

Hon Megan Woods

**Minister responsible for the Earthquake
Commission**

MEDIA STATEMENT

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Wide range of EQC reforms to speed up claims

The Government has accepted the need for a wide range of reforms to speed up the resolution of outstanding EQC claims, as outlined in a new report launched by EQC Minister Megan Woods.

The report was prepared by Christine Stevenson, Acting Chief Executive of New Zealand Customs, who was appointed Independent Ministerial Advisor to identify ways to breakthrough roadblocks in the settling of claims.

“The findings of this report confirm our reasons for commissioning the advice. It’s clear there’s a big job to do to get these claims moving faster, but the report contains some very good recommendations in here to improve the way EQC operates, get claims sorted and to help people move on with their lives,” says Megan Woods.

“The report reveals sizeable issues with staffing levels, data quality, record keeping and organisational culture and structure that are holding back resolution of claims.

Woods says the recommendations fall into several broad categories: those EQC will have the responsibility for implementing, those Treasury and MBIE need to work with EQC on, and those that are more future-facing and need a whole-of-system approach.

“I am accepting all the recommendations of this report and I’ve asked Dame Annette King, the interim board chair, to begin implementing these right away. These include:

- Hiring more staff to reduce the caseloads for case managers so claimants can get more personal attention.
- Establishing a Claimant Reference Group, comprised of claimants and community representative advocates who are paid for their time and expertise to advise EQC on how to improve the treatment of their customers.
- Making any claimants’ EQC file available to them on request and introducing a standard for better communication with claimants.
- Having a team of experienced EQC staff pull out all of the physical claims files relating to the remaining claims, and have the team sort, review, confirm and capture the key data to ensure it is correct.
- Increasing Government monitoring to improve accountability.

“There are also broader recommendations which we will begin work on including looking to allow EQC more flexibility to make cash settlements above the EQC cap, which would then be recovered from the private insurers.

“Another recommendation we are beginning work to implement will be to significantly scale up the Residential Advisory Service which provides independent help to claimants. This service has helped resolve over 4000 outstanding claims and we want to make it even better.

“The report recommends funding RAS to help claimants access independent psycho-social support. This is about recognising the enormous emotional toll that these claims processes can take and making sure people have access to support.

“From here, I have asked for a group of CEOs from various government agencies to come together to implement these recommendations as soon as possible.

“I want to thank Ms Stevenson and those who have worked on the report to deliver it to me in a relatively short timeframe. This is a great start to helping restore hope that after all these years people’s homes will be sorted and they can move on,” says Megan Woods.