



Submission on:

Proposal to Restructure Fire and Emergency New Zealand

Prepared by: The United Fire Brigades' Association (UFBA)

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**SUBMITTED BY THE UNITED FIRE BRIGADES'
ASSOCIATION (UFBA), BILL BUTZBACH**

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1. Position Statement

In preparing this submission, UFBA is conscious of the need to seek the views of our members to ensure the submission is broadly representative of the memberships collective voice. We acknowledge the input of our brigade representative's forum and the many individual members who took the time to prepare detailed submissions and share for consideration by the UFBA.

UFBA generally support the intent and approach to restructuring Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ). UFBA is mindful that for a successful transition and alignment with FENZ strategic goals, continuous communication with all stakeholders, competent leadership and a participative focus are critical success factors.

We look forward to seeing opportunities for our many skilled and talented members to participate in the strategic implementation workstreams.

2. Summary of key issues raised by members

2.1 Disestablishment of Regions

Members do not have a particular position on the proposal to disestablish the regions, provided, the administrative support currently provided by the regions seamlessly transitions to alternate providers and the services are not compromised, and high standards of support are maintained.

Some concerns were noted around the potential for reducing the availability of senior officers to represent FENZ at significant honours and service awards functions held by brigades.

2.2 Proposed District Groupings

The lack of detail regarding the rationale for the three District groupings raises concern. The utility of the proposals is difficult to understand. Of most concern is the risk of the three groups competing, adopting a siloed mindset, and potentially losing focus on communities that are most vulnerable but less visible because of remoteness and other factors.

2.3 Proposed Disestablishment of Women's Development Team and Advisory Role

Many volunteer brigades maintain increasingly diverse memberships and improved cultures. Much of this success is attributed to the support provided by the Women's Development Team. A more detailed submission is provided as *Appendix A*.

2.4 Proposal to disestablish the specialist medical response role

Medical response is now a major part of FENZ service delivery. The medical response committee is concerned about the proposal to disestablish the specialist coordinator role. This role is key to the committee functioning, facilitates committee meetings, coordinates related activities and work, leads several medical related programmes and

reviews and updates, manages the MoU, handles complaints from brigades and others, interacts and develops the relationships with Hato Hone St John and Wellington Free Ambulance. UFBA is interested to understand where this workload would sit in the new structure.

2.5 Proposal to disestablish wildfire specialist roles

FENZ has suffered a gradual loss of wildfire capability and experienced personnel since its establishment in 2017. Members are concerned at the apparent degradation of wildfire capability within FENZ. All at a time when all the signs point to increasing fire risk in the forestry and landscape environment. As volunteers respond to most wildfires across NZ, they must be supported professionally and competently in this role. UFBA is interested to understand what the future capability of wildfire expertise within FENZ looks like.

2.6 Training Proposals

UFBA is broadly supportive of the proposals to separate paid and volunteer training. A detailed submission is attached as *Appendix B*.

[Appendix A: UFBA detailed submission on proposal to disestablish the Women's Development Team and Advisory role.](#)

1. Purpose of Role

The Women's Development Team was established to address systemic barriers impacting wāhine within FENZ, including recruitment, development, and progression into leadership roles. The advisory role provides targeted support, advocacy, and strategic input to ensure gender equity and inclusion are embedded across organisational practices.

2. Current Environment

Fire and Emergency continues to experience cultural challenges that wāhine regularly experience within the organisation. This underscores the significant ongoing need for dedicated support and advocacy to ensure women feel safe, valued, and able to thrive within the organisation. Removing this role and team would diminish FENZ's ability to address these issues effectively and proactively.

3. Safety for women and minority groups in Fire and Emergency New Zealand is *improving but not yet assured*.

While strong frameworks and strategies exist, cultural change is far from complete and a significant amount of dedicated mahi needs to be driven and supported to align outcomes with success. Trust in internal systems is limited, and representation gaps remain.

The Women's Development Team has been a catalyst that has created meaningful change across FENZ, driving critical improvements in uniform design, training, leadership development, and health, safety, and wellbeing. These advancements have not only improved operational effectiveness but have also strengthened engagement and retention among women in the organisation. Without this team's dedicated capacity, deep expertise, and commitment, these inclusive and vital changes would not have been possible. Their work is creating a sense of belonging and opportunity that is essential for keeping talented women in FENZ and building a diverse leadership pipeline.

4. Impact of Disestablishment for wāhine and leadership

Disestablishing this team sends a very strong message that gender equity is no longer a priority for FENZ. This would not only undermine organisational strategic commitments but also significantly risk eroding trust among our people and the communities we serve.

Removing the advisory role will create a gap in capability for delivering FENZ's diversity and inclusion commitments. Without dedicated expertise, there is a serious risk that progress made in increasing representation and reducing barriers for women will stall or reverse. This will directly affect leadership pipelines, retention, and organisational culture, ultimately impacting operational effectiveness and community trust and a lack of diversity at all levels.

5. Loss of Dedicated Support

- The Women's Development Team provides a platform for addressing gender-specific challenges, career progression, and inclusion. Removing it would eliminate a critical voice supporting equity.
- Leaders would lose a dedicated resource that helps them understand and address systemic barriers for women, making it harder to implement inclusive practices.

6. Reduced Opportunities for Professional Growth

- Development programs often include mentoring, leadership training, and networking opportunities tailored for women. Without these, women may face slower career progression and fewer pathways into leadership roles.
- Increased Risk of Isolation
- Women in male-dominated environments often rely on structured support networks. Disestablishment is likely to lead to feelings of isolation, reduced morale, and higher attrition rates.

7. Alignment with Organisational Goals

FENZ has been publicly committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion as core values. Maintaining a role solely focused on women's development aligns with these commitments and supports compliance with legislative and policy obligations. It also contributes to building and retaining a resilient, skilled workforce reflective of the communities we serve. If this does not happen, broader strategic consequences are likely to start at the recruitment and retention stages.

9. Recommendation

FENZ must seriously consider integrating a FTE *dedicated* women's/gender/culture equity advisory role within a broader People and Culture framework or alongside the Pou Whirinaki team to ensure continuity of cultural and gender equity initiatives and align with strategic objectives and outcomes. This approach would align with the D&I Lead JD and preserve specialist experience and knowledge while enabling collaboration across cultural and wellbeing functions

Retaining a dedicated Women's Development function (could also be named gender/culture equity function) is the safest, most strategically aligned, and most cost-effective option to protect progress and uphold the Fire and Emergency New Zealand commitments to cultural reform.

Fire and Emergency's Culture Journey – 2025 Qualitative Research and Insights, June 2025:

Diversity and inclusion improving, but still falling short

Incremental progress

Participants reported that **diversity is gradually increasing, supported by changes in recruitment practices and efforts to promote inclusion across Fire and Emergency** (e.g., through people-led networks). Some noted that organisational policies have started to reflect broader societal shifts, which they saw as a sign of commitment to cultural change.

Participants with longer tenure said that the working environment has improved over time for women, Māori and Pacific peoples, LGBTQ+ personnel, neurodiverse individuals, and other minority groups.

"I think if I joined today as a young Polynesian, the journey would be a whole lot better in the organisation than it was probably years ago."

However, the implementation of diversity and inclusion initiatives was perceived as inconsistent across the organisation. **Those from minority backgrounds said there is still a long way to go before they feel fully included**, and before the organisation's diversity truly reflects wider society.

"As a female firefighter, I've had massive challenges... I've been told that, as a female firefighter, I have to work twice as hard to be seen as half as good as a male counterpart. And that was by a trainer on a course that I was attending... There are differences in how you are treated. It's not necessarily deliberate, it's just I think part of the culture."

These differing perspectives were also reflected in the Advisory Rōpū, where views varied on how strongly the theme of "increasing diversity" resonated.

Diversity at Fire and Emergency is gradually increasing, but participants emphasised that there is still considerable progress needed to create a safe, positive, and inclusive workplace for all. While many recognised the organisation's intent and commitment to change, the reported lived experiences of minority groups often fell short of acceptable standards. These individuals were still frequently seen as 'outside the norm', suggesting that inclusion is not consistent and systematic across the organisation.

[Appendix B: UFBA detailed submission on proposed Training Structure Changes](#)

1. Introduction

The United Fire Brigades' Association (UFBA) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed changes to Fire and Emergency New Zealand's training function. As the representative organisation for volunteer fire brigades across New Zealand, UFBA appreciates the intent to strengthen training design, improve the quality of delivery, and clarify structures across the organisation.

Training is fundamental to our members' ability to respond safely and effectively to the risks present in the communities they serve. For this reason, the proposed changes will have a significant impact on brigades, and UFBA is committed to working in partnership with FENZ to ensure the training system that emerges is realistic, sustainable, and fit for purpose.

2. Support for the Direction of Change

UFBA is broadly supportive of the direction outlined in the restructure proposal and the associated TAPS review. In particular, we support:

- Splitting Training Development and Training Delivery to provide clarity, accountability, and alignment with best practice in learning systems.
- Strengthening the focus on quality assurance, doctrine alignment, and consistent curriculum design.
- Establishing dedicated training delivery structures for our members that recognise the unique learning environment and availability of volunteers.
- Increasing the consistency and professionalism of training through dedicated roles and clearer governance.
- Developing a unified training doctrine that supports contemporary capability needs across both volunteer and career pathways.

These initiatives represent meaningful steps toward addressing long-standing gaps in training consistency, resourcing, and support for brigades.

3. The Importance of Partnership in Designing Volunteer Training

While UFBA supports the overall direction of the restructure, the scale of change proposed for volunteer training requires a different mode of engagement than representative consultation alone.

The membership comprises the majority of Fire and Emergency's operational workforce. The rebuild of the volunteer training pathway is therefore not a peripheral adjustment but a fundamental redesign that will shape how brigades develop capability for years to come.

UFBA believes that training design for the membership must be undertaken through a partnership model. Representation within a mixed stakeholder forum is appropriate for matters affecting all personnel, however, volunteer training carries unique practical constraints, operational realities,

and community expectations that must be directly incorporated into design decisions before they are finalised.

This view is consistent with the approach taken in the Volunteer Engagement Model (VEM) project—a Strategic Implementation Programme—level co-designed initiative between UFBA and FENZ. The VEM project demonstrates that genuine partnership leads to better outcomes, shared ownership, and more effective implementation. Given the significance of volunteer training, a similar co-design model is both logical and necessary.

4. Training Must Align with Community Risk and Volunteer Capacity

UFBA supports a training system that equips our members to respond to the risks identified in the communities they serve. This is core to Fire and Emergency’s legislative purpose and directly informs how brigades contribute to community resilience.

This reinforces the value of partnership. Co-design between UFBA and FENZ enables realistic, risk-based decisions about training, capability, and service expectations to be made transparently and with an understanding of operational, organisational, and community realities. There must be a balance between community expectations, organisational resources, and what our members can sustainably provide.

UFBA is uniquely positioned to advise on what is required to respond safely to local risks. As both emergency responders and community representatives, our members’ insight into capability requirements, barriers, and operational realities must be built into the design of volunteer training pathways.

5. Structural and Practical Considerations for Volunteer Training

5.1 Unified Doctrine with Volunteer-Appropriate Delivery

UFBA supports the development of a unified national doctrine and competency framework, consistent with the direction of the TAPS review. A single, coherent doctrine provides clarity, improves alignment between brigades, and ensures training outcomes reflect contemporary operational expectations.

At the same time, differentiated delivery for volunteers is essential. The learning environment, availability, and operational realities of volunteer brigades is distinct. Volunteer brigades operate in a wide variety of community contexts, often with different support structures, incident profiles, and response expectations. Training must therefore equip volunteers for the full range of roles they undertake, recognising that these roles differ from—but are not lesser than—those of career firefighters.

To achieve this balance, doctrine must be designed with an understanding of how it will be applied by volunteer brigades across New Zealand’s diverse communities. UFBA is well placed to support FENZ in ensuring that unified doctrine is both operationally accurate and practically workable for our members. Partnership in this space will help ensure that training pathways are consistent with FENZ standards while remaining accessible, realistic, and tailored to volunteer capability development.

5.2 Dedicated Volunteer Trainers

Dedicated trainer teams must be properly resourced and selected for their instructional capability, ensuring they can deliver high-quality, context-aware training for our members. To support consistency and effectiveness across the country, dedicated trainers require access to clear doctrine, structured training materials, quality assurance processes, and ongoing professional development. This will ensure that training delivery remains aligned with Training Development outputs and responsive to the operational realities of volunteer brigades.

5.3 Integration Between Brigade-Based Training and Formal Courses

Brigade-based training is expected to deliver pre-course learning and ongoing skill reinforcement, yet receives limited structured support. This leads to inconsistency and variation in learner readiness. Training Development must ensure brigade trainers are equipped with clear materials, practical guidance, and feedback loops to effectively reinforce learning.

5.4 Support Brigade Trainers Through Intentional Integration into the Training System

Brigade-based trainers play a critical role in reinforcing skills and maintaining capability, and their role must be intentionally incorporated into the design of training programmes. Training development should include clear guidance, structured resources, and planned support for brigade trainers so that expectations, learning objectives, and practical approaches are well understood. Embedding brigade trainers into the training system from the outset will help ensure consistent, effective learning and strengthen the connection between station-based training and formal progression pathways.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Establish a Co-Design Partnership for Volunteer Training

A formal partnership model between FENZ Training Development and UFBA should guide the redesign of volunteer training pathways. This includes early involvement in drafting, shared understanding of constraints, and agreement on key design decisions.

6.2 Align Training Development with Community Risk Expectations

Training design must reflect the risk context of local communities and be balanced between the realistic capacity of our members to respond to those risks and Fire and Emergency's ability to provide sufficient resource. Co-design will ensure that training pathways are grounded in operational realities and are achievable for both brigades and the organisation.

6.3 Build Capacity in Dedicated Trainer Teams

Dedicated trainer teams must be properly resourced and selected for their instructional capability. To support consistency and effectiveness across the country, they require clear doctrine, structured training materials, quality assurance processes, and ongoing professional development, ensuring that training delivery remains aligned with Training Development outputs.

6.4 Support Brigade Trainers Through Intentional Integration

Brigade-based training is central to capability development and must be supported by structured tools and guidance that intentionally incorporate brigade trainers into the training system. Clear expectations, practical resources, and planned support will help ensure consistent, effective learning across all brigades.

7. Conclusion

UFBA supports the intent to strengthen and modernise Fire and Emergency's training structures and recognises the significant opportunity this presents to improve training outcomes for our members and the communities they serve. By adopting a partnership approach, FENZ and UFBA can ensure that training pathways are realistic, sustainable, and grounded in the operational realities of volunteer brigades across New Zealand.

A balanced, co-designed training system—supported by unified doctrine, dedicated trainer capability, and meaningful support for brigade-based training—will enhance safety, consistency, and confidence across the organisation. UFBA is committed to working alongside FENZ to achieve these outcomes and to ensuring that our members are equipped to respond safely and effectively to the risks within their communities.

UFBA welcomes the opportunity to deepen this partnership through the proposed changes and is ready to contribute actively to the design and implementation of a training system that supports both organisational expectations and the realities of brigade life.