

Coutts Island Residents' Community Meeting

Evacuation Planning – Minutes

Date: Tuesday 20th January 2026 at 7 p.m.

Location: Belfast Rugby Football Club, 18 March Place, Belfast

1. Introduction and welcome from Charlotte Gavin, Chairperson of the Belfast Area Residents Association.

ECAN early warning system

2. Nick Griffiths from ECAN (Natural Hazards Scientist) addressed the following:
 - a) ECAN early warning system is made up of a series of flow meters along the Waimakariri River to the West Coast.
 - b) The Flow Meter has 4 stages (primarily taken from the Gorge) where a Text Notification to those who are registered by texting WAIMAKARIRI to 3730, on this mobile device will receive a text message with relevant information. This is not a formal notice from Civil Defence, this is a complementary service to allow residents to make their own decisions about their evacuation procedure. This information will also be made available on the ECAN website.
 - c) The ECAN text message service is not restricted to residents only, if you have other friends, family members, tenants, boarders, farm managers etc who would benefit from notification then please do so.
 - d) The levels at the Gorge provide a potential window of 12 hours until it reaches the Waimakariri old bridge, however it could be a lot sooner, so once messages start going out be vigilant.
 - e) The 4 stages are:
 - (1) 1,800 /m³ – High flows: Breach unlikely
 - (2) 2,300 /m³ – Low risk: Move stock to high ground if possible.
 - (3) 3,000/m³ – Request to evacuate
 - (4) 4,000/m³ – High Risk – evacuate now

Evacuation by Civil Defence

3. Addressed by Brenden Winder – Manager, Civil Defence & Emergency Management. At Stage 3 & 4 – Civil Defence evacuation protocol will kick in and the CCC website will provide further information. You may not get a knock on your door to evacuate as there could be a number of factors including staff shortages and dealing with a household with high needs etc, so it is important to remain vigilant and to act in accordance with your individual household evacuation plan.

Dickeys Rd Flood Gate

4. Back to Nick Griffiths from ECAN – This is activated once Dickeys Road is impassable by floodwaters at the Otukaikino Creek and bridge which lies below the flood gate levels. Should someone need to climb over it in an emergency this is possible. Its purpose is to protect the residents of Belfast from floodwaters should an event occur.

Where do you go for information in the event of an emergency

5. When Civil Defence deem evacuation is imminent or required they will post on the CCC website and they will also activate the Emergency Cell Phone warning (which is different to the ECAN voluntary email system) and it is localised to all cell phones in the vicinity. Very much the same cell phone emergency system used for Tsunami warnings.
6. If your family is safe, your plan may be to ensure your neighbour is informed to be vigilant particularly once the ECAN early warning system starts providing information – particularly if you know they don't have a cell phone or internet access.

Stock Movements / Evacuation

7. This is to be part of your individual evacuation plan. If gate access is required onto ECAN land / stop banks as part of your evacuation plan to get stock to high ground, then let us know to provide a solution here.
8. Pets can be accommodated at the Belfast Community Network evacuation centre, and the Belfast Rugby Football Clubrooms can also be opened if required. Dogs will need to be on lead, cats, rabbits and other smaller animals will need to be caged [so have cages handy]. Any pet larger than a dog, or poultry however will need to be housed elsewhere as part of your evacuation plan.

Evacuation to Support Centre in Belfast

9. Lynda Goodrick & Justine Balcar from the Belfast Community Network have a comprehensive Belfast Emergency Response Plan [BERP] and confirmed if evacuation is required the BERP will be activated and centres opened up anytime, day or night. A flyer has been circulated to residents letterboxes in December 2025 and further information is on their website: <https://belfastcommunitynetwork.org.nz/a/HsH8kDy>
10. The BERP includes a direct connection with the Belfast Pharmacy and Medical Centre so in the event of an evacuation and you have forgotten your medication (don't go back for it) or you need medical attention – come to the Belfast Community Network building for assistance and they will get you sorted.

Fire – How to Protect Yourself and Evacuation

11. Addressed by Wayne Hamilton – Senior Advisor Community Readiness & Recovery for Fire Emergency NZ.

Key Points:

- a. Maintain smoke detectors in your home and sheds. It is recommended they are all “linked” so you are notified in any room of the house / property that smoke has been detected.
- b. One of the most attended to fires in the area is vehicle’s being burnt out which is typically in the early hours of the morning, so if a fire does get out of control be prepared it could be in the middle of the night.
- c. Keep flammable vegetation away from your house such as brush and plant moisture retaining plants instead.
- d. Keep your gutters clear of vegetation.
- e. If you have a sprinkler system be prepared to wet things down around your house.
- f. Consider in your plan about if you loose power and your water pump is not operational – where you can get a generator from.
- g. The fire trucks can suck the water out of your tank with an appropriate coupling (check to see if residents need to purchase this) just ensure the lid is off the tank as it can create a vacuum effect and crush the tank.

12. Have your fire evacuation plan ready – this may include cutting fences and having the tools on hand to do that.

13. In the event of a fire your evacuation time could be as quick as 5 minutes or less. Civil Defence, FENZ and the Police will all be put into action with an evacuation protocol. If you have evacuated please notify either the BARA or BCN with your contact phone number and email – this makes it easier to notify you the “coast is clear” and to come back to your home once the event is under control.

14. The Coutts Island area would be attended to with helicopter monsoon buckets and all methods available to control any fire outbreak as quickly as possible given its location to densely populated residential areas (i.e. Belfast).

15. Some residents expressed concerns about emergency services finding their property and the dispatcher not relaying specific information. Wayne Hamilton advised with GPS these days a majority of these issues have now been resolved. [See the Additional notes section for another solution discussed after the meeting concluded.]

16. Dean Harker from Fire & Emergency NZ also addressed the community in relation to “burn offs” and the inherent risks with that. The majority of the residents engaged in controlled burn off activities when permitted to do so.

Dean reinforced the importance of properly extinguishing a fire (which could flare up in high winds up to 1 month later), not blowing air into the fire or starting it on a windy day,

and to notify the local fire department if you are planning to burn and they have controlled burn notice boards also available for use.

17. Wayne Hamilton advised that he is happy to set up the Fire & Emergency Mobile Unit to address the community which will be split into 3 sectors. To provide a BBQ or a cuppa to chat about fire safety, checks of your smoke detectors, and how to formulate your fire evacuation plan further etc. Further information about putting that into practice will come shortly and the BARA seriously encourage the residents to take advantage of that opportunity.



Developing your evacuation plan

18. Addressed by Rachel Hunt from Civil Defence: Flyers on how to prepare an evacuation plan and various other materials were made available for collection.
19. The resident's homework is to work on their emergency and evacuation plan.
20. Rachael Thornton from Emergency Management Canterbury advised they are just about ready to print a helpful guide to Emergency and Evacuation planning specifically designed for the Rural sector. The BARA will circulate that online as soon as it is available.
21. Rachel and Louis Couperus will co-ordinate with BARA to work through the community assistance aspects of providing evacuation support which could include:
 - a. Maintaining a community "asset list" e.g. who has horse floats, trailers, chain saws, water tank locations, generators etc.

- b. Maintaining a community “skill list” i.e. who has their first aid certificate, any defibrillators close by? Who has a chainsaw qualification, heavy vehicle drivers license etc.
- c. Maintain a register of any households identified as requiring additional assistance in order to relay that information to Civil Defence.
- d. Have a telephone call tree maintained and nominating key personnel.
- e. Providing a central place to notify if you have evacuated so that information is relayed to Civil Defence, and so you can be contacted easily to return.
- f. Providing the community with reminders to keep their evacuation plans up to date via email, facebook and post.
- g. Further consultation will be provided as we progress.
- h. It is the intent that the protocol that is decided on that serves the residents of Coutts Island the best shall be integrated into the Belfast Emergency Response Plan.

22. Thank you for your attendance and thank you to the Belfast Rugby Football Club to provide us with the room for the meeting.

Additional Notes / Action Point (post meeting):

- i. If your evacuation plan includes stock movement and you have a transportation company you would work with, contact them to get them on the list also so they have some warning to prepare if necessary.
- ii. If stock makes up over 50% of your income then MPI will need to be involved and consulted. [BARA to Investigate protocol and circulate info to residents].
- iii. Rapid Address Property Notification System for your property [as provided for rural addresses]: this assists to identify address locations quickly – further information to be circulated.
- iv. BARA to chase Canterbury Emergency Response for a copy of their Evacuation planning guide (targeting rural needs) when it is finalised (approx. 2 weeks), then circulate to the residents.