



*Submission to Fire and Emergency:  
Volunteer Brigade Leader Development and  
Review Process*

SUBMITTED ON FRIDAY 24 MAY 2024 BY THE UNITED FIRE  
BRIGADES' ASSOCIATION (UFBA) ON BEHALF OF OUR  
MEMBERS

## Introduction

This submission is made by the United Fire Brigades' Association (UFBA), which represents the interests of 14,000 individual members. The UFBA welcomes Fire and Emergency New Zealand's (FENZ) intention to invest and develop a consistent fit for purpose and enduring framework for the development of volunteer brigade leaders.

## The UFBA

The UFBA was established in 1878, long before New Zealand's first fire legislation was enacted. Its founding objectives included advocating for the interests of fire brigades to their governing councils and fire boards. Today, the UFBA advocates for the interests of its member brigades and their enrolled individual members to FENZ and a range of related stakeholders including the central government.

The purpose of the UFBA was reviewed in 2019 and ratified by members in a new Constitution that supported the unification of all fire brigades in New Zealand following the establishment of FENZ.

Our purpose is to:

- a) Support Brigade, Enrolled, Industry, and Defence Members carrying out their work contributing to the wellbeing and safety of communities by giving effect to FENZ's principal objectives and main or additional functions as outlined in the Act; and*
- b) To do such other things as are incidental or conducive to the attainment of any of the above purposes.*

## Support for the project

The UFBA has been working with the FENZ project team since the project initiation phase. We have provided updates to members and engaged with brigade representatives through our bi-monthly online forums and hosted the project lead and the national commander who provided detailed information on the proposals. We have encouraged brigades to have an individual say about local leadership, to make submissions and to share their views with UFBA. We have monitored feedback through various communication channels and analysed individual submissions provided to us.

The UFBA is confident this submission, on behalf of its members, reflects their views and provides an informed analysis of current, relevant issues.

## Reason for Change

The UFBA recognises that FENZ is looking to introduce some changes to better support Volunteer Brigade Leaders; to make sure the right people are leading brigades, with opportunities to gain specific leadership skills and experience, and to be supported and successful in their roles. The Volunteer Brigade Leader development and review process is one part of the work FENZ have been doing to make the positive and long-term changes needed to improve the experience of FENZ personnel, of which 80% are volunteers. These changes take their lead from the Te Kawa Mataaho | Public Service Commission review (PSC Review) completed in late 2022.

The leadership development proposals include introducing a renewable five-year term for all newly appointed Volunteer Brigade Leader appointments, which is drawn from the intent of recommendations in the PSC Review. The specific recommendations are:

### ***The Role of Chief Fire Officer is Modernised***

- 6. Modernising the role of the Chief Fire Officer. All new Chief Fire Officer appointments should be for a term of five years, with rights of renewal. Renewal should be subject to a*

*review that considers past performance including in role modelling the desired culture, leadership, and people management*

*7. The Volunteer Executive Officer course should be revised to significantly increase its focus on behaviour management and people leadership; and FENZ should rollout the course to cover all Chief Fire Officers*

The UFBA acknowledges the priority that the FENZ Board is placing on the essential culture change objectives set out in the PSC review.

It is important to note that these recommendations should not be the only reason for change. This work has co-dependencies on other areas of important work, such as the new Volunteer Engagement Model, in addition to this, the FENZ Board has statutory obligations within the FENZ Act 2017 and the Crown Entities Act 2004.

### **How the UFBA can support this change**

These obligations cannot be achieved without well-led fire brigades. FENZ should be investing significantly in developing leaders of brigades, as well as those who support them, as recognised in the PSC review in recommendation 20;

*20. FENZ should work with the UFBA to look at prioritising the provision of capability development training for volunteers in the contract between the two organisations, specifically in the following areas:*

- *Provision of training for volunteers on expected behaviour and the Code*
- *Provision of management and people leadership training to Brigade Leaders.*

The UFBA is ready to carry out this recommendation once funding is approved. We have developed and will continue to develop up-to-date and appropriate offerings which complement FENZ's objectives.

### **Feedback on the Proposal Documents**

The UFBA provides the following feedback on behalf of our membership regarding the four documents in the consultation:

#### **1. Recruit for a volunteer brigade leader**

The UFBA acknowledges that this guideline should ensure that we provide our leaders with the tools to create a positive supportive, diverse, and inclusive brigade culture.

This process and core selection criteria appears comprehensive and fit for purpose. The UFBA would like it to be noted that the leader position description highlights the considerable size and scope of the very important role of leading a volunteer brigade.

In point 8 of the process steps, we acknowledge that it is the Group Manager's responsibility to attend the brigade meeting to get any comments or representations about applicants. Brigade feedback on shortlist applicants - Volunteer Brigade Leader. Further to this, FENZ should consider a brigade representative for the interview panel.

Should there not be an applicant deemed suitable for the appointment, our concern for interim appointments is that they could make decisions or changes that have further impacts on the brigade long term. The UFBA would like to see a framework with guidelines for the interim appointment to operate within.

## **2. Volunteer Brigade Leader Annual Support and Development**

This process appears fit for purpose, however we would like some concerns with training:

- With the lack of current funding for training, there is little confidence in future plans to better support Group Managers or volunteer brigade leaders.
- It is good to see the training, development, support being made available to all new brigade leaders and those that opt-in. However, it is unclear if this level of training, development, and support is available to those who do not opt-in.
- There is no visibility on what the time commitment will be for new brigade leaders.

## **3. Volunteer Brigade Leader Non-renewal process**

This process appears fit for purpose.

In order for these situations to be dealt with empathy, honesty, and with a focus on collaboration to minimise any potential negative impact on the Volunteer Brigade Leader and the brigade, the UFBA suggests the leader is offered support from the UFBA to attend this meeting and there is a panel put in place so that the decision is not reliant on the Group Manager and District Manager.

## **4. Volunteer Brigade Leader Renewal Process**

The UFBA believes there should be more than just the Group Manager being the decision maker on the right of renewal. We suggest a panel, which includes a brigade representative, should be appointed to make this decision.

## **General Feedback on Proposals**

The UFBA generally supports the proposals for leadership development, however, we would like to make FENZ aware of several important areas for your consideration:

- Our members understand the relationship between good leadership and strong sustainable brigades and are likely to support further investment by FENZ.
- Members have mixed views on the 5-year term proposals. Accordingly, UFBA does not have a position on the 5-year timeframe. There is no one size fits all. Brigades range in size and complexity. For a very large brigade, 5 years is a considerable commitment for anyone that does the job well.
- We would recommend that succession must be incentivised to ensure a pool of willing applicants can be called upon.
- **Honouring current and binding Agreements**
  - New Volunteer Engagement Model with FENZ – it is unclear how this proposal can go ahead without the development, consultation, and agreement of any new engagement model or agreements of service.
  - Rural Brigades are signing up for more than what they signed up for in their agreements with FENZ which were signed by all rural brigades on 1 July 2017.
  - Brigade agreements of service, significant changes must be agreed.

- **Group Manager accountability and accreditation**
  - It is unclear why significant responsibility has been placed on Group Managers in the processes, however Group Managers must be supported, qualified, and competent to manage the appointment, annual review, and reappointment of volunteer brigade leaders. This may include Group Managers requiring further tools and training to help them better support and develop brigade leaders, along with having equivalent KPIs for fairness and transparency.
  
- **Operational vs people leaders**
  - Volunteer brigade leaders roles encompass both people leading and technical knowledge. While the people leader component is the majority of the role, the operational/technical role is also critical due to the nature and scale of incidents they attend. Volunteer brigades need command provision sufficient to 3<sup>rd</sup> alarm, often because of their isolation. While we appreciate the importance of strong leadership skills in brigades, every brigade must have an operational commander that is sufficient to manage large incidents until help arrives. The UFBA would see at a minimum that the brigade leader is developed and trained in SSO TAPS incident modules, with a preference for all volunteers to complete the IDLP.
  - It is timely to review the rank & role titles and naming convention. As FENZ is a broad-based service, with fire-related incidents reducing, UFBA suggests the term “Chief Officer” or “Commanding Officer” is a more appropriate title.
  
- **Fixed Term Position**
  - The only other positions we can see through our research with a limited tenure are public service Chief Executives. Some of the reasons behind fixed-term arrangements include:
    - Performance and Accountability: Fixed-term contracts allow for regular performance evaluations. Chief executives can be held accountable for achieving specific goals and objectives within a set timeframe, which aligns with the strategic priorities of the organisation.
    - Flexibility and Adaptability: need to remain adaptable to changing political, economic, and social environments. Fixed-term contracts provide the flexibility to bring in new leadership that can navigate these changes effectively.
    - Clear Expectations and Objectives: Fixed-term contracts typically come with clearly defined objectives and expectations.
    - Incentive for Performance: Knowing that their contract is for a limited period, chief executives may be more motivated to perform well and achieve results, as their future employment or contract renewal may depend on their success.
    - Transition and Succession Planning: Fixed-term contracts facilitate planned transitions and succession planning.
    - Political and Policy Changes: Public sector organisations often operate within a political context where policy directions can change with new administrations. Fixed-term contracts enable a smoother transition of leadership in alignment with new policies and priorities.
    - Legal and Employment Frameworks: Fixed-term contracts are sometimes mandated by employment laws and regulations that govern public sector

appointments, providing a standardized approach to hiring and employment terms.

- Overall, fixed-term contracts for public sector chief executives help balance stability with the need for accountability, adaptability, and performance in leadership roles **and they are remunerated accordingly.**

Is it reasonable to bind people to such a rigid framework of scrutiny, performance and accountability on a volunteer basis when paid managers are not subject to similar conditions.

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The UFBA looks forward to the next stages of releasing final documents, implementation, and working together to support our members through this change.

### **Mā whero, mā pango ka oti ai te mahi**

*This whakatauki is similar to 'Nau te rourou' in that it refers to working together, however it talks more directly to the need for collaboration. Traditionally 'whero' signifies chiefs/leaders and 'pango' the community/workers.*

Please feel free to contact the UFBA if you wish to discuss any of the above points or other related matters.

[ufbafenzconnect@ufba.org.nz](mailto:ufbafenzconnect@ufba.org.nz)

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#### **Submitted by:**

Bill Butzbach

UFBA CEO

On behalf of the UFBA and UFBA Members