

# Up to 9 people killed in New Zealand landslides, flooding

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23 January 2026

Six people are unaccounted for and three others are confirmed dead after severe storms caused flooding and landslides across northern parts of New Zealand this week.

States of emergency remain in place for Whang?rei, Thames-Coromandel and Hauraki districts and for Bay of Plenty and Tair?whiti-Gisborne regions due to severe rainfall, which was most intense on Wednesday and Thursday.

In a horrifying and tragic incident, six people, including two teenagers, were buried by a landslide at the Beachside Holiday Park in Mount Maunganui, a suburb of Tauranga in the Bay of Plenty. At about 9.30 a.m. on Thursday, a large chunk of the sodden hillside collapsed and smashed into campervans, tents, vehicles and toilets.

The *Bay of Plenty Times* reported: “People were heard screaming for help from inside a toilet block as would-be rescuers on the roof desperately tried to use tools to get through. The voices went quiet after about 15 minutes.”

Emergency crews continued to dig through the dirt and debris on Saturday, and police announced shortly after midday that human remains had been found, with the operation moving from a search for survivors to the recovery of bodies.

Adding to the toll, two people—a child and his grandmother, originally from China—were killed in another landslide in P?p?moa, another suburb of Tauranga. On Thursday their bodies were recovered from a house which sustained major damage.

A search continues for a 47-year-old man, a migrant worker from Kiribati, who was washed away in his vehicle on Wednesday while trying to cross the flooded Mahurangi River at Warkworth, north of Auckland.

Shock and grief over these events is already turning

to anger. Critical questions are being raised, in particular, about why campers at the Mount Maunganui site—located at the foot of the small mountain, a popular tourist attraction—were not evacuated despite severe weather warnings being issued well in advance.

On Wednesday evening, Minister for Emergency Management Mark Mitchell assured Radio NZ listeners that the country was “well prepared” for the storm fuelled by the tropical low weather system.

“We have been aware that it’s coming, so there’s been a lot of work pre-positioning people,” he said. The local states of emergency, Mitchell explained, would empower officials “to be able to move people to safety, particularly those that may not necessarily understand the predicament or the danger that they’re in.”

In the 12 hours until 6:00 a.m. on Thursday, Tauranga recorded 198 millimetres of rain (7.8 inches)—the equivalent of two-and-a-half months’ worth of rain—making it the city’s wettest night on record. Yet there was no evacuation order given for the campground at Mount Maunganui (also known as Mauao), where hundreds of holiday-makers were staying.

Clear warnings that the area was unsafe did not trigger any official response. The *New Zealand Herald* reported that there had been as many as seven slips on Mount Maunganui during the storm, including “one about 5 a.m. on Thursday—four and a half hours before the much larger and more devastating one.” That prompted one woman “to get up and urge others to wake and move away from the slope.” The woman is now among those unaccounted for, and is believed to have been in the toilet block when it was engulfed by the landslide.

One camper, Karyn Henger, told the *Herald* she felt “angry... because there are people that are not going to

come out alive, and we could have been among them as well. Where were the campground staff? Where were the council? Where was anybody to warn us that we needed to get out of there?”

Tauranga City Council announced at 8.56 a.m. that it would close the walking tracks around the mountain because it had been “significantly destabilised” and there was “an ongoing risk of further slips and falling debris.” This was about half an hour before the landslide at Beachside Holiday Park, but the council—which owns the campground and runs it as a business—gave no order to evacuate.

The *Herald* also reported that Mount Maunganui local Alister McHardy, who had witnessed the earlier slips and unstable ground, called emergency services at 6:00 a.m. “to report the danger and try to get the walking tracks and camping ground evacuated.” He was told to call the council. Instead, he decided to wake up some of the campers and warn them about the danger.

Tauranga Mayor Mahé Drysdale and Council Chief Executive Marty Grenfell have announced there will be an “independent review” of the landslide. Like countless other official inquiries following such tragedies, its purpose will be to make a show of “learning the lessons” while deflecting calls for accountability.

The full extent of the damage from this week’s storms is not yet clear. It appears to be less widespread than Cyclone Gabrielle, which inundated thousands of homes, farms and businesses in 2023. Many small towns, however, including in Northland and Tairāwhiti remain isolated due to landslides and flooding. Strong winds are forecast for storm-hit regions over the weekend, threatening more destruction.

At a press conference on Friday, Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said it was yet to be determined what financial support the government would give to disaster-affected communities. The aftermath will inevitably compound the social crisis facing the working class, which will be forced to bear the cost of rebuilding. Workers are already being driven into poverty as a result of brutal austerity measures imposed by the National Party-led government and the previous Labour Party government.

Insurance and Financial Services Ombudsman Karen Stevens told Radio NZ that people making claims

would likely face lengthy delays. This was also the case following the 2023 flooding disaster. The grossly inadequate support for many people whose homes were damaged or destroyed by Cyclone Gabrielle contributed to the crushing defeat of the Labour Party government in the 2023 election.

Extreme weather events are becoming increasingly common throughout the world because of climate change. Earth Sciences NZ principal scientist Chris Brandolino told Radio NZ that the intensity of this week’s storm was linked to “extremely high levels of oceanic heat content.” Victoria University of Wellington scientist James Renwick warned that if governments do not act to reduce climate emissions “the future cost is going to be huge and ultimately, it’ll be overwhelming. It will destroy our economy.”

Human-induced climate change threatens billions of people with catastrophe from rising sea levels, flooding, hurricanes, droughts, fires and the loss of biodiversity. Yet capitalist governments everywhere, including in New Zealand, refuse to take the actions necessary, because bringing down emissions would affect the profits of the resources industry and other powerful business interests.

The climate emergency can only be addressed through a socialist reorganisation of society. This requires taking the major corporations and the fortunes of the super-rich into public ownership under the democratic control of the working class, so that resources can be directed toward flood and disaster protection and a rapid transition from fossil fuels to genuinely sustainable energy.



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