



13 July 2022

Wattie Watson
National Secretary
New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union

By email: secretary@nzpfu.co.nz

Dear Wattie

I am writing an open letter in reply to your letter to members of parliament, as published on your website <https://www.firecrisis.nz/>.

Firefighters perform our critical function of incident response. They are the face of Fire and Emergency and they experience both the challenge and the privilege of being there for people and communities when they are needed the most. We absolutely value the dedication, professionalism and passion that our firefighters consistently demonstrate in their work.

We also highly value the other critical functions performed across Fire and Emergency. We accept the decisions made prior to the establishment of Fire and Emergency in 2017 that led to us being mandated to invest greater resource in the other functions of emergency management (risk reduction, readiness, and recovery) that go beyond the Fire Service's traditional focus on incident response.

While we have made additional investments in these areas, as well as in upgrading property and fleet for rural brigades previously operating under rural fire authorities, this has not negatively impacted the resources we invest in incident response for career firefighters.

We don't agree that a 'Fire Crisis' exists and nor do we agree that there is no accountability on the priority of expenditure within Fire and Emergency.

I respond to the points raised in your letter, as follows:

"The number of career firefighters has barely changed since the 1990s despite a significant growth in population and other risks in the community but the corporate/administration arm of FENZ has increased by more than 200 employees."

We currently employ around 1800 career firefighters. We don't believe there is a shortage although like many organisations, we have recently been impacted by absences due to COVID-19 and the Health Order requirement for our firefighters to be vaccinated, which lifted on 7 July 2022.

Population increase is not the primary driver for changes in station staffing. There are a range of factors that assist in determining the staffing model of a given fire station – these include the size, scale and risk profile of a community, proximity of nearby stations, forecast growth of population and building structures in a community, and current and predicted incident numbers. The incidence of structure fires has steadily decreased by 1.5-2% annually over the past two decades.

Our National Risk Reduction team work closely with designers and external fire engineers to

design in fire protection systems to help manage the risk of fire in buildings, to our firefighters and the public. The national team also have a focus on working with MBIE and local authorities to highlight where legislative changes are needed and to ensure standards are regularly reviewed and fit for purpose. In addition to our technical work there is a focus on providing education to help prevent fires and create fire safe behaviours if one does occur. These factors have been a driver in the incidence reduction of structure fires over the past two decades.

Fire and Emergency is currently reviewing and further developing its approach and processes to support an evidence-based planning and resourcing framework. We aim to streamline this process and ensure that resourcing decisions are evidence-based. We always consult with the NZPFU over any changes of this nature.

I have responded to your concerns regarding corporate/administrative roles at Fire and Emergency later in this letter.

“Career stations are regularly closed or fire trucks left unstaffed due to the lack of firefighters. The only way to increase career firefighters is to recruit but FENZ cancelled the April 2022 recruit course.”

We do not close stations. Where a staff member is absent resulting in reduced crewing or a truck is off service, we reposition or redeploy our resources in place for that shift so we can continue to meet our target response times. This can occur for several reasons including training our people, unplanned staff absence, and maintaining our fleet. We take the same approach when the appliances at any particular station are attending another incident. This resource repositioning happens on a daily basis dependant on need and is part of our operating model, which includes support from neighbouring brigades and relocation of resources within or at times across Districts.

We run up to four recruit courses per year to maintain career firefighter numbers. Normal turnover is around 2.5% and can be covered by two courses per year. In addition to turnover, many career firefighters progress into more senior or non-operational roles within the organisation requiring regular recruitment to maintain operational firefighting numbers.

I acknowledge that currently our turnover is slightly elevated at around 3.5%. Our Covid response and the Health Order have been factors in this. We are currently running a recruits course, which began on 4 July. This will bring in 30 more firefighters once they have completed their 12 week residential training course. A further course of 30 will commence immediately on conclusion of the current July course, in September. A significant number of both the July and September courses are recruits who will work in the Auckland region. We also ran a course that commenced in January 2022.

In addition, we are anticipating the career firefighters currently on leave due to the vaccination mandate to re-integrate into our workforce from 8 July 2022. We are actively working with these people on an individual basis to make sure this return to the workforce is managed well. We have appreciated your support in this.

“Career firefighters are fatigued, routinely working more than 60 hours a week with some working up to 100 hours a week to keep the stations open.”

The numbers above are not accurate however we do acknowledge that working call-back overtime, which means working a full extra shift on top of rostered shifts, is common for nearly all firefighters.

Our records show that less than half of firefighters worked more than an average of 50 hours per week during March 2022 and April 2022. However, some firefighters do work more than 60 hours

a week on average. In April 2022, for example, this was the case for 22% of firefighters.

Most firefighters are rostered to work two days, followed by two nights, followed by four days off. Many choose to work additional shifts around their rostered hours. A firefighter receives 15 hours of extra pay for working a single extra (10 hour) day shift and 21 hours of extra pay for working a single extra (14 hour) night shift. Until recently, we have had no issues with firefighters being willing and able to work these additional call-back overtime shifts.

Each standard fire appliance (fire truck) is staffed by three firefighters plus one officer. Our target staffing numbers, known as our 'establishment' is currently 4.5 firefighters (including officers) to every standard appliance, for every shift. This means we have a level of built in contingency in our staffing numbers to cover staffing unavailability, for example due to off site training, unplanned absence and rostered annual leave.

For us to fully staff all trucks at all times we do require a level of overtime to be worked to cover all staffing unavailability. This arrangement has been in place for decades and until recently, it has worked well. This practice is common internationally across other fire and emergency type services.

There is usually a reduced workload undertaken during night shifts, and the ability to rest with the bedroom facilities provided. For these reasons it is generally sustainable for firefighters to work additional shifts to a far greater extent than would be the case in roles where usual levels of work i.e. non-sleeping shifts, are required throughout all shifts. From 11pm-7am, firefighters are not normally required to undertake general work activities and are able to rest while maintaining a state of readiness to respond to any emergency call-outs. On average, only 4% of rostered time during night shifts is spent attending emergency call-outs. To put this in real terms, through the fire levy New Zealanders pay for 1,900,000 (1.9 million) career firefighter hours to be available on the overnight shifts every year and only 73,000 of those hours are spent on emergency call-outs.¹ We acknowledge this does vary between stations across New Zealand.

We do recognise that limits on hours of work are necessary, and these are covered in our Fatigue management policy. We acknowledge the nature of shift work is such that over time it does place demands on staff that others not working rotating shifts do not experience. That's why our Fatigue management policy requires a 14 day period of rostered leave every 160 days.

We recognise that recently for a variety of reasons including the impact of Omicron, overtime levels required for full staffing have increased beyond levels that firefighters are willing or able to work. For example, requested call-back overtime was one third higher in April 2022 compared to April 2021. This was caused by sick leave, annual leave and special leave being approximately two and a half times higher than during the same period in April 2021. Sickness absence has been as high as 20% of all firefighters on certain days within Districts in recent weeks.

We have put a number of measures in place to address this which will reduce our overtime demands over the next few months, including the additional recruit course mentioned above. In the meantime, where staff are not willing or able to work overtime to cover absences, appliances are repositioned or the response is provided from further afield to ensure we continue to meet our target response times.

We do have serious concerns about the alarmist language and inaccurate claims being made in relation to this matter by the NZPFU. In the most recent example (from NZPFU's Facebook page on 8 July 2022), this has included claiming that Wellington Airport has had insufficient cover due to a Wellington appliance being offline, ignoring the fact Wellington Airport employs its own fire brigade. The same post also inaccurately claimed that a Porirua house fire was impacted by a 7

¹ Through the fire levy New Zealanders also pay for 1,400,000 (1.4 million) career firefighter hours to be available during the day shifts every year and only 78,000 of those hours are spent on emergency call-outs. In total, New Zealanders pay for 3,300,000 (3.3 million) career firefighter hours every year of which only 151,000 hours are spent on emergency call-outs.

minute delay. In this incident Fire and Emergency met its target response time of the first appliance attending the fire within 8 minutes of the call.

“Almost daily the 111 emergency call centres are operating below minimum staffing, sometimes leaving 1 dispatcher to cover the whole of the South Island. This is unsafe and impacts on the quality of service to the public.”

No 111 fire call goes unanswered anywhere in New Zealand. Each call is picked up by the next available person in any of our three Communication Centres – Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

When someone needs help and calls 111 requesting Fire and Emergency, they are directed to the nearest centre. If that centre is experiencing high call volumes, then the 111 calls automatically reroute to the next centre and then the next. This means the next available dispatcher receives the 111 call irrespective of the caller’s location.

All of our Communications Centre workforce are trained as dispatchers. Where we have people assigned to 111 call-taking they are capable of doing dispatch work where required, and vice versa.

This workforce capability in conjunction with the nationwide service provided from three locations, allows for varying staff numbers and provides a consistent level of service to the New Zealand public. Where one or two members of the team are off sick on any particular day, this does not leave us in a position where we only have one dispatcher covering large areas of the country.

“Auckland only has two heavy aerial appliances (needed for high rise and large buildings) which regularly break down. In 1984 the 800,000 population had the protection of 5 heavy aerial appliances.”

Fire and Emergency currently has a total of 6 aerial appliances located in Auckland.

It is rare for an aerial to aid the escape of people from a burning building. In the initial stages aerial fire appliances aren't usually used for firefighting in high rise buildings where people live because firefighters use the fire safety measures and equipment inside the building – for example sprinkler systems, internal firefighting water systems (risers), protected access and egress pathways. Aerial fire appliances are primarily used to deliver water from height onto a fire, as an observation platform, to prevent fire spread to neighbouring buildings, or to provide lighting. If aerial fire appliances are sent to an incident they are not used until we know that any people still inside the building are out of the way of the water jets.

This is another area where we have serious concerns about the alarmist language and inaccurate claims being made by the NZPFU. In the most recent example (from NZPFU’s Facebook page on 8 July 2022) it is claimed that the UK Grenfell Tower disaster “proved beyond doubt” that heavy aerial appliances “save lives and help to minimise firefighters exposure to risks”. This reference to Grenfell is both inaccurate and highly inappropriate. The issues that led to this disaster were multiple building design issues together with multiple failures to adhere to health and safety measures in the maintenance/management of the building. These issues combined with the UK’s “Stay in Place” no evacuation policy, led to this tragedy. I am not aware of any information that suggests using more or higher aerials would have achieved a different outcome in that fire.

Fire and Emergency has more than 1240 fire trucks and specialist response vehicles across the country. In any large vehicle fleet like ours, from time to time it is expected there may be issues. That’s why our vehicles are serviced regularly and we have plans in place to cover trucks that may be off the run.

I know you will also be aware that Fire and Emergency has a project well advanced to purchase

the next generation heavy pump appliance (predominantly used by career firefighters) and four replacement heavy aerial appliances. The NZPFU has had representation at three levels of these project (reference/working Groups, project team and steering group) and your members have been engaged and contributing positively.

“The most recent procurement of hose has been removed from the fire trucks due to repeated instances of the hose failing leaving firefighters in burning buildings without water.”

The FlashFlood 500 yellow 45mm hose was introduced as a lighter weight hose in 2019. A lighter weight hose is easier for firefighters to deploy and use. Its slightly reduced durability for being ‘lightweight’ was assessed (at the time) as being an acceptable trade-off. The hose is part of the 70,000 items of equipment in use within our organisation.

This hose conforms to appropriate international standards that provide assurance it is safe to use in our operating environment and at our operating pressures. Operational firefighters were involved in the selection of this hose and endorsed the decision to purchase.

However, since this hose has been deployed operationally there have been some reported incidents of the hose failing under certain conditions. These have included two recent occasions where firefighters have had to retreat from inside buildings due to issues with the hose. In response to these incidents, Fire and Emergency is progressively withdrawing the hose from operational service. Firefighters have already been directed not to use it in the first responding appliance, and to use all other available hoses first. The hose remains suitable for other purposes when deploying appropriate firefighting tactics and will be used in our training environment. Fire and Emergency is working with its international suppliers to procure a suitable replacement.

“FENZ’s firefighters respond to 96% of all ambulance out of hospital cardiac arrests yet are poorly trained and receive no recognition for this work and increased exposure to trauma.”

All firefighters who conduct medical **co-response** are trained to unit standards 6401 and 6402 – which are standard workplace aid training - but they are also trained in 23406, which was specifically developed for firefighters. Their primary role in medical co-response is to perform CPR, and this is what their training focuses on. Crews who conduct medical **first response** receive additional training for those duties. All our appliances carry defibrillators (AED), airway management and oxygen therapy equipment. All firefighters are trained in the use of that equipment.

Medical response has been part of the firefighter role for many years which is why it was included in the 2017 Fire and Emergency Act. We acknowledge there was a significant increase in the volume of this incident type from 2013-2017, following the signing of the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding with St. Johns and Wellington Free Ambulance Services.

Medical response work of the nature being undertaken by firefighters is not of a higher value than the other work that firefighters are required to do in their job. Medical response incidents are not creating unreasonable workloads – our overall rates of incident response have remained stable, and have not significantly increased, over the past 2 decades – the increase in medical response incidents that occurred from 2013-2017 compensated for reductions in other incident response types. We do however recognise that some stations have much higher rates of medical response incidents than others, and we have discussed options to spread this workload more evenly across our crews with the NZPFU in the past. We are open to continuing these discussions if the NZPFU are interested in doing so.

We have the Psychological Wellbeing Curriculum Matrix in place, under the career Training and Progression System (TAPS) which is intended to support firefighters to develop the knowledge

and skills they need when attending potentially traumatic incidents (which can include medical co-response as well as more traditional firefighter incidents types such as fires and motor vehicle accidents). This includes education about the support in place for firefighters who require it due to exposure to traumatic incidents or other matters.

Since the 2013 MoU was signed, we have regularly reviewed the training and support we provide, in relation to medical response. We acknowledge the emotional demands placed on firefighters by many of the incidents they respond to. We have offered in current bargaining to engage further with the NZPFU over any developments to the existing training and support programmes we have in place, that could be made. Separately to bargaining we are currently piloting a training package to assist firefighters to effectively work with upset family members and bystanders. This is in response to their feedback that this is one of the aspects of the job they currently find most difficult.

“Career and volunteer firefighters are telling their stories of being unable to access appropriate and ongoing professional mental health support.”

Fire and Emergency has in place a four-tiered approach to welfare/psychological wellbeing:

- Tier One – Self referral – this is effectively supported self-help, available to all staff and their families through a range of channels, making contact privately.
- Tier Two – Workplace Referral – this is to a contracted clinical psychologist, accessed confidentially through our injury management unit, welfare officers, or the safety health and wellbeing team.
- Tier Three – Compulsory Routine Referral – this is referral to a clinical psychologist for specialist team members. This is not for all staff, but applies for specialist teams such as urban search and rescue (USAR); wildfire national and international deployments; Fire Awareness Intervention Programme (FAIP) teams, normalised as part of overall health and wellbeing checks.
- Tier Four – Specialist Referral – this is referral to a consultant psychologist, when people need a one-off specialist medical assessment or ongoing specialist treatment support. This is most often accessed confidentially through our injury management unit. It can also be accessed through a request from a GP or clinical psychologist, or the safety health and wellbeing team.

We employ a welfare team and have increased the size of our safety, health and wellbeing team to increase the support we offer to both our career firefighters and our volunteers. We have also significantly increased the availability of psychological support services to these workforces.

As part of the offer rejected by the NZPFU, Fire and Emergency offered to put in place, for each year of the CEA, a reimbursement of up to \$170 per person plus GST as an annual reimbursement for those staff who elect to undertake additional health screening, as part of proactively monitoring their own health. We also offered to include in the terms of settlement information about the services already available, as outlined above, in order to promote their use. This information is currently available on Fire and Emergency’s intranet.

“FENZ automatically provides income protection/life insurance to its management and its corporate/administration roles yet is refusing to provide an allowance to enable career firefighters to access medical insurance/income protection insurance.”

All firefighters are eligible to participate in the Fire Superannuation Scheme. Employees can contribute up to six percent of their salary with their contributions matched by Fire and Emergency at \$1.52 for every dollar put in by the employee. This means Fire and Emergency contributes up to just over 9% of firefighter's usual earnings to their Fire Superannuation.

As part of that package, firefighters are entitled to receive their Fire Superannuation benefit upon their retirement from Fire and Emergency. In the case of a medical retirement, they will have a guaranteed retirement benefit of no less than two years' full pay regardless of their age or length of service.

In addition, all our people, including career and volunteer firefighters and comcen staff have cover for personal injury, including death, occurring on the job or on the way to and from work.

Fire and Emergency's injury management unit provides specialist support for all staff to aid rehabilitation and return to work following any work or non-work injury.

Corporate and administration roles are eligible to participate in an income protection scheme due to the fact that they are not eligible to participate in Fire Superannuation.

Fire and Emergency does **not** provide medical/health insurance to any employees however external providers including Southern Cross and the Firefighters Welfare Society offer products to eligible Fire and Emergency employees on favourable terms.

“FENZ abandoned an \$8 million unified uniform roll-out after failing to ensure the fabric was suitable for firefighting.”

Fire and Emergency was established as a new entity in 2017 – the first unified national firefighting organisation in New Zealand history.

As part of our establishment it was necessary to update a number of branded items to reflect our new organisation, which included uniform. It was also necessary to provide uniform to personnel who did not have uniform items provided by their previous employer prior to our establishment.

All operations PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) that was designed within this project conformed to the necessary operational standards in tests conducted by VicLabs, one of Australia's leading NATA accredited and independent mechanical testing services.

The single uniform continues to be provided to operational personnel as required. It is not true that Fire and Emergency designed operational firefighting uniform that was found to be unfit for purpose.

“FENZ spent \$10 million on re-branding signage while career stations have closed due to black mould and asbestos. Other career stations have less than 15% seismic ratings and almost half of all career stations do not have sprinkler systems.”

The establishment of Fire and Emergency brought together over 40 firefighting organisations around the country, many of whom had their own logos and emblems. As a new entity, we required a new symbol and identity to reflect the new organisation which was then rolled out across our property and fleet. This cost around \$6.5m in total, over the three years this work was undertaken.

Fire and Emergency fully complies with the Asbestos Regulations 2016. We completed an asbestos survey programme of work in 2021 which identified buildings and stations with asbestos containing materials. We've completed asbestos management plans for those stations and buildings which set out how we will safely manage and control asbestos containing materials at the site and are based on the findings of the workplace asbestos survey. Asbestos was a very

commonly used building material in the past and where it remains in good condition and undisturbed, it presents little or no health risk.

Fire and Emergency has established greater than 67% compliance with the current New Building Standard (NBS), Importance Level 4 (IL4) as our seismic resilience standard for our fire station facilities. Currently 66% of our sites meet this standard, and we are on track to have 100% compliance by our target date 30 June 2027 for facilities in high seismic risk zones.

We have a work programme underway to upgrade those buildings that do not currently meet this standard and risk management plans in place for the interim period.

The Importance Level 4 standard is higher than the normal standard for commercial buildings (IL 2). This is because fire stations are expected to be part of a disaster recovery response in the event of an earthquake, and therefore need to be able to function when other buildings may be impacted by that earthquake event. Importantly this does not mean a fire station that does not meet the IL 4 standard is unsafe to occupy.

One station was confirmed to have a 15% NBS IL4 rating however that has already been addressed. While refurbishments are still ongoing for that station, its current seismic rating is now 67%.

Two other stations have had engineer assessments suggesting less than 34% NBS IL4 compliance – of those we are still investigating one and have committed to a seismic upgrade on the other despite some yet to be addressed concerns about the validity of the assessment.

It is **not** a legal requirement that all fire stations are fitted with a sprinkler system. We assess the need for existing buildings on a case by case basis which includes considering the effectiveness of the other safety features designed into the building. All new fire station buildings have been fitted with sprinkler systems since 2016 and typically, buildings that have had a significant refurbishment since 2016 have been retrofitted with sprinkler systems as part of that upgrade.

The Kilbirnie and Hutt City stations have had black mould issues reported – both issues were investigated and addressed some time ago. The Hutt City station mitigation involved moving our personnel (station was located in a leased building) to an alternative station in Avalon. The Kilbirnie station underwent a refurbishment in 2020 and has subsequently been re-occupied by our firefighters.

“Career firefighters are low paid and devalued when compared to wages for administration and corporate roles.”

The firefighter job contributes to the safety of New Zealand communities, property and the environment, and we appreciate the outstanding work they do.

Firefighter wages are absolutely not ‘devalued’ compared to wages for administration and corporate roles.

All jobs within Fire and Emergency are evaluated under the internationally recognised Korn Ferry (formally Hay) job factor evaluation system. This establishes a job size for each job we employ, based on the requirement of each one in terms of knowledge, problem solving and accountability.

This job evaluation process allows us to access data to understand what other jobs of the same size are paid within relevant external job markets. It also allows us to make sure that jobs of the same size are being paid consistently and fairly within Fire and Emergency.

Our operational jobs including firefighters are compared to other operational jobs, by job size, within both the public and the private sector in New Zealand. This includes other operational jobs that work on 24/7 shift rosters. The group of employers we benchmark our pay rates against has

previously been agreed between the NZPFU and the organisation.

Our administrative jobs are compared to the rate of pay for other administrative jobs, by job size, within the public sector.

The pay scale for operational jobs is higher than the pay scale for administrative jobs. This means that an operational job at Fire and Emergency is paid on a higher pay scale than an administrative job of the same job size.

In addition, operational jobs attract additional payments for a range of allowances. These allowances are not available to administrative jobs. Operational firefighters also have access to higher contributions by Fire and Emergency to their Fire Superannuation than is available to administrative staff participating in Kiwisaver.

Corporate and administrative jobs at Fire and Emergency conduct a range of critical functions that deliver or support the delivery of key components of our services. We operate across the '4Rs' of emergency management which include risk reduction, readiness, response, recovery. Since our establishment in 2017 we have been mandated to increase our focus on risk reduction, readiness and recovery, working directly with communities in doing so, which has contributed to increases in staffing numbers in jobs that undertake or support these functions. We have not reduced resourcing and investment in our response function but we have made additional investments in these other functions of emergency management.

Many of these jobs are conducted by former career firefighters, including NZPFU members, because their professional experience is desirable for much of this work. Examples of important duties performed by Fire and Emergency staff that go beyond incident response work include:

- Fire investigations – we conduct fire investigations and identify trends to inform areas of focus in our fire prevention work (at a district, region and national level). We work closely with the police and other agencies to provide specialist skills to support their investigative work.
- Evacuation schemes - we provide advice and guidance to commercial building owners, schools and industry on how to ensure people can evacuate safely in the case of a fire.
- Fire engineering and building design – we provide input and advice on building and design requirements. These include improving building standards relating to fire identification and early warning systems as well as safe escape routes, which save the lives of building occupants and support safe and effective firefighting when fires do occur.
- Fire permits – we issue permits to enable controlled vegetation burns (such as with arable farming) to operate safely, for both the land owner/manager and the public.
- Weather stations – we manage, maintain and monitor weather stations to enable predictive information about rural fire risk conditions that is used as messaging for the public and readiness for our people to respond.
- Schools – we deliver programmes that ensure our tamariki are [Firewise](#) and know what to do to prevent a fire, but also what to do if one does occur. We also deliver a programme to reduce incidents of arson.
- Community events and meetings – we regularly meet with communities and seek out opportunities to educate the wider public on the risk of fire (how to prevent and what to do if they are in or see a fire).

As we employ around 3,000 staff and engage around 12,000 volunteers, we also have a number of administrative, managerial and specialist staff that perform or manage the necessary functions for an organisation of our size including HR and payroll, finance, procurement, and our relationships with other agencies and stakeholders.

Closing comments

As a modern emergency management organisation, we need to focus not only on response, but also on how we support the different communities across New Zealand to reduce risks, build community readiness and recover from emergencies. This wider mandate requires a wide range of planning and specialist skills and experience, across a range of functions.

We acknowledge that Fire and Emergency and the NZPFU will not always agree on whether we have got this balance between our response functions and our other functions right, however it is important that we are able to work through these disagreements constructively and respect each other's perspectives.

For the reasons set out in this letter, we do not agree that response times or the safety of firefighters or the public is being compromised by how we are currently operating. We also do not agree that Fire and Emergency has lost focus on protecting life, property and the environment. We do acknowledge that in some respects we are operating differently to how the New Zealand Fire Service operated prior to our 2017 inception.

We value and respect the NZPFU's desire for excellence in operational response and their commitment to the safety of their members and New Zealand communities. We share the same values in that regard. As we continue to navigate the bargaining process, we are hopeful that we will identify ways to work together constructively to enable Fire and Emergency to continue to deliver services for communities that we can all be proud of.

We look forward to returning to bargaining, with the assistance of an independent mediator, where we hope to identify a means of resolving the current issues preventing us from reaching settlement.

Kind regards

Brendan Nally
Acting Deputy National Commander

Dear Member of Parliament

Fire and Emergency New Zealand is failing the public by failing to properly resource firefighters.

We are in a fire crisis.

FENZ is primarily funded through the fire insurance levy but there appears to be no accountability on the priority of expenditure. Since 2017, the funding has increased by 40% but FENZ has failed to upgrade a failing fire truck fleet, recruit sufficient career firefighters to keep stations open, or ensure volunteer and career firefighters have reliable equipment to undertake their dangerous jobs.

The New Zealand Professional Firefighters Union has been informing the public of a fire crisis:

- The number of career firefighters has barely changed since the 1990s despite a significant growth in population and other risks in the community but the corporate/administration arm of FENZ has increased by more than 200 employees.
- Career stations are regularly closed or fire trucks left unstaffed due to the lack of firefighters. The only way to increase career firefighters is to recruit but FENZ cancelled the April 2022 recruit course.
- Career firefighters are fatigued, routinely working more than 60 hours a week with some working up to 100 hours a week to keep the stations open.
- Almost daily the 111 emergency call centres are operating below minimum staffing, sometimes leaving 1 dispatcher to cover the whole of the South Island. This is unsafe and impacts on the quality of service to the public.
- Auckland only has two heavy aerial appliances (needed for high rise and large buildings) which regularly break down. In 1984 the 800,000 population had the protection of 5 heavy aerial appliances.
- The most recent procurement of hose has been removed from the fire trucks due to repeated instances of the hose failing leaving firefighters in burning buildings without water.

- FENZ's firefighters respond to 96% of all ambulance out of hospital cardiac arrests yet are poorly trained and receive no recognition for this work and increased exposure to trauma.
- Career and volunteer firefighters are telling their stories of being unable to access appropriate and ongoing professional mental health support.
- FENZ automatically provides income protection/life insurance to its management and its corporate/administration roles yet is refusing to provide an allowance to enable career firefighters to access medical insurance/income protection insurance.
- FENZ abandoned an \$8 million unified uniform roll-out after failing to ensure the fabric was suitable for firefighting.
- FENZ spent \$10 million on re-branding signage while career stations have closed due to black mould and asbestos. Other career stations have less than 15% seismic ratings and almost half of all career fire stations do not have sprinkler systems.
- Career firefighters are low paid and devalued when compared to wages for administration and corporate roles.

This is a public safety issue as closed stations or insufficient firefighters means a fire truck has to come from further afield. Minutes are the difference between life and death in a fire or an emergency.

We support the firefighters and other NZPFU members to be appropriately resourced with safe staffing numbers and reliable resources.

We do not want to see firefighters walk off the job in their fight for fairness and safety, but FENZ is not listening or addressing these public safety issues. There needs to be political intervention.

We are asking you as a representative of Parliament to get involved, to do everything in your power to ensure FENZ focuses on protecting life, property and the environment.

Yours sincerely,
