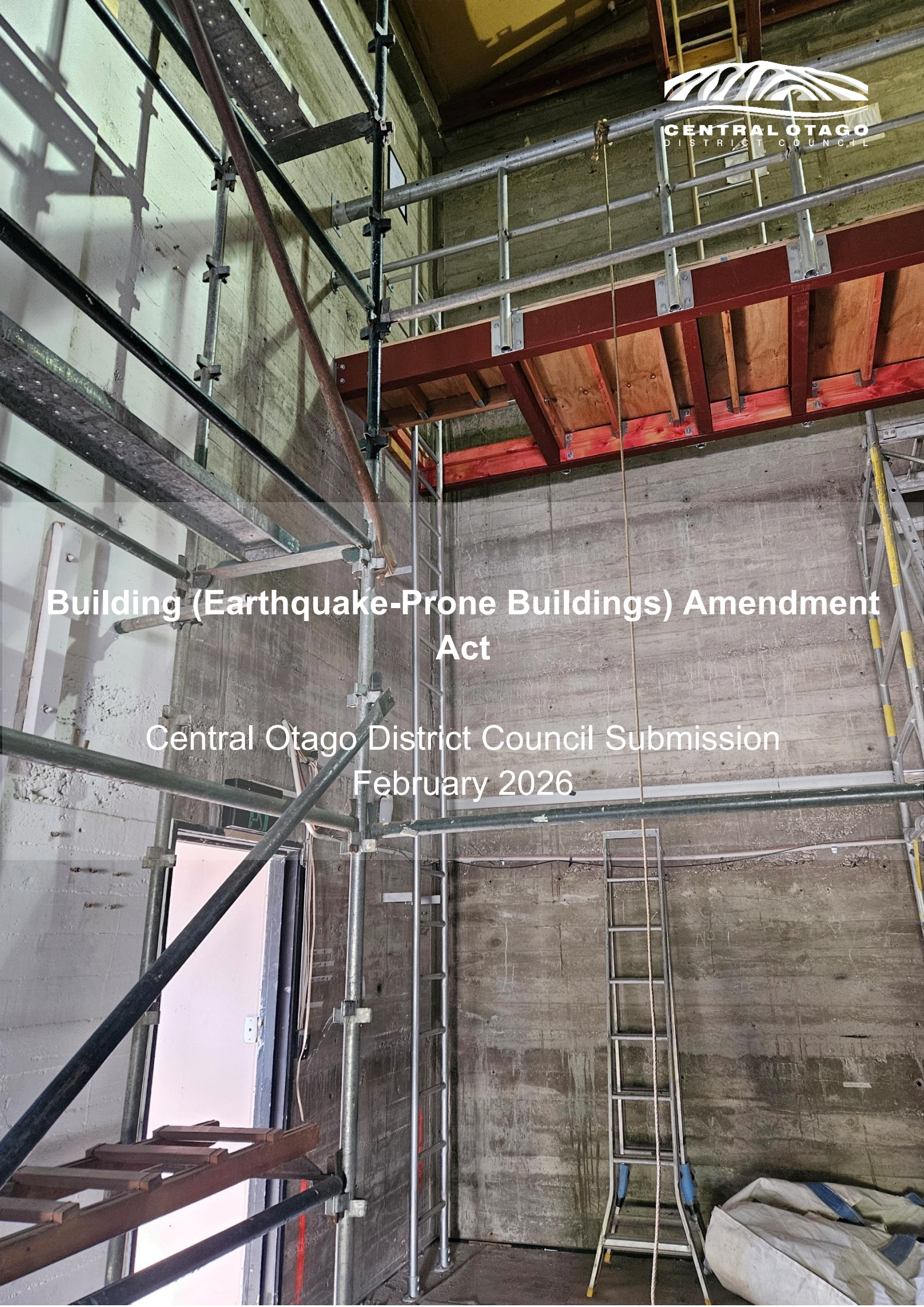


Building (Earthquake-Prone Buildings) Amendment Act

Central Otago District Council Submission

February 2026

Central Otago District Council is the territorial authority for the Central Otago district, a 9,968km2 inland area of the lower South Island. The district is made up of a series of distinct local communities, each with their own voice and priorities.

It is the fourth largest territorial authority by land area, but one of the smaller by population – maintained by 15,500 ratepaying units (25,500 residents). This presents a significant funding and financing challenge.

Council thank the Transport and Infrastructure Select Committee for the opportunity to submit on the Building (Earthquake-Prone Buildings) Amendment Bill. Council supports the tiered and cost-effective mitigation requirements, and the risk-based approach.

Council offers itself as an example of a district with a number of earthquake prone facilities with social and historical importance, and a significant related expenditure. The Bill has the potential to reduce the associated costs significantly.

Central Otago is a 'medium' seismic risk area under the Act, with Council currently owning 15 earthquake-prone buildings. 4 are programmed for potential divestment.

These buildings are historic.

All of Central Otago's earthquake prone buildings are historic. The oldest, the Naseby Town Hall, was built in 1868 – 158 years ago, and just 26 years after the Treaty of Waitangi was signed. Of the 11 to be retained; five buildings are more than 100 years old; two are in their nineties; the other four vary between 50 and 65 years old.

These historic buildings deeply connect to the district's identity. They reflect the regions gold-mining origins, resilient early communities, and the distinct way of life shaped by the climate, landscape, and cultural traditions. They serve as physical anchors to stories of the past – they maintain character, a sense of place, and a connection between past and present. Our community value protecting these assets for future generations.

Their heritage also means they rank very low against the New Building Standard that the current legislation relies on. 14 of the 15 earthquake prone buildings are at or below 20% of the NBS; the remaining one is 30%. This low rating is due to their age, and the difference between build standards, rather than a reflection of the buildings themselves.

The 2025-2037 Long-term Plan includes $8,614,000 of physical earthquake strengthening works cost estimates related to the 11 facilities. If Council retains the other 4 earthquake-prone buildings, currently programmed for divestment, there is an additional $2-3m in related costs under current legislative settings. This would represent a spend in excess of $555 per ratepaying unit for the 11 to be retained; or almost $700 for all 15.

The changes to the legislative settings will make it easier to tackle the areas of highest risk to the community, without needing the additional expense of bringing other aspects of these historic buildings up to NBS standards.

> "The … building is not just a historical landmark but a living, thriving part of our community that deserves to be preserved for future generations."
>
> Submission, CODC Long-term Plan

These buildings matter to our community.

Council consulted on a proposal to divest some of these facilities in 2025, as part of our Long-term Plan. 650 responses were received relating to this question – with the overwhelming majority (85.8%) supporting retaining some or all of the facilities.

Respondents in our smaller rural communities had higher levels of support for retaining the buildings, often noting how central they are to everyday life – and that they are only growing more important as schools and pubs close or change locations. Many respondents noted the lack of alternative spaces for assemblies, productions, sports events, and other community activities. They also highlighted the investment community groups were making in both materials and labour.

> "This is particularly important for communities who have lose other facilities (schools or pubs) which are often central to the everyday life of those communities."
>
> Submission, CODC Long-term Plan

Te Whatu Ora Health NZ highlighted the importance of the facilities to emergency management responses and planning.

Following this consultation, Council resolved to retain 11 earthquake prone buildings and explore divestment of four. The changing legislative settings will enable council to plan and prioritise targeted works based on risk and need, rather than NBS settings.

These buildings must be made safer.

Central Otago is considered a 'medium' risk of earthquakes under the legislation. However, scientific research indicates there is a 75% probability of an Alpine Fault earthquake occurring in the next 50 years, and an 80% chance that it will be a magnitude 8+ event.

This risk means we need to take action on areas of risk in our community facilities. The risk-based approach will reduce the associated costs and make this easier to facilitate.

> "There are cracks where there shouldn't be and it has a floor that warrants replacement. To carry out strengthening would be just one more round of expenditure poured into a facility which … will require a lot more."
>
> Submission, CODC Long-term Plan

The safety of our community using these facilities is our primary concern. Council thank the Committee for considering this submission.

Central Otago District Council Mayor and Councillors
Mayor Tamah Alley; Deputy Mayor Tracy Paterson; Councillors Sarah Browne, Stu Duncan, Cheryl Laws, Nathan McLean, Martin McPherson, Curtis Pannett, Bob Scott, Charlie Sanders.