Figure 1: The New Zealand Government's decision tree to determine who should manage a crisis, event or circumstance

Source: Adapted from *National Resilience System Handbook (2025)* and *Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS), Third edition (2019)*

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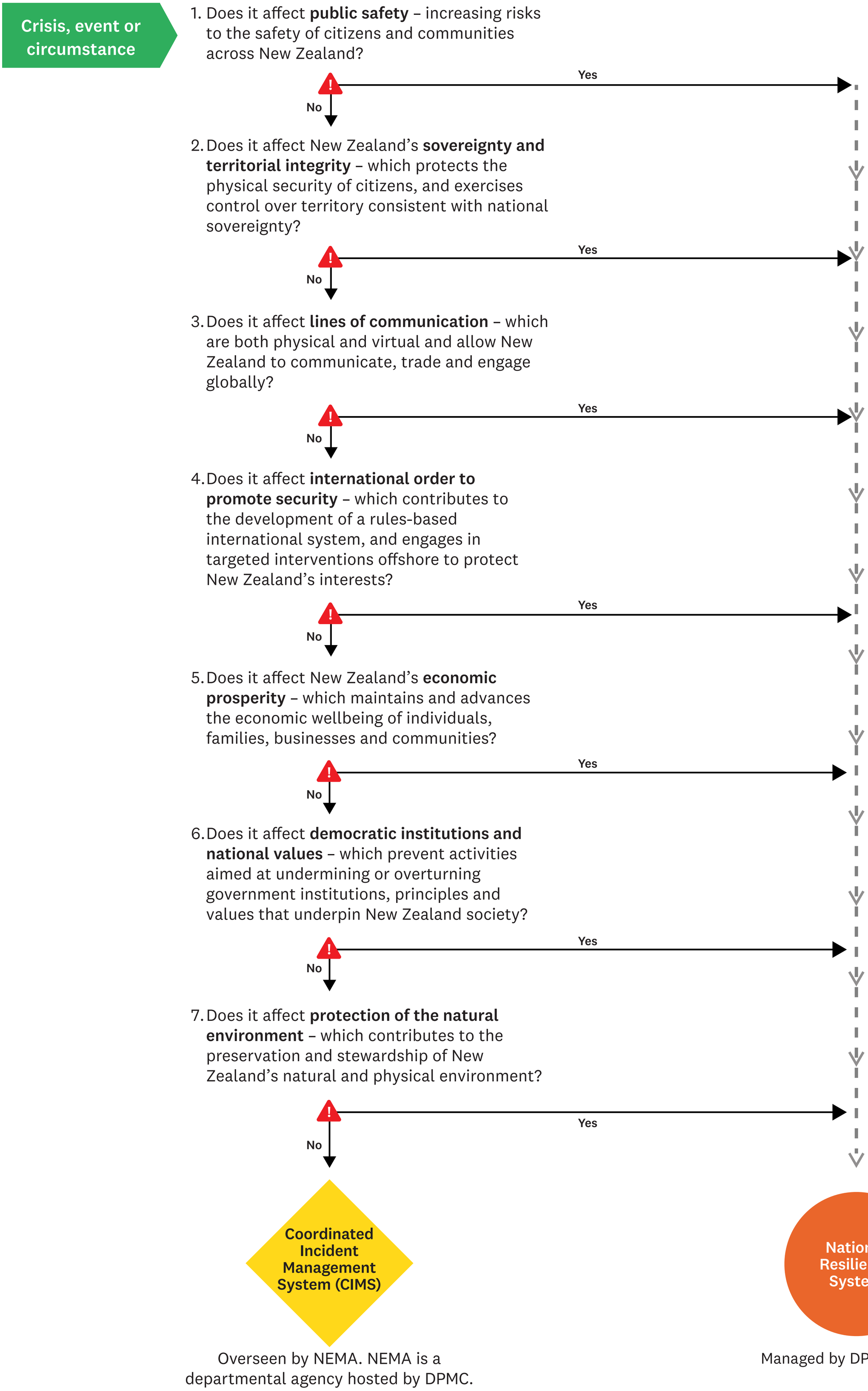

Notes for Figure 1: The New Zealand Government's decision tree to determine who should manage a crisis, event or circumstance

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At each decision point, two key characteristics are considered: risks, and the way in which they need to be managed:

(i) Risks

- Unusual features of scale, nature, intensity, or possible consequences;
- Challenges for sovereignty, or nation-wide law and order;
- Multiple or interrelated problems, which when taken together, constitute a national or systemic risk;
- A high degree of uncertainty or complexity such that only central government has the capability to tackle them;
- Interdependent issues with the potential for cascade effects or escalation.

(ii) Management requirements

- Response requirements are unusually demanding of resources;
- There is ambiguity over who has the lead in managing a risk, or there are conflicting views on solutions;
- The initial response is inappropriate or insufficient from a national perspective;
- There are cross-agency implications;
- There is an opportunity for government to contribute to conditions that will enhance overall national security.[1]

As of May 2025, DPMC announced that the *National Security System Handbook* (2016) was superseded by the newly published *National Resilience System Handbook* (2025). The system architecture that looks across 'all-hazards, all-threats' was also renamed as the National Resilience System. This new system comprises:

- The National Security System
- The National Hazards System
- The Officials Committee for Domestic and External Security Coordination (ODESC) System
- The Emergency Management System.

The aim is for all systems to function as a collective to improve resilience to New Zealand's most serious hazards and threats. This is under the leadership of DPMC.[2]

The Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) is overseen by NEMA which brings together a steering group of multiple government agencies. CIMS provides a framework where a lower response level can be supported or directed by a higher response level. The five CIMS levels are:

- National (NCC)
- Regional (ECC)
- Local (EOC)
- Incident (ICP)
- Community

When an event is nationally significant and/or complex enough to demand a coordinated strategic approach at the national level, the ODESC System gets activated, transitioning the event to the National Resilience System. When this occurs, the ODESC structure sits above CIMS.[3]

NEMA recently published the *Catastrophic Event Handbook* (2024) which includes a definition of a catastrophic event. However the term 'catastrophic event' is not discussed in the *National Resilience System Handbook* (2025). See 2024 definition here:

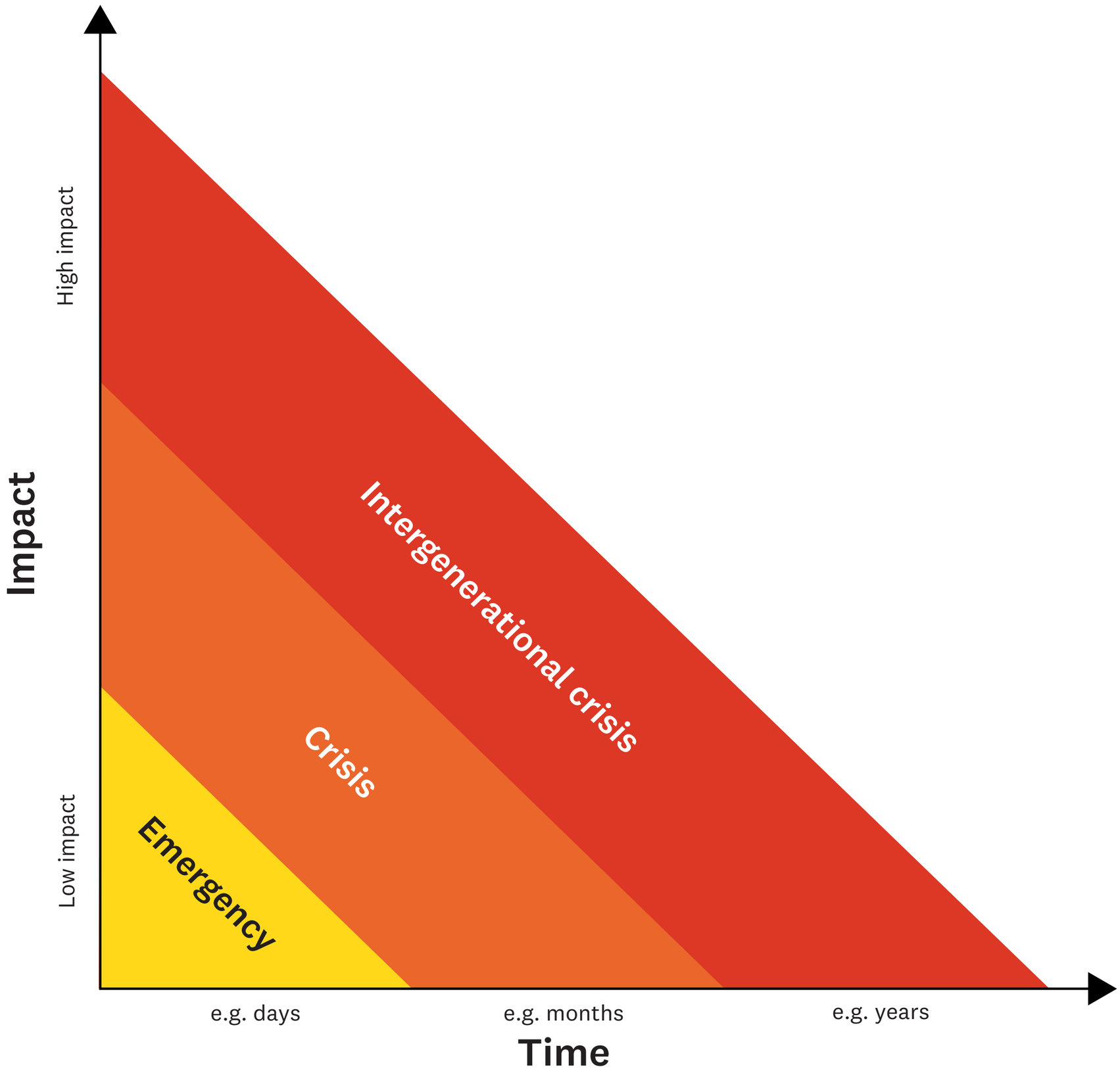
> A catastrophic event is either an emergency as defined in the Civil Defence and Emergency Management Act 2002 (CDEM Act 2002), or a series of emergencies, that causes (or may cause):
>
> - significant loss of life
> - serious and prolonged disruption to the normal functioning of society
> - widespread destruction across the built and natural environment.[4]

References

1. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) (2016). *National Security System Handbook*. [online] p.11–12. Available at: https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2025-01/National-Security-System-Handbook-2016.pdf [Accessed 12 Jun. 2025].
2. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) (2025). *National Resilience System Handbook*. [online] Available at: https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2025-05/national-resilience-system-handbook-may2025.pdf [Accessed 24 Jun. 2025].
3. National Emergency Management Agency (2019). *Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS)*. [online] Available at: https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/documents/cims/CIMS-3rd-edition-FINAL-Aug-2019.pdf [Accessed 12 Jun. 2025].
4. National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) (2024). *Catastrophic Event Handbook*. [online] Available at: https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/documents/publications/Cat-plan/NEMA-Catastrophic-Event-Handbook-V1.pdf [Accessed 27 Jun. 2025].

Figure 2: The distinction between an emergency, a crisis or an intergenerational crisis

Source: McGuinness Institute



	Emergency	Crisis	Intergenerational crisis
Examples include:	Flooding, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes etc.	Pandemics	Climate change
Tends to be:	short, simple* and urgent**	longer, complicated* and important**	longer, complex* and important**
Tends to take the form of:	a risk***	a risk or uncertainty***	an uncertainty***
Tends to require:	a local solution	a national solution	a international solution
Leadership:	Lead agency/agencies	All-of-government	All of society
Preliminary groundwork:	Resilience	Anti-fragile	
Overarching aim is to:	Return to normal	Move to a new normal	

Notes:

* The difference between simple, complicated and complex is useful when looking at how to solve a problem. Simple problems have clear solutions, complicated problems have known solutions but require expertise and effort to achieve, and complex problems have unclear solutions with unpredictable outcomes due to interconnected factors. The Cynefin framework, developed by David J. Snowden and Mary E. Boone, is an advanced decision-making model designed to help leaders understand different contexts and tailor their approach accordingly. It categorises situations into five domains: Clear (Simple), Complicated, Complex, Chaotic, and Disorder (Confusion), each requiring a distinct way of sense-making and action.

** The difference between what is urgent and what is important is that ‘urgent’ demands immediate attention, often with a deadline, whereas ‘important’ may not require immediate action but is essential to achieve long-term goals. This distinction is attributed to Dwight D. Eisenhower.

*** The difference between risk and uncertainty is that risk can be identified and measured (e.g. measured uncertainty) whereas uncertainty is not easily measured. In cases of risk, the tool is to measure and manage the risk, and the outcome is to minimise the risk. In cases of uncertainty, the appropriate tool is scenario development, and the outcome is to better position the country (or organisation) as a result of the disruption. While risk is often negative, a focus on uncertainty creates space for positive and negative outcomes. This distinction is often attributed to Frank H. Knight's 1921 book, *Risk, Uncertainty and Profit*.

These are the documents we have referenced

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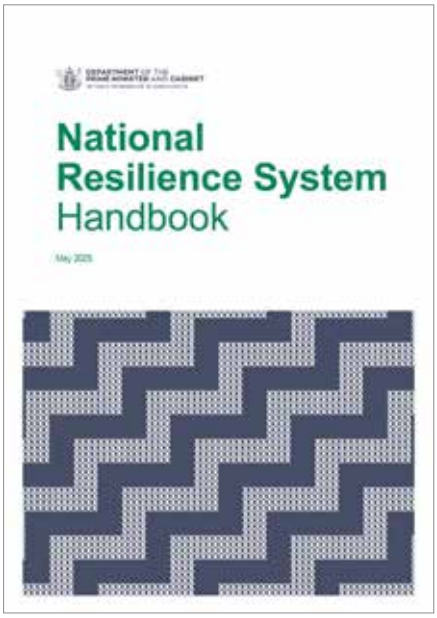
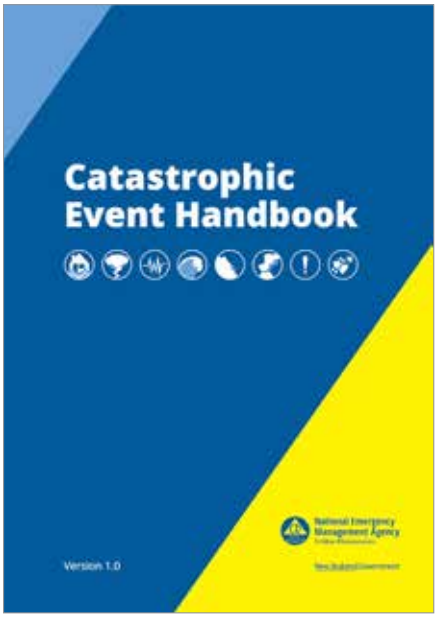


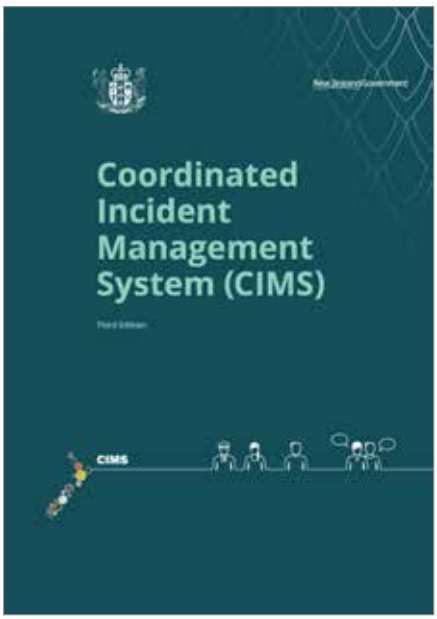
National Resilience System Handbook
May 2025

Published by Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC)



Catastrophic Event Handbook
December 2024

Published by National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)



Coordinated Incident Management System (CIMS) third edition
August 2019

Published by National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)