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## **The road to recovery: Reimagining Kaikōura after a natural disaster**

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### **Introduction**

It is widely recognized that tourist destinations are vulnerable to disruptions caused by natural disasters, and understanding tourism response and recovery to natural disasters is a critical topic of research internationally (Mair et al., 2016). Post-disaster recovery is defined as: “the development and implementation of strategies and actions to bring the destination back to a normal (pre-event) condition or an improved state” (Mair et al., 2016: 2). Recovery may commence immediately following a crisis or disaster, or can be delayed if a destination has been considerably damaged and residents and businesses profoundly affected. Scott et al. (2008) have suggested that the disaster recovery process contains three phases – recovery of damaged infrastructure, marketing responses (revolving around communication and recovery marketing), and adaptations to the new system. These phases may occur sequentially or simultaneously, with different stakeholder groups managing them (Mair et al., 2016).

While a destination’s physical damage may be repaired relatively quickly, the process of restoring the image and reputation of a destination can be protracted, making recovery marketing and communication management critical to the process of re-establishing a destination’s tourism industry in a post-disaster environment. The speed with which the mainstream and social media spread news (often

sensationalized or factually incorrect) and visual images, potentially undermining recovery marketing campaigns, can make this task more challenging (Ritchie et al., 2004; Walters & Clulow, 2010; Walters et al., 2016). Recovery marketing and communication management is generally focused on two main goals: changing perceptions of the destination caused by media reporting or destination damage; and restoring visitor confidence in the destination (Ciocco & Michael, 2007; Scott et al., 2008; Walters & Mair, 2012; Mair et al., 2016). These goals may be achieved by reinforcing pre-existing destination images and correcting negative impressions, or creating entirely new propositions for destinations based on new markets or products (Mair et al., 2016).

Previous research highlighting successful recovery marketing campaigns stress the importance of clear leadership and coordination (Scott et al., 2008; Orchiston & Higham, 2016) and marketing strategies aimed at restoring market confidence at the destination level (Scott & Laws, 2005; Ciocco & Michael, 2007; Hystad & Keller, 2008; Becken & Hughey, 2013). This process is aided by the timely dissemination of consistent, well-considered, trustworthy and accurate information (Ritchie et al., 2004; Carlsen & Hughes, 2008; Walters & Mair, 2012; Mair et al., 2016; Orchiston & Higham, 2016). Relationship marketing, and building trust with the travel trade and key markets, particularly local visitor markets, is also critical to the destination recovery process (Walters & Clulow, 2010; Mair et al., 2016).

This chapter investigates the response of the Kaikōura tourism industry to the 2016 earthquake in the 18 months following the event. Data gathering for this chapter occurred in stages, and drew on existing networks and knowledge acquired through previous research in the region since the earthquake. Numerous visits to the town informed the researchers' understanding of the recovery process, as did the ten semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted with key stakeholders between April and July 2018. Respondents included council and emergency management staff in Kaikōura district, staff of Destination Kaikōura, senior representatives of key partners in the recovery process from the wider Canterbury region, and Kaikōura tourism operators central to recovery efforts.

The interviews, which lasted from 30 minutes to an hour, began with questions about the immediate impacts of the earthquake and initial responses, and the longer-term decision-making processes and activities involved in marketing recovery efforts in the months following the event. The interviews concluded by asking respondents

to assess the current state of Kaikōura as a tourist destination, and to consider future directions for the district. All but one interview, which was conducted by telephone, was audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Transcript data were coded by the authors using deductive and inductive methods (Babbie, 2012), with some themes identified in advance, informed by existing literature, and others emerging through the process of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Documentary analysis included a review of local and regional policy and planning materials, news reports, promotional tourist material, including print and television advertisements and social media posts, and trade newsletters.

## The case study

Kaikōura is located on the east coast of the South Island, Aotearoa-New Zealand. The surrounding district covers an area of approximately 2,000 km<sup>2</sup>, bounded by an inland range to the west, and the Pacific Ocean on the east (refer to Figure 3.1). At just over 2,000 square kilometres, it is the smallest district in New Zealand by area and rating base. The district had a resident population of 3,552, with two-thirds of the population residing in the township of Kaikōura at the time of the last Census in 2013. This Census revealed the significance of tourism to the district. At the time, the accommodation and food sector employed 25.5% of the district's population, followed by retail (15.3%) and agriculture, forestry and fishing sector (12.1%). In Kaikōura township approximately half of the workforce (50.4%) is directly employed in the tourism industry, with another 35% employed indirectly supporting the industry (Kaikōura District Council, 2017: 34).

The mainstay of tourism in the region is wildlife viewing and recreational opportunities. Commercial whale watching began in the 1980s and marine-based tourism has since expanded to include swimming with dolphins and seals, viewing marine birds, and diving and fishing charters. The popularity of the destination is due in part to its location on State Highway 1, halfway between Christchurch and Picton (where ferries depart for the North Island), and it is the most travelled route for tourists traversing the country. The region's tourism industry is highly seasonal; the months between December and April experience high visitation, but the winter months are quiet. At the time of the 2016 earthquake, tourist numbers and expenditure in the district