Two destructive earthquakes in New Zealand within the space of six months have generated the largest material losses in this nation’s history and loss of life exceeded only by the Hawke’s Bay earthquake of 1931.

The Mw 7.1 event of 4 September, 2010 occurred close to Christchurch, generating >180,000 residential insurance claims throughout the region and locally severe damage to infrastructure, especially in areas of soft soil. No deaths and few injuries were reported. On 22 February, a fault almost directly beneath Christchurch ruptured in a smaller but more destructive earthquake, accompanied by widespread ground deformation, severe damage to the central business district and 180 fatalities.

Responding to the disaster the government’s insurer of first-loss for residential property, the Earthquake Commission, has mobilised to meet its largest operational challenge in 65 years. Drawing on its network of science and engineering research capabilities throughout New Zealand and working with other agencies since September, the EQC is assessing and coordinating the reinstatement of damaged land and housing.

The talk will describe the role of the Earthquake Commission in natural disaster risk management and its participation in a recovery program in Canterbury for which tasks and time-frames since February have become even more challenging.