

Solomons earthquake tests international warning system

February 6 2013



German crew members install ocean bottom Seismometers which formed part of a tsunami early warning system in the Indian ocean. Credit: AAP/Mast Irham

A magnitude 8 earthquake that struck today off the Solomon Islands is not a risk to Australia, but has destroyed three villages in the region and resulted in a tsunami with early reports of some deaths.

"The earthquake was originally reported by the United States Geological

Survey to be about 5.8 km deep which made me think oh no, here we go again, this will be a bad one," said Professor James Goff, director of the Tsunami and Natural Hazards Research Group at the University of [New South Wales](#).

"But subsequent bulletins from the [Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre](#) placed it at 33 km deep which at the very least reduces the likelihood of the tsunami being too bad."

It remains to be seen how regionally significant this tsunami has been, and how bad the damage was from the earthquake, Professor Goff said.

"Close to the source we hear of villages being destroyed, but equally stories are emerging of people evacuating to higher ground after the earthquake and that is indeed wonderfully encouraging."

The international [warning system](#) worked well in this case said Tom Worthington, adjunct senior lecturer at the Research School of Computer Science at Australian National University.

However he said there were limitations to the local warning which could be given, due to a limited number of tsunami sensors in the Pacific and limited communications in some countries.

"The Pacific [Tsunami](#) Warning Centre issued an 'Expanding Regional Warning – Initial' 12:18pm Canberra time. This was then relayed around the Pacific via various electronic means, including the Internet. I received the warning shortly afterwards by SMS to my phone," Mr Worthington said.

Professor Goff said much work needed to be done to improve our understanding of such events in the [Solomon Islands](#) for the safety of both local and regional communities.

[Australians](#) seeking consular assistance should call +61 2 6261 3305 from outside Australia or 1300 555 135 from within Australia.

Reporting with [AusSMC](#).

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