



**Hon. Chris Penk**

Minister for Land Information  
Parliament Buildings  
WELLINGTON

15 July 2024

Dear Minister,

I was made aware last week that Land Information New Zealand (LINZ) has opted to withdraw from its leadership of the New Zealand Marine Geospatial Information (MGI) working group. I also read in the press that it has opted to cease work on the Common Operating Datasets for Emergency Management (CODEM).<sup>1</sup>

These decisions – which appear to have been made with minimal consultation - impact on two crucial data-focused initiatives that have required significant investment from the public sector and have far-reaching ramifications across environmental, societal, and economic domains. While CODEM is equally important, I'd like to draw your attention to the work of the MGI working group.

The MGI working group was created to facilitate national collaboration and provide national leadership and coordination between New Zealand agencies to maximise the value of hydrographic and marine investments. Its purpose is to improve the discoverability, access and reuse of marine and hydrographic data collected in New Zealand waters. The working group includes over 220 stakeholders from over 70 cross-sector organisations, including major ministries (e.g. MPI, DOC, MFE, MBIE, MNZ, NZDF, Te Arawhiti), the Local Government Coastal Special Interest Group and CRIs. It facilitates the prioritisation of coastal and ocean mapping, fosters partnerships to maximise investment value, and enables co-funding opportunities between organisations.

A nationally coordinated approach to the management of data and databases can only benefit New Zealand Inc. In these times of constrained budgets, such an approach efficiently supports planning and decision-making and contributes to the strategic allocation of resources and efforts for coastal and ocean mapping. The collaboration

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/520483/emergency-coordination-system-work-halted-by-public-sector-cuts>

also enhances efficiencies, and generates cost and time savings, rather than risking duplication of efforts.

LINZ, as a New Zealand government organisation, is responsible for managing *inter alia* geodetic survey systems, topographic information, and hydrographic information. LINZ's leadership of the MGI Working Group is well-aligned with its mission. The need for better environmental information to effectively manage our terrestrial environment is a reoccurring theme in several of my reports. It is no different for our marine estate which covers an area 20 times larger than our emerged land and is still poorly understood. Increasing the accessibility of marine environmental datasets is critical for environmental monitoring and the sustainable management of the ocean's resources.

While LINZ's decision will not prevent members of the working group from continuing to work together, no other organisation seems to be resourced and better placed than LINZ to lead and coordinate this work. The MGI work programme has unlocked the discoverability of critical datasets collected across the public sector that had thus far not been made publicly available. The absence of leadership and coordination from LINZ will seriously affect the progress of the group and those stakeholders who need access to critical environmental information and databases. Essentially, the amount of robust information available to support effective management will decrease rather than increase.

The savings in question – effectively one FTE – are tiny in comparison with the value that the MGI working group is providing to New Zealand. I find it hard to believe that this expenditure was of less value than anything that remains funded within your vote. At the very least, I would encourage you to ask some hard questions of your officials to see whether alternative lower priority expenditure could be removed to keep this function alive.

I am copying your colleagues, the Ministers for Digitising Government, Science, Innovation and Technology, and the Minister for Infrastructure and Responsible for RMA Reform because this decision highlights, once again, the fragmented handling of environmental and physical information in New Zealand. There is an urgent need to integrate this information as part of a **national data strategy**, with proper oversight from all the agencies that intersect with these data. Modern economies rely on information and when an economy is as land and sea dependent as ours, an inability to access and interrogate multiple data sets is inexcusable.

I would encourage you, along with your colleagues, to consider whether LINZ's decision in this case is aligned with the sort of information infrastructure New Zealand should be aspiring to create.

Yours sincerely



Rt Hon Simon Upton  
**Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment**