



5 December 2022



Sustaining our volunteer fire services

Parliamentary Briefing





CONTENTS

About the United Fire Brigades' Association	1
Introduction from our Chair, Hon. Peter Dunne	3
A majority volunteer service	4
Funding of New Zealand's Fire and Emergency Service	8
Inequitable treatment of volunteers	9
Volunteer Fairness and Equity Campaign	11
Community resilience and partnership	12
Work with us	13
Appendix: Fire and Emergency Act New Zealand 2017	14

ABOUT THE UNITED FIRE BRIGADES' ASSOCIATION

The United Fire Brigades' Association (UFBA) is the largest association supporting firefighters in New Zealand. Our members include volunteers and employed firefighters, Pacific Island brigades, industry such as airports and defence force brigades. We champion volunteerism, the independence of volunteer brigades as a community driven resource, community resilience and preparedness, and advocate on behalf of 14,000+ members in the fire and emergency sector.

We build our services around our goals:

- Connection - across the sector, here and overseas.
- Recognition - of community service through honours and awards.
- Advancement - greater access to technical and professional development opportunities.
- Support - greater representation for and on behalf of members.

Our services include:

- Individual advocacy and support through disputes or conflict.
- Awarding service milestones and supporting brigade honours functions.
- Leadership training for current and future brigade leaders.
- Volunteer brigade administrative training for non-operational roles such as secretaries and treasurers.
- The largest annual conference for firefighters to connect and develop.
- Four different challenges that showcase firefighter skills, while supporting camaraderie, training and networking.
- Financial support through the Benevolent Fund and ACC Top-Up Scheme.
- Sector advocacy to be a cohesive, unified voice for the members.

UNITED FIRE BRIGADES' ASSOCIATION



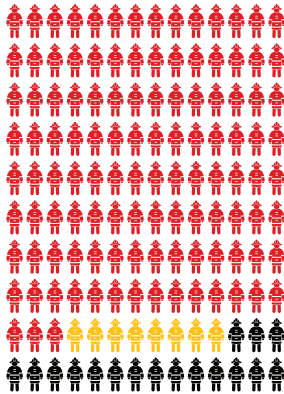
The largest association supporting firefighters in New Zealand championing volunteers, community resilience and preparedness.



UFBA REPRESENTS OVER **14,000 members**

FIRE AND EMERGENCY WORKFORCE

- 12,000 VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS
- 1,700 EMPLOYED FIREFIGHTERS
- 800 SUPPORT STAFF



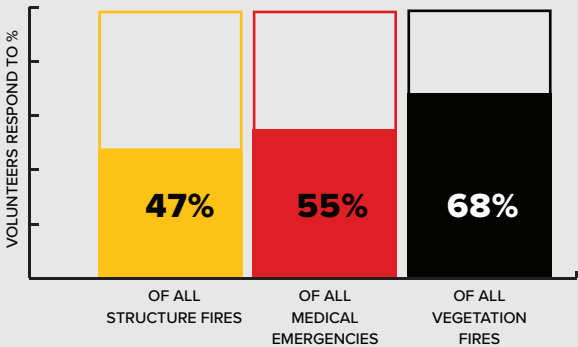
Volunteers represent 85% of the frontline Fire and Emergency NZ workforce



Annual economic contribution of volunteers



Volunteer firefighters respond across 93% of New Zealand's land mass



VOLUNTEER PROFILE



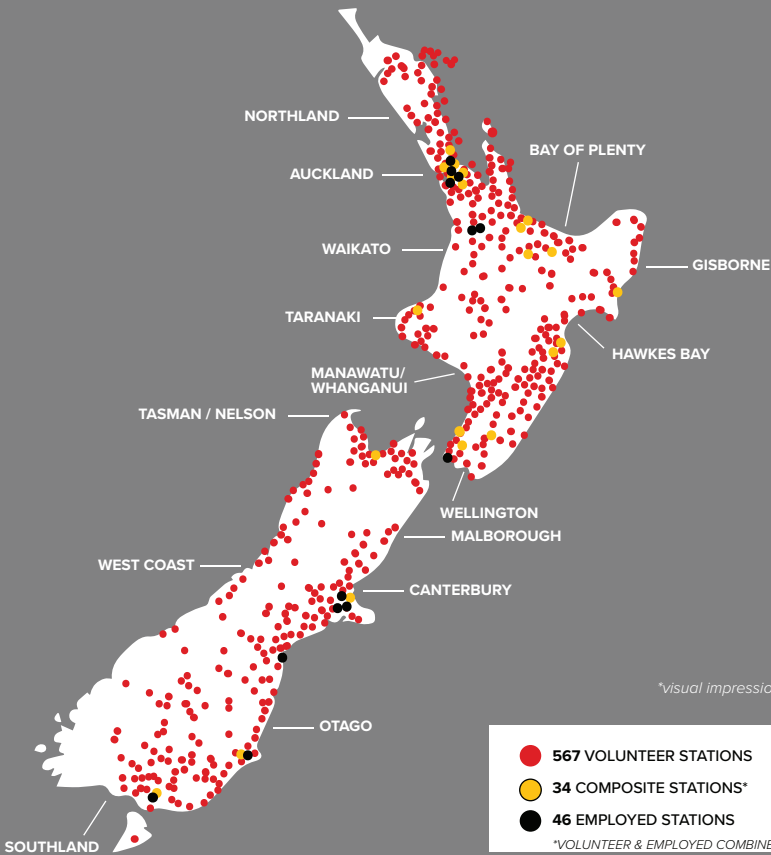
Average age **44 years old**



Average length of service **10 years**

83% MALE

17% FEMALE



OVER FOUR YEARS (2018 TO 2022) THE UFBA:

Assisted with **405** advocacy and support cases, with the majority being resolved in seven days

Gave **\$350,000** to support brigade members through tough times from our Benevolent Fund

Dealt with **228** Accident Assurance Scheme (ACC) claims for volunteers injured on duty

SUPPORTING AND CONNECTING ANNUALLY:



8 challenge events



Largest networking event for brigades



8,500+ volunteer hours support our work



Representatives from **350+** brigades join UFBA events and workshops



3,500+ service honours awarded to volunteers recognising their contribution

INTRODUCTION FROM OUR CHAIR, HON. PETER DUNNE

Tēnā koe

It is an honour for me to Chair the United Fire Brigades' Association (UFBA), continuing my long-term involvement in the fire and emergency sector in New Zealand.

Our firefighters are facing numerous challenges. Firefighting duties have for some time become increasingly varied and complex, and additional challenges are emerging, such as the increase in wildfires caused by inadequate fire prevention and land management practice and current climatic conditions. Volunteer firefighters are also the first responders across most of New Zealand's land mass (93%), often first on the scene at road traffic accidents and medical emergencies and vegetation fires. Like other workforces, they are ageing.

I was the Minister of Internal Affairs who led the fire services reform that led to the setting up of Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) in 2017 as the single body unifying rural and urban fire services. One of the key aims of the reform was to lift funding and support for the volunteers who make up the majority of the service. Another was strengthening the role of communities in the provision of fire services.

I have been listening to the views of our members closely these last few months. I led the UFBA's annual conference in October, and prior to that, I met with representatives from more than 200 brigades at 18 regional UFBA events, from

Southland to Northland. Their views are clear – they have not seen enough progress on the reform that was promised five years ago. This briefing sets out the UFBA's views on the key actions that are needed to help sustain a majority volunteer service, a community workforce the government cannot and should not underestimate or under-value.

I acknowledge progress on reform has been hampered by recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing dispute between the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) and FENZ. But we cannot forget, or ignore, the intentions of the 2017 legislation if we are to create a sustainable service that is fully equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

There is still much more to do to deliver one of the most important, and significant, transformations in the history of the public sector in New Zealand. I urge you to read this briefing and support greater government funding for this essential emergency service.

Nāku noa, nā



Hon. Peter Dunne

Chair

United Fire Brigades' Association



A MAJORITY VOLUNTEER SERVICE

Fire and Emergency New Zealand is fundamentally a volunteer-based organisation. Our volunteer firefighters are a vital part of our New Zealand fire services, alongside our employed firefighters and professional community risk specialists. What many members of the public do not realise is that volunteers make up the majority of New Zealand's frontline staff (85%) and deliver a significant proportion of Fire and Emergency New Zealand's services in the community. We are largely reliant on the goodwill of volunteers and their deep sense of community connection and service, as well as their employers and those that are self-employed. If our volunteer service is not sustained, it creates a significant risk for our communities now and in the future.

The ongoing industrial dispute between Fire and Emergency New Zealand and the New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union (NZPFU) has dominated media headlines recently. Our members tell us this has caused confusion for some of the public, who do not always understand that volunteers are not part of the dispute, do not go on strike and will continue to turn out for their communities.


The New Zealand population is not large enough, and we cannot afford, to staff fire stations with employed firefighters throughout the country and to overlook the communities own contribution to managing the risks of fire and other emergencies. Volunteers are vital.




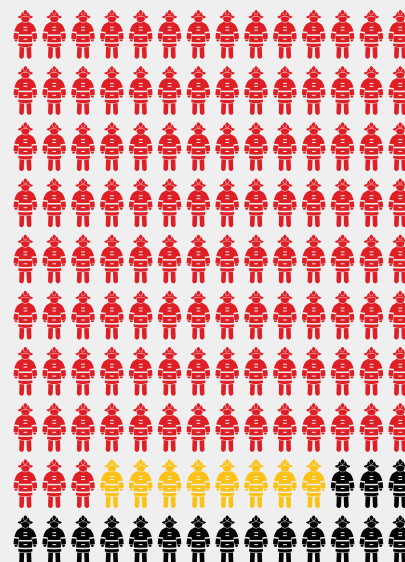
**UFBA REPRESENTS OVER
14,000 members**

FIRE AND EMERGENCY WORKFORCE

 **12,000 VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS**

 **1,700 EMPLOYED FIREFIGHTERS**

 **800 SUPPORT STAFF**



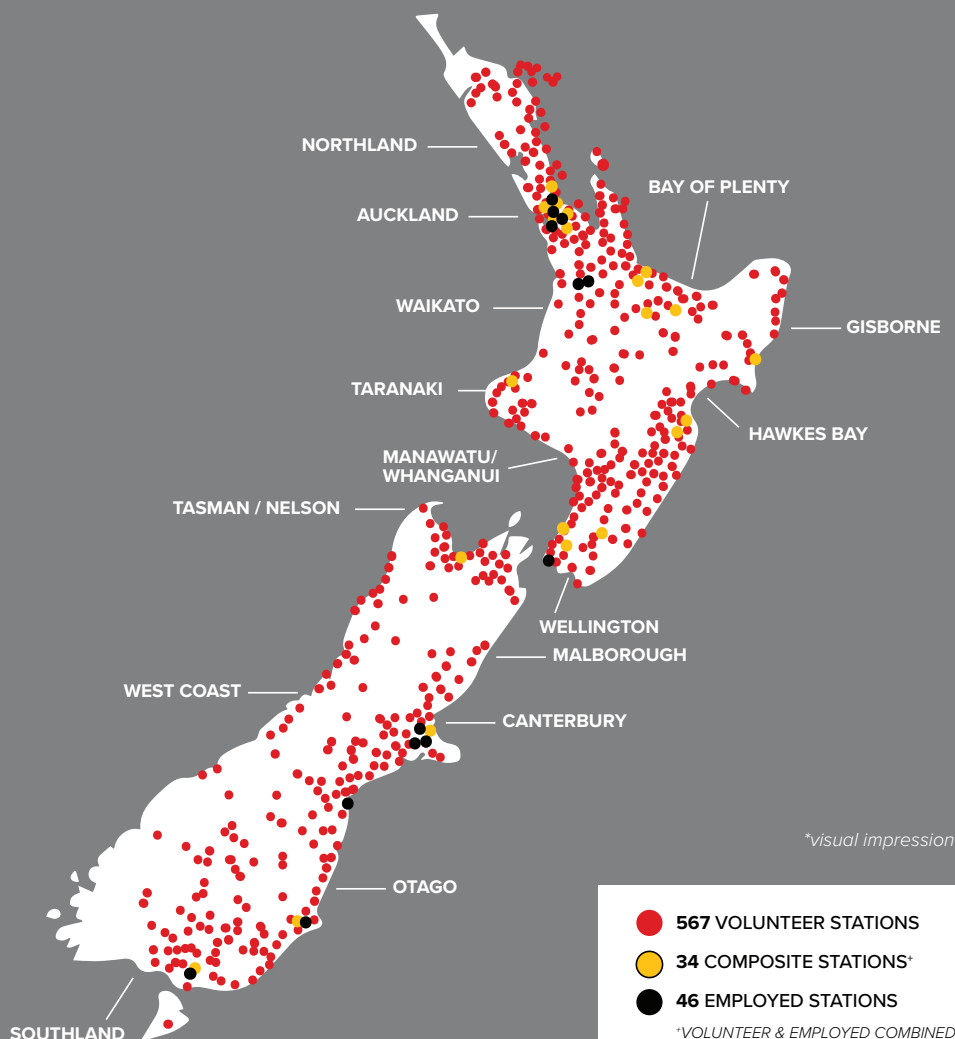
VOLUNTEERS STAFF THE MAJORITY OF NEW ZEALAND'S FIRE STATIONS



Volunteers represent
85% of the frontline
Fire and Emergency
NZ workforce

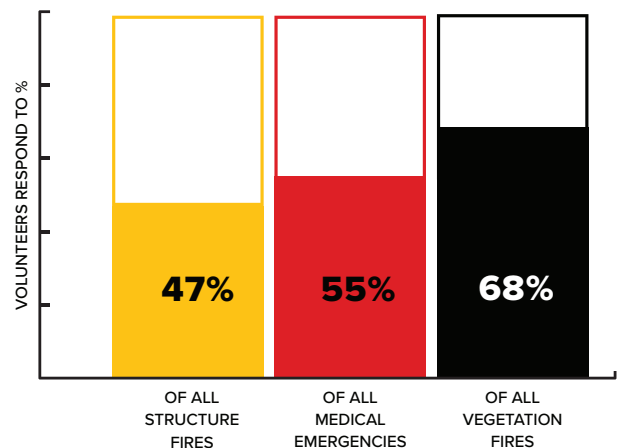


Volunteer firefighters
respond across 93% of
New Zealand's land mass



WHAT SERVICES DO VOLUNTEER FIREFIGHTERS PROVIDE?

Volunteer firefighters are the first responders to emergency incidents across the majority of the country including road traffic incidents. They also respond to 68% of vegetation fires, 55% of all medical emergencies and 47% of all structure fires. With the increasing effects of climate change, we expect the number and severity of vegetation fires and natural disasters (such as flooding) to increase.



THE UFBA VIEW

- New Zealand's c. 1,700 employed firefighters deserve fair and equitable terms and conditions, and it is the NZPFU's role to negotiate those terms and conditions as they see fit. Like everyone else, we hope their ongoing dispute with Fire and Emergency New Zealand is resolved as soon as possible.
- But we cannot forget that New Zealand's fire services are staffed mainly by volunteers. The UFBA is concerned that not enough is being done to support our volunteers. Change is needed if New Zealand are to sustain a modern, 21st century fire and emergency service that is equipped to face the challenges of the future with the legislative mandate to protect life, property and the environment.

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS WILL LIKELY INCREASE THE RISK FROM NATURAL HAZARDS

Current climatic conditions are also likely to increase the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, particularly flooding, storm surges, and drought. According to the latest climate projections for New Zealand¹, we are likely to experience:

- higher temperatures
- rising sea levels
- more frequent extreme weather events
- changes in rainfall and wind patterns
- more drought
- increased fire risk.

Asia and the Pacific is the most disaster-prone region in the world. Nearly 45 percent of the world's natural disasters occur in the region, and more than 75 percent of those affected by natural disasters globally live in the region.

THE UFBA VIEW

- Brigades play a key role fighting the increasing issues caused by climatic conditions. They need to be adequately equipped, trained and provisioned for the unique current and future challenges they face in each of their communities. Local planning processes are a significant enabler to identifying their local risks and needs.
- Resources should be targeted at the specific challenges different communities are facing – no 'one-size-fits-all' approach.
- Established Local Advisory Committees (see pages 12 and 13) operating effectively are a key part of ensuring local areas are resilient in the face of climatic conditions by bringing firefighters, communities and Fire and Emergency NZ together.
- Fighting vegetation fires and dealing with floods is very different from fighting structure fires. In some cases, our volunteers are supported by specialist rural contractors within the forestry industry, but they also need more specialist training.
- International deployments to help out on major incidents are an important part of upskilling. This has not been possible during the pandemic but these can now continue and should include volunteer firefighters.



¹ Reference: <https://www.ehinz.ac.nz/indicators/population-vulnerability/about-natural-hazards/>

FUNDING OF NEW ZEALAND'S FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICE – VOLUNTEERS ARE NOT FREE

The bulk of New Zealand's fire and emergency services funding – around \$649m a year – comes from a property insurance levy, with the Government providing a very small c. \$10m a year 'goodwill' contribution.

The Government is currently consulting on the Fire and Emergency New Zealand (Levy) Amendment Bill to adjust the way the levy is collected and managed.

Firefighters (volunteer and employed) represent a workforce the same size as the police - but we spend roughly a third of the money on fire services that we spend on the police service. The police service costs \$2.1bn a year.

The current government contribution to Fire and Emergency New Zealand equates to \$1.99 a day per firefighter (volunteer and employed). It is simply not enough.

That's because the service is largely reliant on the contribution and goodwill of volunteers, their families, employers and the firefighters who themselves are self-employed. Volunteers are not free. The UFBA commissioned an independent report in 2019 which estimated volunteers' annual contribution as more than FENZ's total annual funding. Three years on, we estimate the value of this contribution to be higher.



Annual economic
contribution of volunteers

THE UFBA VIEW

- Funding for volunteers must be protected and enhanced to sustain their vital role in this essential service. We have advised Internal Affairs Minister Jan Tinetti that funding to settle the NZPFU dispute must not come from existing funding for volunteers.
- The Government's 'goodwill' contribution to the Fire and Emergency service of \$10m a year is nowhere near enough – we are calling on the Government to increase their contribution.
- Funding needs to be increased, and targeted, to ensure volunteers have the appropriate level of equipment, training and support for them to meet local risks and needs. This should not be at the expense of what employed firefighters also require and deserve.
- Along with operational funding, substantial capital investment is also required to replace ageing fleet, equipment and buildings.
- We need a larger debate about the funding of Fire and Emergency New Zealand that supports a fit-for-purpose 21st century fire service equipped to meet the challenges of the future.

INEQUITABLE TREATMENT OF VOLUNTEERS

The Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act 2017 set out Fire and Emergency New Zealand's responsibilities towards volunteers* including that they must apply 'good employer' principles as set out in the Crown Entities Act 2004, to volunteers as if they were employees. But volunteers continue to face a range of inequities compared to their employed colleagues. This includes uniform, fleet, equipment, training and support. For example, rehabilitation support for volunteers injured on duty is substantially less to the support provided to employed firefighters. ACC does not cover mental trauma experienced by volunteer firefighters on duty, or chronic workplace illness because their contribution is considered in law to be a leisure activity. The Government continuing to accept this as acceptable treatment of emergency volunteers on call 24x7 is deplorable.



THE UFBA VIEW

- FENZ needs to fulfil the responsibility of the 2017 legislation and be a 'good employer' to volunteers, respect, recognise and promote their contribution through nondiscriminatory policy, consultation and organisational arrangements.
- FENZ policies should be consistently applied across all regions and based on local risks and needs – not on whether a brigade is staffed by employed or volunteer firefighters. This includes safety, fleet, training, qualifications, professional development opportunities and health standards.
- Rehabilitation and compensation support for volunteers injured on duty should be similar to the support provided to employed firefighters. Fires and emergencies do not discriminate based on if they are attended by a volunteer or employed firefighter so why does the law?
- We are calling for a fit-for-purpose uniform for volunteer firefighters regardless of their employment status, and a unified dress uniform to be provided to them in full.

UFBA VOLUNTEER FAIRNESS AND EQUITY CAMPAIGN

In a survey last year, our members overwhelmingly supported the need for equitable compensation and rehabilitation support that reflects the support FENZ provides to employed firefighters.

Independent survey of members in 2021
More than 1500 responses

Do you support the UFBA campaign seeking compensation rights for volunteers who become chronically ill (e.g., cancer caused by exposure to carcinogens) or injured as a result of their fire and emergency duties?

98%
said yes

Do you support the UFBA campaign seeking rehabilitation support for volunteers injured as a result of their fire and emergency duties?

99%
said yes

Do you support a UFBA campaign that would see volunteers receive the equivalent Health and Safety cover that paid FENZ employees receive regarding worker engagement, participation and representation as part of the Health & Safety legislation?

95%
said yes

With FENZ volunteers attending 63% of road crashes and 55% of medical response incidents, the UFBA believes the psychological impact of exposure to multiple or a single event of this nature is deserving of more proactive mental health support and services for FENZ volunteers. Do you agree?

93%
said yes

“Volunteers continually get treated lesser than our paid team.”

“This is not a hobby I am self-employed and do this at my expense to help my community and think that all volunteers should be treated as our paid firefighters are as we [are] all exposed to the same risk.”

“We do the same roles, see the same things, why would the effects/illnesses be any different??”

“We do the same job as paid staff, all we are asking is to be treated equally.”

“We give our time and efforts for nothing, to protect and serve our communities. Accepting responsibility for the harms that can come to us in this is the least they could do.”

“We do the same job as paid staff and are presented with exactly the same risks. Its morally outrageous and lacks common sense and understanding of our role to think we somehow don't deserve the same support.”

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND PARTNERSHIP

Well-supported, independent community-based volunteer brigades, meeting local risks and needs, in partnership with their communities and FENZ, are a vital part of protecting our country from the perils of incidents and natural disasters.

Firefighting duties are increasingly varied and complex involving fire, critical medical emergencies, motor vehicle response, rescues, natural weather events and hazardous substances, to name a few. And the types of risks vary considerably across New Zealand. As an example, we will see an increase in vegetation fires in key rural areas as climatic conditions and other contributing factors continue to take effect. It is vital to ensure brigades are equipped, trained and provisioned based on their current, and changing, local risks and needs and not what is often currently a costly 'one-size-fits-all' approach by FENZ.

Local Advisory Committees (LACs) were intended to give communities a say in local planning and investment by FENZ for their local brigades and were designed to help tailor services to local risks and needs. They were included in the Fire and Emergency Act 2017 as a statutory requirement to make sure that FENZ, a large Wellington-based Crown agency, did not ignore the voice of different communities (metropolitan, provincial, rural, and remote) across the country. Five years on, only seven of the 16 LACs have been set up.



THE UFBA VIEW

- Volunteer brigades must remain independent entities, working in partnership with their local community and FENZ. This is a vital ingredient to attract and maintain volunteers willing to protect their community and strengthen its resilience against the impact of disasters. Volunteers do not volunteer to be part of a large corporate entity. They must not be amalgamated into FENZ.
- Brigade services must be based on local risk and need, balanced with national priorities – FENZ must move away from the costly ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to sustain volunteerism as its main service delivery capability. Investment must be targeted and based on local community risk profiles.
- Busy volunteer brigades facing high risks may need additional support to support the needs of their community. We call on FENZ to consider a broader range of options to support volunteer services in challenging areas of the country.
- FENZ must establish the remaining nine Local Advisory Committees (LACs) without delay.

FENZ is to establish 16 LACs in the following areas to align with Civil Defence Emergency area names (CDEMG). The initial seven LACs were selected to span diverse communities with varying risks and activity.

- Northland (established)
- Auckland
- Waikato
- Bay of Plenty
- Tairāwhiti (established)
- Hawke’s Bay (established)
- Taranaki
- Manawatu/Wanganui (note Fire and Emergency LAC name will be Manawatū/Whanganui)
- Wellington
- Chatham Islands (established)
- Nelson/Tasman
- Marlborough
- West Coast (established)
- Canterbury
- Otago (established)
- Southland

WORK WITH US

We implore you to understand the fire services model implemented in New Zealand and to be an advocate for adequate ongoing funding of that service (FENZ). Otherwise we will further put at risk the volunteer model that currently sustains this essential emergency service for our small and diverse country.

The UFBA prides itself on its professionalism and transparent approach to driving positive change in the fire and emergency sector. We encourage Members of Parliament to raise the voice of volunteer brigades in their constituencies and reach out to connect with their local volunteer brigade leaders.

Please contact Peter Dunne, our Chair, or your local fire Chief or Controller (volunteer brigade leaders). We can answer any further questions you may have relating to fire services, particularly as it relates to volunteers and what they require to sustain service in community.

To talk to the UFBA, contact our Board Secretary Susan Passuello on board.secretary@ufba.org.nz or 04 237 0265 who will direct your query to the best person for you to talk to.

To check the details for your local fire stations:
www.fireandemergency.nz/find-a-station/



APPENDIX

*Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act 2017
(page 9)

Subpart 1—Preliminary provisions

S.3 Purpose

The purpose of the Act is to-

- a. **reform the law relating to fire services, including by strengthening the role of communities and improving support for volunteers in the provision of fire services,** and, to that end,-
 - i. to unify Fire Services by establishing Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ); and
 - ii. to provide for FENZ's objectives functions and operating principles; and
 - iii. to provide for FENZ's powers; and
 - iv. to provide for a levy-based system to fund FENZ; and
- b. provide for local advisory committees to influence and advise FENZ; and
- c. **improve support for volunteers and enable them to communicate directly to FENZ;** and
- d. provide new offences and penalties to improve fire safety

Subpart 7—Volunteers

S.36 Duty of FENZ in relation to volunteers

1. FENZ must 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.
2. The duty imposed on FENZ under [section 118](#) of the Crown Entities Act 2004 applies, with all necessary modifications, in relation to volunteers working for FENZ.
3. A FENZ volunteer is not an employee within the meaning of [section 6](#) of the Employment Relations Act 2000.