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## Team studying Tasman mega-tsunamis

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A study is underway to determine if Australia and New Zealand were hit by mega-tsunamis many times the size of the 2004 Boxing Day disaster and what risk there is of any repeat.

Scientists from both sides of the Tasman are looking for geological evidence that both countries were hit by super waves in the past 10,000 years.

Controversial data has suggested three or four huge tsunamis may have hit south eastern Australia during that period, although scientists are divided about how severe the events were.

Some studies in NSW have said there is evidence of mega-tsunamis many times larger than the 2004 event in the Indian Ocean, which was caused by a huge undersea earthquake and killed hundreds of thousands of people.

Researchers have pointed to sedimentary evidence and the presence of large boulders, deposited on 30-metre tall cliffs in the Jervis Bay area of NSW's South Coast, as well as strange rock formations at Cathedral Rocks, 80km south of Sydney.

If such large events did occur in the region, there should also be geological evidence in New Zealand. So the hunt is on.

Dr Dale Dominey-Howes, from the University of NSW, is heading the new three-year study, which aims to establish how real the risk is of a catastrophic tsunami in the future.

Researchers say more than 300,000 lives and property worth more than \$A150 billion on the NSW coast could be vulnerable if a big tsunami hit.

Dominey-Howes is sceptical about some of the tsunami claims, but says the possibility that huge waves had hit Australia must be properly investigated.

"If it is true it has profound implications for vulnerability and risk on (Australia's) south east coast, because of the enormous infrastructure and assets and people that are exposed ... It would be really scary," he said.

Dr James Goff, from New Zealand's National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA), is also part of the new research team.

He said the study, funded by the Australian government, is important because it will investigate New Zealand's west coast as well as Australia's east.

Previous studies have looked at only half of the picture because a huge tsunami should leave behind geological evidence in both countries, he explained.

"Are the deposits that we see in Australia correct, and are they being interpreted correctly? If so, then where the heck are they in New Zealand?" Goff said.

He said the study would also seek to find out the source of any mega-tsunamis that have occurred in and around the Tasman.

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Earthquakes are simply not strong enough to account for the apparent mega-tsunami sediments found in Australia.

The cause of such giant waves could be something such as immense underwater landslips from the Continental Shelf. Meteor strikes would also be investigated as a possible cause, he said.

"The problem with a lot of the potential sources is that no-one has ever really looked, so the information doesn't exist," Goff said.

*This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2007/10/04/1191091251007.html>*