

New Zealand After Nuclear War

THE BACKGROUND PAPERS

New Zealand Planning Council
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As a response to shortages of transport fuels, problems of distribution and allocation, plus energy and employment imbalances between the North and South Islands caused by decline in exports, government decides to devolve many responsibilities and decision-making powers to a number of regional bodies. Thus central government recognises its inability to respond effectively to the divergent demands of the whole country. Nevertheless it retains responsibility for some essential co-ordinating functions, those of communication, the national electricity grid and some financial management.

Regions are forced by circumstance to respond to local needs for education, social welfare, resource allocation, employment and health. Existing organisations and agencies adapt or new ones develop with new leadership. Conservation of scarce resources through recycling and greater efficiency is a high priority. There are serious disputes between regions over resource rights, equitable distribution of imports and exports and the previous boundaries of various state and local authority jurisdictions. Some experimental approaches fail. Nonetheless, the responses to the massive changes forced upon the country are flexible, responsive to local needs, emphasising self-reliance and resilience. Central government is preoccupied with co-ordination and re-establishing overseas links in a vastly changed world.

A MECHANISM FOR POLICY AND PLANNING

The working party concluded that the situation after nuclear war would make unprecedented demands on government for which existing decision-making procedures may prove to be inadequate. Government's ability to act in the best interests of the country at a time of national crisis would thus be seriously impaired unless plans had been prepared for putting in place a flexible regional response.

In opting for a systematic planning approach to address this shortcoming it was clear that the issues would involve a wide number of government departments, agencies, and private sector organisations. The planning responsibility does not lie clearly with one particular department. Therefore the working party recommends the establishment of a separate entity called the Nuclear Impacts Planning Unit. The functions would include the development of policy advice and contingency planning, monitoring and updating information on the potential effects of nuclear war on New Zealand, and keeping the public fully informed on the work and findings of the unit. The planning process developed by the unit would intimately involve the public at all levels since public involvement and co-operation would be essential to its success. The development of policies for crisis management should include strategies for decision-making at regional and local government levels in the event of a collapse of central government or serious loss of communications.

The unit, with a small permanent staff, should be established within an existing government department. Public accountability could be encouraged by making it responsible to a Cabinet Committee or, more desirably, on a bi-partisan basis to a Select Committee of Parliament.

Possible functions and tasks are summarised below.

Functions of the unit and special purpose groups:

1. To provide advice for policy formulation and contingency planning.