

New Zealand earthquake: 6.2-magnitude shake halts parliament

Houses sway as strong quake under central New Zealand is felt in Wellington.

A 6.2-magnitude earthquake has struck central New Zealand, causing parliament to be suspended.

The quake was felt most strongly in central New Zealand, including the capital city of Wellington. It struck at a depth of 207 kilometres south-west of Taumarunui.

There were no immediate reports of serious damage or injury. People near the epicentre reported their houses swaying and pictures falling off walls.

Parliament's deputy speaker Anne Tolley made the snap decision to suspend parliament when violent shaking interrupted the speech of an MP.

"I never thought I'd have to do that, suspend the House until we find out what's happened," Tolley said.

"There were public in the galleries and people need to just make sure their staff are OK. We're in the safest building probably in the country - but just to make sure and get some advice."

GNS Science, the country's earthquake monitoring body, said the quake was widely felt around the country and lasted a long time. There was no tsunami threat but people needed to take care during the aftershocks, the agency said.

The prime minister, Jacinda Ardern, used Twitter to urge New Zealanders to check on each other's welfare.

Civil Defence Minister Kris Faafoi said civil emergency groups were actively checking the country for damage but there had been no reports of anything "major", nor injuries or fatalities.

The quake struck at 3.13pm local time and GeoNet has so far reported more than 15,000 'felt' reports, with the strongest shaking reported in Wellington,

Christchurch and Nelson.

Geonet reported “moderate” shaking in Auckland, where the royal couple are spending the day for a public walkabout in the Viaduct Harbour.

A spokeswoman for Internal Affairs who was travelling with the couple said the quake was not felt in Auckland and the couple “didn’t feel it”.

Fa’afoi said the shake would have given New Zealanders a decent scare, and Anne Tolley made the right call to suspend parliament and evacuate the house.

“She chose the wise thing to do... we felt it quite heavily in the house.”

Fa’afoi reiterated the prime minister’s earlier message and asked New Zealanders to look out for their neighbours and community, as the country could feel on edge for a number of days.

“People might be a little nervy, and that’s understandable.”

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/30/new-zealand-earthquake-62-magnitude-shake-halts-parliament>

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