

## Tsunami alert after NZ earthquake

THE east coast of Australia was put on tsunami alert Wednesday night after a powerful undersea earthquake struck off the coast of New Zealand.

The Australian Bureau of Meteorology issued a tsunami warning saying that Tasmania, Victoria and NSW could be hit by waves following the earthquake, which occurred off the south-west coast of New Zealand's South Island at 7.22pm Sydney time.

A bureau spokeswoman said that it was possible waves could develop and hit Australia's coast, but "it's quite rare that this would happen".

"At the moment no waves have been recorded but an alert has been issued for NSW and large parts of the east coast. However, the alert was later cancelled.

The US Geological Survey said the epicentre of the earthquake was about 160 kilometres west of the city of Invercargill, at a depth of 33 kilometres.

Police in the town of Tuatapere on South Island said they had reports of minor cracks in buildings and stock falling from supermarket shelves, but there had been no reports of serious damage or injuries so far.

A helicopter pilot in the south island town of Te Anau, Mark Deaker, said he saw power lines arcing and sparks flying in the air.

An Invercargill man said his flat began shaking and he jumped under a table for safety. "I was crapping myself," he said. Another woman in the city said her children started screaming. "We just told them it was like a ride."

In Tuatapere, a hotel patron said a ute shook as though someone was jumping on it. "The staff ran away scared so the drinks have been free."

The quake was felt widely across the South Island and residents in Bondi even reported feeling the tremor.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Hawaii also issued a warning, saying: "An earthquake of this size has the potential to generate a destructive tsunami that can strike coastlines in the region near the epicentre within minutes to hours".

# Lovers put their devotion to the test

*DAME Edna would be proud – there's been an outbreak of niceness on reality TV. First it was MasterChef, where the tears come from genuine disappointment rather than menacing tasks set up to bring contestants down. And now there's Australia's Perfect Couple, based on American show called Here Come the Newlyweds. The format is familiar: eight apparently affable couples compete for up to \$250,000 in prize-money. There are "game-on" challenges, a communal house and one elimination each episode.*

As naff as the title may sound, conjuring as it does visions of doe-eyed, sunny couples who never fight or suffer from morning breath, there is a wholesomeness to the Australian version and an attempt at including everyone in the fun.

Host Jules Lund agrees. "I think reality TV ran out of options. There are billions of authentic people and it kept relying on stereotypes – the alpha male, the blonde vixen – and we wanted interesting people with stories to tell. Fresh stories.

"There's a lot of insight into the couples' relationships – the humour, the bond, the chemistry – it's inspiring, like watching a romantic comedy."

The couples may share a house but



it is no Big Brother-style compound. There are no covert cameras. Instead there is end-of-day "auto-confession-cam" filming in the bedrooms.

While the first episode is (almost) all smiley niceness, Lund says the cracks do show a few episodes in. Australia's Perfect Couple makes full use of the dramatic potential of relationships under the spotlight.

"It opens up a whole new world of chemistry in terms of the individuals, the dynamics within the couples and then between the couples," he says.

The couples are mostly unremarkable in their representation of a generous cross-section of Australia: there are the hard-working high school sweethearts, several second-generation Italian and Greek migrant children, a scary yuppie couple and the "Brady Bunch" second-marrieds. But what is unusual

are the two couples who perhaps represent an Australia not much seen on commercial television: gay and Indian.

"The challenges are entertaining and test the bonds of the partners. It never becomes Temptation Island (where spousal fidelity was deliberately challenged) and the couples walked away stronger as a result," Lund says.

The challenges sound promising and a little bizarre, if the first episode is any indication. The husbands are hooked up to 100 volts on several parts of their bodies and the wives have a stick with a metal loop that they must trace along a meandering, trying not to jolt their beloved.

Lund says the challenges progress to become more involved, such as dangling from great heights on hillside flying foxes; the old chestnut of map-reading but set in a maze with only a walkie-talkie for communication and just two minutes to read the map; and some awkward questioning in front of mothers-in-law.

One of Lund's favourites involves the wives going to a day spa and the husbands staying home to prepare a surprise roasting for their partners, except the men end up having to do it in front of a hall full of locals (snippets of which have been seen in the on-air promos).

But, how long the contestants can continue to make nice remains to be seen. The pressure was already too much for the wife of the couple evicted in the first episode. In what has to be one of the best reality-show dummy-spits of the year, she gives the other stunned contestants a poisonous spray, much of which, Lund says, had to be cut from the show.

"They came in thinking they were competing in The Amazing Race," he says. "So convinced were they that they could win it."

Australia's Perfect Couple premieres Wednesday at 7.30pm on Nine.

Article from The Age

## Alleged rape victim 'sought MP's aid four years later'

FOUR years after a woman was allegedly raped by former Victorian cabinet minister Theo Theophanous, she sought his help in an unrelated compensation claim against the Department of Education, a court heard yesterday.

A childhood friend of the woman, who cannot be named for legal reasons, told a committal hearing in the Melbourne Magistrate's Court that in 2002, the alleged victim was seeking financial compensation from the Department of Education for wrongful dismissal. "She told me that she was going to see Theo Theophanous for added help," the woman said. "She told me that she was friends with him." The witness, who said she had no knowledge then of her friend's claim that the long-serving MP had raped her on the red couch in his office four years earlier, agreed it would be a good idea, given that Mr Theophanous was parliamentary secretary for education at the time and could offer advice. The witness, who was giving evidence for the prosecution, said her friend had shown her a text message stored in her mobile phone from somebody called Theo proposing a catch-up over coffee. She said her friend had told her she had previously met Mr Theophanous, who had shown her around the parliament. "I remember she seemed quite pleased that she had that opportunity," the witness had written in her police statement, which was tendered. The court heard that six years had lapsed before the woman spoke again, when the alleged victim rang her friend from Greece asking for her support in a rape claim she was making. "She basically was saying, do you remember what happened to me? I told you about it and I would like you to be a witness," the witness told

the court. "I was horrified, I thought, what is this all about? I thought rape was such a serious crime and I thought this is something I haven't heard about." The witness said the telephone call was short and she quickly cut off the alleged victim before she divulged details of the incident or named Mr Theophanous. "I felt pressured to be a witness," she told the court. "She kept repeating, 'You know what happened to me'."

Call records retrieved from the alleged victim's mobile phone indicated that she had telephoned her friend at 8.13pm on September 10, 1998, the night she claims she was raped.

But the friend said in court yesterday that she did not remember speaking to the alleged victim that day.

In other evidence, the civil solicitor who initially represented the alleged victim said she had offered him a slice of whatever compensation he could win for her in the rape case against the parliamentarian. Bruce Burdon-Smith, a commercial lawyer of 27 years' experience, who has a legal practice on the Mornington Peninsula, said he had received an email from the alleged victim on October 6, 2006. Mr Burdon-Smith, who claimed he never charged the alleged victim for his services, said he saw his role as her lawyer to compile a brief of evidence that the woman could take to the police. He said he did not form the view that she was after money despite writing to him in 2006 saying she was seeking "justice in the form of dollars".

Mr Burdon-Smith said he did not remember her saying to him that this case would be his retirement package.

He said the most he ever thought he could get from the matter was a \$3000 to \$5000 legal fee.