GEOTECHNICAL RECONNAISSANCE OF THE
2016 Mw 7.8 KAIKOURA, NEW ZEALAND EARTHQUAKE

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Finally, we would like to acknowledge the collaboration of GNS Science and EERI in the coordination of the reconnaissance efforts and information sharing.

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1. INTRODUCTION

On November 14, 2016 at 12:02 am local time, the Mw7.8 Kaikoura earthquake occurred along the east coast of the upper South Island, New Zealand. The fault rupture initiated in the Waiau plains in North Canterbury and then progressed northeast. The rupture involved multiple fault segments in the region of Kaikoura and north of it. The earthquake generated intense ground shaking in the near-source region, and it caused numerous surface fault ruptures, landslides, as well as other forms of ground distress and failures, including liquefaction and lateral spreading. The earthquake affected a relatively large area along the Waiau (North Canterbury) – Kaikoura – Blenheim (Marlborough) stretch of the South Island. It also caused considerable distress in Wellington, the capital of New Zealand at the southern tip of the North Island. In the South Island, the most significant impacts were to a few smaller townships and rural settlements in the North Canterbury, Kaikoura, and South Marlborough regions, including residential and commercial buildings, and particularly the horizontal infrastructure in the region. In Wellington, the earthquake affected several buildings in its Central Business District (CBD) and caused liquefaction in the reclamations of port of Wellington (CentrePort), which affected wharves and buildings at the port.

Because of the large area affected by the earthquake and the different effects it produced, the geologic and geotechnical effects of the Kaikoura earthquake were documented through several independent teams who collaborated at the interfaces between their focus areas. A GNS-UC-GEER team of researchers mapped and documented surface fault ruptures and its effects, and another GNS-GEER-UC team of researchers documented the occurrence and effects of landslides. Comprehensive reconnaissance efforts were carried out by these GNS-lead efforts on surface fault rupture and landslides. The results of their reconnaissance efforts are published elsewhere.

The primary geotechnical engineering reconnaissance effort in response to the Kaikoura earthquake was conducted by a joint QuakeCoRE-GEER (NZ-US) team of researchers and engineers. The QuakeCoRE-GEER team focused on earthquake ground motions and site effects, geotechnical effects of the earthquake in Wellington (with a focus on liquefaction effects at the port of Wellington), general geotechnical effects in the South Island, geotechnical impacts on bridges and infrastructure in the South Island, and societal impacts and emergency response. The results of these geotechnical reconnaissance efforts are documented in this report.

The initial reconnaissance was performed in the period of 15 to 19 November 2016, and covered the Waiau and Blenheim areas (but not Kaikoura itself), as well as the initial inspection of CentrePort in Wellington. Follow-on efforts from 20 November to mid-December were then organized through four teams focussing on the Waiau area, Marlborough, Kaikoura, and CentrePort (Wellington). The majority of the observations presented in this report resulted from these reconnaissance efforts in the second half of November and early December in 2016.
The QuakeCoRE-GEER team included the following members:

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The QuakeCoRE and GEER team members worked collaboratively and shared resources, information, and logistics to conduct a thorough and efficient reconnaissance covering a large area over a limited period of time. This report summarises the key evidence and findings from the reconnaissance efforts. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the associated organizations and funding agencies. Online versions of this report are available at the QuakeCoRE and GEER websites.

The report is organized in five chapters in addition to this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 provides the geological context for the Kaikoura Earthquake, including geologic setting, geomorphology, causative faults, and rupture characteristics of the earthquake. Chapter 3 summarizes strong ground motion observations at representative strong motion stations, and it also discusses the characteristics of the ground motions through comparisons with design spectra and empirical and physics-based ground motion models. Chapter 4 covers the geotechnical impacts of the Kaikoura Earthquake on the South Island of New Zealand, and presents key observations in three separate sections for the affected regions of Waiau, Kaikoura, and Marlborough, respectively. Chapter 5 summarizes key observations on the performance of reclamations, wharves and buildings at the Wellington port during the Kaikoura Earthquake. Finally, Chapter 6 is focused specifically on the effects of ground shaking and ground deformation on the South Island bridges and infrastructure.