

3 powerful earthquakes hit off New Zealand coast, topped by magnitude 8.1; tsunami threat cancelled for Hawaii

Several powerful earthquakes hit near the coast of New Zealand on Thursday night and Friday morning, prompting tsunami warnings for New Zealand and tsunami watches for Hawaii.

The most powerful was an 8.1 quake that hit some 620 miles northeast of New Zealand on Friday morning, the U.S. Geological Survey said. Two earlier quakes registered magnitude 7.4 and magnitude 7.3.

Small tsunami waves were seen later Friday, but there were no reports of serious damage or casualties.

Jennifer Eccles, an earthquake expert at the University of Auckland, said the 8.1 temblor was at the top end of the scale for those involving only the Earth's ocean crust.

"This is about as big as it gets," she said.

While the quakes triggered warning systems and caused traffic jams and some chaos in New Zealand as people scrambled to get to higher ground, they did not appear to pose a widespread threat to lives or major infrastructure.

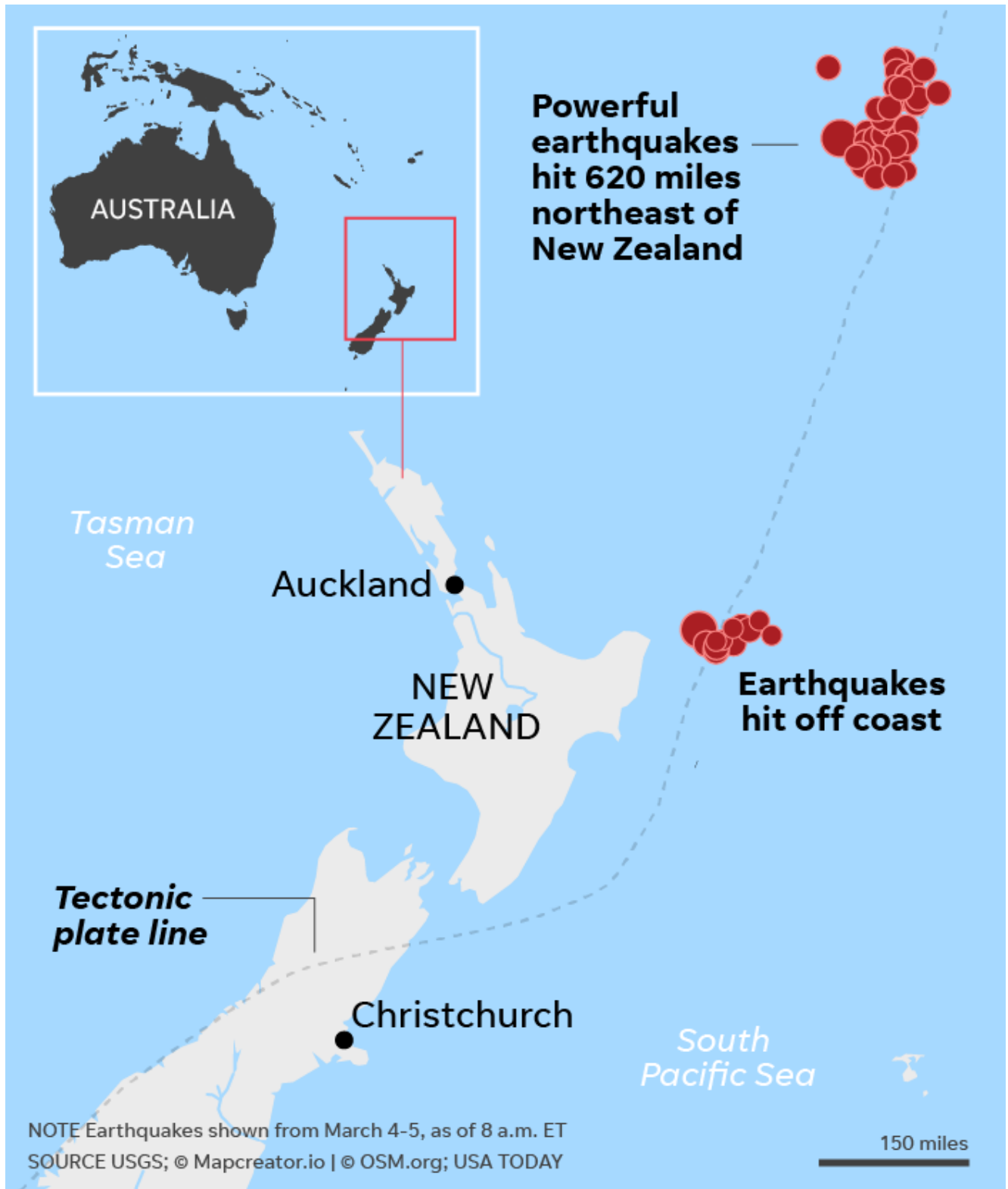
Following the 8.1 quake, civil defense authorities in New Zealand told people in certain areas on the East Coast of the North Island on Friday morning that they should move immediately to higher ground and not stay in their homes. They said a damaging tsunami was possible.



John Fitzgerald, left, scans the horizon from high ground for any sign of a tsunami on Friday near Waitangi, New Zealand. Peter De Graaf/New Zealand Herald Via AP

New Zealand's National Emergency Management Agency tweeted, "People near coast from the BAY OF ISLANDS to WHANGAREI, from MATATA to TOLAGA BAY, and GREAT BARRIER ISLAND must MOVE IMMEDIATELY to nearest high ground, out of all tsunami evacuation zones, or as far inland as possible," they wrote.

"Hope everyone is ok out there," New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern wrote on Facebook.



A tsunami watch, which had been issued for Hawaii, was canceled Thursday afternoon. There was also no threat to the U.S. West Coast.

Officials in New Zealand had issued an advisory for coastal areas after the first shallow, powerful earthquake struck off its northeastern coast Thursday night.

National Emergency Management Agency @NZcivildefence

We have issued a TSUNAMI WARNING for New Zealand coastal areas following the magnitude 7.3 earthquake east of the North Island. There is a LAND and MARINE TSUNAMI THREAT. An Emergency Mobile Alert has been issued to areas under land and marine tsunami threat.

“We expect New Zealand coastal areas to experience strong and unusual currents and unpredictable surges at the shore,” New Zealand’s National Emergency Management Agency tweeted.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the first quake was centered at a depth of 13 miles under the ocean about 108 miles northeast of the city of Gisborne. Residents of Gisborne reported light to moderate shaking.

A magnitude 6.3 quake hit the New Zealand city of Christchurch in 2011, killing 185 people and destroying much of its downtown.

Contributing: The Associated Press

Source:

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2021/03/04/new-zealand-earthquake-tsunami-warning-issued-coastal-areas/6918719002/>

[Disclaimer]