



Peter Dunne

1 NOVEMBER, 2016

Speech to UFBA Conference, Christchurch, 28 October 2016

"Firstly I would like to start by acknowledging the following people from the UFBA here today: your President, Russell Anderson, and Vice-President, Alan Kittelty; your Chief Executive Officer, George Verry; Rick Braddock, Chairperson of the UFBA Board, and Patron of the UFBA, Dame Margaret Bazley; Deputy chair of the UFBA Board, Glenn Williams and Board members Nigel Lilley, Bill Butzbach, and Matt Cleaver.

I would also like to acknowledge the Hon. Paul Swain, chair of the NZ Fire Service Commission, and Paul Baxter, Chief Executive & National Commander of the NZ Fire Service, who are also speaking to you today.

Introduction

What a difference a year makes.

When I spoke to you at your conference in Wellington this time last year I announced the results and direction of what was then known as the Fire Services Review.

I spoke of 35 meetings with various stakeholders up and down the country, and of around 235 public submissions, on the future shape, direction and funding of the Fire Service.

As you know, this work has now crystallised into Fire and Emergency New Zealand, a completely new organisation bringing together the current New Zealand Fire Service, the National Rural Fire Authority, 12 enlarged rural fire districts and 26 rural fire authorities into one new national organisation.

Let me stress at the outset – this is not a takeover of any one sector of the fire service by another, it is rather a genuinely new organisation.

To anyone who thinks or says otherwise, my message is blunt and clear: leave those attitudes behind, otherwise there will be no place for you in Fire and Emergency New Zealand.

It is therefore appropriate that the theme of this year's conference is Building on Strong Foundations, as the progress we have made this year is down to exactly that - strong foundations.

The massive amount of effort and goodwill that everyone in the sector poured into the consultation and development process has allowed us to build the momentum and progress we have to date.

I am delighted to acknowledge that, and to express my appreciation to everyone involved for the positive contributions to date.

Those contributions have largely made possible the biggest reform of fire and emergency services in 70 years.

On 30 June, the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Bill (to repeal the two Acts governing New Zealand's fire services and to give effect to a single unified fire services organisation) was introduced to Parliament.

This landmark legislation, the first comprehensive reform package since the aftermath of the Ballantyne's fire in 1947, will give the legal mandate for all the work that the modern firefighter does, including search and rescue, responding to flooding, and call-outs to road accidents.

Interestingly, the establishment of a unified national fire service was the only one of the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into that tragedy not to have been implemented – until now.

The task that the FENZ transition team has been set - to bring together the fire functions of over 40 organisations and more than 600 individual brigades into a single integrated service from 1 July next year – is an ambitious one.

We are right, though, to be ambitious about stronger support for our volunteers at all levels, about ensuring fire services meet community expectations, and about modernising the management of fire service to make it fit for purpose in the 21st century.

They are the objectives which underpin these reforms.

FENZ Transition

Work is now well underway to make the transition to FENZ a reality, and I think it is worth considering just how far we have come since I last addressed you.

The legislation continues its progress through the House.

The Select Committee has heard from a large number of you, and will be reporting back on its consideration of these submissions later this year.

We have a refreshed Board, led by Hon Paul Swain, whose credentials for the task at hand are well known to you all, having chaired the independent Fire Review Panel in 2012.

Paul is supported by a strong board, including his Deputy Chair Dr Nicola Crauford who has an impressive wealth of governance experience, plus a sound understanding of fire services gained during her time as Chair of the Wellington Rural Fire Authority.

More recently, the FENZ Transition Team has taken shape under Transition Director David Strong.

David served for more than 20 years in the New Zealand Defence Force, rising to the rank of Lt. Colonel.

From his time in the Army David understands the unique relationship of a uniformed, service organisation that comprises paid and volunteer workforces.

As a designer of NZDF's long term strategic vision, David is well-placed to think about the future of fire and emergency services for New Zealand.

David's team is made up of strong performers from within the fire sector and elsewhere in the government space.

There is important continuity from people who have been involved in the project from the start, and I am pleased that David is supported by people with the necessary governance, leadership and strategy experience to make this transition succeed.

The FENZ Transition Team has wasted no time in developing the high level design of the Transition Project.

They have released the Day One Blueprint which sets out the target and intention for Day One of our new organisation which is now only eight months away.

For those of you who have not yet taken the opportunity to get to grips with this document, I encourage you to do so.

The Transition Team is continuing to work with the sector and stakeholders as much as possible, including ongoing work with the UFBA on key issues such as the direct engagement of volunteers, and response assets.

Over these next few days, the Board Chair, Paul Swain, and Transition Director, David Strong, and the Transition Project team will provide more detail about the work that is being done to amalgamate urban and rural fire services from 1 July 2017.

Assessment of Rural Costs

The assessment of rural costs is starting and I would appreciate your support of this work.

As part of transition to FENZ, I requested that the Board robustly account for the costs of FENZ providing rural fire services from 1 July 2017.

This assessment, along with a comprehensive operations and performance review of the New Zealand Fire Service Commission will provide a picture of the costs of providing national fire and emergency services.

On 18 October 2016 Martin Jenkins was commissioned to undertake the assessment of rural costs by the end of the year, and this will inform FENZ's 2017/18 budget.

They will build on the indicative work they did last year.

UFBA concerns

Shortly after the Bill was introduced to the House, I met with Chairman Rick Braddock, Director Bill Butzbach and Murray McKee to talk about the role of the UFBA in this new Fire and Emergency service.

I heard your concerns about disturbing the primary relationship between a volunteer and their brigade, and that the UFBA and FRFANZ could be left high and dry as a result of the transition.

I do not want that to happen, and it is most certainly not my intention.

The regard I have for the work of the UFBA and FRFANZ cannot be overstated, and I absolutely expect these existing relationships to be carried forward in the new organisation.

I understand your concerns that these relationships are not prescribed in statute.

However, this legislation is designed to be flexible, enabling and future proofed.

To give FENZ the greatest chance of success, the new organisation will need the ability to design a suitable and workable organisational structure.

One of the problems with the current legislation is that it is too rigid and inflexible when it comes to dealing with changing circumstances.

However, it is critical to the structure and performance of the new entity that the relationships between the community, the volunteer and the brigade continue, to ensure we continue to have strong foundations to build from.

So I think that the role and significance of the UFBA and FFRANZ, although likely to change, will probably become even more significant and important than has been the case to date.

And so it should be.

Remember that 1 July 2017 is just the beginning.

We have four years to move to a fully integrated organisation, and that means taking the time to get it right and deliver on our commitment to building a world class fire organisation that delivers services for the community, in the community and by the community.

The key to the success of the journey to date has been engagement at all levels.

That will be no less important over the next few months to 1 July, and in the time beyond.

You therefore have my commitment that the Board, the Department of Internal Affairs and I will continue to work closely and openly with the UFBA and other organisations to ensure the success of the transformation to FENZ".

[Peter Dunne](#) [Internal Affairs](#)

