Key messages:

A national state of emergency has been declared in response to the tsunami threat.

The wave is expected to hit Southland from 1.15pm. People should avoid Southland beaches and shore areas and not go sightseeing.

Fortrose and Waikawa residents, along with all people in Southland’s coastal areas, particularly Bluff, Riverton, Fortrose, Waikawa and Stewart Island, have been evacuated and are advised to seek their own accommodation.

People at Milford Sound, Doubtful Sound and coastal areas of Fiordland are advised to evacuate the area and go to higher ground immediately.

If people are unable to find their own accommodation in safe inland areas, they should make their way to the Civil Defence welfare centre at Stadium Southland.

A surge of at least 5 metres has hit Milford Sound at 2pm, which follows the declaration of a national state of emergency for the expected tsunami threat. Major flooding and damage has already been identified.

The seawall at Stead Street has had a 20 metre breach. Water is now able to flow into Lake Hawkins. The airport could be affected by waves of over 2 metres.