centres in the event of a disaster for example, is a costly process and the review found government processes to reimburse costs incurred as well as mobilising support resources were considered by Māori to be 'complex, bureaucratic and lacking in clarity' (Technical Advisory Group Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2017, p.18).

Following Hurricane Gabrielle in 2023, a 2024 *Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events* (NISWE) was produced. Among its key recommendations was the need to empower iwi Māori who have the 'capacity, capability, and desire to contribute to emergency management' (p.23). As of June 2024, a new bill to replace the CDEM Act was in draft form to deliver the 'robust, fit-for-purpose emergency management framework that New Zealand needs' (Emergency Management and Recovery Minister Mark Mitchell, in Crimp 2024). Additionally, in October 2024, the Aotearoa New Zealand Government released a response to the NISWE to 'strengthen disaster resilience and emergency management' and endorsed 14 recommendations. This includes Recommendation 3 to 'optimise the effort of iwi Māori to benefit all people in an emergency' (New Zealand Government 2024).

The need for a better integrated emergency management system in Aotearoa New Zealand is being advocated for by researchers, policymakers and emergency managers. However, little research has been conducted on the perspectives of emergency managers on how the current system enables Māori participation as well as what the opportunities are for building a cohesive and inclusive emergency management system for the future.

Research design and methods

This qualitative project was designed and implemented by Māori researchers in accordance with Māori research and ethical principles (Bishop 1996; Smith 1999) and is equally informed by the principles of partnership, protection and participation developed from the articles of the Treaty of Waitangi. Geographic case studies were selected based on regional risk profiles for natural hazard events (Horspool et al. 2015; Stirling et al. 2012), previous research links with Te Rūnanga o Ngāi Tahu (Kenney and Solomon 2012) and consultation with Māori in Auckland, Wellington, Bay of Plenty and Hawke's Bay as well as advice from local CDEM authorities.

Participant engagement was purposive and navigated by intermediaries through disaster risk reduction networks. Fifteen emergency managers (n=10 non-Māori, 5 Māori) were recruited as research participants from regional CDEM groups located in Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Hawke's Bay, Wellington and Canterbury. Participant roles spanned group controllers, emergency managers, welfare managers and coordinators, emergency management advisors and Kāiārahi Māori [local Māori emergency management advisors].

The views, stories and experiences of participants were gathered during dialogical (Frank 2005) semi-structured

4. Following an internal review of operations following the 2023 North Island severe weather event, this function was re-named 'Tākaihere'. The name translates to 'tākai' being to wrap-around and 'here', which means to tie together. This recognises the purpose of the team to connect and support throughout emergency management.

interviews (Corbin and Morse 2003), participant observation (Liamputtong 2007; Bishop 1996) and hui a wānanga [interpretive workshops] (Barnes 2000; Frank 2000). Interview discussions were guided by an overarching question: ‘What are your views and concerns in regards to Māori emergency management?’ Prior to the interviews, 10 discussion topics were circulated to participants for consideration as potential conversation prompts during interviews. Conversational prompts consisted of Māori emergency management capabilities and capacities, Māori emergency management assets and resources, partnering with iwi, barriers to or enablers of Māori emergency management, legislated recognition of Māori emergency management, workforce professionalisation, mātauranga Māori [values, knowledge and actions] in policies and practice, collaborative emergency management and governance as well as Māori emergency management accountabilities.

Thematic analysis (Clarke and Braun 2017) was applied to analyse Māori emergency managers’ talk and observations of participants. Four themes emerged during data analysis:

- Whakatureture me Kawanantanga [legislation and governance].
- Whakawhanaungatanga [communication, engagement and relationships].
- Mātauranga Māori [Māori emergency management values, knowledges and practices].
- Āheitanga [capability and capacity].

Discussion

Participants reflected on a variety of topics and themes regarding the inclusion of Te Ao Māori [Māori worldviews] and Māori disaster management into mainstream emergency management. Discussion was guided to identify opportunities, barriers, synergies and discordance in emergency management structures, policies and practices.

Participants have been given pseudonyms (chosen at random from a book on Aotearoa New Zealand birds) for quote attributions. Māori emergency managers have been assigned Te Reo Māori names of endemic Aotearoa New Zealand birds (Tūi, Kākā, Whio, Ruru) and non-Māori participants were assigned English-language names of non-endemic birds (Kingfisher, Oystercatcher, Teal, Silvereye, Song Thrush, Goldfinch, Blackbird, Skylark, Starling, Chaffinch).

Whakatureture me Kawanatanga - legislation and governance

One of the core themes that emerged in the interviews was whakatureture me kawangatanga [legislation and governance]. Several of the participants noted the current lack of provisions for Māori participation in emergency

management legislation, noting that the CDEM Act is the only legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand that does not refer to Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Goldfinch, a non-Māori participant, concluded that a lack of explicit inclusion in the CDEM Act should not be a barrier for CDEM groups to partner with iwi and hapū:

Even the Treaty of Waitangi talks about partnership, so why can't we do that? We shouldn't have to have it in legislation to do it. The legislation will help and enable it, but it should happen anyway. It would be nice to see it happening.
(Goldfinch)

Skylark indicated that relationships between CDEM groups and local iwi are inconsistent. She noted that including Māori, iwi and hapū specifically in the legislation may not have a significant effect as regional CDEM groups are currently ‘not even accountable to [NEMA] anyway’. If the CDEM Act was amended to include provision for Māori, iwi and hapū involvement in emergency management, the participant concluded that regional CDEM groups would need to have aligned measures to ensure action.

All participants deemed partnerships between regional CDEM groups and iwi and hapū as important and that more work was needed on both sides to strengthen arrangements. One Māori participant, Kākā, noted that ‘we don’t want a tokenistic set-up because you mess it up with Māori once and it’s game over’. It was argued by another Māori participant that if emergency managers are able to understand and use a Te Ao Māori worldview to look at emergency management ‘it’s going to work for both of us and it’s going to be a win-win situation’ (Tūi). A major challenge with the current partnership approach is that relationships are very dependent on individuals and ‘if individuals fall over on both sides, how do we keep that partnership; that relationship working?’ (Goldfinch). Calls for greater representation of Māori in the development of emergency management policy and planning have been made by academics (Hudson and Hughes 2007; Kenney and Phibbs 2015). This may help to effectively embed partnerships at an institutional rather than individual level.

Another issue that emerged was a lack of clarity on what Māori governance would look like for regional emergency management. One non-Māori participant stated they were unsure of what the ‘partnership space’ with iwi would look like, ‘are they a stakeholder or are they a partner?’ (Silvereye). Emergency managers were clearer on the role of Māori at an operational and community level rather than in leadership. The efficacy of marae to aid in response and recovery efforts is well-documented by academics, the media and in government reports (Bailey-Winiata et al. 2022; Bush International Consulting 2024; Carter and Kenney 2018). One participant stated that, based on their experience, ‘governance is not where [iwi] want to be sitting to be able to effect change’ (Rosella) and that a lack

of clarity on what collaborative governance arrangements with iwi looks like creates a challenge for implementation.

Some CDEM groups have achieved iwi representation on their CEGs with varying degrees of success. One participant saw this arrangement as a real ‘thumbs up’ (Chaffinch) and an opportunity for mana whenua guidance at a governance level to filter down through their structure. Another participant spoke of the challenges of iwi representation on both the CEG and the joint committee regarding influence on decision-making:

A decision was made that iwi would go on the CEG as a member with full voting rights... but there wouldn't be voting rights on the joint committee. Now when we have the JC and the CEG meetings, [iwi] are sitting at the table... I suppose in a sense they have decision-making rights they just don't have final decision-making rights... (Goldfinch)

It was clear from the participant contributions that collaborative governance arrangements and roles and responsibilities for iwi and hapū representation on CEGs and in joint committees needs to be better articulated and organised. However, the diversity of iwi, hapū and regional emergency management groups means that no single model would be likely to be useful. As of October 2024, NEMA has begun working with the National Iwi Chairs Forum along with other Māori organisations to explore the contribution of iwi and Māori to emergency management. The intention is to co-design the development of an investment and implementation roadmap and to formalise the role of iwi and Māori in emergency management settings. The success of this initiative will be highly dependent on the quality of relationships developed.

Whakawhanaungatanga – engagement and relationships

Participants identified issues with whakawhanaungatanga [engagement and relationships] from both emergency management and iwi and hapū perspectives. Some regional CDEM staff were reported as lacking patience when engaging with iwi ‘because it takes too long’. For other participants, following the correct tikanga [cultural practices] processes was deemed crucial. ‘There’s a reason for it, that’s the way things happen and it always has been. It’s not just one person making a decision, it’s the whānau’ (Kākā). By enabling time for effective engagement, better relationships can be built on a stronger foundation.

Some participants reported general negativity from staff who had engaged with iwi and hapū previously. ‘I think people have had some quite negative experiences working with Māori leadership...I see people going “well we don’t want that, we don’t want civil defence disrupted. We want someone who can work with us”’ (Skylark). However, Māori emergency managers had received strong feedback from

whānau who had taken issue with how engagement had been conducted by CDEM groups in the past, ‘Don’t come and tell us what we can and can’t do on our land, that’s a big turn off’ (Ruru) and that CDEM staff need to be ‘as flexible as we ask the Māori community to be’ (Silvereye) when engaging.

One non-Māori participant discussed their experiences learning more about Māori kaupapa [principles] ‘like manaakitanga [hospitality], whanaungatanga [relationships] and the opportunities to integrate them into emergency management more widely. ‘That should be weaved into the fabric of our organisation rather than just an expectation for when you engage with Māori’ (Chaffinch). Overall, participants described challenges developing strong and trusting relationships with Māori and that presented a significant barrier to effective inclusion of Māori in emergency management. ‘It’s continuing working at a relationship, you can’t take it for granted, you have to consistently work on it, you can’t let it lapse’ (Oystercatcher)

Māori emergency managers discussed the tensions they experienced working with their communities as council employees:

A concern for me, working at the coalface is... you’re not one face, you’re a label and the moment someone goes out there and does something with iwi, it doesn’t matter who you are, you stuffed up, ‘you’re council, you stuffed up’... there is a fear, for me, that we can do a lot of really good work only for it to be fumbled by someone else who is maybe not quite up to speed in terms of how we interact. (Kākā)

The establishment of a Kaitohutohu/Tākaihere function and Māori Advisory Committee by NEMA in 2021 demonstrated some progress towards greater equity at the national level. Additionally, at the local level in 2021, the Nelson Tasman CDEM formally invited iwi to nominate representatives to attend meetings (Sivignon 2021). This process is being replicated to varying degrees by other CDEM groups. As one non-Māori participant commented:

One thing we’ve struggled with is in our CIMS structure, it has a role that says ‘iwi representation’. In our [regional] structure we call it ‘iwi and Māori advisory’... 19 iwi in our very small EOC... I think that’s the real challenge. How do we take that role from an iwi Māori advisor role to an actual true iwi representation role in the ECC [Emergency Coordination Centre]. That’s a bit of a journey that will take us a little while. (Teal)

There has been some criticism by Māori practitioners on the way in which the Kaitohutohu/Tākaihere function is operationalised. Alternative models are being proposed that integrate the connections with Māori communities and marae in particular (Katene 2025). More cognisance of

the ‘dual role’ that is required for Māori working in CDEM groups is needed as well as a greater understanding of the time and protocols needed to build genuine relationships with iwi, hapū and Māori communities.

Mātauranga Māori and emergency management knowledge and practices

The role of Mātauranga Māori [Māori-specific knowledge and practices] in emergency management has been explored in research (Dunlop et al. 2023; Kenney et al. 2015; Rout et al. 2024). Authors argue that Māori knowledge, worldviews, values and practices inform a culturally grounded and effective approach to disasters based on a long history of holistically responding to crises. As one Māori participant reflected: ‘all of that [emergency preparedness] stuff was always transmitted through waiata, through korero through karakia, through poi through just wānanga, those are the things that allow us to maintain resilience as a whānau’ (Ruru).

The ability to effectively engage with mātauranga Māori in mainstream emergency management is hampered by a lack of understanding from agencies (Kenney et al. 2015). These findings were supported by interviews with emergency managers. Generally, participants saw the value of Mātauranga Māori in emergency management acknowledging that ‘it provides a much richer understanding of what that science means and how we respond’ (Rosella). Additionally, ‘good research that’s bringing in a Māori or iwi perspective can only be good for the sector’ (Goldfinch). Some participants were unclear on the best way to incorporate Mātauranga Māori into emergency management practices. Oral histories and pūrākau [inter-generational oral narratives] were mentioned. For example, stories of taniwha [water guardians] and their correlation to evidence of past tsunami (as explored in King et al. 2020) were mentioned but there was confusion on how to put it into a ‘European context’ (Silvereye).

Some participants were uncomfortable with access and use of Mātauranga Māori in emergency management due to their own skills and knowledge, concluding that more trust needs to be built:

I’m unsure what the right protocols are about requesting to use that knowledge and the processes around that. The last thing we want to do is take something. So there has to be a process.
(Silvereye)

Progress on understanding the role of Mātauranga Māori in emergency management has been made. Through different strands of work, emergency managers are beginning to ‘sow the seeds’ (Oystercatcher). However, one non-Māori participant was firm that anything regarding mātauranga Māori needs to be ‘mana whenua-led’ as opposed to led by council (Teal).

Mātauranga Māori is a living body of knowledge that is inter-generational and provides a rich framework for how communities can recover from disaster events as explained by the following Māori participant:

Long-term preparedness with Mātauranga Māori is actually the beginning of long-term recovery. If everyone has a plan that’s intergenerational and everyone knows what to do and how to survive, well that’s already recovery happening.
(Whio)

One of the ways local CDEM groups were growing capacity was through hosting Māori Masters students to work on resilience projects. A Māori emergency manager reflected that many young Māori who are educated in science, planning and other disciplines related to emergency management are returning to their ancestral lands and could potentially help with the skill shortage in that area. Growing Māori capacity and capability within mainstream emergency management and simultaneously, growing emergency management capability in Māori communities, needs to be a focus to ensure the sector can grow in an equitable and inclusive manner. The Natural Hazards Commission provided ongoing funding for Te Toi Whakaruruhau o Aotearoa, a Mātauranga Māori Disaster Risk Reduction Centre based in Massey University and focused on Māori disaster risk reduction interests and aspirations. This programme provides connection and support particularly for emerging pūkenga [Māori researchers] working in emergency management (New Zealand Government 2024). It is important that iwi, hapū and senior Māori mentors are involved in providing support and guidance for emerging researchers and professionals.

Āheitanga - capacity and capability

Independent inquiries into CDEM responses to recent disasters have found limitations in the capacity and capability of mainstream emergency management agencies to work effectively with iwi, hapū and Māori organisations (Bush International Consulting 2024; Government Inquiry into the Response to the North Island Severe Weather Events 2024). Of particular concern to emergency managers was a lack of cultural competency to be able to effectively work with iwi, hapū and Māori communities and the need to resource further development for staff. As one non-Māori participant remarked: ‘we’re trying to build a bit of internal competency. We’re really lucky in our team to have a lovely guy who’s been helping in our weekly meetings with pronunciation’ (Songthrush). Participants noted that some CDEM centres had put in place bilingual signage, had conducted Te Reo Māori and Te Tiriti o Waitangi [Treaty of Waitangi] workshops and tikanga training.

Participants noted that there have been efforts to increase staff capability but that there is a funding gap to resource initiatives. Emergency managers spoke highly of Māori staff

supporting initiatives to train staff. They also expressed concern for the additional burden on Māori staff to fill that gap for CDEM groups as cultural training is something that gets ‘delegated’ to them. Emergency managers also discussed their own challenges developing skills in this space:

But if you're starting from scratch where a lot of people in emergency management are, then it's pretty scary and daunting and it's just little things, pronunciation... And that's not hard to get, you just need to think about it.
(Rosella)

Participant Goldfinch claimed that if he had been asked a few years ago about his desire to step onto a marae it would probably have been ‘reasonably low, a bit of fear and uncertainty’. Working with Māori communities has changed his perspective. ‘It’s quite different now. There’s work required to develop that understanding, it’s not just emergency management, it’s life in general, working with iwi and understanding iwi’ (Goldfinch).

There was optimism from participants that there has been, albeit slow, progress in staff capacity and capability for working with iwi, hapū and Māori communities and a general enthusiasm for improving skills in Te Reo Māori and in tikanga. Without specific resourcing for training, responsibility for this is likely to fall on the shoulders of Māori staff. As one Māori emergency manager discussed, training needs to go beyond the surface level to better understand Māori worldviews so that emergency managers:

...understand the reasons why we do a karakia, this is what the spiritual realm looks like, this is the importance of that, mana atua [spiritual power of deities], mana whenua [spiritual power of the land], mana tangata [spiritual power of the people]...that's deep understanding.
(Tūi)

Emergency managers also discussed the capacity and capability of Māori participating in emergency management. Participants discussed their appreciation of what Māori have to offer but acknowledged that further work is needed to collaborate effectively.

I think... we have not particularly valued the capabilities and capacities that Māori bring in a day-to-day environment and consequently, in the response and recovery environment. With the number of events... I think it's starting to expose to our sector that there is that capacity and capability and maybe there's more to Māori than 'a marae is a great place to set up a welfare centre'.
(Blackbird)

The cultural, spiritual and psychosocial support given to emergency management staff by Māori in high-stress response environments was recognised.

There's a level of support [from Māori] that can be provided throughout that system that we can't do. And

what I've seen in a response is how that manaakitanga provided to our staff and our responders. That was really important and significant.
(Rosella)

They also acknowledged tensions due to the ‘command and control’ element of emergency response in appropriating iwi, hapū and marae resources:

You can't just go into someone's home and say we're going to take water from them, you need to actually to ask that before you go in and just take water... Just those little considerations for iwi so that it's not just 'take take take' because we have the powers under a [state of emergency] declaration... You have to actually ask and seek their advice.
(Rosella)

Māori emergency managers spoke of the ‘it’s just what we do’ attitude of Māori when responding to disasters as something that is inherent and natural:

...to whānau, they don't know what [emergency management] is. To them, it's just coming together, looking after each other and making sure they can get through it, as they have done... the last thing we want to do is walk in and say, this is what you need to do even though you've been doing it since as we say, time immemorial.
(Kākā)

While the proactive attitude of Māori communities responding to disaster events was seen as positive, it can also result in tensions when there are expectations on iwi and hapū to support disaster response without adequate resourcing:

...we need to recognise what iwi can do themselves... They're not highly funded entities... so when it comes to playing the game they do require quite a bit of support.
(Kākā)

Participants acknowledged that while there is broad recognition of the contributions iwi and hapū can make in emergency management, the ability to effectively partner is still very limited and dependent on individual relationships as opposed to a systemic culture. This claim was supported in an independent inquiry into the response to Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023 by Hawke’s Bay CDEM. The inquiry found that ‘engagement of iwi Māori and Māori communities was more a matter of ad hoc relationships than the product of systematic and formalised effort’ and that ‘Māori agencies and marae felt that their proven abilities to deliver welfare services at scale were either ignored or hampered by bureaucratic decision-making from the centre’ (Bush International Consulting 2024:6).

Not all iwi, hapū and marae may be in a position to participate in formal emergency management systems but those with the capacity, capability and desire to be involved should be empowered to participate in the system. The Government Inquiry into the Response to

the North Island Severe Weather Events 2024 suggested that to give effect to participation, ‘the role of iwi Māori in emergency management should be formalised and embedded within the one emergency management system’ and ‘reflected throughout the community, local, regional and national structures’ (p.16). While legislation can provide the statutory imperative for emergency management agencies to implement the framework for partnering with iwi and hapū, embedding these relationships requires upskilling of emergency management staff to give effect.

Conclusion

The interviews with emergency managers provided insights into both the challenges and opportunities for partnering effectively with iwi, hapū and Māori communities in emergency management. Effective Māori emergency management practices have been well-documented in research and in government reports. Most recently, the Government Inquiry to the North Island Severe Weather Events claimed that ‘iwi-led civil defence readiness, response and recovery are already in effect and provide a living example of what can be done in an emergency’.

While emergency managers expressed a desire to improve relationships with iwi and hapū to better respond to emergencies, there is still significant progress that needs to be made. There remains a gulf between the manner in which mainstream emergency management operates using a formal CIMS structure and how iwi, hapū and marae use their own emergency management practices. To date, the role of iwi, hapū and other Māori organisations is not formally mandated in legislation and relationships continue to operate on an ad hoc basis. There is limited understanding of Mātauranga Māori and Māori emergency management practices and more work needs to be done to improve capability and capacity in mainstream and Māori emergency management.

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