

## **Membership Advisory Panel Consultation Report**

**18 November 2020**

During the recent Korero 2020, Fire and Emergency ELT informed viewers that helmet/pocket torches will not be made available to all personnel this financial year. Russell Wood, Deputy CE Organisational Strategy & Capability Development, would like to better understand the case for torches, their cost, and benefits. Over the coming months, he will task his Equipment people to work with the Response Capability team to determine what the case is for torches, what a deployment might look like and what the costs would be.

The UFBA understands that this is a matter close to the heart of volunteers who see having a torch as important to their safety and wellbeing. Many brigades have already bought their members personal torches by fund raising to cover the cost.

The following survey findings from over 700 members provide some insight into views on the use of personal torches. They recommend that a range of potentially suitable torches are trialled for use in the range of environments and circumstances volunteers work in.

A resolution of this long-standing issue would contribute significantly to a thriving and unified workforce that feels valued, safe, and supported. The provision of personal torches needs to remain on Fire and Emergency's 'to do' list.

### **Torches**

In mid-July, Takaka Volunteer Fire Brigade approached the UFBA to seek the Membership Advisory Panel's (MAP) agreement to consult with UFBA members on:

- Whether Fire and Emergency NZ operational personnel should be issued with a standard helmet torch for use in all emergencies; and if so,
- To ask for recommendations for a suitable torch.

The MAP recommended consultation with members which took place in August. This consultation indicated strong agreement that a helmet/pocket mounted torch should be issued by Fire and Emergency to all operational personnel. The UFBA therefore makes this recommendation to Fire and Emergency NZ on its members' behalf.

Most respondents agreed that the torch proposed by Takaka VFB was suitable; however, testing a range of suitable options will be necessary to ensure any torches offered are fit for purpose for a variety of potential uses. A small range of options could be offered to ensure that brigades can select the most suitable for their requirements.

## Members were asked six questions

During August, the UFBA asked members on its distribution list to consider the following questions:

1. Should a standard helmet torch be made available to all Fire and Emergency operational personnel?
2. If so, why?
3. Having read the information about the torch recommended by Takaka VFB, are you happy to support its recommendation?
4. If not, why not?
5. Is there a torch you would recommend?
6. Other comments?

Representative comments have been used here to illustrate the key points made by respondents.

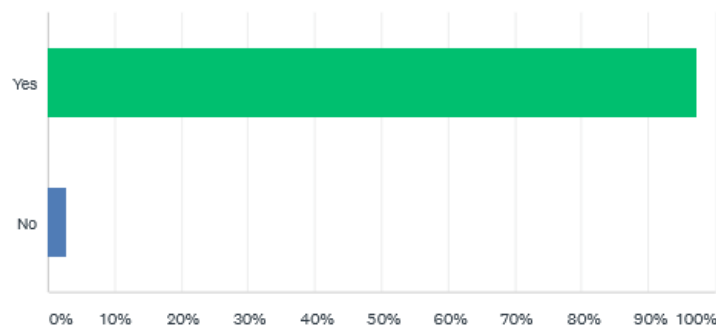
### A helmet/pocket torch should be standard issue

97% of respondents indicated that a standard torch should be made available to all Fire and Emergency operational personnel. The survey question asked specifically about helmet torches; however, it is clear from the survey responses that many members would prefer a pocket torch.

“My preference is a torch that fits into the loops on the level 2 jacket. The helmet torches when someone comes to talk with you shines in your face and ruins your night vision. the helmet torches though are good when you are moving around the fire ground”.

#### Q1 Should a standard helmet torch be made available to all Fire and Emergency operational personnel?

Answered: 709 Skipped: 2



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	97.18%	689
No	2.82%	20
TOTAL		709

## Q2 If so, why?

Hands free lighting members brigades need hands free required need hands  
easier appliance night time operations personal fire fighters situations H S tool  
dolphin torch tasks PPE often everyone firefighters around makes hazard  
keep hands free well times road see dark go also part  
helmet personnel working night able see  
helmet torch think one standard light always need  
available use safety issue work hold torch night allows  
Safety personal safety torch hand held torch  
Health safety visibility hands free useful dark  
trying see especially job operational equipment etc carry FENZ  
good holding working dark MVA incidents basic fire buy  
free hands issued provided touch essential training safe one hand  
people BA set many health safety issue help looking lot us S don t operate conditions  
calls trucks use hands without

### It's about health and safety

Reasons for having a torch were simple and clear:

- "All about health and safety."
- "Hands free to work."

Respondents were adamant that a torch was crucial to their health and safety when working in a variety of situations.

"Is this a serious question?? The answer is a self-evident health and safety issue."

"Adequate lighting at any job is a must. Poor lighting not only makes doing our job difficult but it is a safety hazard, particularly on an MVA scene."

"Lighting/visibility is the biggest factor in safety. It is not always possible to use a handheld torch and perform required tasks let alone do it safely as possible. It should be an essential part of PPE."

Some noted that the current issue torch was not fit for purpose, "The torches do not meet the standard of what we need, it's hard to carry around a clunky torch while trying to perform other firefighting duties".

Most respondents were consistent in the view that torches should be a standard piece of equipment.

“A helmet torch is a vital piece of equipment for many situations during operational responses.”

“This is an important piece of PPE like a helmet or boots.”

“We operate a 24/7 service and ensuring personal safety at night is fundamental. All personnel should be supplied with equipment to ensure their safety day or night.”

Survey respondents noted that wearing a torch will make them clearly visible to others but recognised the disadvantage of a helmet torch shining into the eyes of others working near them.

Some respondents referred to the ‘safe person concept’ and the value of a torch to thinking and acting safely.

### **Hands free to work in the dark**

Respondents provided examples of where having your hands free on the job is vital, such as carrying equipment and treating patients. Respondents noted the lack of available artificial lighting in many situations, particularly on rural roads.

“Trying to use a handheld torch while at a MVA or job requiring both hands is impossible. Helmet torches are by far the best and easy to use in all situations when lighting is required.”

### **Cost and equity**

A few respondents raised concerns about the cost of buying and running torches. Two felt that the money could be better spent elsewhere, noting the amount of use would not justify the significant cost. One respondent felt that brigades should fund personal torches.

Some saw advantages to having one significant purchase – bulk purchase rates and with many torches in use, parts could be interchanged.

Some Fire and Emergency NZ operational personnel are supplied with a personal torch and others are not, several respondents noted that this was unfair. Others indicated that those brigades that could afford torches had them and those which could not, did not and this was considered equitable.

The importance of fairness and equity for all Fire and Emergency personnel was a strong message from many.

### **A grant to cover the cost or a set per appliance**

One member suggested brigades be provided with a grant so that they can purchase or upgrade their torches.

“I do support the need for helmet torches but not necessarily this model of torch. Many brigades have gone out and purchased torches maybe a better idea would be providing a grant to brigades to purchase their own torches or upgrade their current ones.”

Two respondents suggested that a set of torches could be carried on appliances.

“At least kit out each riding position in the Appliance as standard inventory to have helmet torches that can be clipped on similar to radios. So, if too costly to provide for each volunteer, look at 6 torches per Iveco so if two on station will be 12 torches rather than 30 for 30 members. Then can be part of standard kit enroute to incident. Radio in pocket, torch on helmet, etc.”

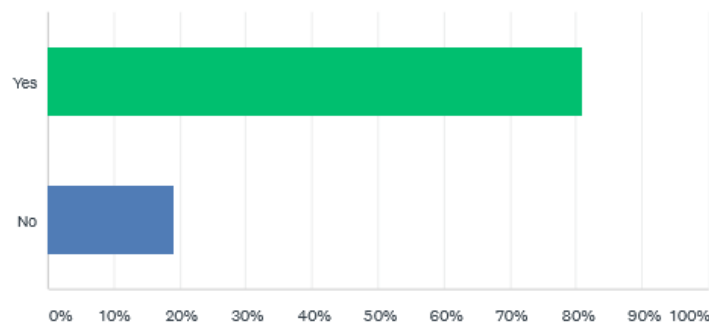
“I have been personally fighting this issue for the last 8 years as a VSO to get them. My only other comment would be a compromise of having 6 available i.e. 1 per seating position on an appliance and members attach it to their helmets as required and return to a holder in cab on leaving appliance.”

### 80% of respondents happy to support Takaka VFB’s recommendation

UFBA MAP Consultation. Helmet torches.

Q3 Having read the information about the torch recommended by Takaka VFB, are you happy to support its recommendation?

Answered: 703 Skipped: 8



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	80.94%	569
No	19.06%	134
TOTAL		703

Most respondents were happy to support the recommendation of the Dualie torch.

“I have been using the Dualie for about 12 months now and find it to be a great helmet torch.”

“We purchased our own and they are solidly tested.”

“Behind it 100%.”

One respondent highlighted a potential for conflict of interest and noted that other torch options needed to be put forward.

“LED and reliable, use outside contractor to check to evaluate!”

## Questions raised about performance, brightness, and sustainability

Questions were raised about attaching the torch to all available helmets, balance, and the performance of the torch.

“Need to be able to mount securely to helmet with an easy option for removal when required without needing to look or remove the helmet to do so.”

“Would unbalance the helmet.”

“Would need to see more details around how they actually perform in real use conditions before endorsing a particular product.”

“I think that torches should be mandatory however, the attached one does not appear to have a corresponding helmet clip and I also think that due to the value, the market should be tested.”

Several indicated concern about the brightness of the torch, “I don’t believe that 115 lumens is bright enough, and I am not certain that it would mount to the helmet effectively”.

“There also appears to be no adjustable brightness mode. Having variable brightness on a torch allows it to be used for many tasks from map reading to signalling helicopters. The torch I currently use that I purchased myself is USB rechargeable with a 3500mAh 18650 battery including variable brightness adjustment to over 1000 lumen.”

Some respondents indicated that being able to operate a torch with gloves was important. “As long as buttons can be operated while wearing gloves it sounds fit for purpose.”

“The safety factor of taking the glove off to turn them on would be a hazard.”

Concern about the sustainability of battery powered torches was raised, “My main point of concern is that the torch runs on AA batteries which are likely not rechargeable. Not purchasing a rechargeable torch is not only investing in old technology but it’s also not sustainable.”

LED torches stop without warning and one respondent encouraged the use of a battery rotation process.

Three members believe a tilt option on a torch would be an advantage.

“I actually prefer angle adjustable torches, but the fact that this torch can be secured to a pocket. Streamlight torches are well regarded internationally for performance and reliability too.”

The availability of a suitable way of attaching the torch to a helmet was questioned by many.

## Any torch chosen must be fit for purpose

“Helmet torches are great as obviously they are hands free. Some thought needs to go into the choice so that they are durable, waterproof, can handle firefighting conditions and are generally firefighter proof.”

Most respondents talked about the need to ensure that torches chosen were fit for purpose in a range of circumstances. They encouraged trialling of several torches and recognised that different circumstances might require different torches.

“A robust transparent trial needs to be completed to ensure the right product is selected that is suitable for our operations.”

“I would not be happy with a piece of equipment that hadn't been tested thoroughly and passed as suitable for FENZ use.”

“Learnings from the radio project could be incorporated in this discussion (ie. what are the top 3 options and can we put them through all types of scenarios)”.

“Fit for purpose rural or urban etc wide beam adjustable clip onto helmet and PPE pocket, decent battery life (preferably rechargeable), options for brightness, LED, bright, lightweight, durable.

Respondents encourage Fire and Emergency to trial and test potentially suitable torches for different needs and offer the opportunity for brigades to choose from a standard range. Given that there are a range of torches already in use by volunteers their views on the suitability of each could be sought.

## Several torches recommended

477 respondents answered the question, is there a torch you would recommend? 28% of these answers were no or not applicable. Many endorsed the Dualie but a range of torch makes and models were recommended. Brands or suppliers recommended by more than one respondent included, Pelican, PSL, Underwater Kinetics, Intova, Nitecore and Pacific.

In the answers to this question respondents gave strong messages around testing to ensure the fitness for purpose of any torch supplied to volunteers. Other respondents were unconcerned by the brand of torch just that one was supplied.

“Any one as long as it a good one.”

“Intrinsically safe with a torch clip and able to be used with gloves.”

“No specific brand. Would just want one which is intrinsically safe from causing combustion, and reasonably high-powered/lightweight/durable. It needs to be LED, helmet clipped.”

“Any type. I haven't got one.”

“One that is robust and easy to operate.”

“No, but it should be capable of being worn, not held.”

“Not a particular torch, just one that works well and is reliable.”

“Decent battery life and firefighter proof.”

“No, open to whatever is fit for purpose and good value for the taxpayer.”

### **This is a longstanding issue**

Respondents noted, when answering various questions, that this is a long-standing issue. Several comments noted that discussion about the supply of helmet or pocket torches to volunteers has been going on for many years. Respondents strongly expressed their desire to see Fire and Emergency supply a good quality torch as soon as possible.

“Let’s sort it out and move strong view that this issue has dragged on for some time. Prioritise health and safety.”

“We’ve talked about this for 5 plus years. Time to make it happen.”

### **A final word**

Most respondents indicated that a personal torch would make their work safer and easier. Making personal torches available to all Fire and Emergency personnel is fair and equitable. Respondents see value in agreeing a set of criteria by which to trial and test a range of torches. Options of different models should be given to brigades and torches chosen to best suit their individual circumstances.

Some test criteria emerge from the respondents’ feedback:

- Adjustable brightness
- Sustainability – use of LEDs and rechargeable batteries
- Can be operated by a gloved hand
- If helmet mounted, balance and secure attachment

Respondents were clear in their view that this matter should be addressed as soon as possible.

UFBA will send a copy of this report to Russell Wood, Deputy CE Organisational Strategy & Capability Development, to help with the development of the case for torches, and to improve understanding of their benefits to UFBA members.