

Ready For Anything

QUEENSTOWN LAKES COMMUNITY RESILIENCE GROUP NETWORK

Quarterly Update



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Queenstown Lakes Community Resilience Group Network - Quarterly Update July 2026

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Kia ora CRGs,

If last night's earthquake prompted you to check your emergency kit, pull out your household plan or stop and think "what if?", you weren't alone. It was a good reminder that while we can't predict emergencies, we can be prepared for them.

It was great to see CRGs jumping onto social media so quickly to share official information and remind your communities what actions to take. Those timely reminders and neighbourly connections can make a real difference in these situations and are a great example of the important role our CRGs play.

Speaking of roles, we're thrilled to welcome a new team – the West Queenstown CRG – to our network! More about that later.

This quarter we've been put through our paces with an Otago-wide snowstorm exercise while making good progress on planning projects like CARE. There's some great mahi happening across the district, so read on for the latest updates.

As always, thank you for everything you do to support your communities and each other, and for sharing your news, ideas and learnings.

Get winter-ready

Although Snowmageddon seems to have missed us so far, winter conditions can quickly turn a minor inconvenience into a major disruption - especially during severe weather or an earthquake.

CRGs play a vital role in helping communities understand local hazards and prepare for emergencies. Here are a few winter-specific tips you could share to help ensure your neighbours are ready for anything:

- **Make a plan:** Know how family members will stay in touch if separated, and put a plan in place for [home](#), [work](#) and school, particularly for snow days, road closures and emergencies. Use NZ's official [Get Ready](#) website for planning templates, guides and resources in multiple languages and accessible formats.
- **Stock up:** Have enough water, food (including pet food), medications, a radio, batteries, first aid supplies, warm clothing, bedding, and heating and cooking fuel to get through several days without help. Plan for power and telecommunications outages by charging power banks, fuelling generators and BBQs, and buddying up with neighbours to pool resources (maybe they have solar and you have a BBQ?).
- **Winter-proof homes and vehicles:** Service heating systems, insulate pipes, seal drafts, remove/strap down outdoor furniture, and keep vehicles stocked with snow chains, warm clothing, blankets, food, water, a torch, and phone charging cords.
- **Look out for others:** Check in with neighbours who may need a little extra support and, if you have livestock, make sure there's a good supply of food, water and shelter, particularly if bad weather is in the forecast.
- **Check conditions first:** Check [weather](#) and [road](#) conditions before travelling or heading outdoors.
- **Drive to the conditions:** Avoid unnecessary travel in bad weather and always allow extra time and following distances. Sign up for [QLDC's excellent Winter Road Reports](#) for daily conditions or check its [webpage](#), [webcams](#) and [Facebook](#) page for updates. NZTA also has some [handy winter driving tips](#). Note: New snow chain rules this winter mean that drivers who don't carry and fit chains when required may face a \$750 fine.

Events and training

Region-wide emergency exercise

Our winter preparedness was recently put to the test, with around 300 people from across Otago taking part in a Tier 2 Civil Defence exercise simulating a severe snowstorm affecting multiple districts.

Local Emergency Operations Centres (EOCs) and the Group Emergency Coordination Centre (ECC) in Dunedin were activated, with councils, emergency services, lifeline utilities and partner agencies working together to coordinate the response.

In Queenstown Lakes, Controller Bill Nicoll donned the white vest and led the local team from pop-up EOCs in Arrowtown and Wānaka. [Watch his video](#).

The exercise included road closures, isolated communities, flight disruptions, stranded tourists, power and communication outages, welfare needs, downed power lines, and an IT outage.

Regular surprise injects and CRG situation reports helped test decision-making and build a realistic picture of conditions on the ground so thanks for your help, team! Exercises like this strengthen our readiness by identifying what worked well and what we can improve.

Free professional development resources for local community groups

Want to upskill in governance, funding applications, project planning, event delivery, promotion, audience building or impact measurement? [Join The Learning Space](#) - a free, flexible e-learning platform offering short self-paced workshops, toolkits and templates, and an online forum.



Kids clued up on emergency preparedness

More than 500 Year 6 students across Central Otago took part in the annual Clued Up Kids programme, learning practical life skills to help keep themselves and others safe. Run by Emergency Management Otago, the programme brings together emergency services and community organisations to teach everything from preparedness and mental resilience to first aid and water safety. Check out [this story](#) to find out how it went.



CRG news

- Pencil in Sunday 8 November, 1–3pm, for a CRG get-together at Lake Hayes Pavilion. More details to follow.
- The [West Queenstown CRG](#) is forming! Give them a wave on [Facebook](#) to welcome them and stay connected. If you know someone who lives in Alpine Retreat, Bobs Cove, Wilsons Bay or Closeburn please encourage them to [register with Otago Gets Ready](#) and follow the group's [Facebook page](#) for details of a community meeting.
- Here's a [good article](#) highlighting the potential impacts of an AF8 earthquake and the great work the Hāwea CRG is doing to help prepare the Upper Clutha community.
- The Wānaka CRG held its first Community Emergency Hub exercise, giving volunteers the opportunity to test how the Hub would operate following a major earthquake (see photo). The exercise helped the team better understand each role and how they work together, while identifying opportunities for improvement, including the need to recruit more volunteers.
- The Southern Corridor CRG welcomed QLDC Councillor [Jon Mitchell](#) to its meeting to share insights into disaster management leadership and the roles local government, community groups and infrastructure providers play in building resilient communities. An experienced emergency management professional, Jon supports the Mayor on Civil Defence matters, co-chairs the Otago Lifelines Committee and represents QLDC on the Otago Civil Defence Emergency Management Group Committee. He also facilitates leadership development programmes for Massey University.
- Kingston CRG hosted an open day in May (see photo), giving locals a chance to see firsthand how their Community Hub would operate during an emergency. FENZ was there to promote fire alarm safety, and Craig Gibson brought along an emergency grab bag and plenty of merch. He and Group Lead Jenny Geelan shared emergency preparedness advice and explained the roles of Emergency Management Otago and CRGs.
- Sadly, a few weeks later, Kingston CRG was called on to activate its Community Emergency Hub for real to support those affected by the tragic drowning near the wharf. The team provided hot drinks, blankets and a warm, safe place for those involved, while Police used the Hub as a base for interviews and operational support.



CARE (Coordinated Air Repatriation and Evacuation) project update

We're progressing well with the CARE project, which forms part of our Alpine Fault (AF8) earthquake planning. The joint QLDC, Queenstown Airport and Emergency Management Otago initiative focuses on how aviation could support the safe and efficient evacuation of tens of thousands of visitors if road access to the district was cut off.

Early work included exploring airport infrastructure, airspace and airline capabilities, as well as talking to other airports and organisations to learn from their emergency response experiences. This quarter, we've had discussions with the CAA, commercial airlines, Police and border security agencies. General Aviation is up next.

As President Eisenhower famously said, "Plans are nothing; planning is everything."

Emergencies never unfold exactly as predicted, so we're bringing the right people together ahead of time to understand what's feasible in a large-scale evacuation and work through the challenges we'd likely face.

The goal is to develop a coordinated, flexible planning framework that's strongly supported by the people and organisations we'd rely on in an air evacuation response. There's still plenty of work to do, but the outcomes will strengthen local preparedness and help inform broader regional and national planning.



AI-generated but you get the idea! It's human nature to head to the airport after a major emergency, hoping to get out. Planning ahead helps ensure aviation resources can be prioritised, coordinated and used where they are needed most.

News across the sector

Get ready for El Niño

Forecasters are predicting a significant El Niño weather event in late spring and early summer. [Find out more.](#)

Virtual power plants and community batteries

Aurora Energy is exploring how community batteries, rooftop solar and smart EV charging could work together as a local-scale "virtual power plant" at Homestead Bay near Jack's Point. The project aims to improve energy resilience, support growing demand and supply power back to the grid when needed. [Read more.](#)

Aurora is also investigating how a network community battery could support more remote communities during power outages, with a trial planned for Glenorchy later this year. GY is currently supplied by a single line from Queenstown with no back up supply and can be affected by weather events and slips. A community battery would store electricity and work alongside local generation to help keep power on longer if the area becomes isolated. This could mean fewer outages, faster restoration and greater energy security during emergencies.

New tech to streamline emergency management

The Government plans to modernise emergency management technology with a new Common Operating Picture, giving responders a shared, real-time view of critical information during emergencies. (Different to D4H, which we will still use.) [Read more.](#)

NZ Maritime Operations Centre gets state-of-the-art upgrade

The national Maritime Operations Centre, which manages mayday calls and provides navigational warnings and weather information across one of the world's largest search and rescue regions, is undergoing a [major technology upgrade](#) to strengthen maritime safety.

Road resilience

A recent \$400 million Government roading investment, which includes SH6 Cromwell-Frankton, Frankton-Kingston and Haast-Hāwea, aims to strengthen critical transport links and [improve resilience to future events.](#)

Solar on schools

Solar energy systems will be installed at 500 schools across Aotearoa to reduce electricity costs, improve resilience and increase energy self-sufficiency. The rollout begins this year and is expected to be completed by 2028.

From peacekeeping to preparedness – meet Gibbo

If you're involved in emergency management or community resilience in the district, chances are you've crossed paths with Craig "Gibbo" Gibson. Since joining Emergency Management Otago in 2020, he's been helping communities prepare for the unexpected – usually with practical solutions and a few well-timed one-liners.

Alongside fellow Emergency Management Advisor Dave Grimes, Gibbo works with communities, groups and businesses across the district on emergency planning, training, community engagement and resilience-building. He also supports regional Civil Defence projects and strategy, and shares responsibility for supporting the district's 18 Community Resilience Groups with Dave, and Jacqui Lambeth. With responsibility for eight CRGs from Kingston to Glenorchy, he spends almost as much time on the road as he does in meetings.

Gibbo brings more than 30 years of frontline experience to the role. Originally from Dunedin, he began his career in the NZ Army and served on UN peacekeeping missions in Cambodia and Thailand. He then spent 21 years with NZ Police and supported communities through major events including the Canterbury earthquakes.

Since moving into Civil Defence, he's been deployed around the country for responses including the Southland floods, the Ōhau wildfire and, most recently, the Dunedin and Waitaki flooding. For the past 14 years, he's also been a local Search and Rescue volunteer.

Known for staying cool under pressure, breaking down complex problems into clear actions and rolling up his sleeves to get the job done, Gibbo also has the gift of the gab and a knack for making emergency management relatable and fun, whether he's talking to school kids, community groups or business leaders.

When he's not working, you'll usually find him on the sidelines supporting his kids' sports teams or making the most of the region's mountains, lakes and trails.

Gibbo's top emergency management tip?

"Hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and always know where the biscuits are."



Craig "Gibbo" Gibson (with a little help from AI).

Tools and resources

Don't forget to check out the [CRG Shared Resources Hub](#), our online library of downloadable 'templates', promotional tools and newsletter back issues.

That's it for now. Please keep in touch and share your ideas, suggestions and news with us - email Jen Andrews at jen@flyingsquad.nz.