



Waiharara/Kaimaumuau Recovery Research

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KANTAR PUBLIC



FIRE
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Background and Objectives



- This research has been commissioned to develop FENZ's national recovery strategy, as well as finalise the organisation's approach to recovery for the Waiharara fire.
- The aims of this research are to:
 - Understand the level of recovery required for an event of this size.
 - Gain deeper understanding of the impact fires have on communities and the journey community members go on throughout the event.
 - Understand what communities and stakeholders need from FENZ to make sure they are supported throughout their recovery.
 - Understand how our operational staff interact with community members and stakeholders before, during and after events.
 - Understand our role within the communities' recovery and when/to whom we hand the recovery over.
 - Understand how we manage our people's recovery during and after a fire, and how that affects our response capability.*

**The ability to research this objective was hampered by the difficulty of engaging front line personnel during a period of ongoing industrial action.*

Approach and sample breakdown



Given the exploratory nature of this research, a qualitative (interview) approach was utilised.

This consisted of in-depth interviews and discussions with a range of stakeholders. In-depth interviews were on average around 45 minutes in duration.

A site visit was also undertaken to get an understanding of the extent and development of the fire.



In total, 39 interviews were conducted both via video call and in person during fieldwork.

Interviews were completed between May and August, 2022.



The table below details the interviews and discussions conducted by Kantar Public.

Community	Ngāi Takoto Iwi, Waiharara and Kaimaumu Residents, Farmers, Local Business, Local Health Provider	13
FENZ Staff	Incident Controller, Community Liaison Officer, Operations Manager, Group Manager, CRR Manager, CRR Advisor, Iwi Liaison Officer	17
Organisations	Civil Defence, Department of Conservation, Far North District Council, Northland Regional Council, Northland Rural Support Trust	9
Total number of participants		39

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Experiences of the Waiharara/Kaimaumu fire



A tale of two fires...

- This was a fire that threatened the settlement of Kaimaumau, and the people of that tight knit community. For the people of Kaimaumau, this was the 'Kaimaumau' fire.
- This was also a fire that swept through large swathes of wetland and farmland on the Waiharara peninsula, which affected those who are connected to, care for, and make a living from this land. To them, this was the 'Waiharara' fire.
- These fires were part of the same fire event, but people's experience and impact of the fire was different depending upon their relation to it.
- The 'Kaimaumau' fire is a story which centres on community involvement in the response and recovery. It is one of strong relationships, trust and co-operation.
- The 'Waiharara' fire is a story of lingering frustrations and lasting impacts, where uncertainties over responsibilities come to the fore.
- Both stories share admiration for the people involved in responding to the fire, and a shared desire – and frustration – that history should not repeat itself and action needs to be taken to ensure that it does not.

“The fire people were brilliant, at the school they were very informative, patient, kind, and understanding considering they were going through heaps of stress themselves.”

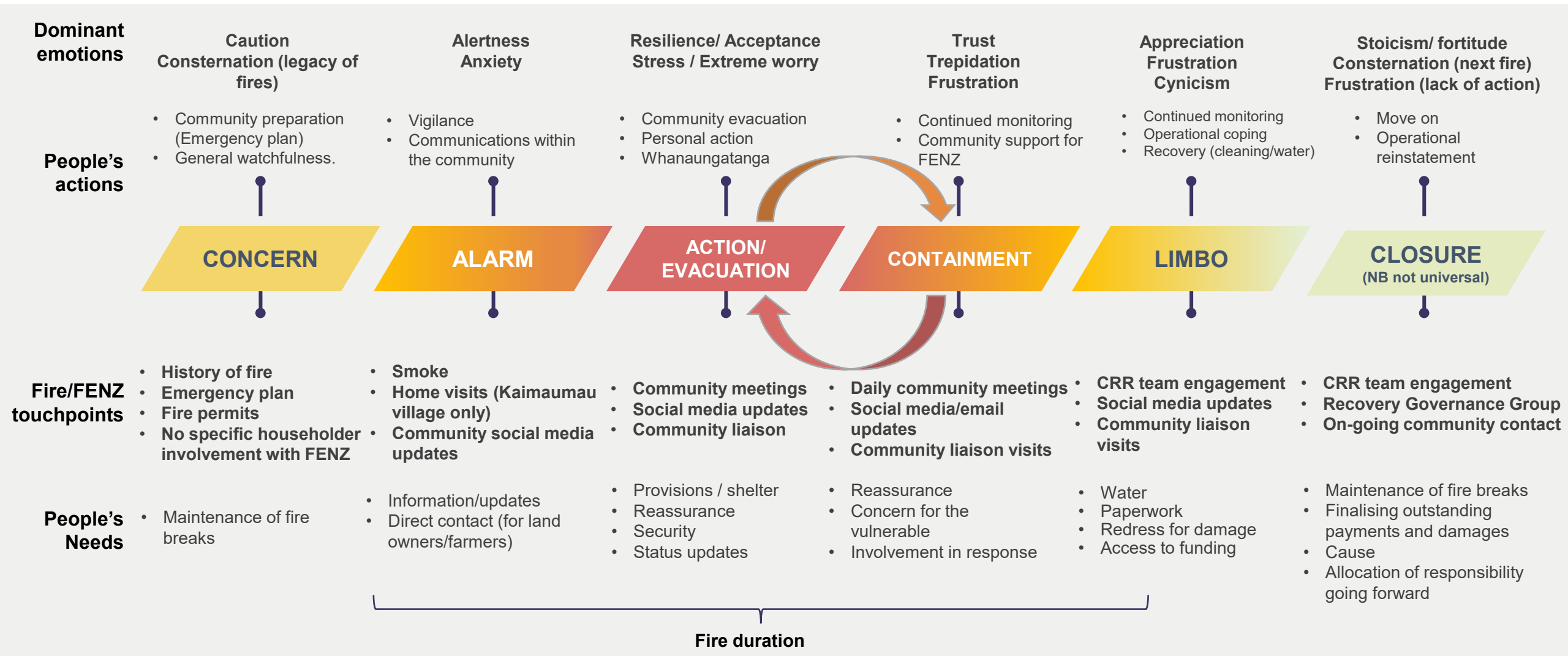
- Community member

“There was a lot of emphasis on Kaimaumau, but we're on the western side, not much communication on this side of the fire. We felt so out of the loop and didn't know what was going on.”

- Community member



Overview: the six key phases of people's experience of the Waiharara/Kaimaumu fire



The community knew it was at-risk, and that it was just a matter of time before the next fire

PHASE 1: CONCERN

SUMMARY

Prior to the fire, community members felt alert and aware of the possibility of a fire, but also felt that there was no accountability as to who was responsible for basic maintenance of fire readiness.

- Before the fire, the community were well aware that a significant fire was always likely. Some residents had been witness to five previous fires in the area.
- Over recent years land use in the area has changed significantly, with the growth of avocado orchards and drainage to expand farmable land. The growing intensity of agriculture may have impacted the water table in the area. Locals believe that these factors have made the land more prone to drying out, and increasing the fire risk in the area.
- The Kaimaumau community itself is capable, self-sufficient and tight-knit, with strong whanau and Iwi ties. Amongst the community was an awareness that, due to their remoteness, they had to be self-reliant in the event of an emergency, at least initially, due to the time it takes for emergency response to reach the community.
- As a result of the March 2021 Tsunami event, three to four months prior to the fire event, the Kaimaumau community had updated its Community Response Plan under the supervision of Civil Defence. This Community Response Plan was a key asset in the later community response and cooperation.

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“It was a model community for such a big fire to occur in.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“The people of Kaimaumau are Kaitiaki, very capable guardians of their own area.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“For the community, that's not the first time there's been a fire there. And so the community were aware of it and understood it. And as a consequence, we're ready to respond, took direction from authorities, and understood the need for us all to be standing together. It reflects the community. Everyone just coming together to stand side by side.”

– Community Stakeholder

“Quite clearly now in that part of the world, the land management has changed and they've got big huge orchards so they are having an effect on the landscape. Through that land management practice, there's a whole lot more drainage going on. The probability of that water table rising up and putting the fire out totally has been reduced.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

Given the history of fires in the area, the community were frustrated by the lack of fire readiness

PHASE 1: CONCERN

- Some community members report having little to no interaction with FENZ prior to the fire event, and note a lack of fire preparedness, signage or education within the community.
- Given the history of fire in the area, there was vexation among the community that fire breaks had not been maintained. This was in part due to a lack of budget allocated to maintain them, as well as no clear accountability for who was responsible for this.
- Introduced species such as Australian wattle, a highly flammable plant, had grown in the area more or less unchecked, which also left some community members concerned.

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“There was not much [fire emergency] pre-planning done before the fires.”

– Community Stakeholder

“He’s [farmer] seen three lots of fires go through there... He’s got a really clear view of how the fire should be or how the area should be managed to minimise fire in the future.”

- FENZ Stakeholder

“Never heard of [FENZ] before the fire, don’t hear of these people before they turn up and save your world.”

- Community Stakeholder

“After the next two or three fires all they will be protecting wattle and gorse”

- Community Stakeholder



Once the fire started, the community were quick to spread the alert of a fire through its social media channels, and monitored the progress of the fire closely

PHASE 2: ALARM

SUMMARY

In the early stages of the fire, community members felt scared and concerned at the unknown, potential scale and impacts of the fire in their community.

- For many community members, they were first alerted of the fire through their own observation of the increasing level of smoke in the area.
- Another vital means of alerting the Kaimaumu community was its Facebook group 'Keeping up with the Kaimaumu'. From the initial alert of the fire, right through the evacuation, containment and eventual extinguishing of the fire, this group was an invaluable means of communication for the community.
- Shortly after the raising the alarm of a fire in the area, community members were also contacted by Police, who door-knocked and raised the possibility of an evacuation, which increased concern among community members.
- However, communications for community members that were not in the immediate Kaimaumu village were not as strong. Some farmers noted that they were not adequately notified or kept up to date, especially in the early stages of the fire.

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“We saw smoke from our house and thought it was a bit much to be an incinerator fire. As people gathered on the street we thought shit that’s quite a big fire, where is it?”

- Community Stakeholder

“We could see the fire, coming back from town we could see it. Our local community page was busy, all talking about it.”

- Community Stakeholder

“Tensions in the farming community at the time were pretty high.... people watching flames out of their kitchen window going “We don’t know when we’re gonna have to evacuate”.. and obviously not just evacuating a home, but evacuating stock.”

- Organisation Stakeholder

As the fire spread, the community were evacuated in a fast and orderly way; FENZ worked hard to manage the more difficult aspects of the evacuation

PHASE 3: ACTION/ EVACUATION

SUMMARY

As the fire spread, concern among the community continued to grow and peaked during this phase, as well as a sense of anxiety of being away from their homes, animals and property. For some community members frustration and anger were felt in regard to some of FENZ's operational methods due to some of the firefighting practices, but also a sense of gratitude for those staff on the ground fighting the fire.

- Due to the narrow, coastal landmass of the area where the fire was occurring, it was difficult to predict wind direction, and with that, how the fire would grow and spread. In the initial days, the wider community kept a very close eye on the fire.
- During this time, worry and anxiety continued to grow among the community and an evacuation of the Kaimaumau village become increasingly likely.
- When the call was made to evacuate the Kaimaumau community handled it very well; the vast majority were cooperative, and following one phone call, the evacuation was completed in 15 minutes in an orderly and very efficient manner. Most were shifted to a local school, and some relocated to nearby friends and family. Some residents decided to stay put, at least initially, but in the end almost all people in the area evacuated their homes.
- The two key evacuations spanned the Christmas/New Year holiday period, which added an additional strain on those involved in not being able to celebrate and be with friends and whanau in the way they usually would. To help address this, Christmas presents for the evacuated children were organised, which was greatly appreciated by the community.

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“They were they were really well prepared, and they didn't muck around. I mean, it was I think it was a 15-minute evacuation.”

- Organisation Stakeholder

“It just took one phone call. I made one phone call to one of the coordinators of the group and she was able to put the pānui on their internal Facebook page which is called keeping up with the Kaimoumouians.”

- Organisation Stakeholder

“The local community did a bloody awesome job when it came to evacuating. The community definitely got on board with what they should be doing, when they were told what to do.”

- Community Stakeholder

“Felt pretty shit, anxious, nervous, worried about our animals. What do we take, we had 3 cars, couldn't drive all of them. Anxiety and panic, and wondering where to go.”

- Community Stakeholder

As FENZ's response ramped up, a programme of strong and regular community engagement was put in place

PHASE 3: ACTION/ EVACUATION

- During the initial period of the fire, the fire came very close to Kaimaumau's marae, nearly reaching the firebreak situated behind it. It also came within 400 metres to the houses of the Kaimaumau village.
- As the full-scale response to the fire rolled out, community engagement also ramped up.
- FENZ, Iwi, and DOC established a governance group and held regular meetings with the community. Police, Civil Defence, and local government representatives would also attend. During these meetings the community were able to ask questions, voice concerns, and feed in information in the fire response. These meetings would become invaluable touch points with the community, and provided FENZ a means to address concerns and spread advice, updates, and information
- Community members also sought assurance and security at this point, wanting to feel as though the fire was being managed professionally and properly and that their property and land was safe. Along with regular meetings, FENZ liaison officers were diligent in their home visits to check-in on community members and field questions.
- Whilst evacuated, community members were also given the opportunity to check in on their houses and animals, and gather further belongings through supervised visits facilitated by FENZ. Patrols of the area were made to ensure security. This was done with gratitude from the those who were evacuated.

"You could just see the worry on the people's faces. The angst in the faces. The way they spoke, they were emotional."
– FENZ Stakeholder

"The emotional stress on the community, some of them are right up against the scrub, that plays a huge impact and an ongoing one as they are still living next to scrub."
– Community Stakeholder

"The FENZ guys were absolutely awesome. They called meetings a couple of times a day and told us everything that was going on. They instilled confidence in us."
– Community Stakeholder

"[Iwi member] used to come to the briefings each day and I would have a chat with him after the morning briefing of how's your community going?"
– FENZ Stakeholder

"They were open for us to ask questions, no question was a dumb question. Having two meetings a day was very fair."
– Community Stakeholder

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The community wanted to help combat the fire and provide support to FENZ and to one another

PHASE 3: ACTION/ EVACUATION

- During this time the community also showed strong support for FENZ staff, offering them a lot of food which was seen as ‘a big mana enhancer’ among staff. At one point, so much food was provided that FENZ staff had to turn it down, as they did not have enough storage or refrigeration to manage it.
- There was a strong desire from the community to be involved and help out in whatever way they could to fight the fire. This involvement took shape in many ways including the provision of food, machinery and expertise to FENZ.
- Community members also showed a very high level of support toward one another, and leaned on their strong bonds to come together and help each other out during this time.

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“The set up at the school was magic, our Civil Defence and [a community member] had everything organised. People donated stuff, food coming out of our ears ... even for the animals.”

– Community Stakeholder

“All supported each other, knew where people lived that needed help and delegated people to help, had food and coffee and tea at the school. We felt welcome at the school.”

– Community Stakeholder

“There was a great community spirit throughout.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“School accommodated the animals. It was great because we got to know each other much better, new people, and people we already knew. We almost had a party one night, few beers and stuff.”

– Community Stakeholder

It also generally felt very thankful toward FENZ; though some voiced frustrations around how the fire was being tackled and the lack of contact they had had from FENZ

PHASE 3: ACTION/ EVACUATION

- As the fire progressed, some community members, particularly farmers, voiced frustration around some of FENZ's methods of fire fighting such as the lack of care by some of the heavy machinery operators not to damage roads and fences.
- There was also a sense that greater local knowledge of the vegetation and topography could have been used to combat the fire, particularly in terms of placement of firebreaks and where best to operate machinery. This was more acutely felt, as non-local FENZ staff rotated in to combat the fire, who had less knowledge about the area, and brought their own perspective on how best to combat the fire.
- Some also felt that the fire was not being combatted intensely enough, with most engagement often ending around 6pm most days. There was a sense that the still evenings with low levels of wind, were not being capitalised upon to help extinguish the fire.
- During this period, the farmers in the surrounding area noted that they had not been engaged by FENZ in a meaningful way, and that their key focus was just on the Kaimaumuau village. One farmer mentioned that having not heard anything from FENZ for days, they had to take things into their own hands to get a sense of the spread of the fire, and how it may threaten their land.
- There was also a sense of an over-reliance on social media for communications, particularly in the earlier stages of the fire, which put a lot of the onus on the community to track information.

“The locals down here know exactly where the ridges are. They can point and say yes, you can drive down here. You can put a bulldozer there and not get stuck, but you can't put a bulldozer over there. Because you're gonna end up in the swamp. So a bit of local knowledge to get the bulldozers drivers most of them haven't been through here so they don't know where they're going... to me it's not rocket science.”

– Community Stakeholder

“A lot of emphasis from FENZ was placed on Kaimaumuau, but we're on western side, not much emphasis on this side of the fire. We felt so out of the loop and didn't know what was going on. Not hearing anything from FENZ, I had to disobey instructions and go out myself to the northern road see how protected we were or weren't.”

– Community Stakeholder

“There were times that there was quite a few non-local FENZ staff who had their own plans and own take on how things should be dealt with... There were a couple of times where things were a little bit tenuous, but it was more down to the personalities.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

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As the immediate threat to the Kaimaumuau village lessened, a holding pattern of living with the fire began

PHASE 4: CONTAINMENT

SUMMARY

- During the containment phase, Kaimaumuau community members began adapting to the 'new normal'. This meant continued vigilance and awareness of the potential for a fire outbreak, on-going concern and perseverance with the affects of the fire, as well as a sense of gratitude toward FENZ staff for their continued work in combatting the fire and supporting the community.

- As the fire near the Kaimaumuau village became contained the community were confident that the imminent danger was at an end. Community members were able to return to their homes, and a small sense of normalcy was resumed, though they were still aware of the constant FENZ activity in the area. Smoke and smoke inhalation continued to be an issue, and people from the area were forced to evacuate again at times.
- As they returned to their homes, the impact of the fire on their homes became apparent, such as their drinking water, which was no longer safe to drink due to ash contamination. FENZ helped the provision of drinking water, and offer advice around cleaning rooftop water collection systems.
- Smoke and ash continued to be a hinderance to the community, and required them to keep their windows and doors shut as much as possible, as well as on-going cleaning both inside and outside their homes, and general disruption to their normal activities.

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“By this stage of the fire, the community were pretty well-versed in what was going on.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“Relieved, nervous I almost couldn't believe it, and of course there was the afternoon we had to go back to the school.”

– Community Stakeholder

“The ash and the smoke lingered for a long time after the fires went out, I was wiping down all my surfaces 2-3 times a day.”

– Community Stakeholder

“Husband still has breathing problems – one of the head nurses at the clinic was at the school with medical supplies and giving consultations to people”

– Community Stakeholder

Through positive engagement and outcomes FENZ gained a lot of trust and confidence from the Kaimaumu community

PHASE 4: CONTAINMENT

- To the appreciation of the community, FENZ continued to maintain a presence at night times by stationing an engine on the main road in Kaimaumu village. This helped to reassure locals of FENZ's continued presence in the evenings when its firefighting activities had ended for the day.
- By this stage, strong trust in FENZ had been developed, particularly among the Kaimaumu community. This trust was led by consistent community engagement, involvement of local Iwi in decision-making, and constant communication touch points and reassurance from FENZ staff. Local Iwi also respected FENZ for the emphasis its staff placed on trying to protect wāhi tapu sites during its response.

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“The community were very thankful. They were also confident that it wasn't going to spread again [once it was contained].”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“I saw the trucks randomly come up and down the street for a few weeks later – checking for hot spots.”

– Community Stakeholder

“The way that DOC and [community member's] lot worked was absolutely amazing. Everyone did their little bit, cooking, cleaning, tidying up at the school afterwards. They worked their butts off. Makes a huge difference, between them and the Fires your level of panic dropped considerably.”

– Community Stakeholder



With the Kaimaumu community secure it entered into a holding pattern; FENZ's focus began to shift to extinguishing the fire in the surrounding area

PHASE 5: LIMBO

SUMMARY

As the immediate threat of the fire lessened, some Kaimaumu community members began to grow frustrated with the slow start to the recovery process, and the lack of accountability. For some, there was still on-going strain and anxiety from the fire. There was a sense of 'never seeing the end of it' and that things were not moving fast enough. This period was also the height of fear and anxiety for those living in the surrounding areas, such as farmers, as the fire was still a large threat.

- Though the fire was under better control near the village, there was still a lot of work to be done by FENZ to extinguish it to a point that it was happy to end its operations. For the surrounding area, the fire was still very much a concern.
- For many locals, this meant an extended period of limbo, whereby they were waiting and monitoring the on-going efforts to put out the fire nearby.
- The length of time it took to bring the fire under control, lead to some on-going stress and concern among some community members, for whom, whilst some normalcy had returned, were still concerned about the fire spreading again if the winds were to shift or the conditions change.

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“The locals are pretty frustrated with farm owners [where the fire started]. And they think there's a lot of recklessness and irresponsibleness that went on.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“To have that sort of event, on the back doorstep is scary... it becomes a groundhog day for them, they see the same thing happening, there's all these firefighters cruising around and a lot of smoke... it just wears on them.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“The community was very, very nervous and worried. There were stressed out people because it went on for so long that and they couldn't see the end of it. There was frustration that the fire was put out and I couldn't get back to normal straightaway... There was a lot of frustration that things weren't happening fast enough.”

– FENZ Stakeholder



With the main fire threat extinguished, the community felt fortunate to have not suffered significant damages or on-going impacts

PHASE 6: CLOSURE AND RECOVERY

SUMMARY

With the fire extinguished, anxiety and fear in the community eased, and many began to feel a sense of calm and normalcy return. However, for some, a lack of closure and frustration persisted, as well as annoyance around the lack of speed of the recovery process, and the lack of action on future readiness measures.

- Following weeks of effort from FENZ, the main threat of the fire was extinguished. At this point many community members simply ‘got on with their lives’.
- Some viewed this as one of many fire events they have witnessed in their time living in the area, and thought that there would likely be more in the future. The fire did not have any impact on whether they would remain in the area long term.
- Reflecting on the fire, the community was largely grateful toward FENZ and its efforts. Despite some residual impacts, they viewed themselves as being very lucky that there was no loss of homes or life, which, given the scale of the fire, certainly could have been a possibility.
- Most community members did not suffer from any long-term impacts of the fire, and were very grateful for this.
- Some also came out of the fire with an increased awareness of fire risk, and certainly thought that they would be more vigilant moving forward.

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“Felt good, just wanted to know when we could go home and get on with Christmas. Relieved, it was a very stressful time not knowing if your house was going to burn down.”

– Community Stakeholder

“Life for the community, is back to normal.”

– Community Stakeholder

“They are very durable people, they don’t sit around and “boo hoo”. They just get on with life and move on.”

– Community Stakeholder

“It meant we’ve got our emergency thing sorted in case it ever happens again – grab bags, water put together in a certain area. A bigger cage for our cat.”

– Community Stakeholder

Though many still sought closure, and further action from FENZ

PHASE 6: CLOSURE AND RECOVERY

- However, for some, there was still not a complete sense of closure and that everything relating to the fire had been dealt with, and concluded. For these community members, this lack of closure was due to those who caused the fire still not being identified and reprimanded for their actions that led to the fire. Some accused FENZ of not being ‘assertive’ or ‘active’ enough in this work.
- Others pointed to on-going efforts to sort out insurance claims, as well as unpaid reparations for expenses incurred by the community for services they provided to FENZ, such as catering and the operation of heavy machinery used to combat the fire. During the course of the response to the fire, relevant paper work, receipts and expenses had not been maintained or completed, causing these delays in repayment, which was a source of annoyance.
- One of the key concerns, was the lack of clear accountability around who would be responsible for community preparedness moving forward, such as maintaining fire breaks, access roads, and vegetation. Given the likelihood for future fires in the area, some raised concern about the management of these already lapsing, and that the firebreaks may not be effective should another fire occur.

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“This block is going to burn again. It’s just a fact of life. It needs to be managed a hell of a lot better than DOC has been managing it for the last 30 odd years. They are supposed to be protecting the swamp out here and they’re not. It’s going to be covered gorse and wattle. They need a better management plan of this land. DOC also needs to involve adjoining land owners. Who is responsible for maintain clear fence lines?”
– Community Stakeholder

“Everyone’s concern is that the firebreaks are maintained – somebody needs to maintain them, everyone’s promised it.”
– Community Stakeholder

“I feel pissed off really, it’s like we’ve just been forgotten about again. Let’s clear it, don’t want it to happen again.”
– Community Stakeholder

“[On wattle and firebreaks] I don’t know how many millions were spent to fight it – makes sense for some of it going to preventative maintenance.”
– Community Stakeholder

There was no strong understanding of the long-term damage to ecological and cultural sites

PHASE 6: CLOSURE AND RECOVERY

- Long-term ecological damage to the surrounding swamp and wetlands had still not be fully measured or understood, but there was concern from DOC over the impact the fire had on the peat, and its ability to filter and retain water for the area's aquifer, and the knock-on effect this will have on the wetland, the water table, and the biodiversity of these delicate environments.
- Added to this were concerns about the invasive wattle species growing back to a greater extent, and the implications this has as potent fuel for a future fire.
- It was also noted that the fire damaged some wāhi tapu sites, including exposing remains, though the exact extent of this damage was not quantified.
- The fire also had some positive outcomes for the community. It now views itself as more tightly knit and unified, having forged bonds in its response to the fire.
- On-going community relations between FENZ and the community were also stronger, with some of the connections still being maintained long after the fire was extinguished. In the event of a future fire in the community, if maintained, FENZ will have a comprehensive community network to coordinate a response with.

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“The biggest thing we are concerned about is the opportunity of the firebreaks to introduce weeds, and allow human access and human impact to the scientific reserve.”
- Organisation Stakeholder

“If the fire has burned a significant percentage of the peat land, is that ecosystems still a peat bog? Or do we have a different ecosystem now? It's degraded the ecosystem.”
- Organisation Stakeholder



Recovery was still a new space for FENZ; as a result it was not progressing as fast as some would like

PHASE 6: CLOSURE AND RECOVERY

SPOTLIGHT: RECOVERY

At the time of this research, the community were very much still in the recovery phase. Both community members and FENZ staff commented that this process was going slower than anticipated.

FENZ staff noted that recovery was a new area for them, and that there had been some teething issues, such as a lack of clear understanding and training as to what recovery both generally, and from this fire, would look like and what exact role FENZ should play in Waiharara's recovery. Managing recovery for a fire of this large of a scale and complexity also added an element of difficulty.

Some noted that the recovery process had not started early enough in the fire, during the initial response, which had set back this process. During the fire event, landowners felt they had been promised that roads, fences and drains damaged by FENZ staff would be repaired quickly, but in some instances this had not been followed up by those responsible for the damage.

There had also been delays in forming a governance group to manage the creation of a recovery plan, and some thought that this process may have stalled. Concern persisted around allocation of responsibility for recovery actions, as well as accountability to ensure they are fulfilled.

Added to this, the recovery reporting was noted as still being very 'operational' and 'tickboxy'. This reporting was viewed as having a strong FENZ perspective, which may have discounted additional perspectives such as those of DOC. Some of the 'clean up' had also been taken on by DOC, in lieu of FENZ.

From the community perspective, they needed reassurance and support from the agencies involved, that they would remain active in the recovery process and not desert them. They also sought assurance that the Iwi would be a partner in the recovery process. To its credit, FENZ were careful to ensure that Iwi leaders were incorporated in the governance group.

"FENZ just see their job as putting out the fire and bugging off. They need to be more active in leading the recovery plans, or bringing in experts to do this."

– Organisation Stakeholder

"It seemed to take a long time to get the governance group together. And then the recovery plan formulated. There's now a project team, which I'm on and it doesn't seem to be much movement happening on that. So that is in place, but the whole thing seems to be taking a long time."

– FENZ Stakeholder

"[On recovery] There's a sense that they're building their plane as they're flying it... there's a lot of hui, and not a lot of do-ey."

– Organisation Stakeholder

"The recovery stuff that we're doing now, we're still learning as we go. And there is really no training and no education around that and the sort of the bigger picture, and it just hasn't been developed yet... We've got so much going on as an organization. I don't necessarily see it as a failing... we just haven't gotten to it yet"

– FENZ Stakeholder

"Recovery is not something I had ever done prior. And I had no experience. And I still wouldn't say I have great experience in it. I felt like we would just there to keep the seat warm at times to be quite honest."

– FENZ Stakeholder

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Key findings



Key findings



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Recovery seems to be influenced by a set of underlying principles that span the whole course of an event. These principles can be summed up in six C's.

1

CONNECTION: The importance of having built relationships prior to the event

2

CO-OPERATION: The need to be guided by one another to achieve successful outcomes

3

COMMUNICATION: The importance of keeping people in the loop

4

CONSISTENCY: The importance of constancy (within reason)

5

CLOSURE: The need to close the loop

6

CLARITY: Around the role and scope of recovery

1

CONNECTION

The importance of having built relationships prior to the event



“

“Just continuously maintain those relationships, make those relationships strong.”
- FENZ Stakeholder

Connection: The importance of having built relationships prior to the event

- If there is one thing that marks out the response to the Waiharara fire, it is the extent and quality of the relationships that FENZ has built both into and across the community and stakeholders.
- The importance of these relationships - the “5th R”- can not be over emphasised when faced with the fast moving, geographically remote, and socially diverse situation that FENZ encountered in Waiharara.
- The crucial point is that many these relationships were (by and large) formed *before* the fire happened. They were no doubt strengthened (and tested) through the experience of the fire itself, but without having these relationships in place the response to the fire would have been even more challenging.
- Research participants often talked about ‘knowing who to call’ but the value of these pre-established relationships is far more than merely knowing the right people. It is the foundation upon which the subsequent co-operative efforts were built.
- The power of these connections played out in different ways:
 - A sense of understanding one another’s agendas (even if not fully in agreement)
 - An ability to get ‘straight on with the job’ rather than having to spend time feeling others out
 - An ability to lean on alternative resources when FENZ capacity was constrained
 - An ability to successfully expand and tap into broader connections within the community in incorporate additional resources into the response.

“

“If you want something done, you have to have the relationship, you just can’t go barrelling in and ask something to be done.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“We meet every month. We don’t agree on everything, but we know each other’s operations well enough. We know the people. So just made life easier because no matter what anyone says it works better when know the people.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“It’s not just having a plan, when shit hits the fan you ring the people you know.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“There’s nothing like having those established relationships between organisations.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

Connection: These relationships need to be choiceful, long term, and invested in

- Connections do not always need to be formal, but they do need to be invested in and sincere. During the incident, connections were routinely managed and cemented throughout the engagement both formally and informally with frequent meetings, visits, and hui. One non-FENZ stakeholder commented that he would give the level of connection forged “an 8.7/10”.
- As the scope of FENZ’s operations develops from response to recovery, clearly the variety and scope of connections will become wider.
 - Maintaining relations at all levels (frontline to frontline, operational to operational, CEO to CEO) with landowners, Iwi, Civil Defence and even local health providers keeps FENZ in good stead.
- However, what was notable within the Waiharara response is that the relationships that had been established were vital (and consistent) through all stages of the response.
 - Notably, Iwi connections guided preparation (being an integral actor in the Community Emergency Response Plan), response (guiding FENZ operations and communicating with the community), and guided recovery (both as kaitiaki and landowners)
 - FENZ’s Iwi liaison team and governance group (FENZ, DOC and Iwi) were especially integral to this process, and they had great success in developing trust and connection between the local community, Iwi, and FENZ. This trust was built by the ability of members of the Iwi liaison team to speak Te Reo Māori, and from frequency, openness, and honesty of interaction, and the willingness to accept input from the community and governance group to the wider FENZ team.
 - In this way, not every member of the community needed to have a direct relationship with FENZ - as the community leaders did, and were able to hold the space for those relationships on behalf of FENZ.
- The experience of the Waiharara fire has deepened these connections across the board. However, these relationships, once activated, also need to be maintained during non-emergency times (such as training together and on-going engagement). There was clear call for this from the community and organisational stakeholders for this.

“

“The best relationships are built over cup of tea.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“How is that resource [the relationship] nurtured to be truly effective?”

– Community Stakeholder

“We should be having consistent interactions, consistent discussions before the fire happens.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

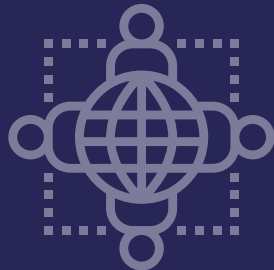
“People think firefighting is about fire hoses and trucks and helicopters and anything else but it’s not. It’s all about people. And if you don’t have the relationship with people, then you don’t get far.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

2

CO-OPERATION

The need to be guided by one another to achieve successful outcomes



“

“There's some real knowledgeable people out there and any help they can give us to lessen the risk or the danger or the period that we're at these fires. That's great. And they feel part of it if they have helped.”

- FENZ Stakeholder

Co-operation: The need to be guided by one another to achieve successful outcomes.

The network of connections built before the fire event were activated into a strongly co-operative response – a sense of combined forces and shared objectives which guided operations.

- There was a strong desire among the community to feel like they had a role in combatting the fire, and they were very keen on doing all that they could to work with and help FENZ. Iwi were central to this and were included as part of the Incident Management Team.
- The bedrock of the co-operative response was the Community Emergency Plan (which had only just recently updated). Interagency co-operation and Iwi involvement were written into the plan.
- The rest was a degree of Iwi involvement which was a huge contributor for successful operations within the community.
- This co-operation took many forms, from the provision of information to FENZ about the local area such as the location of water supplies, alerting FENZ to the location of wāhi tapu sites, and guidance about suitable terrain for heavy machinery. It also helped with catering and the provision of heavy machinery. There was a real sense of ‘the community pulling together’ to get things done. However, it is important to note that this sense of co-operation was more keenly felt among the Kaimaumu community, than the surrounding farmers, who felt ‘outside the tent’ at times during the decision-making process.
- FENZ were diligent in consulting with local Iwi about important decisions. One particular decision was the use of fire retardant on Iwi and DOC land. FENZ were aware of the apprehension among Iwi, so they were careful to first talk through other possible solutions, as well as discuss concerns about the use of retardant with community representatives.

This close co-operation with Iwi and community leaders undoubtedly made community evacuation more straightforward. And without this level of co-operation, consequential but avoidable impacts (such as the destruction of wāhi tapu sites) could well have been a feature of response.

“

“Nothing like a fire to bring people together and cut through the bullshit – politics can go to one side”
– Organisation Stakeholder

“Early on we had established a bit of a governance group between FENZ, DOC and Iwi. We met at that level and we had a clear understanding of what was going on and what we were doing. That was really beneficial. Between the three of us, we had good knowledge in the group, and relationships with the local community.”
– FENZ Stakeholder

“[Senior FENZ staff member] will always seek opinions and views on how he could deal with things in a different way. He really took this on in this occasion.”
– Organisation Stakeholder

Co-operation: The importance of good working relationships with other agencies involved in the response.

- However, the co-operation was not exclusive to Iwi. Civil Defence, DOC, Council, Police, and other agencies were also heavily involved and influential on operations.
- As an 'affected land owner', representatives from DOC were on the governance group and worked very closely with FENZ to help coordinate the response. In this role, DOC staff provided input to high-level conversations, were an important sounding board for decisions, and provided advice and oversight on fire response methods. Incident controllers from FENZ worked with DOC staff to ensure that they were connected with the right people during the response.
- FENZ also worked closely with Civil Defence to help manage the establishment of relationships and the evacuation of the community. Civil Defence already had existing relationships with the community, which had been strengthened during its response to the 2021 Tsunami event, and the updating of Community Response Plan which followed. FENZ worked with Civil Defence to initially establish relationships with Iwi. It was also willing to seek advice from Civil Defence on how to best manage the evacuation, and manage the expectations of the community.
- Co-operation with other organisations was also important. For example, during the fire response large capacity bores on the land of horticulturalists were identified as being useful. FENZ were able to work with the local council to ensure that the horticulturalists were given relief for the water used to combat the fire.
- The involvement (and in some cases joint decision making) of multiple agencies/actors extended through to the recovery phase, with the establishment of a joint governance team to lead recovery efforts. It is unlikely this team would have got off the ground without the extensive co-operative efforts both during (and in some cases) before the fire.

“There’s a really good working relationship between Civil Defence Far North and the Far North FENZ Crew.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“If I had a problem, I’d pick up the phone and talk to FENZ directly... There were no barriers.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“It’s a multi agency multi person approach to recovery. And to do that solely as one organization is pretty tough. And you’re gonna need the help of external to make that successful.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“One key learning is that Iwi wanted to be involved. They’ve got people that they want to get trained up to work alongside DOC and FENZ. They want to be able to have that ability to have a rapid response team. For their community emergency services are 40 minutes away.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

3

COMMUNICATION

The importance of keeping people in the loop



“

“Listen to the people, listen to the locals. You still have to do what you're there to do. But the more people you can get on board the better it's gonna be in the long run.”

- FENZ Stakeholder

Communication. The importance of keeping people in the loop.

Communication will always be difficult in the context of a fast moving operation which affects many different individuals, organisation and groups.

However, good communication has a clear upside. Better communication breeds greater confidence in FENZ operations and less anxiety amongst the general public and stakeholders.

- Good communication can give people a much needed sense of control over a situation where they may be feeling helpless and uncertain.
- Good communication means that people will come with you, rather than work against you.

There was a sense at Waiharara, stemming from a closeness with the community and from the previous experience of operational leaders, of a conscious decision to go out of the way to engage people, which may not always have been done in the past.

“I remember going out to an evacuation centre in Pigeon Valley in Nelson, and I saw the anguish on people faces and kids crying and absolute carnage. And they just wanted information and they couldn't get it. No one would give it to them.

So when we when we started at this fire, I remember a discussion right in the first couple of days like ‘no, we're not gonna do that [again]’. So it was a decision conscious decision at the beginning by a number of people to go ‘look we just need to engage. And this is gonna be time consuming and tricky and we won't have the answers, but we need to engage’”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“The biggest issue is when you don't get their local community on board or you don't tell them information. They've got those big roaring fires next to their community and they want to know if they're safe or not, or what's actually happening. As long as you keep in constant updates with them, they'll be happy enough, and they'll come on board and offer any assistance they can. But if you're not passing any information on then you get them banging down your door and wanting to know. And then you end up spending a lot of time and damage control trying to rebuild that relationship.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“We wanted to carry the community with FENZ, so when we had to make decisions, the community could understand what these decisions were based on.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“

Communication. Investment in community centric and transparent communication pays off in trust and cooperation

This took a lot of time and investment – particularly in face to face conversations, as well in creating appropriate modes and means of communication to reach all sectors of the community.

- Partially this reflected existing community ways of communicating – Kaimaumu had an existing Facebook page and good community phone trees.
- The regular community stand ups were an essential (and successful) mode of communication
- Interestingly, updates on FENZ social media pages were not mentioned by respondents.

There was a sense that FENZ were transparent in their operations and communications. Incident leaders were open with what they were trying to achieve, key issues and how long it was expected to take to resolve them. The openness and regularity of these briefings engendered a sense of trust in the community. In return, FENZ got an understanding of what was important to the community.

This was particularly beneficial when working with the community to lay out the principles of operations – so that everyone in the community knew what the ‘deal’ was.

“The 10 days I was there, we had representatives from DOC, the local community ... So [the community] were really heavily embedded into the process. They were welcome and were invited to join any of our briefings so they could they could hear what's going on.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“Leveraging off the current community ways of keeping in touch was to our advantage.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“Because they were well informed at every point I had community meetings, they might have had them every day. They were kept up to date. And so that minimize the levels of anxiety.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“I knew that if I sent an e-mail to this [person], the whole of her phone tree would know what was going on. So there was no mystery then, and they didn't have to chase their information at the incident management centre at the at the command point.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“

Communication. However, gaps in communication can be keenly felt

- Even though Kaimaumau/Waiharara is a small community, not everybody is necessarily connected. Reaching bordering home/land owners was particularly challenging.
- In particular, communication with local farmers was felt to be less successful (even if FENZ did make efforts to engage them). This was due to a number of factors:
 - A perception that, whilst Iwi were in the incident control room, farmers were left on the outside
 - Community stand ups happening at times and locations which farmers could not make (due to farming operations)
 - Less face to face contact in the early days which lead into a spiral of lack of confidence for some
- Two way communication was also a challenge. People have their own concerns that they want to raise with FENZ. If they were not connected into a Liaison Officer this can be difficult.

“

“Life goes on when there's a fire on a farm. You've still got all of your responsibilities... A lot of the stand up meetings they weren't able to be there because they were still doing their farming operations.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“I knocked on the door and they told me to f off’ [words to this effect after going to the control unit to find out what was going on].”

– Community Stakeholder

“There are tensions in Northland between the rural community and mana whenua around the perception that the voice of mana whenua was acknowledged and heard and responded to, whereas the farmers kind of felt that they were side-lined. The farmers, they probably felt like, ‘hey Kaimaumau settlement had all this stuff wrapped around them to make sure that they were OK. But we kind of got left hanging.’”

– Organisation Stakeholder

4

CONSISTENCY

The importance of consistency (within reason)



“

“When [the liaison officer] turned up he said to me, ‘I’m doing liaison. What do I do?’ I said, ‘Well, there’s actually no manual for this. There is none.”

- FENZ Stakeholder

Consistency. The importance of constancy (within reason)

Clearly, fires change and the response needs to change accordingly. Staying consistent in an ever moving situation is a challenge. There were a number of aspects of the Waiharara operations that encouraged a sense of consistency and continuity in a very fluid situation. In turn, this helps build trust and co-operation.

These included:

- The regularity of briefings and communications – it was comforting for locals and stakeholders to know when and how they were going to receive the next update.
- The openness of communications – by explaining the intention and challenges of operations, people understood what the bigger picture was. Importantly, this included the provisions needed to be put on actions (e.g. what conditions would a return to homes, or reopening of the beach). This allowed people to plan and act accordingly (and keep eye on others' actions).
- Written and visible updates – face to face communications are good for engendering trust, but written communications are a vital (and reassuring) reference point. The 'what to look out for' leaflet given to locals after FENZ operations had concluded is a good example of this.

“

“One of their big things was they wanted the beach opened and we tried to give them a time frame with a few provisions in place. We held to their timeframe and we opened it. Some of them monitored it themselves and they held their own people to account on there as well.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“Every morning briefing would encourage all the fire fighters on the ground that if they saw anything of cultural value to make sure that they let Iwi know.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“The liaison role is just critical to effectively connecting with communities on fires.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

Consistency. Consistency was challenged, not just by events, but by lack of procedures and processes.

● However, inconsistency disorientates people (particularly those on the outside) and reduces their confidence in operations and recovery.

● In this case, consistency was not helped by

- Gaps in communication (to sectors/ individuals) – as people start doing their own thing
- Conflicting messages - What can be done or not done e.g. FENZ being able to supply drinking water, filling tanks

● The biggest source of inconsistency was via changes in personnel. A number of FENZ people-rotated in and out, resulting in a perceived lack of consistency or loss of focus on what is important to local stakeholders.

● This was particularly evident in the perceived 'lurching' of the liaison role, which seems to have been interpreted in different ways by different incumbents, and not helped by a lack of underlying procedures to work from.

● However, the biggest source of inconsistency, particularly when it comes to recovery, is the contrast between the investment in fighting the fire, versus the lack of resources for fire prevention, and investment required for recovery . As the district moves into the recovery space, the gap between words and deeds, particularly the lack of action on the ground is becoming increasingly evident.

“He was all good as long as we were talking. We'd keep updating them. When it went quiet he'd get agitated and start doing things a little bit outside the box.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“So [one liaison officer's] idea of liaison was to try and map everything. [Another's] idea was to not map it, go talk to the people.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“So they rolled in a number of folks doing advanced planning often that only come for three days and they would try and get this document transition document sorted out. So I'd be talking to one person and say here's the notes around it. Here's what I suggest you do. And then two days later, someone else will be in.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“That fire cost about \$15 million dollars. That was a lot of people's wages that could have been spent on prevention.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“

5

CLOSURE

*The need to close
the loop*



“

“We probably need to think of the end game while we're doing that. You know, what do we do when we leave?”

- FENZ Stakeholder

Closure: The need to close the loop for people.

- In any dramatic or traumatic event, there is a human need for closure. This is an important element of recovery, in particular through creating the ability for people to move on.
- It is clear within the district that many people have been able to put the fire behind them but some are still living with the consequences – particularly those farmers/landowners who suffered damage to their land and/or operations. For them, the bureaucracy and lack of clear pathways to move forward is still a source of stress and discomfort.
- Closure for Kaimaumu is also being affected by a sense of déjà vu. Given the widespread awareness within the community of the potential for a large scale fire before this event happened, many people are still wondering whether they will be left in the same situation again, without having learnt lessons (and put in place the practical actions such as maintenance of fire breaks) from this fire event.
 - In this context, knowing the circumstances surrounding how the fire started is requested as people want to know that it will not happen again.
- Operational staff also talked about a sense of quickly moving on to other duties without having fully processed the experience of the Waiharara fire. At the very least, this can prevent learnings being taken on board and acted on for future events. Deeper investigation of the fuller impact of the fire event on responders has unfortunately not been possible within this study.

“The people on the ground are just saying: “Well, this is months now. And we still haven't got to this point, where we can get our fences fixed and we can do everything else.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“To the people on the ground. I think it feels like things aren't moving fast enough. They wanted to have the report of how it started, so that they could give it to their insurance companies, but then our legal teams needed to look over it with a fine tooth comb to make sure that it was correct and concise.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“It helps you. You write down what did go well and what didn't go well and improvements and what that does is it provides a sense of closure. So you can say I've stopped. I've stopped this part of my life. I'm now moving into a different part. Especially if there's trauma - distressed families, distressed animals, distressed communities and being able to sort of separate yourself from that.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“We're very slow learners and a lot of the identified lessons never get learned.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“

Closure. Knowing when and how to leave for FENZ is a skill that needs finessing

Closure of FENZ operations is also an important point for the community. The downside of strong community engagement during a fire response is knowing when, and how, to leave. Relationships (and reliance) have been established during operations, and locals are understandably concerned about who they should look to when FENZ are no longer there.

- Liaison officers continued to field questions from the community long after direct involvement ended

Particularly for fires such as this one (which are contained rather than extinguished in the short/medium term), communities can be anxious when they see crews pulling out. The briefing document for local stakeholders of what to look out for went some way to addressing this.

However, there is a larger sense that some locals may have been left hanging, in the absence of clear responsibilities for managing these relationships (and issues) which were unresolved.

“People wanna know what we’re doing when we leave. They’re really scared. So it was a real unknown and that probably added a bit of anxiety to the public.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“Even weeks after I left the job, because they had my phone number, they would call or text me to ask me questions. I would then be able to point them in the right direction, and they got an answer.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“We probably need to think of the end game while we’re doing that. You know, what do we do when we leave? And who do we hand it over to? And what about the community engagement that we started? Who takes that over? You know, that was really a real, real problem. We created the problem.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“The downside of all this liaison and building relationships is that was bloody hard to stop them.

We’ve formed all these relationships with people, so this is the downside. We’ve got no one to hand it over to. Because we’ve all moved on to other jobs since then. It becomes a distant memory very quick.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

6

CLARITY

*On role and scope
of recovery*



“

*“It’s a new world for us. We’re only in
year one of recovery. We still have
lot to learn.”*

- FENZ Stakeholder

Clarity: A variety of recovery actions were undertaken, but the ultimate responsibility (and resourcing) remains unclear

- A huge range of recovery actions were undertaken as a result of the fire (both during and after). Recovery actions included:
 - Being at the table to help the community during the fire and evacuation events – working cross agency to deliver welfare needs e.g. provisions, care for animals, and small actions like ice blocks for kids were extremely welcomed.
 - Immediate post fire: Making sure water tanks were not at risk of contamination. Keeping kids safe (e.g. avoiding playing in dams), clearing felled trees, re-establishing gateways and fences, reopening roads, and relaying tracks.
 - Being an integral part the cross agency recovery group, drafting a Community Recovery plan.
- The Community Recovery plan is a welcome initiative. But, without any clarity around financial resources and responsibilities, it has been challenging to action anything. There has been (to date) no decision around how the firebreaks will be maintained. This is the biggest concern about the recovery (in the eyes of the local community). The responsibility and resourcing for this is unclear.
- The impacts of the fire, and the recovery needs are plotted on the next pages.

“

“They tried to do the best that they can. Fire recovery is new to a lot of FENZ staff – they don’t usually get this size of fire.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“One of the impacts was smoke inhalation... people’s homes up there, some of them are just about inhabitable doors don’t shut windows don’t shut so you’ve got smoke pouring into people’s homes.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“Biggest thing for us and the biggest thing for the farmers is around what happens after - whose responsibility is it to get those fences back up, to clear the trees that are being felled?”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“This is where I kind of start feeling a little bit confused because we put all the structures and the terms of reference in place, and then it seems like it’s come to a grinding halt.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

Clarity: More clarity is needed in general on the role and scope of recovery for those involved in the response to a fire event

Many respondents talked of the need to make sure that consideration of recovery impacts are actively taken into account during the planning and execution of operations.

- Being smart in response means that some of the burdens of recovery can be minimised - particularly by knowing what the community and individuals value.
- This is where the connections, co-operation, and communication come into play.
- As a case in point, the close liaison with iwi avoided unnecessary damage to wāhi tapu (culturally important areas).

However, the broader challenges around closure and who takes over responsibility for relationships and ongoing issues points to a broader issue around a lack of clarity on what is meant by recovery and what FENZ's role should be within in it.

This is recognised as a new area, and one which is being actively worked through. There is an awareness and acknowledgement that this is an active journey.

“

“Every day we were doing something that was going to have an impact on the environment or someone's property.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“Start the recovery process on day two of the fire.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“Our people focus on the on the one R that they're really familiar with and that is response. We've done that for decades and we've done really well at that. But the recovery is the one out of the bag, which we as an organization don't know very well. And I know in my experience and in the last seven months, we're still finding our way with that.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

Conversations around the role and scope of recovery play out across a number of dimensions:

Impact

recovery from FENZ operations or the fire more generally?



“We shouldn’t destroy things and just walk away. If we can do something about it.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“If we can do something because we’ve got the manpower or the machinery close by and it’s simple to do then we should do it. We shouldn’t leave the place in a worse state if we can.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

Time horizon

12/24/48hrs to decades?



“Our intervention is high in 12 hours. By 48 hours we’re done. We’re not there for the long term sort of recovery.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“Recovery should end when the community returns to a state of normality, when there’s no outstanding issues as when recovery should really end.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

Role

as participant or leader?



“I can see them as a participant, but they are not land managers. And I think that any recovery work should be done by the land managers that are responsible for that place.”

– Organisation Stakeholder

“Because this fire was largely on DOC land... There may have been some expectation that it might be a DOC led recovery and that FENZ would be a supporting stakeholder in the process.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“When do we go from doers to advisors. Where’s the line?”

– FENZ Stakeholder

Responsibility

from legislative to moral



“FENZ has values which it is promoting and they have values that are embedded in us as firefighters as well. Morally, that’s the steer – doing the right thing from our stated values. That may not be what we have to provide legislatively. But if it’s the right thing to do we have to go a little bit extra to help this family out, then I believe we do and we should.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“We need to be really clear on what recovery means to our organisation. Our function needs to be identified first and foremost.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

Recovery Goal

from getting back on feet (coping) vs reinstating pre-fire state (restoring) vs. something better (improving)



“We’re not gonna get that person back to the level that they were at prior to the fire. We aren’t, but we can assist them to get back up. So, if we imagine them being at five level 5 and going down to level 1 because of a fire, we can hopefully get them to level 2 - a step up and point them in the direction where they can get back up to where they were previously.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

“Basically bringing things back to a state that they were or as close to as they were prior to the fire that we’ve had to cause to extinguish the fire.”

– FENZ Stakeholder

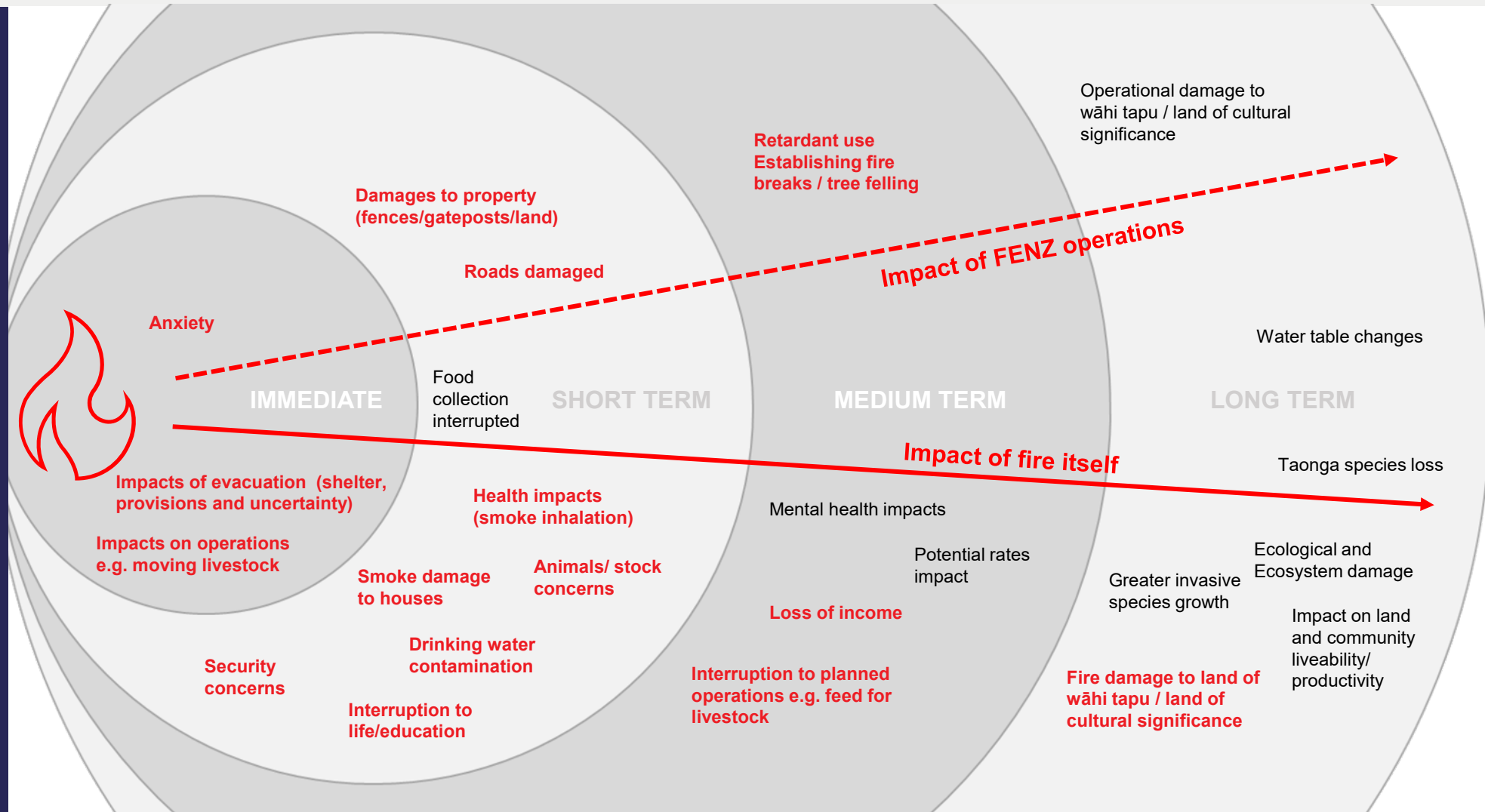
Plotting the scope of impact: Actual and potential impacts of the Waiharara fire from the short to long term

This diagram captures some of the key impacts that were observed (or avoided) during the Waiharara fire.

Impacts range from the immediate and critical (e.g. basic provisions) to the long term and fundamental (e.g. changes to ecosystems).

Impacts pertaining to FENZ's operations have been mapped separately to those pertaining to the fire – reflecting that these are different categories of impacts.

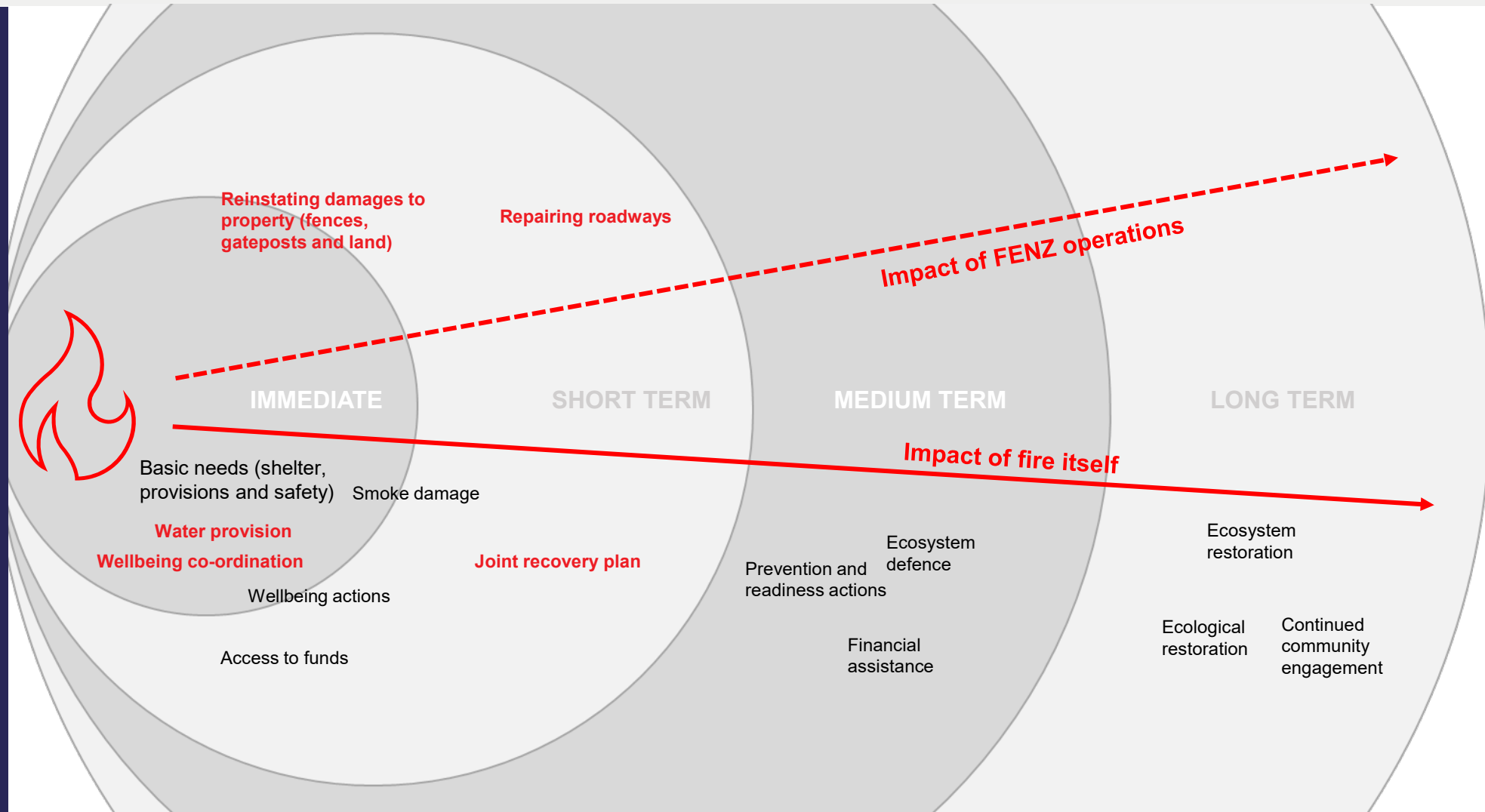
These impacts have been given an approximate time horizon. Some of these long term impacts (such as impacts to water tables) are currently unknown.



Plotting the scope of involvement: Actual and potential recovery actions from the short to long term

This diagram captures the actual/potential scope for FENZ involvement in recovery during/after the Waiharara fire.

A similar framework could be used as a basis to plot the intended scope of recovery operations for similar incidents.



Actual observed actions (FENZ involvement)

Potential actions

Looking forward – learnings and reflections



Looking forward – learnings and reflections



The response to the Waiharara/Kaimaumu fire is in many ways a success story.

In spite of some lingering frustrations from certain sections of the community, and general uncertainty around the long term outcomes of the fire, the success in containing the fire without loss of life or dwellings is a great achievement in itself. Furthermore, the fact that this has been done with the co-operation and confidence of the community is to be celebrated. Strong community and stakeholder/interagency relationships have been strengthened further as a result.

There is a lot that can be taken forward from the incident, taking learning from both the positive experience and actions of the team, as well as reflecting some of the gaps which have been identified.

The following reflects upon the key learnings of each of the 6C principles and what ensuing questions this learning may inspire. These reflections are intended to be the start point for discussion rather than an exhaustive list of recommendations.



Learning and reflections: Connections and Cooperation

LEARNING:

A key aspect of success was the ability to activate a network of existing relationships which had been built up prior to the fire.



LEARNING:

Cross agency and community co-operation ultimately contributes to better outcomes for all.



Reflections:

- Do we have the right relationships in place? At the right levels – both top to top and frontline to frontline? Do they include mana whenua alongside other important conduits into the community?
- Are relationships enduring and personal not just procedural? Are they documented?

Reflections:

- Is there an opportunity to consistently join forces with Civil Defence in creating community emergency response plans? Can the content/format of the Kaimaumau emergency response plan be rolled out to more communities?
- Is there a role for greater joint (cross emergency agency/land manager) training?
- Are we prepared to embed the voices of community leaders into our response operations? Are we sensitively taking into account the concerns of mana whenua (where appropriate)?

Learning and reflections: Communication and Consistency

LEARNING:

Good communication can aid FENZ operations by reducing concerns and keeping people on board.



LEARNING:

Consistency of response aids community co-operation and confidence in operations.



Reflections:

- Do we know who our stakeholder groups are and how best to reach them (in ways that work for them)? Do we understand what they value?
- Are we enabling both inbound (community-in) as well as outbound communication? What is the rhythm of our communication response (regular or reactive?)
- Are there opportunities to template some key elements of communication response? Are we getting the mix of face-to-face and written (or leave behind) communications right?

Reflections:

- Do we have a consistent understanding of what the liaison role entails and when it should be established (both in terms of procedures and type of person?)
- Do we have effective systems in place to track community concerns? Do we have the ability to share this information with front line teams?
- Are we lining up our actions with what expectations have been set? Are we capable of follow through?

Learning and reflections: Closure and Clarity

LEARNING:

Closing the loop is important for people to move on and recover from the impacts of an incident.



LEARNING:

There are currently a wide number of perspectives on what recovery involves and this can impact on people's confidence in FENZ's role.



Reflections:

- Do we have closure processes for individuals involved in the fire? Have we given personnel a chance to debrief? Have learnings been captured and actions identified?
- Can we be more front footed (and swift) with informing the community on how the fire started? How can we better assist the insurance process?
- Have we planned our departure and handover? Have we helped the community understand what to look out for, what happens next, and who to contact?

Reflections:

- Are operational staff aware of and actively considering what the community and stakeholders value during the course of operations? Are there channels in place to aid this?
- Is recovery planning happening early enough in the operational response? Are the scope/duration/responsibility for recovery actions for each incident being clearly identified and communicated?
- Is there the potential for national wide guidance around recovery scope/duration/responsibility or is it determined by the characteristics of individual incidents?

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Thank you





FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT

Kathryn Robinson

Kathryn.Robinson@kantarpublic.com

Kantar
Level 9, 101 Lambton Quay
Wellington 6011
Phone (04) 913 3000

www.kantarpublic.com

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