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Waikato Times **Editorial**

A plan for survival

There was some criticism of the Government when it decided to devote part of the reparation payment by France following the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior to a study of the impact of a nuclear war on New Zealand.

The Planning Council report arising from that study, *New Zealand After Nuclear War*, was released yesterday. In our view it completely justifies the Government's decision.

It dispels several widely-held myths — it provides a useful starting point for deciding the best form of planning to adopt to provide for the conditions New Zealand would have to face up to following a nuclear conflict.

In the past many New Zealanders have questioned the worth of doing any planning at all. Their reasoning has been that a nuclear war, even if it was confined to the Northern Hemisphere, would mark the beginning of the end of the world. Those of its inhabitants who weren't wiped out in the blasts would die slow and lingering deaths as radiation clouds gradually enveloped the globe.

That wouldn't happen, the report says. Radioactive clouds would be the least of New Zealand's worries in the event of a full-scale nuclear war on the other side of the equator. Even if Australia were targeted, as well it might be, New Zealand would still survive with virtually no immediate ill-effects.

We would all still be hale and hearty — but we would immediately begin running out of all those things we rely on the Northern Hemisphere for. We would start running out of oil fuels, we would run out of spares for our vehicles and machines, we would run out of medicines, we would have to contend, probably, with climatic changes that would affect our crops. And the markets for much of what we export would disappear abruptly.

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All this takes preparing a plan for life after a nuclear war out of the academic, time and money-wasting category and promotes it to most urgent status, in our view. A nuclear war, provided our country isn't a target, is eminently survivable.

Naturally we all hope and pray there will never be one. But we must accept that it is a possibility. Given the findings of the Planning Council's report, it makes sense that we should prepare contingency plans — just as we do to cope with the natural disasters we hope will never eventuate.

The report makes it plain where it believes the responsibility for getting the planning process moving lies. Principal researcher Wren Green says the effect on New Zealand society would depend very much on the level of preparedness of the Government.

That is where the catch may prove to be. Governments are marvels at setting up studies to give leads on what needs to be done in this or that situation. What they are not nearly so good at is following up on those leads — especially when a fairly hefty financial outlay is involved.

The report suggests that as of now the Government is totally unprepared. If this unpreparedness existed after a nuclear war it is doubtful whether those responsible for making the crucial decisions would be able to cope.

It isn't difficult to imagine, in such circumstances, panic spreading like wildfire, conditions becoming more chaotic almost by the hour and the whole fabric of our society crumbling.

It wouldn't be much consolation to reflect that all this had been brought on us not by the bombs or their radioactive fallout but by our own ignorance and apathy.

It seems the Government has no choice — it has to prepare a comprehensive plan for post-nuclear-war survival, and it has to start on it without delay.