



SUMMARY VERSION

The National Disaster Emergency Plan of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas

2025 Edition



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Summary Version

National Disaster Emergency Plan

Draft Dated September 03, 2025

Foreword

[Insert message from key official]

List of Acronyms

BDOCS	Bahamas Department of Correctional Services
BNGIS	Bahamas National Geographic Information Services
BPL	Bahamas Power and Light
BRCS	Bahamas Red Cross Society
BTC	Bahamas Telecommunication Corporation
BUC	Bahamas Utility Company
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CDEMA	Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency
CDM	Comprehensive Disaster Management
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DWI	Disaster Welfare Information
EOC	Emergency Operations Centre
ESF	Emergency Support Function
ESG	Emergency Support Group
EWS	Early Warning System
FI	Family Island
FIDEP	Family Island Disaster Emergency Plan
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
GIS	Geographic Information Services
GoBH	Government of The Bahamas
ICC	Incident Command Centre
NDCP	National Disaster Coordination Protocols
NDEC	National Disaster Emergency Council
NDEOC	National Disaster Emergency Operations Centre
NDEP	National Disaster Emergency Plan
NGCC	Non-Government Consultative Council
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PM	Prime Minister
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures

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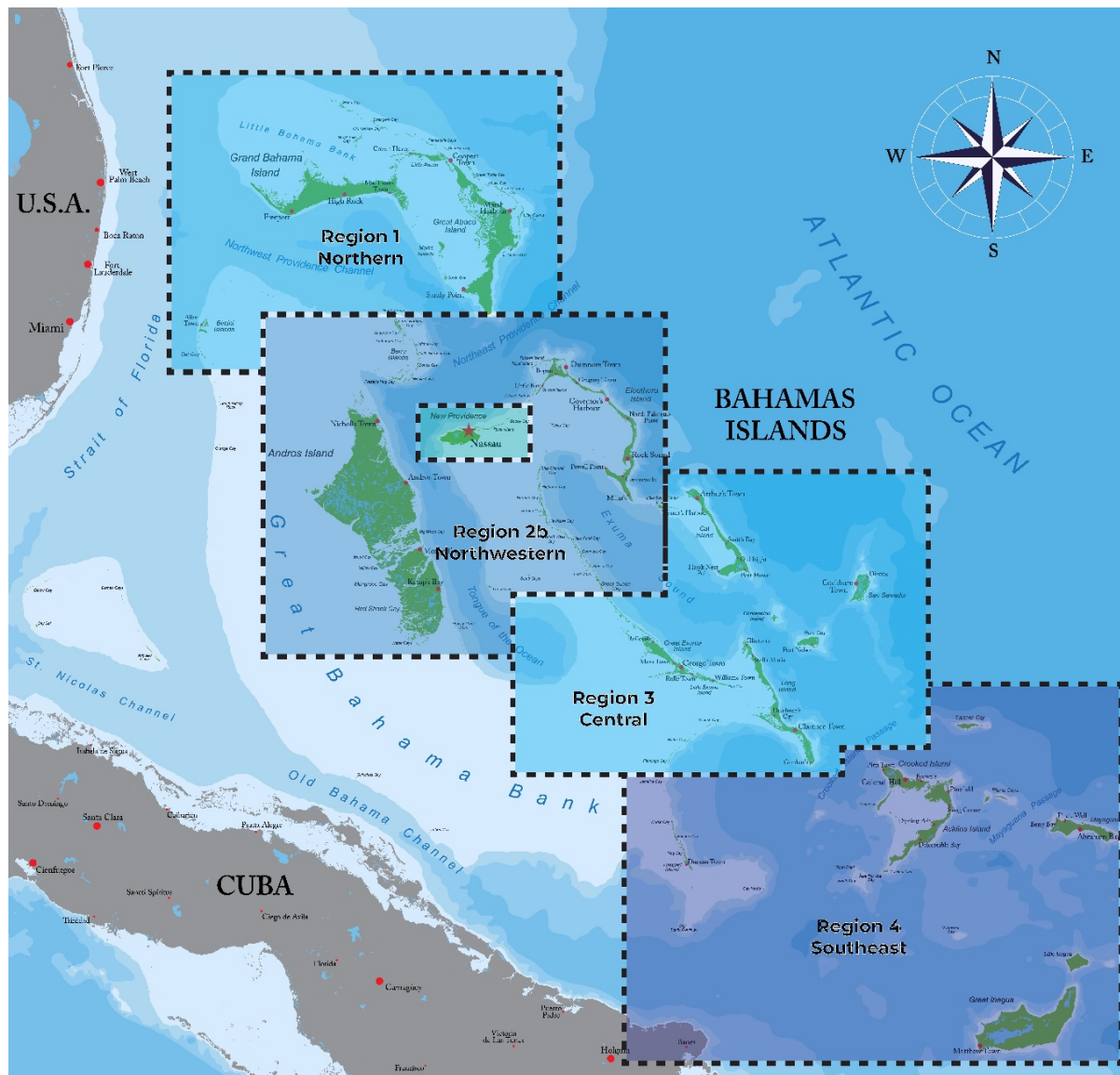
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 DISASTER RISK PROFILE AND COUNTRY CONTEXT

The Commonwealth of The Bahamas is an independent archipelagic state comprised of over 700 islands located within a tropical band of the Atlantic Ocean. These are divided into four meteorological regions, each a mix of Family Islands and cays (see Fig1.1A). Eight percent (80%) of its communities and economic activity are located in or near coastal areas. The Bahamas is neighbored by the United States of America (USA) to the north and west, Cuba and Santo Domingo to the south and Turks and Caicos Islands to the east. The Bahamas is a participating member state of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and its disaster and emergency coordination mechanism, the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA).

Fig 1.1A Map of the Bahamas, Demarcating Meteorological Regions.



1.1.1 Disaster-Related Risk Profile

The Bahamas' geographical location contributes significantly to its disaster-related risk profile. The country has experienced increases in tropical storms and other disasters, with multiple category 4 and category 5 hurricanes impacting different regions over the last decade. These included Hurricanes Joaquin (2015), Matthew (2016), Irma (2017) and Dorian (2019). Among these events, Hurricane Dorian stands out in the scope of both its economic and human cost. It resulted in 67 confirmed deaths, with another 282 persons deemed missing, and over \$3.4bn in damages and losses.

In addition to hurricanes, less destructive but more prevalent storm surges and coastal floods affect different regions and Family Islands intermittently, bringing damage to property, disruption of livelihoods and potential loss of lives. Inland, wildfires have become more prevalent and destructive on some Family Islands. Whether caused by natural factors or human action, the increase in droughts and effects of climate change have exacerbated their scope and potential impact on people, property, ecosystems, communities and livelihoods.

1.1.2 Socio-Economic Vulnerability to Disaster Risks

Among the effects of the extreme disasters that have affected The Bahamas in the last decade, socio-demographic areas of vulnerability and inequality have come under greater focus. Thus, despite the country's high rates of human and economic development, disaster events have revealed that some aspects of the population are at a greater risk of loss of lives, livelihoods and property. This has led to different approaches to defining what makes some Bahamians more vulnerable than others. The DRM Act spotlights "those members of the population who are most vulnerable by reason of age, disability, poverty, lack of resources, physical displacement or gender".¹

Food and water security have become critical considerations in the country's capacity to respond to and recover from disaster events. Through the effects of climate change, reliable access to sustainable sources of potable drinking water has come under threat, as groundwater resources are depleted.² This is exacerbated by the storm surges and flooding that accompany extreme hydrometeorological events, which can increase pollution and salination in groundwater resources.³ Thus, securing access to clean water has become a critical consideration in disaster and emergency planning, particularly for Family Islands that have limited freshwater sources. The Government of The Bahamas has sought to tackle this issue and make the island more resilient to disaster risks and the effects of climate change.

1.2 LAYOUT OF THE NDEP

The NDEP is comprised of 9 sections, as follows:

¹ DRM Act, 2022 Section 2(a) (ii).

² United Nations. 2022. Common Country Analysis – Update 2022, the Bahamas.

³ United Nations. 2022. Common Country Analysis – Update 2022, the Bahamas.

- **Section 1** provides introductory information on The Bahamas, its disaster risk profile and the disaster scenarios against which the plan aims to respond.
- **Section 2** outlines the legal and structural framework that provides authority to the plan and links it to other plans within the national disaster risk management policy.
- **Section 3** provides the concept of operations for the plan and describes the different tiers of disaster impact that trigger different types of response.
- **Section 4** describes the country's early warning systems and the conditions and arrangements surrounding the issue of a Declaration of Disaster Alert Order under the DRM Act, 2022.
- **Section 5** outlines emergency response procedures, incident coordination measures and the conditions and arrangements surrounding the issue of a Declaration of Disaster Emergency Order under the DRM Act, 2022.
- **Section 6** outlines post-event emergency response measures once a disaster has been declared, and includes damage and humanitarian needs assessments, as well as search and rescue and related evacuation orders.
- **Section 7** summarizes the transition from response to rehabilitation and recovery.
- **Section 8** outlines the process for testing, reviewing and updating the plan from time to time.

This summary version includes abbreviated content on sections 1 through 7.

1.3 RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS

Fig1.4A NDEP and its Relationship to Other Plans



The DRM Act, 2022 names two key plans from which all other plans are developed. The first is the National Disaster Risk Management Plan (NDRMP) which will make provision for risk analysis and the establishment of resources to improve the country's resilience and risk management over time. The second is this National Disaster Emergency Plan, from which other operational plans, protocols, guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) flow. Fig 1.4A summarises the NDEP's relationship to other plans.

1.3.1 Description of Plans and Related Documents

Below are definitions and explanations of different types of planning documents and their distinct functions. These documents are developed by the DRM Authority, or by other public bodies, with technical support and oversight from the Authority.

- **National Disaster Emergency Plan:** This plan establishes the actions and contingency arrangements required to manage alerts and disaster emergencies to safeguard life, protect property and restore normalcy to society during the disaster response, rehabilitation and recovery phases for the entire country. It is aimed at coordinating the technical, financial and operational capacities of a public body and an Administrator, to effectively manage alerts and disaster emergencies.
- **Family Island Disaster Emergency Plans:** Plans that outline the actions and contingencies required to manage local emergencies and disaster emergency events as it relates to the mandates and responsibilities of the Family Island Administrator and the local government district under their responsibility.
- **Public Body Plans:** Plans that outline the actions and contingencies required to manage local emergencies and disaster emergency events as it relates to the mandates and responsibilities of that Public Body
- **Emergency Support Function Plans or Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):** Documents developed by Emergency Support Functions to guide their activities during the disaster response, rehabilitation and recovery phases. Where, based on the nature and scope of the issues being addressed by the ESF the document requires high level sign-off (for example by one or more Permanent Secretaries or Ministers), a Plan can be used. Where the document is primarily concerned with operational details and can be changed by agreement of members of the ESF, SOPs can be used.
- **Activity Specific Plans:** Plans that outline the scope and steps involved in critical disaster emergency activities that have complex, cross-sectoral components, such as mass evacuation or mass casualty response.
- **National Mass Evacuation Plan:** A strategic framework that outlines how a country will safely and efficiently relocate large numbers of people from areas threatened or impacted by disasters, emergencies, or other hazardous events.

- **Recovery Plan:** A framework that outlines how an island/constituency/local government district/public body, or other entity will restore living conditions, infrastructure, services, the economy, and the environment after a disaster. It sets priorities, timelines, and responsibilities for rehabilitation and reconstruction, ensures support for affected and vulnerable populations, and integrates measures to build resilience and reduce future disaster risks.
- **National Humanitarian Assistance Standards:** National standards that provide the minimum standard to be met by any humanitarian assistance provided by the Government, to the Government or by humanitarian aid organizations, particularly in relation to the supply of water, the promotion of sanitation and hygiene, food security and nutrition, shelter and settlement, and health.
- **Disaster Risk Communication Plan:** A structured strategy for delivering timely, accurate, and accessible information to the public and stakeholders before, during, and after a disaster.

2 LEGAL AND STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 STATUTORY PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE NDEP

This plan will support the fulfillment of the objectives of the DRM Act, which are quoted in the extract below.

- “a. (To) develop, promote and implement an approach to disaster risk management that –*
- i. is holistic, comprehensive, integrated, and proactive in lessening the socio-economic and environmental impacts of disasters including climate change; and*
 - ii. focuses on reducing risk, including the risk of loss of life, health, physical integrity, economic disruption and damage to environment and property, especially to those members of the population who are most vulnerable by reason of age, disability, poverty, lack of resources, physical displacement or gender; and*
- b. (To) promote the involvement and participation of all relevant sectors and stakeholders, at all levels of the society.”⁴*

The requirement for a National Disaster Emergency Plan is established in the DRM Act (s.9), which outlines the document’s focus as follows:

“The National Disaster Emergency Plan, shall establish the actions and contingency arrangements required to **manage alerts and disaster emergencies** in order to **safeguard life, protect property and restore normalcy** to society during the **disaster response, rehabilitation and recovery** phases and it is aimed at coordinating the technical, financial and operational capacities of a **public body** and an **Administrator**, to effectively manage alerts and disaster emergencies.”

The NDEP is thus focused on the effective management of disaster alerts and emergencies.

2.2 OBJECTIVES AND PRIORITIES

2.2.1 Objectives

This plan is designed to provide a clear and actionable framework for implementing emergency response measures that minimize the impact of disasters on human lives and sustainable national economic and environmental development. This will be done through the following objectives:

1. To clarify the actions and contingency measures required to manage disaster emergencies and the standards by which they will be implemented.
2. To provide a pathway for safeguarding life and protecting property before, during and after an initial disaster response period.
3. To provide a coordinated and efficient pathway towards the restoration of normalcy and the transition from response to effective disaster rehabilitation and recovery.
4. To clarify the emergency response requirements of public bodies (as sector leaders and ESF participants) and their role in the management of alerts and disaster emergencies.

⁴ DRM Act, 2022, section 2

5. To clarify the emergency response requirements of Family Island Administrators and their role in the management of alerts and disaster emergencies.

2.2.2 Priorities

The activities and response mechanisms outlined in this plan will be implemented in a manner that prioritizes human lives and sustainable national economic and environmental development, in the following order:

- Implementing and facilitating lifesaving measures
- Restoring access to essential services
- Restoring access to major road networks and ports of entry
- Supporting economic recovery, key industries and livelihoods.
- Restoring access to minor road networks, points of entry and non-essential services

2.3 KEY DRM ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The following table (Fig 2.3A) outlines key roles and responsibilities within the DRM machinery. This is guided by the DRM Act, 2022, as well as good practices in disaster emergency management.

Fig 2.3A Key Roles and Responsibilities in The Bahamas' DRM Machinery

Entity/Position	Summarised Responsibilities	Reports To
1. <i>The Prime Minister</i>	Ultimate and final authority for all DRM policies and executive decisions.	People of The Bahamas.
2. <i>Ministry with Responsibility for DRM</i>	Ministerial guidance on all DRM issues and executive oversight of DRM Authority.	Cabinet/PM
3. <i>The Inter-Ministerial DRM Committee</i>	Cabinet sub-committee that is the policy-level focal point of inter-sectoral collaboration on DRM, ensuring that risk resilience and sustainability factors are integrated across government. Convenes as the NDEC during an emergency (see below).	Cabinet/PM Under the DRM Act, the IMDRMC reports to Parliament on the implementation of the National DRM Policy and the Comprehensive Financial Strategy for DRM.
4. <i>The National Disaster Emergency Council</i>	Takes the place of the IMDRMC during an emergency, thus ensuring high-level coordinated decision-making. Cabinet level inter-sectoral coordination and decision-making during emergency response, ensuring that there is adequate and appropriate	Cabinet/PM

	support for national coordination processes across government.	
5. The DRM Authority	Leadership, implementation and coordination of all DRM activities and requirements set out in the DRM Act. Provides technical support to improve DRM at all levels and technical guidance to the PM and Cabinet on issues related to DRM, risk resilience and related aspects of sustainable development. Assumes command of the NDEOC and all coordination activities during an emergency response (unless delegated based on the level or nature of the response required), using a unified command approach.	Ministry with Responsibility for DRM on policy level issues. Chairman of the Authority, in administrative oversight issues. During an emergency, the Managing Director of the Authority maintains a direct line of reporting to the PM and provides daily briefings to the National Disaster Emergency Council.
6. The National Disaster Emergency Operations Centre	Operational level mechanism for coordinated inter-sectoral emergency response action and related decision-making.	Director of the NDEOC (Managing Director of the DRM Authority), as well as to the NDEC through daily briefings.
7. FI Administrators	Leadership and coordination of local emergency activities within their capacity, with guidance, direction and support from the DRM Authority. Assumes incident command of local disaster events or incident scenes, under the guidance and direction of the DRM Authority.	For the purposes of disaster management, FI Administrators report to the DRM Authority. Implement responsibilities ascribed to Family Island Administrators/local government structures as set out in the DRM Act.
8. Emergency Support Function (ESF) Coordinators	Inter-agency coordination of key emergency functions.	For the purposes of disaster management, ESFs and their coordinators report to the DRM Authority.
9. Public Bodies	Leadership and implementation of institutional and sectoral emergency activities within their mandate area, with guidance, direction and support from the DRM Authority.	For the purposes of disaster management, heads of Public Bodies report to the DRM Authority. Implement responsibilities ascribed to public bodies, heads of agencies etc., as set out in the DRM Act.

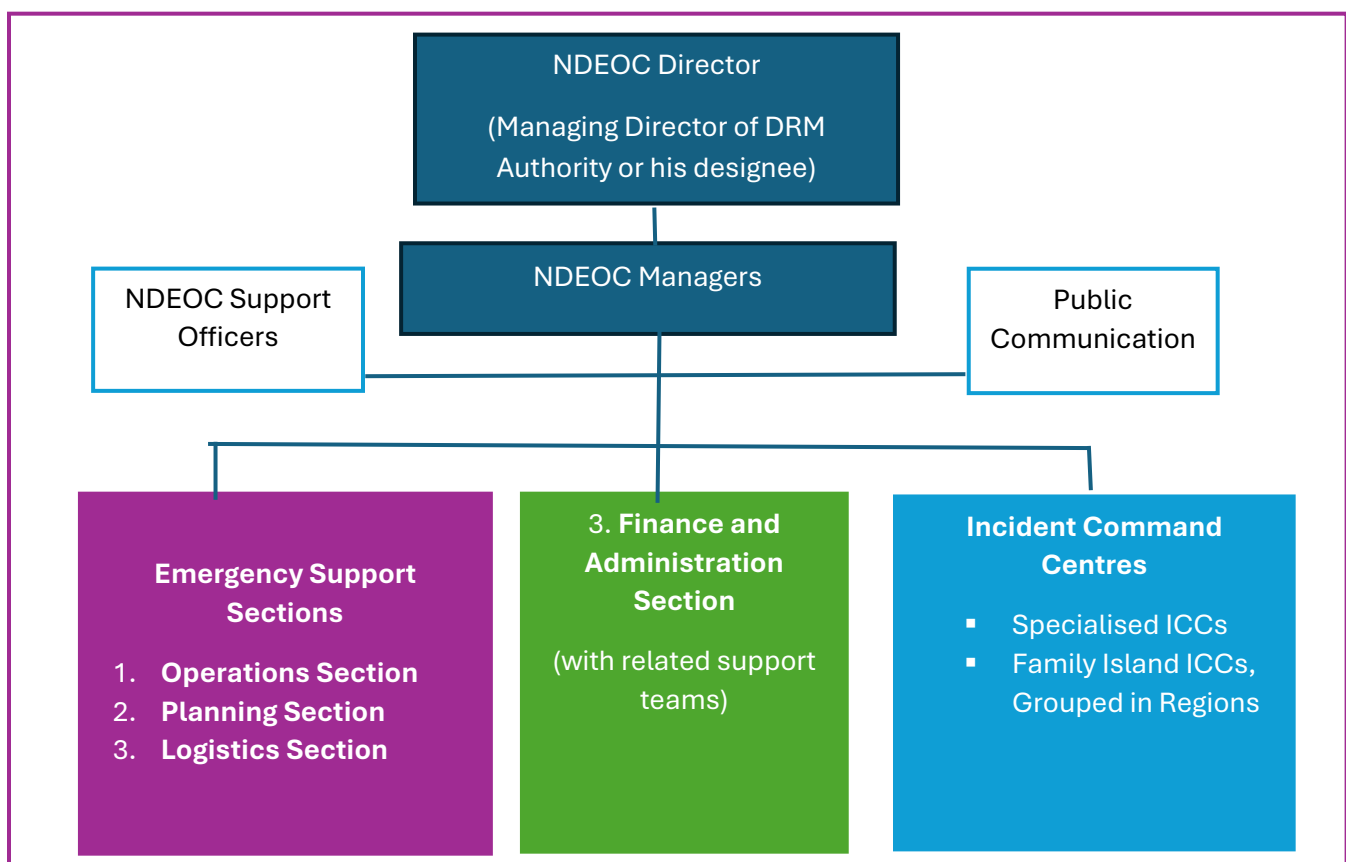
2.4 STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORK FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Under the DRM Act, there are two critical bodies that comprise the structure for emergency management during a disaster emergency response:

1. The National Disaster Emergency Council, which includes Ministers responsible for all Ministries and public bodies that have a role to play in disaster emergencies and is chaired by the Prime Minister.
2. The National Disaster Emergency Operations Centre, which is led by the Managing Director of the DRM Authority, and reports to the NDEC.

Fig 2.4 outlines the key components of the NDEOC.

Fig 2.4: NDEOC Framework

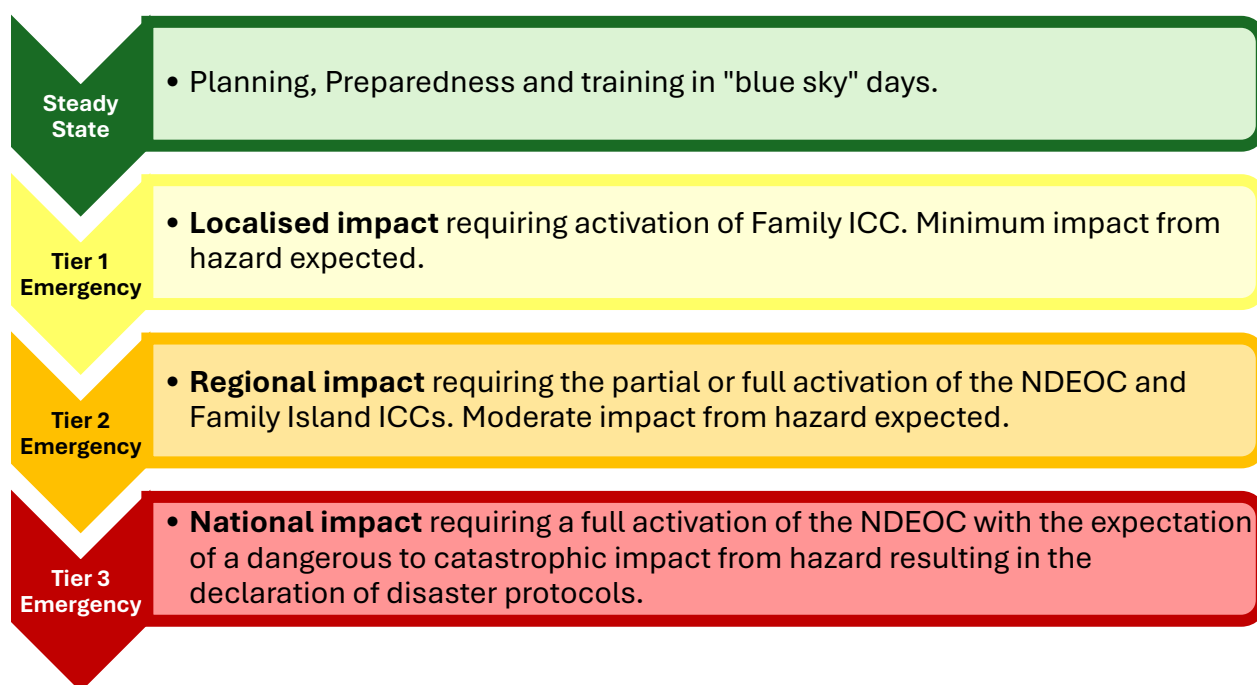


3 CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

This Concept of Operations outlines the approach to be taken in responding to emergency situations. It uses a three-tiered model for categorizing emergencies and deploying different levels of response, based on the risks and resources associated with each tier.

See Figure 3.1 for an overview of the tiered disaster emergency response.

Fig 3.1: Tiered Emergency Response System



4 EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS & DISASTER ALERTS

This section addresses the requirement under the DRM Act to establish actions and contingency arrangements required to manage disaster alerts. Under s. 50 of the DRM Act, a disaster alert declaration **may** be made by the Prime Minister after he receives advice from the DRM Authority or an Accredited Disaster Alert Notification Service warning of the “substantial prospect of the occurrence of a disaster triggered by a natural hazard”. The NDEP establishes procedural linkages between early warning systems and disaster alert declarations.

4.1 HAZARD MONITORING

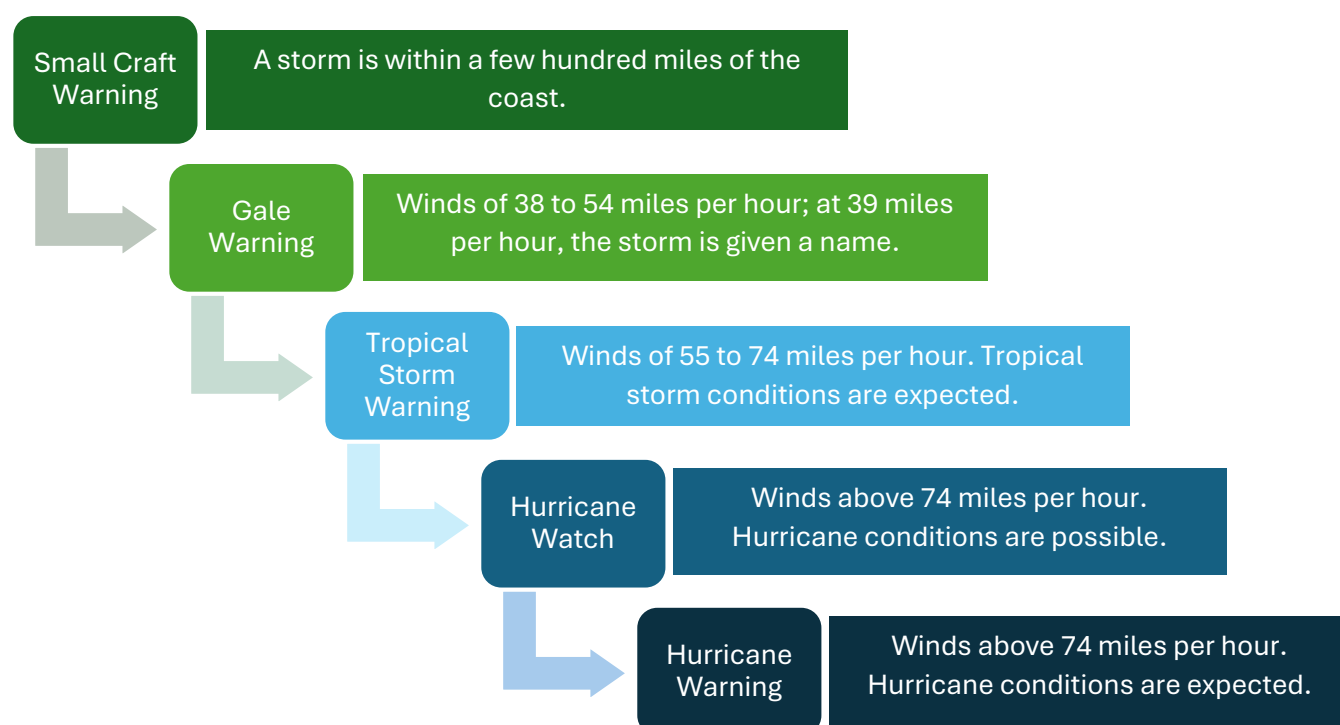
Hazard monitoring is conducted by national and regional scientific and technical experts and, in some cases, at the local level. This includes the Department of Meteorology and the Bahamas National Geographic Information Systems Centre (BNGIS), working in close collaboration with the DRM Authority. In selected circumstances, such as in the case of wildfires, monitoring may be conducted at the community level and involve communication with Family Island Disaster Risk Management Consultative Committees.

4.2 EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

4.2.1 EWS for Tropical Storms and Hurricanes

The Department of Meteorology plays the lead role in managing the Early Warning System for tropical storms, hurricanes and related weather systems. The levels of warning are outlined in Fig 4.2A.

Fig4.2A: Early Warning Progression Grades for Tropical Storms and Hurricanes



4.2.2 Multi-Hazard EWS (including Wildfires)

A color code has been developed by the DRM Authority to assist partners to classify the level and type of risk that an event brings, based on the nature and proximity/probability of the hazard. Codes range from green (steady state) to red (imminent danger), and different levels of preparedness and response are associated with each. The codes are classified at a national scale, and local risks may be greater or lesser than the overall national risk assessment. Fig 4.2B outlines the trigger points for codes related to each major hazard being tracked within the EWS. Detailed procedures regarding the EWS for each hazard will be outlined in SOPs.

Fig 4.2B: Early Warning Code System for Multiple Natural Hazards

Type of Hazard	Code Green	Code Yellow	Code Orange	Code Red
General	An event could impact an area within a 49-72-hour period	An event can occur within a 37-48-hour period	An event can occur within a 25-36-hour period	The event is imminent and may occur within a 6-24-hour period
Storm Surges	Surges in excess of 3 – 6 feet	Surges in excess of 7 – 10 feet	Surges in excess of 11 – 14 feet	Surges in excess of 15 – 20 feet
Wildfires	No forest fire has been identified; however, drought conditions in dry, forested areas mean a heightened risk exists. .	A forest fire has been identified, but can be contained within a 36-hour period.	A forest fire has been identified, cannot be contained within a 36-hour period but is not likely to impact a community.	A forest fire is out of control and its impact on a community is imminent.
Flash floods	Rainfall levels in the range of 3 – 6 inches per hour	Rainfall levels in the range of 7 – 12 inches per hour	Rainfall levels in the range of 13 – 18 inches per hour	Rainfall levels in excess of 19 inches per hour
Tsunami	Tsunami waves may impact your sector within 12-24 hours	Tsunami waves may impact your sector within 7 – 12 hours	Tsunami waves will impact your sector within 1 – 6 hours	Tsunami waves will impact your sector within 60 minutes

4.2.3 EWS for Wildfires

A distinct Early Warning System for Wildfires will be developed by the DRM Authority in collaboration with the Department of Meteorology, the Royal Bahamas Police Force, as well as Administrators and community members in islands deemed most at risk. Before any wildfire occurs, a hazard monitoring system for wildfires can be guided by drought conditions. These conditions are likely to occur during summer months, when forested areas are particularly dry and at higher risk for naturally occurring fires, or for the spread of fires that are deliberately or recklessly started by human activity. Hazard monitoring procedures for wildfire prone areas should include:

- ☑ Drone monitoring and data collection.
- ☑ Data sharing among key entities (including the DRM Authority, Department of Meteorology, BNGIS , the RBPF and FI Administrators)
- ☑ Public communications and sensitisation on preparedness and response requirements.
- ☑ Mobilising forest-adjacent communities to increase monitoring and reporting of wildfires.

4.2.4 Early Warning Dissemination and Communication

Once an Early Warning has been issued by the Department of Meteorology or other relevant entity, the DRM Authority will implement appropriate measures from the National Disaster Risk Management Communication Plan and SOPs. This will include formal notifications issued by the

GOBH, as well as informal public education and information messages communicated through social and traditional media.

4.3 ISSUING DISASTER ALERT DECLARATIONS

Disaster Alert Declarations are issued by the Prime Minister in consultation with the DRM Authority and based on information provided by the Department of Meteorology or similar hazard monitoring entity. The Disaster Alert Declaration is a type of order available under the DRM Act, 2022 that allows disaster emergency measures to be implemented when there is a high risk of a disaster occurring. The decision to issue a Disaster Alert Declaration is therefore made based on the predicted likelihood and scope of impact of the disaster. Once a Disaster Alert Declaration, disaster emergency management resources can be deployed to maximise life-saving measures before a disaster occurs.

4.4 DISASTER ALERT COMMUNICATIONS

Once there is a medium to high likelihood of a disaster occurring, the Disaster Risk Communication Plan will be activated. This outlines the formal and informal communications that are to be issued by the DRM Authority through media, cell phone providers and other forms of mass communication, as well as by working in close collaboration with partners at the community level.

4.5 COORDINATION OF RESPONSE TO DISASTER ALERT DECLARATION

Once a Disaster Alert has been declared, all affected public bodies, Administrators and Emergency Support Functions will initiate appropriate responses, based on their plans and SOPs. The measures implemented may depend on the likelihood of impact and the level of disaster expected.

4.6 PRE-EVENT ASSESSMENTS

Once a Disaster Alert has been declared, all public bodies, FI Administrators and ESF Coordinators shall conduct assessments to test the readiness of their systems and identify areas of vulnerability. For slow onset disasters, assessments can allow organizations to address gaps in preparedness and to put in place business continuity plans. At this stage, local authorities can determine whether evacuation procedures may be necessary, as well as whether shelters should be activated/

4.7 PRE-EVENT EVACUATION ORDERS

Upon the Declaration of a Disaster Alert, an Evacuation Order can be issued as a pre-emptive measure and to ensure maximum protection of lives and property. The Evacuation Order procedures outlined in section 6, as well as in the National Mass Evacuation Plan, can be implemented.

5 INCIDENT COORDINATION MECHANISMS AND DISASTER DECLARATIONS

5.1 ACTIVATION OF THE NATIONAL DISASTER EMERGENCY COUNCIL

Under the DRM Act, 2022, a disaster event triggers the conversion of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on DRM to the National Disaster Emergency Council. The National Disaster Emergency Council is therefore comprised of the same members as the IMCDRM, which includes the following representatives:

- Prime Minister (Chairman)
- DRM Minister
- Finance Minister
- Ministers with responsibility for
 - National Development Planning
 - Tourism
 - Housing
 - Transport
 - Public Works
 - Health
 - Agriculture
 - The Environment
 - Foreign Affairs
 - Public Utilities
 - Social Welfare
 - Communications
 - National Security
- Other Minister with a DRM function and/or appointed by the Prime Minister.

During an emergency response, the National Disaster Emergency Council is provided with daily briefings by the NDEOC Director.

5.2 CDEMA EMERGENCY COORDINATION PARTNERSHIP

As a participating member state of the Caribbean Disaster and Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), the GOBH receives ongoing CDEMA support throughout all aspects of disaster management. During the process of emergency coordination, the DRM Authority will institute informal and formal communications with CDEMA and relevant components of the CARICOM Regional Response Machinery. In addition, the DRM Authority will share relevant information with CDEMA, including any Humanitarian Needs Assessment Report, and After-Action Report.

5.3 ACTIVATION OF THE NATIONAL DISASTER EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE

Once a disaster is declared and the level of impact is expected to be Tier 2 or higher, the NDEOC may be activated as the headquarters for all response activities. The decision to activate the NDEOC is made by the DRM Authority, and the NDEOC is maintained under the command of the Managing Director, who functions as its Director. The NDEOC operates under the delegated authority of the Prime Minister. It is designed to ensure that the country benefits effectively from the technical and operational competence of the DRM Authority during an emergency response, and to provide a flattened, integrated, joint-GoBH management system that can respond with alacrity to all emergency issues that arise during a disaster. Under the unified command system used in emergency response activities, the DRM Authority has the authority to implement the operational coordination mechanisms necessitated by emergency conditions. This coordinated response system is implemented through the NDEOC, supported by Emergency Support Functions, which are operational groups addressing key components of the emergency response. There are fifteen Emergency Support Functions within the NDEOC. They comprise groups of Ministries, other Public Bodies and selected private agencies that have a key role to play in disaster emergency management.

5.4 ALL CLEAR ANNOUNCEMENT

Once a disaster event has dissipated, the DRM Authority, consulting with technical monitoring entities such as the Department of Meteorology, shall issue an all-clear notification. This may be issued per region, as disasters move across The Bahamian archipelago. The all-clear notification creates room for other emergency response actions to be taken safely, without causing further harm to human life. These response actions include conducting damage assessment processes, conducting evacuations and search and rescue operations, or establishing incident site-based support services.

5.5 ISSUING A DECLARATION OF DISASTER EMERGENCY

The Declaration of Disaster Emergency is typically issued by the Prime Minister after an event has passed/dissipated, once initial information indicates a significant level of damage at the Family Island, regional or national level. This can be done for a short initial period, to facilitate further damage assessment and loss analysis. Once a Disaster Emergency Declaration has been issued, post-event emergency response measures can be put into effect, as needed. The Prime Minister will prioritise measures needed to save lives, prevent injury and mitigate damage and loss arising from the disaster, while returning the country to normalcy. The order of activities may depend on the nature of the event, however Fig. 5.5A below provides a generic model that may be adapted for use in a tropical storm, hurricane or wildfire related disaster.

Fig 5.5A Generic Flow of Emergency Response Measures that may be Activated Following a Disaster Declaration



6 POST-EVENT EMERGENCY RESPONSE MEASURES

6.1 EMERGENCY RESPONSE OBJECTIVES

6.1.1 Emergency Response Goal and Principles

The main goal during the emergency response period is to provide a pathway for safeguarding life and protecting property⁵. This is guided by the principles of the DRM Policy, as outlined in the DRM Act, which include (among other factors):

- The supremacy of life, security and health of a person, his property and livelihood, and the environment.
- The responsibility of the Government to assume financial responsibility for the response to, rehabilitation and recovery from, disasters occurring in The Bahamas.
- The duty of the Government to intervene and take responsibility for a disaster which exceeds the capacity of an Administrator.
- The special needs of certain groups within the population affected by the disaster are considered in emergency response activities.
- Consideration of any political, historical and socioeconomic factors unique to The Bahamas is taken into account.

In implementing the above, the priorities of all emergency response mechanisms and personnel shall be:

- **High Priority:** Saving lives, preventing or reducing injuries, restoring access and functionality to hospitals, essential health services and shelters, and preventing secondary hazards.
- **Medium Priority:** Saving livelihoods, restoring major access routes, restoring essential services (transportation, utilities, access to clean water, access to social support services), minimizing economic loss and restoring key industries.
- **Low Priority:** Restoring minor access routes, restoring access to non-essential services (e.g., entertainment).

These priorities shall guide the distribution of resources throughout the response period.

6.2 ACTIVATING COORDINATION PROTOCOLS FOR RESPONSE-RELATED ESFs

Once a Declaration of Disaster Emergency has been issued, the National Disaster Coordination Protocols should be fully activated. This means all Emergency Support Functions (ESFs) should be fully activated and reporting procedures between the NDEOC and all ESFs will be initiated.

6.3 HAZARD SPECIFIC RESPONSE PROCEDURES

Once a Disaster Declaration has been issued, any hazard-specific response procedures developed by the DRM Authority shall be activated. These will define specific procedural requirements in the response related to the following hazards, respectively:

⁵ This is adapted from the DRM Act, section 9(1).

- Hurricanes and Tropical Storms
- Coastal Floods and Storm Surges
- Wildfires

6.4 IDENTIFICATION OF DISASTER ZONES

Prospective Disaster Zones can be identified from the early warning stage and may be the subject of Evacuation Orders issued before, during or after the disaster event. Any initial information sharing, reconnaissance or damage assessment activities conducted by any EOC member before, during or after a disaster event should seek to identify/confirm and demarcate (prospective) disaster zones.

Once a disaster event has passed/dissipated and the ‘all-clear’ is given, the Authority will conduct an assessment to determine the geographical area(s) most significantly impacted by the disaster.⁶ Based on the outcome of the assessment, recommendations will be made to the Prime Minister outlining the geographic demarcation of any disaster zones. This should be accompanied (immediately or within 30 days) by supporting recommendations that outline any additional restrictions required for public safety and security within each disaster zone. Additionally, timelines for developing long-term rehabilitation and recovery plans should be included, as well as plans for humanitarian aid and social support services to affected persons, particularly those deemed most vulnerable.

6.5 INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

The management of incident sites requires a clear chain of communication and decision-making, particularly where multiple agencies are involved in the response. The role of incident command for emergencies arising from natural disasters ordinarily rests with the DRM Authority, with some exceptions. For example:

- For a Tier 1 Emergency, operations at local incident sites may be coordinated by the FI Administrator, based on their level of capacity and locally available resources.
- For wildfires, evacuations or incidents requiring a strong security presence, the Royal Bahamas Police Force maintains command and control of the incident scene, at minimum until order is restored.
- In some incidents, the first state entity on site shall assume command and control of the site, until the arrival of the DRM Authority.

During the management of an incident, frequent situational reports are critical to effective decision-making and strategic responses up the chain of command.

6.6 EVACUATION ORDERS

Once a Disaster Alert or Declaration of Disaster Emergency has been issued, the DRM Authority will review the risks faced by communities that are likely to be most affected by the natural hazard, including any proposed disaster zones. The review will include consultation with Administrators and relevant public bodies. The DRM Authority will provide guidance to the NDEC and the Prime Minister

⁶ Section 54 of the DRM At, 2022.

on any zones that it recommends should be evacuated. The Prime Minister makes the final decision as to whether an Evacuation Order should be issued. Once an order is issued, the National Mass Evacuation Plan will be implemented. The National Mass Evacuation Plan covers procedures for supporting evacuations, including support for transportation, alternative shelter and other services. There are also specialized evacuation plans for high-risk facilities, including hospitals or police stations.

Even where no Evacuation Order has been issued, an Administrator may encourage voluntary evacuation of danger zones by any person or family whose housing structure is not sound enough to allow them to shelter in place safely. All evacuation processes are supported by communication and public information, including specialized outreach to vulnerable groups.

6.7 SEARCH AND RESCUE

Where required, search and rescue teams will be deployed, led by the Royal Bahamas Defence Force. This is typically done after an all clear is issued by the DRM Authority or other hazard monitoring body, as under law⁷, no first responder has a duty to risk his/her life to rescue or recover any person until the ‘all clear’ is given. Search and rescue teams are sometimes supported by regional or international partners.

6.8 CONTROL OF PORTS

In the immediate wake of a disaster event, there can be an influx of *ad hoc* relief items, including from territories in close proximity to affected islands. These may happen before ports are declared safe for re-opening and can result in disorder or the entry of harmful or unlawful items. Once the ‘all clear’ is given, the Royal Bahamas Police and Defence Forces will deploy teams and establish Field Command Centres at all major affected ports and informal points of entry to restore public safety and security, facilitate the landing of humanitarian goods while preventing the entry of illicit items.

6.9 FIELD OFFICES, HOSPITALS AND COMMAND/OPERATIONS CENTRES

The NDEC will work with the DRM Authority, ESF Coordinators, FI Administrators and humanitarian partners and determine the number and type of field operation centres needed. The NDEC will establish a network of field operations, to avoid duplication of efforts and ensure synchronization of initiatives.

6.10 DAMAGE ASSESSMENT

Damage Assessment and Needs/Loss Analysis functions are guided by the Damage Assessment Unit within the Planning Section of the National Disaster Emergency Operations Section. The DRM Authority guides the technical support provided by this unit and ensures that all FI Administrators and Public Bodies participate in damage assessment activities. This will include collecting information and reporting on damage caused by the disaster emergency, as well as any

⁷ S.56(3) of the DRM Act, 2022

quantification of costs. The Damage Assessment and Needs Analysis reports produced will guide relief, recovery and rehabilitation activities, including humanitarian assistance.

6.11 HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Under the DRM Act, the GOBH retains primary responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance to affected people. This is done by first creating a Humanitarian Needs List as part of the Damage Assessment process. Humanitarian assistance can be implemented through the FI Administrator in a Tier 1 Disaster. In a Tier 2 or Tier 3 Disaster, the ESF with responsibility for relief will be activated and the National Humanitarian Assistance Standards will be implemented. The FI Administrator/ESF will work in partnership with the Non-Government Consultative Council and other humanitarian actors to coordinate the provision of humanitarian assistance to affected groups.

Where the nature of the disaster and the scope of the relief required suggests that there will be an influx of disaster relief goods and personnel entering the country and that this relief is necessary to meet humanitarian assistance goals, the Prime Minister may issue a Declaration of Disaster Relief⁸. This is a type of order available under the DRM Act to facilitate the ease of movement of disaster relief items through ports. The order will include appropriate waivers and exemptions for a specified period of time. It will also provide guidance to persons wanting to import or donate items specifically for humanitarian assistance related to the disaster emergency. Once issued, the order will be communicated widely, including through mass media.

The GOBH may accept assistance from international partners and ensure that this is integrated into national relief and response efforts. Procedures governing this are outlined in the DRM Act, which requires additional regulations. Additionally, the GOBH may make requests for international assistance where local resources are exceeded by the level of impact. The DRM Authority will act as a liaison point for all interface and communications between the GOBH and international humanitarian actors.⁹ The DRM Authority will seek to ensure coordination among all international actors, including by:

- Agreeing with international development, humanitarian and disaster risk management partners the sectoral or geographical scope of their assistance, thereby reducing the risk of overlapping or duplicated efforts.
- Establishing clusters, where appropriate.
- Creating linkages between international actors who are new to the country and those who have long-term partnerships with the GOBH.
- Holding coordination meetings and sharing information among international actors.

6.12 DISASTER RESPONSE COMMUNICATIONS

The DRM Authority will develop and maintain a Disaster Risk Communications Strategy, along with SOPs to guide all aspects of disaster preparedness, response and recovery communications. The DRM Authority will work with partners to ensure that communication strategies utilise all available

⁸ See section 72 of the DRM Act, 2022.

⁹ See section 70 of the DRM Act, 2022

formal and informal communication and information sharing networks, including WhatsApp groups and e-mailing lists, and that vulnerable groups are included.

6.13 END OF RESPONSE OPERATIONS

Once there is no longer a need for response operations, the NDEOC will be deactivated. This will make room for the initiation of disaster rehabilitation and recovery activities. The decision to deactivate the NDEOC will be made by the NDEOC Chair in consultation with the head of the DRM Authority. Following deactivation debrief meetings will be held and After-Action Reports completed.

7 DISASTER REHABILITATION AND RECOVERY

7.1 DISASTER REHABILITATION AND RECOVERY OBJECTIVES

The objective of this NDEP, as relates to disaster rehabilitation and recovery, shall be:

To provide a pathway for the restoration of normalcy during a disaster rehabilitation and recovery period.

Thus, the NDEP links emergency procedures to the longer term aims of disaster recovery and rehabilitation, ensuring that community resilience and sustainable development policies and principles are integrated.

7.2 COORDINATING AND IMPLEMENTING DISASTER REHABILITATION AND RECOVERY

Unless the Prime Minister puts alternative systems in place, the DRM Authority will be responsible for the coordination of disaster rehabilitation and recovery efforts. The Authority will ensure that these efforts are in alignment with the principles and priorities of the DRM Act and other relevant laws and policies governing the sustainable development of The Bahamas. The DRM Authority will coordinate with all other entities engaged in disaster rehabilitation and recovery, and will fulfill the requirements outlined in section 57(5) of the Act.

7.3 INTEGRATING NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT POLICIES IN REHABILITATION AND RECOVERY EFFORTS

The NDEC/IMCDRM shall work with the DRM Authority, the Non-Government Consultative Council and other partners to ensure that national development policy priorities are integrated into all rehabilitation and recovery activities. This will require issuing guidelines from time to time, for example, to:

- ☑ Integrate disaster risk resilience, nature-based solutions and climate change adaptation measures in all rehabilitation and recovery plans, while ensuring that ecosystem assets and resources are protected and restored.
- ☑ Support the recovery and rehabilitation of livelihoods and local industries, ensuring that Bahamian small and medium-sized enterprises and the local labor force are integrated into rehabilitation and recovery plans, where possible.
- ☑ Integrating people-centred plans with social services as well as ensuring alignment with national policies, strategies and service-delivery standards related to health, education, poverty reduction, employment and other social services.
- ☑ Ensuring that all planning and building requirements and standards are met and adopting ‘build back better’ approaches to improve infrastructural and housing stock resilience across the country. This includes establishing and/or promoting guidelines for the implementation of disaster risk analysis and risk reduction requirements in any applications being made for building permits, as mandated under s.71 of the DRM Act.

- ☑ Ensuring that key principles of disaster risk resilience are infused in all rehabilitation and recovery activities and utilizing rehabilitation and recovery activities to build disaster resilience knowledge and capacity among workers, beneficiaries and communities.
- ☑ Ensuring local participation and ownership of rehabilitation and recovery projects, and the integration of community/beneficiary voices and views throughout the planning cycle.
- ☑ Providing adequately for vulnerable groups, and ensuring that facilities and services are appropriately accessible to key target groups, including people with disabilities.
- ☑ Integrating child protection and violence prevention measures in all activities and ensuring that all rehabilitation and recovery activities integrate and adopt measures to protect workers and beneficiaries from sexual exploitation or abuse.

7.4 COORDINATION AND FACILITATION OF NON-GOVERNMENT REHABILITATION AND RECOVERY PROJECTS

The NDEC/IMCDRM will work with the DRM Authority, the NG Consultative Council and other partners to put in place coordination plans that integrate the objectives and activities of all non-government rehabilitation and recovery projects. A joint planning framework will be used to capture key activities, and all parties will be encouraged to work together on similar projects, reducing duplication and ensuring common standards of delivery.