

Tsunami hits Solomon Islands after quake

10:36 AM Tuesday Jan 5, 2010

A tsunami unleashed by a major earthquake ploughed into the Solomon Islands on Monday, devastating at least one village and sparking the evacuation of two New Zealanders.

Initial reports said no one was seriously hurt and a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade confirmed the two New Zealanders had been evacuated but were safe and well.

A total of 53 New Zealanders were known to be in the Solomon Islands and there were no concerns for the eight in the affected area, he said.

A series of major quakes have rocked the South Pacific region since Sunday, with three powerful tremors striking Monday, including a 7.2 magnitude tremor. The Solomon Island's National Disaster Management Office said reports of the devastation were beginning to filter in late Monday.

The quakes were centred beneath the ocean floor near the town of Gizo, which was badly damaged in April 2007 when a 8.1-magnitude quake sent a tsunami crashing into the coast, killing more than 50 people.

Monday's tsunami devastated a village on Rendova Island, some 300 kilometres from the capital Honiara, disaster management official Loti Yates told The Associated Press.

"One report from police was that one village was hit by a 6 to 10 foot (2-3 metre) wall of sea water," Yates said. "It was a total inundation police saw in a fly over."

Rendova is home to about 3,600 people.

Yates said in Baniata village on Rendova's coast, 16 houses were destroyed and 32 damaged by the quake and the wave.

"It could be several hundred houses have been damaged ... but that is still not verified," said Yates. "There are two to three villages where the situation could be much worse."

Ten foreign tourists were staying on Tetepare Island, an uninhabited eco-tourism site, and the four Germans, four Britons and two New Zealanders were evacuated. Unconfirmed reports said two had been injured.

Yates said there were no other reports of injuries. "We're lucky that whatever happened happened during



NZ Herald graphic

the day and people were able to hike up the hills," he said

Two helicopters and a police boat were carrying out damage assessments and a vessel carrying water, food and tarpaulins was dispatched from Honiara.

The US Geological Survey recorded eight earthquakes in the region since late Sunday. The magnitude 7.2 quake was centred 103km southeast of Gizo, and followed a magnitude 6.5 tremor less than two hours earlier centred 90km southeast of Gizo at a depth of 10km.

The latest aftershock was magnitude 6.1 and struck late Monday, 36km southeast of Gizo, US Geological Survey said in a statement.

Pacific Tsunami Warning Center geophysicist Gerard Fryer in Hawaii said it was too small to create a tsunami. There were no immediate reports of damage.

The Solomon Islands lie on the "Ring of Fire" – an arc of earthquake and volcanic zones that stretches around the Pacific Rim and where about 90 per cent of the world's quakes occur.

– AP

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