



## **Briefing to Minister of Internal Affairs Hon Tracey Martin**

### **United Fire Brigades' Association / Forest and Rural Fire Association of NZ**

**February 2018**

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#### **Introduction**

New Zealand's fire and emergency services sector is undergoing radical transformation following the enactment of new fire and emergency legislation in May 2017. The first stages of the transformation - the establishment of a new Crown entity Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ), amalgamation of the old urban and rural fire agencies and formulation of day one operating procedures - are complete. Greater challenges lie ahead including delivery of a major plank of the new legislation - a "better deal" for volunteers. This plank recognises the high value that community participation offers to the fire and emergency services sector.

Complete transformation of the sector will take several years and require the support of many stakeholders and community groups. The largest stakeholder organisation in the sector, the United Fire Brigades' Association (UFBA) together with its rural counterpart, the Forest and Rural Fire Association of New Zealand (FRFANZ), worked positively with DIA Officials throughout the fire reform process and were key partners supporting the transition towards sector amalgamation.

UFBA and FRFANZ are committed to working closely with you, DIA officials and the FENZ Board to ensure the transformative vision set out in the new legislation is realised in full.

#### **UFBA and FRFANZ**

The UFBA was founded in 1878. Now with 543 member fire brigades and rural fire forces, it is almost certainly the longest continuously operating membership association in New Zealand. The UFBA's founding objective was to advance the charitable purposes of fire brigade members within New Zealand. A principal activity supporting that objective is to represent and advocate the interests of fire brigades and their members to their parent bodies (in those days insurance companies, provincial governments and local councils) and to promote good officership and firefighting skills through a system of technical courses, formal qualifications and practical inter-brigade competitions.

FRFANZ was founded in 1987 by a group of senior rural fire officers to improve rural fire control measures and codes of practice after the disestablishment of the New Zealand Forest Service. FRFANZ's immediate task was to facilitate control at fires with the provision of a suitable command structure to co-ordinate multi-agency responses (which later resulted in CIMS), and introduction of standard hire rates for specialised fire equipment. The Senior Fire Officers annual conferences, initiated by the Forest Service, continued along the same exclusive lines, although membership of the Association became diversified.

Following the first two FRFANZ conferences, several voluntary rural fire forces asked FRFANZ to promote and advocate the interests of rural fire volunteers at a national level as rural volunteers were unable to join the UFBA by virtue of restrictions in the Fire Service Act. FRFANZ accepted that request and instituted a wide range of services for its now 133 rural fire force members including service honours and awards, study grants, rural fire themed safety clothing and mementoes. The UFBA currently has in excess of 50 voluntary rural fire forces on its membership register. This growth in membership continues to grow.

Today UFBA and FRFANZ are in the process of merging (See *Integrating Urban and Rural Services* below). Taken together they speak for all 14,000 operational members of New Zealand's fire and emergency services although their primary role is representation of close to 12,000 volunteer firefighters. Providing advocacy, volunteer support services and skills training are major aspects of their work but they also operate comprehensive service recognition programmes to encourage recruitment and retention and a welfare programme for firefighters and their families in need of financial or other support. The UFBA through its Provincial and Sub-Association membership networks has significant "outreach" to every community within New Zealand. Participation in a professional association brings many benefits unobtainable elsewhere: a sense of community, personal interaction with like-minded individuals and a way for members to participate and contribute to the fire and emergency services industry. The UFBA/FRFANZ network provides significant potential leverage to maintain sustainable volunteer "engagement" with the fire and emergency sector.

The UFBA is governed by a Board of five Directors; three elected directly by members and two independently appointed. The Board is chaired by Mr Rick Braddock, an independent member and professional Director. Scott Miller, Chief Executive of Volunteering New Zealand, was recently appointed as the second independent Director. The focus of the Board is on the effective delivery of the UFBA's core services within a strong, sustainable business framework. The Board appoints a Chief Executive Officer to lead the small staff of nine. Bill Butzbach was appointed Chief Executive Officer in July 2017. Members also elect a President and Vice President to represent the UFBA on ceremonial occasions such as Gold Star and 50 Year service awards and to chair the UFBA annual conference and AGM.

### **The Value of Fire and Emergency Services Volunteerism**

Fire and emergency services are presently delivered by a workforce engaged on terms and conditions largely inherited from FENZ's predecessor agencies. Volunteers remain by far the largest proportion of the workforce - perhaps 12,000 out of a total of 14,000 operational personnel. These volunteers will continue to provide emergency cover for the foreseeable future across hundreds of communities throughout metropolitan, provincial and rural New Zealand where any other basis of engagement would be financially prohibitive.

Of the more than 362,000 emergency incidents attended nationally over the past 5 years, volunteers responded to 45% of that number. As well as responding to 50% of the structure fires during that period, volunteers resolved a high proportion (63-68%), of all rescue, urgent medical, vegetation fires and weather-related incidents.

Fire service volunteers do not expect to be paid for their contribution to their community or to be formally recognised other than by way of an occasional "thank you" or modest celebration of a significant service milestone. Nevertheless, their contribution is not without value from an economic perspective. In 2015 the UFBA sought an independent professional valuation of the services provided by fire and emergency volunteers. It was advised the value was of the order of **\$530 million per annum**. This value goes

unrecognised in FENZ's accounts but is effectively the annual sum of the sacrifices, trade-offs and earning opportunities foregone by volunteers, their families and employers. To put this value in perspective, FENZ operating expenditure for 2018 is forecast at \$388.8 million and levy income at \$389.3 million. In this light the financial consequences for FENZ, levy payers and the Government of any loss of volunteer capability is very significant.

## **Key Issues for the Sector**

**Implementing the “Better Deal” for Volunteers:** All forms of volunteerism are under pressure in contemporary New Zealand society for many reasons - longer work hours, less leisure time, reluctant employers, increased commuting, aging rural work force, urban migration, both parents working, decay of the volunteer ethic, etc. The most recent report on the state of volunteering in New Zealand found that more New Zealanders are stepping forward to volunteer but the total time committed to volunteering has reduced by 42%. In other words, a trend towards short episodic volunteering. Against that backdrop, fire and emergency services volunteerism with its requirement for 24/7 availability demands extra commitment and sacrifice by its volunteers.

Long standing internal organisational arrangements, operating practices and policies within FENZ's predecessor agencies frequently also had the effect of disempowering and discouraging volunteers. The opportunity presented now by establishing a new entity, FENZ, to create a more inclusive environment that allows for “diversity in its broadest meaning” will help overcome the unintended bias and institutionalised prejudice that has prevailed for decades and defeated previous attempts at reform.

The FENZ Act specifically addresses many of these issues in section 36 where it spells out that improved support for volunteers means more than just additional administrative assistance for volunteers but extends to a new duty on FENZ to take reasonable steps:

- a) *to recognise, respect, and promote the contribution of FENZ volunteers*
  - (i) *to the performance and exercise of FENZ's functions, duties, and powers; and*
  - (ii) *to the maintenance of the well-being and safety of communities; and*
- b) *to consult with FENZ volunteers and relevant organisations referred to in section 37 on matters that might reasonably be expected to substantially affect those volunteers; and*
- c) *to develop policy and organisational arrangements that encourage, maintain, and strengthen the capability of FENZ volunteers*

The same section also imposes a duty on FENZ to apply the good employer provisions set out in section 118 of the Crown Entities Act 2004 to volunteers engaged in the work of FENZ.

Taken together, these provisions largely define the extent of the “better deal” for volunteers. They are far reaching and will impact on many current “carried over” policies and organisational arrangements that had the effect of disempowering and discouraging the enthusiastic participation of volunteers in the organisation. UFBA and FRFANZ look forward to working closely with the FENZ Board and management to ensure Section 36 is implemented in full.

**Funding for Advocacy and other Services:** Section 37 of the FENZ Act requires FENZ to provide independent advocacy services to its volunteers free of charge. FENZ and the UFBA have entered into interim arrangements for the UFBA to provide these advocacy services until late in 2018. Sometime thereafter Government's advances to fund FENZ's one-off transition costs cease. FENZ is then expected to generate

tens of millions of savings from the efficiencies arising from amalgamating the urban and rural services. UFBA and FRFANZ foresee a funding crunch at that time and notes that the Cabinet papers approving the establishment of FENZ carve out specific amounts to be applied to the “better deal” for volunteers. UFBA and FRFANZ will work with FENZ to ensure the funding reserved for volunteers is respected and to extend the interim funding arrangements for advocacy services to 2020 and beyond.

**The Changing Mix of Business:** The number of fires in structures attended by fire services has trended down over many years. By contrast the number of non-fire incidents to which fire services are called (motor vehicle extrications, storm damage, flooding, technical rescues, medical emergencies and ambulance support, etc.) has trended up sharply. Safer building materials and improved fire detection and suppression systems are likely to further drive down the incidence of unwanted fire in structures in future. Conversely, climate change and an aging population and other changing demographic features within New Zealand society is likely to drive up the incidence of non-fire emergencies in future.

Despite these clear historic trends and forecasts, fire service resources remain largely configured for the mix of business appropriate to an earlier era. This has significant implications for volunteers as they are the predominant providers of non-fire interventions. UFBA and FRFANZ will work with FENZ to ensure financial and material resources are allocated in future in ways that reflect the changes to the mix of business.

**Integrating Urban and Rural Services:** Integration of the urban and rural fire services presents FENZ with major challenges given significant differences between the fire prevention/firefighting strategies, organisational cultures and management and governance arrangements of the predecessor agencies. To assist FENZ to advance this aspect of its work, UFBA and FRFANZ are in the process of merging into a single entity capable of advocating on behalf of all volunteer firefighters and a range of fire managers, land management stakeholders and contractors.

FRFANZ is an amalgamation of volunteers, local government, forest and rural landowners, rural fire authorities and others with an interest in vegetation wild fire management. FRFANZ approved the merger at its annual conference in August 2017 and the UFBA Board recommended the merger at its annual conference at the end of October 2017.

The proposal to merge was unanimously and enthusiastically approved by the membership. The new entity will advocate on behalf of all fire and emergency volunteers along with a range of key rural stakeholders, and look to assist FENZ to achieve seamless integration of the previously disparate urban and rural fire services.

## **Future Vision**

UFBA and FRFANZ seek to play a constructive and positive role during this crucial stage in the evolution of New Zealand’s fire and emergency services. They will strengthen their traditional advocacy, practical skills and officership and leadership training, service recognition and welfare offerings in the context of their relationship with FENZ.

They also intend to build new competencies in dispute resolution, recruiting for diversity and youth engagement, to include the development of new models of engagement for a National fire and emergency services cadet scheme. The cadet scheme in particular is a critical element for supporting volunteer brigade/fire force sustainability, improving emergency management skills and awareness generally within the community and building a stronger foundation for a much broader emergency management workforce

for the future, both employed and volunteer. The UFBA has already led a three-year multi-agency pilot programme to train 170 15 to 19-year-old students in risk awareness and emergency response skills.

In time, it may consider extending its business model beyond representation and support of volunteer fire and emergency service volunteers to representation of volunteers in other sectors.

UFBA and FRFANZ look forward to working with you on this issue that remains so central to our communities.