

Canterbury Earthquake Response: Lessons for Land Administration Policy

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SUMMARY

In New Zealand, a series of approximately 8,000 earthquakes and aftershocks starting in 2010 caused widespread damage to land and buildings, disrupted property boundaries and had a significant impact on confidence in the property market. This paper focuses on aspects of the response that may provide lessons for other countries faced with similar major disasters.

In many countries such disasters initially overwhelm the land administration systems. And yet these systems are needed as a key contributor to recovery and rebuild efforts and an eventual return to normality – ideally stronger and more resilient than before the disaster. Although each disaster poses different problems, and each country has different land administration systems, some common themes emerge.

This paper explores how key elements of the land administration systems necessarily switched mode from a relatively routine transactional focus before the 2010/2011 earthquakes and aftershocks to larger scale issues of governance, legislative and regulatory responses, and recovery of survey infrastructure. Each of these are necessary for recovery and rebuild in Canterbury. Some parallels with responses to the 1931 Hawke's Bay earthquake in New Zealand are also made. These lessons may assist development of Disaster Risk Reduction policies in other earthquake-prone regions.