



25 August 2025



Reference: OIA-2025/26-0059

Dear

Official Information Act request relating to the tsunami warning alert issued on 31 July 2025

Thank you for your Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) request received on 31 July 2025. You requested:

“The entire country was woken up on the 31st of July in order to receive a blaring alert that told us information we already knew. In my case, I didn't even get the information as I struggled to silence the alert and it was gone before I read it. Who in Civil defence authorized the abuse of the emergency system in a non-critical situation?”

The Emergency Mobile Alert (EMA) system is governed by strict protocol on its use. The [Emergency Mobile Alert Protocol for User Agencies](#) document covers the criteria for sending Emergency Mobile Alerts to New Zealanders. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) will only send alerts when there is a severe, urgent and likely threat to life, health or property. Dangerous tsunami activity generated by the Kamchatka earthquake affecting New Zealand's coastline clearly met these criteria, and the decision to use it was informed by scientific advice and consultation with Civil Defence Emergency Management Groups.

The Emergency Mobile Alert system, and the noise it generates, is based on a global standard, and is also used in other countries. In nearly eight years of use in New Zealand, which has seen tens of millions of instances of alerts being received by people, NEMA is not aware of any confirmed severe health event or accident that has been directly attributed to the use of Emergency Mobile Alerts. Conversely, every time the system is used, it potentially prevents significant impacts to life, health or property.

Regarding the implication in your request that this was an abuse of the system I note that NEMA has a statutory responsibility to alert the public to tsunami risk. Every decision to alert the public is based on best advice available including scientific evidence, international best practice, the observable conditions, and the life safety risks.

Based on advice from Earth Sciences NZ that tsunami activity would arrive at our shores around midnight on Wednesday evening (30 July), NEMA issued a National Advisory and sent an Emergency Mobile Alert. As always, we carefully selected who should receive it - in this case, the alert was only sent to phones connected to a mobile tower near the coastline. The first alert was sent at 4.13pm as it was critical to issue it before nightfall, because many people live on boats, or plan ahead for early fishing trips or a dawn surf.

Overnight, we received confirmation that tsunami activity was impacting New Zealand's coastline and would continue to do so well into Thursday (31 July). We weighed up the risks and concluded that we needed to inform the public that the threat was present and ongoing. We sent the alert at 6.30am to ensure we did not wake large numbers of people up in the

middle of the night, while informing those planning morning activities in beach or marine areas while dangerous tsunami activity was happening.

Information on the M8.8 Kamchatka Russia earthquake and tsunami prepared by GeoNet is available on the following website:

<https://www.geonet.org.nz/news/4O1zMI5rXgg8mFCJOfcEg>

More information on civil defence emergency management alerts and warnings are available on the following website: <https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/get-ready/civil-defence-emergency-management-alerts-and-warnings>

In relation to the part of your request for who specifically authorised the alert being sent; I am withholding the name and position of the staff member under section 9(2)(g)(ii) of the Act, to maintain the effective conduct of public affairs through the protection of such Ministers, members of organisations, officers, and employees from improper pressure or harassment.

In making my decision, I have considered the public interest considerations in section 9(1) of the Act. No public interest has been identified that would be sufficient to override the reasons for withholding that information.

You have the right to ask the Ombudsman to investigate and review my decision under section 28(3) of the Act.

This response will be published on the DPMC website during our regular publication cycle. Typically, information is released monthly, or as otherwise determined. Your personal information including name and contact details will be removed for publication.

Yours sincerely



Sarah Holland
**Chief Advisor to the Chief Executive
National Emergency Management Agency**